

**SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE**  
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE**  
**QUALITY & STANDARDS COMMITTEE**  
**held on 25 November 2021 at 9.30 am**  
**at Sparsholt College**

**<sup>1</sup>PRESENT** J Milburn (P); G Davies (E); R Palmer (E) (Chair); H Perry (S); J Plenderleith (St); C Wilson (E).

In attendance: C James, Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education (from minute 163)  
H Mitchell, Apprenticeship Manager (minutes 120-156 & 178-183)  
R Price, Interim Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt)  
B Stokes, Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover)  
S Willson, Clerk to the Corporation

**MEMBERSHIP**

120. It was noted that S Orme had stepped down as FE Student Governor (Andover) and that recruitment was underway for a new Student Governor to join the committee.

**DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

121. R Palmer reported that his contract with the University of Reading for the provision of academic services had been renewed. This activity was recorded in the Register of Interests.

**MINUTES**

122. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

HE performance (minute 88)

123. It was noted that exam boards had now taken place. The Vice Principal HE had provided a presentation to the Board of Governors in October on University Centre Sparsholt headline outcomes for 2020-21.

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

**COMMITTEE BUSINESS PLAN**

125. The committee had received the report of the Clerk to the Corporation proposing the committee's forward business plan for 2021-22, following consultation with the Committee Chair and members of College management.

126. There were no significant changes to the planned reporting, but it was noted that revisions might be required in-year to respond to changing external requirements, such as from the Office for Students (OfS).

127. **Resolved** – that the committee's forward business plan for 2021-22 be approved.

**FURTHER EDUCATION QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE**

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

## FE Self- Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan

128. The committee had received the College's draft FE Self-Assessment Report (SAR) for 2020-21 and FE Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) for 2021-22, together with an accompanying report from the Vice Principals Curriculum.
129. The Vice Principals reported that there was some additional benchmark data to be added and some further refinements to the SAR and QIP made before presentation to the Board of Governors. It was also highlighted that this was the first SAR which Landex had been invited to validate during the process, prior to presentation to the committee, and that management had found that a worthwhile process.
130. The committee noted that learner performance, supported by improvements in teaching, learning and assessment, had been self-assessed as 'Good' and that College management was confident that the QIP provided the framework from which changes can be implemented to support further innovation in practice and enable all learners to fulfil their potential.
131. The SAR confirmed that, whilst the effectiveness of the provision was evident across most curriculum areas and there were many outstanding features, there remained some areas that had not yet made sufficient progress. Covid-19 continued to present a challenge in terms of the impact on attendance.
132. The committee also noted that, whilst exam boards had been provided with the regulatory framework needed to make any adaptations to assessments and had indicated that a certain degree of support would be offered to centres in terms of assessment content, it remained to be seen how this will be applied in light of ongoing disruption to learning in comparison to previous years so as not to jeopardise the progress of learners.
133. Members reviewed the SAR in some detail, considering a range of matters and raising a number of questions for discussion, including in relation to the strength of leadership and management in identifying and rectifying any areas of concern and the embedding of the Study Plus programme to underpin outstanding student personal development. Several challenges were recognised and discussed, including in relation to maths provision and 19+ provision. Highlights of strong performance in areas where actions had been taken in previous years included the outcomes for Care Leavers and the value-added achievement data for A Levels. Members were also commended on the learner satisfaction data.
134. The Chair commented positively on the high and consistent achievements rates between Andover and Sparsholt and the notable increase in attendance rates. He further noted that in the Personal Development section engagement with employers had confirmed their need for wider business skills. It was noted that this was addressed in a number of ways on various programmes, both formally and informally, and the Chair speculated as to whether a course in business skills to include the basics of accounting and finance would be applicable.
135. In relation to the section of the SAR on behaviours and attitudes, a member confirmed that the work of the Progress Coaches had been positively received by the curriculum teams at the curriculum area SAR meetings which he had attended.
136. Members confirmed that they found the SAR to be a thorough, coherent and well-evidenced report but suggested that it could be developed further the following year to give more clarity in terms of the College's vision for reaching 'Outstanding' and the targets/actions to achieve that. Members also suggested that performance in relation to

diversity and equality target groups could be emphasised more and that the narrative sections could in the future differentiate more between ambition and evidence, while recognising that there was a legitimate role for qualitative statements as well as quantitative data.

137. During the discussion, the Staff Governor explained the challenges for reaching Outstanding in relation to the breadth and levels of the curriculum, not just the numbers of students or size of the organisation.
138. The Principal proposed that a refresher session be held at the January Governors' Seminar on quality and curriculum, ahead of the next Ofsted inspection, and the Committee Chair endorsed this.
139. The committee went on to scrutinise the QIP, noting that there was an evident continuity between the SAR analysis and the QIP actions for continued improvement, and that the QIP targets were clear and assessable.
140. Members queried the impact on staff workload and noted the management discussions with the newly established staff Health & Wellbeing Strategy group and plan to be able to enable key staff to have the opportunity to deliver the actions and make a difference.
141. The Staff Governors also raised a question about the processes for handling and recording punctuality of attendance so that Progress Coaches were aware of any developing issues and College management undertook to give this further consideration.
142. **Resolved** – that the committee recommend to the Board of Governors that the Self-Assessment Report 2020-21 (SAR) 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 2021-22 be approved by the Board.
143. The committee endorsed College management's commendation of the professionalism and commitment of staff to their learners during a further year of challenging circumstances because of the pandemic. The Principal also commended the Director of Information & Funding, and his team, for the management of the data used in the SAR.

#### Operational Action Plans

144. The committee had received for information and assurance the reports of the Vice Principal Curriculums on the operational performance action plans for English and maths (cross campuses) and for Sport/Public Services, 19+ and Brick/Electrical (Andover).
145. The committee noted the current achievement rates for English and maths GCSEs and functional skills qualifications, and that there had been several noticeable improvements in the quality of education, though this varied by campus. There had been a focus on recruiting to key staffing positions and benefits from the introduction of additional internal quality review meetings, with earlier intervention and support, and more of a cultural shift in the curriculum teams to understanding the benefits of English and maths for students' progression. There had been concerns about attendance this year, although it was starting to improve with clearer identification of responsibilities and actions.
146. The committee noted the assessment as to why Sport/Public Services, 19+ and Brick/Electrical (Andover) required enhanced scrutiny and relevant quality improvements processes and the actions planned.

147. The Staff Governor provided some examples of the challenges faced by some students and how extenuating circumstances were recorded.
148. There was also a discussion about how improved value-added outcomes could be achieved with BTech qualifications.
149. The committee noted the actions being taken by College management in relation to both plans and was satisfied that the performance issues were understood by management and were being addressed as a priority.
150. Quality Activities
151. The committee had received an update report from the Interim Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) (also Head of Learning & Quality) on key learning and quality activities for 2021-22, covering curriculum area SAR reviews, the report from Landex on its quality advisor's part in the SAR reviews, TALO (Teaching and Learning Observations) outcomes and CPD linked to TALO outcomes.
152. Members welcomed the development of the SAR process and the earlier engagement of external review by Landex.
153. Members also endorsed the approach to TALOs and TALO reobservations, being assured by the Head of Learning and Quality that the approach was intended to be supportive and linked to academic staff development and support.
154. Members queried the reported use of recorded TALOS, and the Head of Learning & Quality provided assurance that these were sometimes used as a way of providing additional feedback, alongside the continuing use of in-person observations.
155. The Principal highlighted that the process for Learning Walks had also been further developed, with walks based on specific themes in line with Ofsted's approach. College management was also responding to feedback to help support staff to deal with low level behavioural issues from students, although this did not appear to be a widespread issue.
156. The Vice Principal and Dean of HE also reported for the committee's information developments to the approach to TALOs in HE, which incorporated specific HE criteria such as scholarly activity and industry engagement, and were also intended to be supportive. This included an established process of peer observations (maximum of one in the member of academic staff's own subject area). Separate processes existed for the FdSc Vet Nursing to comply with Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons requirements for observations to be conducted by a qualified Vet Nurse.

## **T- LEVELS**

157. The committee had received the termly monitoring report of the Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) on actions to support the College in delivering T-level routes from September 2022 at the Andover College campus.
158. The committee noted that, following confirmation from the DfE in July that the College's proposed T Levels Capital Fund bid had been agreed in principle, the College subsequently resubmitted data to support its application and this was rejected by the DfE. The Principal summarised the actions being taken to encourage a review by the DfE of the decision, given that the declined application could have ramifications for the College in being able to deliver the T-level in Construction, and the contingency plans being considered. This was particularly challenging given the timescales.

159. The committee noted that there was good progress in other areas of the T-Level planning, including in relation to securing work placements with employers for the different T-Level pathways. Other matters highlighted were development of a T-Level transition programme and actions being undertaken to assist local schools to increase their knowledge of T-Levels.
160. The committee also noted that DfE had announced changes to the English and maths requirements for T Levels, removing the exit requirement and replacing this with a condition of funding in line with other level 3 post-16 study programmes.
161. The Vice Principal confirmed that information on applications to the T Level programmes would be reported to the Curriculum, Employers & Market Requirements Committee next term.
162. The committee noted that the actions being taken by the College in relation to T-levels and that the considerations were understood by management and continued to be addressed as a priority.

### **HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE**

163. The committee had received the report of the Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education (HE) on current progress in the quality of HE provision and the HE student experience and the main outcomes from the 2020-21 Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review (ASQER).
164. The Dean of HE highlighted key points, noting that the University Board of Studies showed confidence in the academic and quality standards of the University Centre Sparsholt (UCS) as well as the College's approach to enhancement of learning opportunities for the students. The University of Portsmouth's (UoP's) response to the College's ASQER had not yet been received.
165. The committee noted that the HE Achievement and Continuation data continued to demonstrate a quality student with the attainment of 'good' degrees being consistent year on year.
166. It was noted, however, that the impact of the Covid pandemic appeared to be increased number of students taking study breaks, student repeating units or students deferring their enrolment. There were some concerns about lower attendance and students electing to engaging with teaching remotely. A number of actions were in place in response, including increased interactive teaching methods, communications with students, and application of the HE Academic Performance Policy where appropriate.
167. The committee also noted the anticipated increasing need for wrap around support for students from the Access and Participation Plan (APP) target groups and to respond to the increasing number of students experiencing mental health issue, including the recruitment of a new Progress Coach and the use of a HE Wellbeing Champion.
168. The committee noted the assurance that a comprehensive range of external examiner activity had been undertaken, including the Award Examiner's satisfaction that assessment standards were maintained and overall positive feedback from reviews conducted by external examiners across the various programmes. As previously reported, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) had confirmed five-year accreditation for the FdSc Veterinary Nursing Science.

169. The committee noted the improvement in NSS (National Student Survey) result for 'overall satisfaction' since the previous year from 70% to 76.5%, despite the sector average falling by 7%, and the summary analysis of the detailed results. UCS performed better than the sector in relation to 'quality of teaching'. Members discussed with the Vice Principal HE the underlying factors, as well as student feedback from the Student Association and Student Resources & Facilities Group. It was noted that there were ongoing challenges with wi-fi strength on campus, partly related to the location and partly due to increased use in teaching.
170. The report confirmed that UCS continued to meet the Office for Students (OfS) registration conditions and there had been no reportable events. The Vice Principal HE briefed the committee on the consultation being undertaken by the OfS on the future regulation of quality and standards, the outcomes of which were yet to be confirmed. There was also no decision yet regarding the replacement of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) awards. The likely challenge for the UCS would be future approaches to assessing student outcomes and whether the measures recognised as 'highly skilled' the types of employment available in the specialist sectors favoured by UCS graduates.
171. 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.
172. The Principal commended the HE teams for all their efforts in supporting the excellent achievements of the students.

#### **COLLEGE REPORTS - PREVENT**

173. The committee had received the College's updated FE and HE Prevent Duty Risk Assessment/Action Plan for information and assurance.
174. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) and Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) summarised the key considerations during the review, noting that the College took into account advice and information from the FE/HE South East Region Prevent Co-ordinator (DfE) when identifying the key risks.
175. It was noted that the types of risks which were covered by Prevent had broadened since the legislation was first introduced, with potential issues acknowledged in rural areas and as a result in the growth of online activity.
176. A new risk on 'Incel' had been added to the Prevent risk register, recognising the increase in this online subculture and the risks associated with it, and a number of actions were in place to mitigate this, including through the student tutorial programme.
177. The Vice Principal Curriculum confirmed that the College had not made any Prevent referrals.

#### **COLLEGE POLICIES**

178. The committee had received the report providing a summary of the review and recommended updates to four College Group policies.
179. It was noted that the majority of the updates proposed to the FE & Apprenticeship Admissions Policy were as the result of lessons learnt and new ways of working adopted

during the pandemic. The entry criteria for under 16-year-olds had also been more closely defined.

180. It was noted that the HE Freedom of Speech Code of Practice was due for review the following term and that the FE and HE codes responded to different external requirements.
181. In relation to declaring conflicts of interest, it was noted that management would put in place actions to communicate the policy and procedures once these were approved.
182. Members raised a range of points about the contents of the policies and the committee agreed a number of revisions to provide additional clarity and consistency about the policies and related procedures.
183. **Resolved** – that the following updated policies be recommended to the Board of Governors for approval, subject to the revisions agreed by the committee:
  - a) FE & Apprenticeship Admissions Policy, with a clarification in relation to the protected characteristics;
  - b) Academic Conflict of Interests Policy, with the addition of reference to declaration of potential conflicts arising from gifts and hospitality;
  - c) FE Fitness to Study Policy, with the addition of more information about the appeals process;
  - d) FE Freedom of Speech Code of Practice, with amendments to ensure the level of authority and reporting requirements in relation to decisions about external speakers and about contentious meetings were consistent.
184. The meeting concluded at 12.40 pm.