

SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
QUALITY & STANDARDS COMMITTEE
held on 26 November 2020 at 9.30 am
Via videoconference

¹PRESENT J Milburn (P); A Owen (E); R Palmer (E) (Chair); H Perry (S); C Wilson (E).

In attendance: J Baker, Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt)
C James, Dean of Higher Education (to min 136)
H Mitchell, Apprenticeship Manager (mins 156 to 161)
J Lander, Governor
R Price, Head of Learning & Quality
B Stokes, Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover)
S Willson, Clerk to the Corporation

ATTENDANCE

109. The Committee Chair welcomed J Lander, who was attending the meeting as a guest, and J Baker and B Stokes who were attending their first meeting of the committee since their appointments as Vice Principals Curriculum from 1 August.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

110. There were no interests to declare.

MINUTES

111. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2020 (Parts 1 and 2) be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Committee Chair.

City & Guilds (mins 26/20)

112. The Principal noted that, as reported to the Board of Governors in July, the appeals process regarding a set of Level 2 Animal Care synoptic assessment results in 2018 which had been the subject of a complaint (not upheld) by the College to Ofqual, had concluded and no further action would be taken.

113. There were no other matters arising not covered by items on the agenda.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS PLAN

114. The committee had received the report of the Clerk to the Corporation proposing the committee's forward business plan for 2020/21, following consultation with the committee Chair and members of College management.

115. The committee noted that the plan and/or coverage of management reports might require updating during the year given the higher than normal degree of uncertainty in both the FE and HE sectors in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic.

¹ (C) = Co-opted; (E) = External; (P) = Principal; (S) = Staff; (St) = Student

116. **Resolved** – that the committee’s forward business plan for 2020/21 be approved.

HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE

117. The committee had received the report of the Dean of Higher Education (HE) on current progress in the quality of HE provision and the HE student experience, including the main outcomes from the 2019/20 Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review (ASQER).
118. It was noted for context that the College’s HE provision through University Centre Sparsholt (UCS) met the registration conditions of the Office for Students (OfS), held the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)’s ‘Quality Assured’ kitemark and a Gold Teaching Excellent Framework (TEF). The TEF was due to expire in July 2021 and the consultation on its replacement had been delayed due to the pandemic.
119. The Dean of HE reported that the University of Portsmouth (UoP) had conducted a full review of its partnership with the College and that the HE programmes had been re-validated in April 2020 for six years. However, it was noted that the UoP’s new administrative and student information systems had resulted in some significant difficulties, including in relation to delays confirming students’ awards and to student registration, which needed to be addressed.
120. The Dean of HE emphasised the challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic and praised the work of the HE teams in continuing to teach, assess and support students from March onwards.
121. The committee noted the trends in continuation and achievement and the analysis of results reported. UCS had adopted all of the adjustments to the University Assessment and Academic Regulations and practices had ensured that no student was disadvantaged by the changes to assessments necessitated by the pandemic. The Dean of HE explained that consideration would be given as whether some of the beneficial features of the open book assessments could be used in the future. The Dean of HE also noted that the positive continuation data reflected the collaborative cross-College approach.
122. The committee noted that the external examiners had been able to conduct their work remotely and that the overall feedback was positive, recognising very high standards across a range of areas including support for students, use of assessments and relevance and links to industry. There were also some development points which were being followed -up.
123. Members discussed the results of the National Students Survey (NSS) which had seen a disappointing reduction in the ‘overall satisfaction’ score from 89% in the 2018/19 survey to 70% in 2019/20, although scores for many of the individual criteria had remained high (for example, 89% satisfaction for ‘teaching on my course’). The Dean of HE explained that the NSS ‘overall satisfaction’ result was out of kilter with the results of in-house surveys with ‘overall satisfaction’ at 96% for new students in the Autumn term 2019/20 and 93% for continuing students in the Spring term. Due to small student cohorts, a breakdown of NSS data by course was only provided for two areas. It was also the case that foundation degree students were not resurveyed when they progressed to BSc top-ups, so the results did not give the full picture of the student experience. Nonetheless, the Dean of HE confirmed that analysis of the NSS data had identified some specific areas of dissatisfaction and actions had been put in place to address these.

124. The Dean of HE explained that some actions responded to a recognition that some students required higher levels of non-academic support and more course management communications to develop their independent organisation skills. UCS had been successful in widening access and students included those who were the first generation to progress to HE and an increase in the numbers of students with higher needs. Members discussed the recruitment of students to the Access & Participation Plan targets (monitored in detail by the Curriculum, Employers & Market Requirements Committee).
125. Asked about how UCS's NSS results benchmarked with the sector, the Dean of HE explained that it was difficult to draw firm conclusions because results amongst land-based colleges varied. The Dean of HE also reported that consideration was being given to seeking input from the UoP into the action plan, where relevant.
126. Members acknowledged the evident commitment from management to understanding and addressing feedback from students and the continuing aim to engage with students to enhance their experiences. The report gave detailed examples of communications with students and responses to student engagement which had taken place during the year and the committee noted that increased frequency and improved effectiveness of communications with the student community was a primary focus for 2020/21.
127. Members also recognised that the impact of the pandemic presented a potential risk in relation to the results of the 2020/21 student survey and that, although this would be experienced across the sector, there were specific factors such as the disruption to veterinary nursing placements which were likely to be a particular factor for UCS.
128. In conclusion, the committee noted that UCS continued to provide a high quality HE academic and student experience, evidenced by both internal and external indicators, progression to employment and validated by the UoP.
129. It was noted that there was no current requirement for a formal 'quality and standards' return to the OfS this year. However, the OfS continued to introduce ongoing conditions of registration and had recently commenced a review and consultation of its regulation of quality and standards which it was expected would result in the need to adapt delivery, assessment and monitoring. Members discussed the OfS's approach to assessing progression into skilled employment, noting the emphasis on professional, highly paid posts and that the current categorisation failed to recognise worthwhile, skilled graduate roles in the land-based, veterinary nursing and environmental sectors.

RCVS Accreditation

130. The committee had received the report of the Dean of HE on accreditation with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and delivery of the University Centre Sparsholt's (UCS's) FdSc Veterinary (Vet) Nursing programme, together with the RCVS action plan and the UoP/UCS letter to Vet Nursing students.
131. The Dean of HE provided an update on events related to the accreditation.
132. The committee noted that, following an RCVS accreditation panel event in August 2020, the UoP/UCS FdSc Vet Nursing received a one-year accreditation from the RCVS with an agreed action plan and the requirement to seek reaccreditation within a year. At the request of UCS, the next reaccreditation event was scheduled for the week commencing

26 April 2021, for a decision by the Veterinary Nursing Education Council (VNEC) in late June.

133. The Dean of HE explained that, while management was confident in the actions in place, the decision timetable would enable UCS to provide advice and guidance to students in a timely manner in the event that accreditation were not to be granted. A progress report had been submitted in September and again in November, with evidence that the actions had been completed.
134. The Committee Chair sought further context to the outcome of the accreditation process, the respective roles of the UoP and UCS and the related quality assurance processes. The Dean of HE summarised the approach taken since the FdSc Vet Nursing was accredited six years previously, including positive feedback by external examiners each year. The Dean of HE emphasised the quality of teaching and her confidence in the skills and experience gained by the vet nurses, with progression to employment being 100%. However, she recognised that the actions required by the RCVS around consistency and clarity of processes and documentation would strengthen the programme and support the student experience.
135. Asked by a member about concerns that the letter would unsettle students, the Dean of HE explained that it had been a requirement of the RCVS that UCS write to all students and the letter had been carefully worded to avoid creating unnecessary anxiety. In terms of recruitment of students prior to June, the Dean of HE confirmed that the College/UCS website would state that the programme for 2021/22 was subject to accreditation.
136. The committee recognised that UCS was fully committed to delivering the FdSc Veterinary Nursing and that management was optimistic that the action plan would result in a degree programme which was fit for purpose and fulfilled the RCVS Standards for accreditation.

PREVENT

137. The committee had received the College's updated FE and HE Prevent Duty Risk Assessment/Action Plan for information and assurance.
138. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) and Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) summarised the latest updates to the risk assessment, noting that it had been reviewed and included feedback from the Regional Prevent Coordinator. The online safety actions had been modified to reflect the increased use of remote learning and the risks/actions relating to right wing extremism and animal rights extremism had been updated in line with the last assessments.
139. Responding to the Committee Chair's question, the Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) explained that the South East Counter Terrorism Unit identified the South East as at 'severe' risk (the highest risk category) in relation to Islamic extremism but that this was the result of cities and major transport infrastructures outside of the College's main catchment areas.
140. Members welcomed the careful approach being taken and noted that some education institutions could experience increased risks with students in lockdown situations in student accommodation.

141. The committee noted the controls in place and was assured, on behalf of the Board, that College management continued to effectively manage requirements in relation to the Prevent Duty.

FURTHER EDUCATION QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE

FE Self- Assessment Review and Quality Improvement Plan

142. The committee had received the College's FE Self-Assessment Report (SAR) for 2019/20 and the FE Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) for 2020/21, together with an accompanying report from the Vice Principals Curriculum. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) noted that there was some final data in relation to student destinations to be added to the SAR prior to submission to the Board of Governors.
143. The SAR indicated that the College had been graded as 2 (Good), including the Quality of Education and Education Programmes for Young People. Learner outcomes at all levels, excluding maths and English qualifications, had improved. There remained small pockets of provision which required improvement, and these had been placed under enhanced scrutiny for 2020/21 with the aim of making rapid improvements.
144. The committee noted confirmation that College staff had utilised robust measures to judge learner achievement prior to submission of Centre Assessed Grades (including at Sparsholt final exams and assessments having been completed prior to lockdown) and that management was confident in the authenticity of learner outcomes and the improved achievement rates.
145. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) confirmed that significant progress had been made in Level 3 Animal Management provision, with improved organisation and preparations for practical and synoptic assessments, and that the key focus of the QIP was now on Level 1 and 2. Animal Management students at Level 1 and 2 levels had also found it particularly hard to engage with online learning during the lockdown.
146. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) noted that the SAR report also sought to set out the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and how the College had responded.
147. On behalf of College management, the Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) highly commended all staff in responding to challenging circumstances and ensuring that learners continued to engage with their studies through the Covid-19 pandemic. It was recognised that the professionalism and commitment of staff in the context of exceptional challenges had enabled learners to continue to progress to employment or further study.
148. Members welcomed the SAR report as clear and coherent, demonstrating the impact of actions taken during the year, including new appointees. It was noted that there was some minor editing required for consistency and that this would be undertaken prior to submission to the Board.
149. Asked about independent input the SAR process, the Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) confirmed that a 'virtual' peer review would be undertaken with Capel Manor College. The committee also noted that the SAR was consistent with other monitoring reports and performance data reviewed by the committee.
150. The Committee Chair welcomed the positive indicators in relation in particular to retention, attendance and student behaviour and the linkages in the report to the

- benefits of the revised Teaching and Learning Observation (TALO) process in supporting good practice, citing the example of the details given in relation to L3 Equine and Sport.
151. The Staff Governor proposed that the report document the opportunities afforded to gifted and talented students across the College curriculum and the Vice Principals undertook to update the SAR to include this.
 152. The Head of Learning & Quality drew the committee's attention to the final report on the QIP 2019/20 outcomes, noting that there had been a good level of completion, and introduced the QIP for 2020/21.
 153. Responding to the Committee Chair's prompt about measurable outcomes, the Principal confirmed that success criteria would be added to the QIP prior to submission to the Board of Governors.
 154. The Committee Chair welcomed the clear linkages between the SAR and the QIP and the relevance of the areas covered, noting that the plan appeared to be comprehensive and required the prioritisation of resources.
 155. **Resolved** – that the committee recommend to the Board of Governors that the Self-Assessment Report 2019/20 provided a satisfactory basis on which to judge the quality of the FE and apprenticeship performance and quality improvement targets and that the SAR and the associated Quality Improvement Plan for 2020/21 be approved by the Board.

Construction Operational Action Plan

156. The committee had received for information and assurance the report of the Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) and the quality operational action plan for the Construction curriculum area.
157. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) explained the reasons behind the review of the Construction provision, giving a detailed summary of for each course, and presented the operational action plan which sought to make rapid improvements in teaching, learning and assessment to improve learner attainment and progression.
158. The Head of Learning & Quality reported that he had undertaken the planned 'deep dive' audit of the Construction team (together with Motor Vehicle) and that he was pleased to report that the quality of education in the Future Skills building was 'Good', with some of the practical sessions having 'Outstanding' features. There were some actions for improvement identified for the theoretical sessions and progress would be reviewed fortnightly, with bespoke CPD and continued coaching in place for teachers depending on their level of experience.
159. Asked by a member whether the impact of the pandemic on GCSEs in schools could have a detrimental effect on students' maths and science knowledge in this area of learning, the Vice Principal (Curriculum) explained that the College had carried out assessments at the start of term to provide a roadmap for support where required and that the processes were in place to offer this.
160. Members discussed the reliance in Construction on a small number of specialist teaching staff and questioned the extent to which this remained a risk factor. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) agreed that it could be a challenge and noted that Construction was a growth area of the curriculum for student enrolments, with an increase in construction jobs in the local area, and that it was important. However, members also

recognised that reliance on individual specialists was an issue in a range of subjects and education institutions.

161. The committee noted the actions being taken by College management in relation to Construction and that the report confirmed that management understood the performance issues and that these were being addressed as a priority.

Maths & English Operational Action Plan

162. The committee had received for information and assurance the report of the Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) and the quality operational action plan for Maths and English.
163. The committee noted that interventions taken in previous years in maths and English delivery had supported increased achievement at GCSE level on both campuses. However, the impact of changes in delivery required by the pandemic was having a detrimental effect on attendance and engagement, with variability between sites and curriculum areas, and this was being addressed. Additionally, achievement of functional skills maths and English had declined in 2019-20 and actions had been identified to improve the standards and consistency of assessment and monitoring of individual learner performance.
164. The Staff Governor commended review of online delivery, recognising the level of difficulty achieving maths & English qualifications represented for some students and that completing learning within a set 'attendance' time period was sometimes problematic if a student struggled with a particular element of the curriculum.
165. The committee was assured that College management understood the performance issues in relation to maths and English and that these were being addressed as a priority. It was noted that the operational action plan would be monitored by the Vice Principals at both campuses with the support of the Head of Learning & Quality.

Apprenticeships

166. The committee had received for information and assurance the report of the Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) and Apprenticeship Manager on an ESFA minimum standard review and the improvement plan supplied to the ESFA.
167. It was noted that, overall, Apprenticeship performance had improved, with an overall success rate of 72.7% and College delivered programmes achieving a success of 76.8%. Overall retention was stable despite significant changes and challenges within the Apprenticeship landscape. The Apprenticeships Manager explained, however, that, for a number of specific reasons, three Apprenticeship programmes had not met the minimum achievement standard threshold of 62% in 2019/20. In the case of two of these programmes, there were temporary reasons or specific unavoidable reasons and therefore no further action was required.
168. For the other programme, Game & Wildlife Apprenticeship, it was reported that the low achievement had primarily been as a result of the model of delivery requested by employers being detrimental to student retention. It was recognised that performance in this area had also been an issue in previous years. An action plan to address these issues through a new model of delivery, changes to the recruitment of employers and support for teaching enhancement had been submitted to the ESFA. Progress would be monitored and reported to the next meeting of the committee.

169. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) explained the characteristics of the Game & Wildlife industry and noted, that while necessary for learner success, the revised pattern of block release was not as popular with employees because of the working patterns of gamekeepers. Enrolment figures were down since the previous year.
170. The committee noted that the College had identified and responded to the underperformance as a priority and that the matters reported were also identified in the SAR and the actions include in the QIP.

COLLEGE DIGI-ED STRATEGY

171. The committee had received the report of the Head of Learning & Quality together with the new Digi-Ed Strategy, which was planned to be updated annually with a report to the committee on progress and replaced the previous ILT Strategy.
172. The Head of Learning & Quality explained that the strategy aimed to shift the emphasis from focussing on technology as a delivery means towards digital learning and education as an overall journey, accessible to all. The strategy set out five key aims, with dissemination and sharing of effective practices central. Key milestones included the reforming of the current ILT team as the Digi-Ed team, with a requirement for further investment in the team and in IT hardware/software.
173. Members commended the work of the ILT and IT teams in supporting remote teaching during the last year and sought more information about the scope of planned changes for the ILT team, the role of the Digi-Ed team in the teaching and learning observations (TALO) team, and barriers to students engaging more with digital learning. The Head of Learning & Quality summarised the plans, emphasising the need to ensure all students could engage. In terms of TALOs, the Digi-Ed team would provide expert support in embedding digital teaching skills and work with other members of the TALO team.
174. The Principal explained that the College had supported students during the previous lockdown to ensure all students had access in their household to a suitable device for remote learning. With further investment in hardware, the College was now able to support students as necessary to have access to a dedicated device. The Principal went on to highlight the budget considerations, with savings from other areas such as reductions in hard copy library publications contributing to the costs of digital resources.
175. The Staff Governor welcomed the commitment to and investment in digital learning technology and support and reflected the associated resources required in terms of IT support and maintenance and support for the new digital T-Levels.
176. The committee endorsed the new Digi-Ed Strategy as being in line with the College's strategic objectives and QIP, noting that the strategy provided a starting point for a refocused and rejuvenated College-wide approach to implementing pedagogical practices through innovative, engaging technology that supported and enhanced digital skills.

HEALTHCHECK REPORT

177. The committee had received the latest College Healthcheck report (08/2020).
178. The Head of Learning & Quality updated the committee on the latest teaching and learning observations (TALO) data, as of 27 November, noting that the data would also be included in the next Healthcheck Report issued to governors. The Head of Learning & Quality explained that this year's TALO observations were being prioritised based on the

needs of individual staff, rather than by curriculum area, to intervene and support at an early stage.

179. The Head of Learning & Quality explained that he was supporting teachers with a range of Covid-19 safe interactive learning activities in response to the restrictions on physical spaces having constrained use of the collaborative and interactive learning approaches which had been developed the previous year to engage students.
180. The meeting concluded at 12.30 pm. Confidential items were discussed and are recorded separately.