

SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
QUALITY & STANDARDS COMMITTEE
held on 23 June 2022 at 09:30
at Sparsholt College

¹PRESENT J Milburn (P); G Davies (E); R Palmer (C); H Perry (S); C Wilson (E) (Chair)

In attendance:

C James, Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education (from minute x)
H Mitchell, Apprenticeship Manager (to minute x)
R Price, Head of Learning & Quality
B Stokes, Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover)
M Treagust, Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt)
S Willson, Head of Corporate Governance

MEMBERSHIP

58. The Committee Chair welcomed R Palmer to his first meeting as a co-opted member and recorded the thanks of the committee to J Plenderleith who had completed her term of office as HE Student Governor.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

59. There were no interests to declare.

MINUTES

60. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 February 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

61. FE Quality (minute 23/22): the Head of Learning & Quality confirmed that of the Teaching, Learning and Observations (TALO) for technicians had taken place and reporting would follow.

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

FURTHER EDUCATION QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE

FE In-Year Performance

63. The committee had received the progress report on FE and Apprenticeships performance indicators and the FE Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) for 2021-22 from the Vice Principals Curriculum, Apprenticeships Manager and Head of Learning & Quality. The report included progress on the English and maths (cross campus) and the Brick, Electrical, 19+ and Value Added (Andover College) operational action plans.

64. The committee reviewed the current progress in relation to FE Andover, FE Sparsholt and Apprenticeships, discussing with the Vice Principals Curriculum the decline in retention on both campuses which was likely to impact overall achievement. The Vice Principals

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

Curriculum highlighted course areas which had been a particular challenge in relation to retention and their assessment of the underlying reasons and the actions taken.

65. Although the gap in attendance between main programmes and English and Maths had reduced, members sought further information about the underlying factors behind the variation in attendance for English and Maths between learners on different study programmes at Andover College, noting that attendance was significantly lower for the creative subjects. The Staff Governor explained that creative subject learners were used to working in more creative spaces and it was agreed to look at the location and timetabling of Maths and English for these learners.
66. The Head of Learning & Quality also noted that the new English and Maths monitoring meetings, which had been added to the Quality cycle in addition to IQRs, provided greater transparency about performance and progress.
67. The committee welcomed a number of positive performance indicators at Andover College, including the improvements expected in value added in Sport and Public Services and the encouraging levels of attendance and engagement at GCSE exams.
68. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) provided explanations of the overall decline in in-year retention at Sparsholt College, explaining some of the challenges encountered with learners re-integrating to full time face-to-face learning.
69. Responding to the Committee Chair's challenge about the lower in-year retention for Equine Studies compared with other parts of the Land and Recreation Studies faculty, the Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) confirmed that there had been some challenges identified in relation to the ways of workings of the academic and centre staff and the levels of guidance and support required by some learners, and that these were being addressed.
70. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) also reported challenges from the return to technical exams and synoptic assessments which had seen a decline in results compared to the Spring 2020 (pre-pandemic) assessments. Learners were being supported with additional study support for Summer retakes. One of the factors identified as a performance issue by land-based colleges had been a long, written answer question at the end of the technical exams and greater preparedness was needed.
71. The committee noted that, as a result of retention and assessment outcomes, that the 'worse case' forecast for achievement for the Sparsholt campus was 83.5% (excluding RHS courses and adult funded short courses). The Principal stressed that addressing this would be a major priority for College management. The committee agreed that the issues identified were disappointing in terms of achievement for individual learners and welcomed the actions being taken to support learners. It would be necessary for the QIP to prioritise actions to further address these issues and for the committee to be assured that the College was doing all that it could to improve performance in 2022-23.
72. It was noted that, for both campuses, while many challenges had been caused by the pandemic, there had not been a consistently effective enough response from all areas. After an initial period of adjustment after the disruptions of the pandemic, clear expectations needed to be set for learners. The Staff Governor added that there had been a noticeable change in attitude from some parents in relation to supporting attendance and that issues such as travel distances and cost could be a factor. The College sought to mitigate these risks through tracking travel distances and ensuring progress coaches discussed issues with learners.

73. The Principal also highlighted that the increase in fuel costs for both parents and bus companies was a risk factor for enrolments for 2022-23 and the Admissions team were communicating with families about the availability of bursaries. The Apprenticeship Manager explained that similar issues were being experienced by apprentices and that the College was encouraging employers to increase salaries beyond the minimum wage where feasible given that businesses were also under pressure from cost inflation.
74. The Apprenticeship Manager noted that in-year retention was up year on year overall and the apprenticeship team was closely monitoring attendance during the summer period when more employment was available.
75. The committee noted that the current apprenticeship achievement rate was 48.3% and that this would likely increase to 62.3% once the End Point Assessments (EPA) currently underway completed (assuming all learners passed). If the EPA organisations had sufficient availability, there were a further 21 apprentices who could achieve their EPA by year end, bringing the achievement rate to 68.3%.
76. The Apprenticeship Manager explained the programmes which were currently below minimum performance, 5 out of 6 of which were affected by low group size. The Quality team had provided enhanced quality monitoring for the sixth programme (Horticulture & Landscape Operative Standard) and a series of actions were in place.
77. The committee noted the updating of the Apprenticeship accountability framework this year, including new minimum thresholds for intervention.
78. The Head of Learning & Quality drew the committee's attention to a number of updated actions in the QIP and plans for the following year's QIP, highlighting positive responses from learners about the value of feedback from curriculum teams, plans for the programme of external quality reviews, developments to the learner surveys going forward to encourage higher rates of participation, remodelling of the TALO programme to include more staff categories, extra English & Maths activities and building the Study Plus offer.
79. Members discussed the developments to the Professional Learner initiative and induction and endorsed the expansion of the TALO programme, providing this continued to be a supportive mechanism for staff development.
80. Members also queried and received clarifications in relation to the data in the report's appendices about awarding body quality reviews of study programmes and the sustainability of A Level courses with small student cohorts.

Ofsted Residential Inspection

81. The committee had received the confidential draft report of the Ofsted inspection of residential provision (under the social care common inspection framework) which took place on 3-5 May 2022 and was subject to internal verification by Ofsted before confirmation and publication.
82. The committee noted that the draft overall judgement and the judgement for the three areas were all 'outstanding' and commended the teams involved for the excellent outcome.
83. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) explained that the inspection had been rigorous and had provided valuable confirmation of the management of residential provision and

student wellbeing across a range of activities, including HR processes. The College was nonetheless committed to continuous improvement.

Curriculum Delivery & Quality Improvement

84. The committee had received from the Vice Principals and Head of Learning & Quality the revised FE Curriculum Delivery, Teaching & Learning, and Quality Improvement Policy and the new FE Curriculum Delivery, Teaching & Learning, and Quality Improvement Strategy for 2022-23.
85. The committee noted the proposal to incorporate more information about teaching, learning and assessment mechanisms established at the College and to add 'teaching and learning' to the title of both the policy and strategy. The policy was normally reviewed on a three yearly cycle while the strategy set out the processes and priorities for the academic year by which the policy's aims would be achieved.
86. In response to a member's query as to whether there would be a benefit for an external review of the teaching and learning policy/strategy to validate the approach and resources involved, the Head of Learning & Quality explained that the Landex External Quality Review (EQR) activity included reviewing the operation of the teaching, learning and the resulting performance of teaching and learning. It could be considered testing the policy/strategy documents as part of this or through peer review in conjunction with the EQR steering group.
87. The Staff Governor also suggested that there could be value in seeking feedback from academic staff about the TALO process and the Head of Learning & Quality agreed this could be sought during a CPD event.
88. The committee discussed how the delivery of soft skills would be assessed and it was noted that management planned to include relevant criteria in the Professional Learner initiative and learner progress reviews, with termly monitoring of progress, as well as in the Professional Learner self-assessment surveys and the course and area Self Assessment Reports (SARs). A mapping exercise was also suggested.
89. **Resolved** – that the Board of Governors be recommended to approve the revised FE Curriculum Delivery, Teaching & Learning, and Quality Improvement Policy and the FE Curriculum Delivery, Teaching & Learning, and Quality Improvement Strategy 2022-23.

T- LEVELS

90. The committee had received the termly monitoring report of the Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) on actions to prepare the College for delivering T-levels.
91. The Vice Principal drew the committee's attention to progress in a number of areas, including the arranging of work placements and planning of the T Level programmes with insights from other colleges' experiences.
92. The committee noted that the outcomes of the T Level capital allocation bids were awaited in July. In the meantime, the College was seeking to progress preparation of facilities for the Digital Design and Production T Level while students were offsite over the summer. Work was almost complete on the identification of purchases funded by the Specialist Equipment Allocation and an outline would be submitted to the ESFA for review with additional information submitted in the next academic year to demonstrate how the money had been spent.

93. The committee sought confirmation of contingency plans should the T Level capital bid for Construction (Brick and Carpentry) not be successful and the Principal explained that discussions were taking place with the local council about potential lease of buildings.
94. The Principal reported that given the strategic importance and challenges with implementing the new T Level pathways at Andover College, additional management resource would be allocated to oversee this and support the Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover).
95. The committee noted the monitoring report and was satisfied that the necessary preparations for delivery of T Levels in relation to quality and standards were understood by management and continued to be addressed as a priority.

HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE

96. 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, together with the Royal College of Veterinary Science (RCVS) report of the annual progress review for the FdSC Vet Nursing Science accreditation.
97. The Vice Principal HE highlighted key points, noting the decline in attendance year on year across all subject areas. Emerging from the pandemic, attendance had become a challenge and measures were being taken to address this. From the start of the new academic year, remote attendance would only be permitted by exception, although recordings of lessons would still be made available to support learning.
98. Members reflected on common experiences elsewhere in the sector about changes to student behaviours and expectations as a result of the pandemic.
99. The Vice Principal also noted that retention rates were comparable with the same time last year but that the reduction in attendance would be likely to have an impact on end of year achievement. The module assessment board had been held and confirmed there would be a large number of students doing second attempts over the summer. There were adjustment issues for some students with undertaking assessment, and some had not attended their mocks. Revision sessions were being offered over the summer.
100. The committee noted the outcome of the RCVS review in April had been positive but had classified the University of Portsmouth (who held the accreditation) as a medium risk provider. The Vice Principal & Dean of HE had queried this, requesting information about the risk matrix indicators used, and the RCVS had now informed her that the risk classification had been reduced to low. Written confirmation had been requested from the RCVS.
101. The committee noted the update on HE student recruitment and that confirmed acceptances were currently lower than at the same point in time in 2021. Economic pressures on families were thought to be a factor, as well as changes to the UCAS application process. Applicants whose offers had been 'declined by default' by UCAS had been contacted for feedback and the reasons varied. There were not known to be any quality or reputation issues linked to recruitment, and corresponding actions, were being closely monitored by the SLT and the Board.
102. Responding to a member's question as to whether accelerated two year degrees or part-time online offers had been considered to respond to economic and other pressures on

students, the Vice Principal & Dean of HE explained that options had been considered but that there were operational hurdles to extending teaching over 52 weeks. However, higher level apprenticeships were being introduced and other alternative models would continue to be considered.

103. The committee noted the summary of outcomes from the Spring and Summer term student surveys, noting that satisfaction about the quality of teaching remained very high, with satisfaction about facilities slightly lower. This related to known issues, such as the lack of a standalone HE teaching building. The Principal reported the decision, endorsed by the Resources Committee, to bid for £4m of Office for Students capital fund monies for an HE building (to be submitted in July).

COMPLAINTS MONITORING

104. The committee had received the annual report of the Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) on Complaints, Comments and Compliments covering the whole College Group.
105. The Vice Principal Curriculum explained that the complaints reported covered the academic year up to the end of May and that future reporting would also capture complaints received from June to September for the information of the committee. At the end of May 2021 there had been 89 complaints, rising to 131 by the end of August. These end of year complaints related mainly to the teacher assessed grade outcomes.
106. The committee noted that there had been 83 complaints from September 2021 up to the end of May 2022 which had led to formal responses and reviewed the breakdown of complainants and subject matter of the complaints. The Vice Principal Curriculum gave examples of some learning points and actions taken but noted that the analysis had not identified any systematic concerns with areas of the business. It was also noted that there had been no complaints in relation to the College's approach to managing Covid-19.
107. The committee noted the summary of matters relating to the Conduct and Performance Policy (which applied to both FE and HE) and discussed the analysis of serious conduct reviews and student exclusions, where there had been a focus in ensuring consistent implementation of the policy and establishing expected student behaviours. It was noted that the performance review process was aimed at supporting the learners to complete their study programme and that standards would be reinforced during the student induction at the start of 2022-23.
108. The Principal explained that, if a learner was excluded from residential accommodation, the College sought to support them to continue their programme if possible or to transfer to another provider if not.
109. The committee noted that the College continued to maintain a zero-tolerance approach to alcohol and drug use in accommodation and this had been a focus for the warden team to enforce given the behavioural trends this year. This had been recognised and supported by the Ofsted residential inspectors.
110. The committee queried the low number of compliments recorded and the Staff Governor confirmed that many more compliments were received from students and parents/carers and shared locally.

111. The committee also discussed the type of complaints/feedback which could be received below the level of a formal complaint and how these could be captured and reviewed centrally to inform strategic decision-making.
112. The Head of Learning & Quality explained the new ‘See It, Say It, Do It’ approach to encouraging student feedback, with QR codes on posters provided to enable feedback on any safeguarding concerns but also for positive suggestions.
113. The Vice Principal & Dean of HE summarised the procedures for HE complaints with three academic related complaints having three stages (University Centre Sparsholt, University of Portsmouth, Office for the Independent Adjudicator HE (OIA)) and non-academic related complaints having two stages (University Centre Sparsholt and OIA). The aim was to resolve complaints informally first where possible. There had been a small number of formal HE complaints in the year and the Vice Principal & Dean of HE explained the background to these and the outcome. There was one complaint which had gone to the OIA and where the outcome was awaited.

HEALTHCHECK REPORT

114. The committee had received the latest Healthcheck (KPIs) report (2022-04) and noted that updated data was due to be released shortly and would be presented to the July meeting of the Board. In the meantime, there were no matters to raise not already covered on the agenda.

COLLEGE POLICIES

115. The committee had received the report providing a summary of the review and recommended updates to the HE Admissions and HE Student Engagement policies.
116. The Vice Principal & Dean of HE explained that the HE Student Engagement Policy had been updated to include an increased emphasis on the importance of student feedback, the provision of confirmation of actions taken as a result, and the role of student feedback in compliance, course development and quality improvement.
117. It was noted that proposed revisions to the HE Admissions Policy were minor updates, the policy having been fully updated in 2021.
118. **Resolved** – that the Board of Governors be recommended to approve the updated HE Admissions and HE Student Engagement policies.

COMMITTEE PERFORMANCE REVIEW

119. The committee had received the report of the Head of Corporate Governance which provided information to inform the committee’s annual review of its performance and terms of reference and highlighted the requirement of the AOC Code of Good Governance to ‘foster exceptional teaching and learning’.
120. The Committee Chair highlighted the review question, ‘Does the committee’s oversight contribute to the College’s success and the outcome for learners?’ and sought feedback from members of the committee and management.
121. It was noted that over the last year or two and under the leadership of the previous Committee Chair, the committee had been proactive in scrutinising matters under its remit, reinforcing management’s drive for continuous quality improvement in FE and HE

through the questioning of proposals and providing insights into performance management. With the support of the Principal and SLT, reports had been reformatted and focused to provide clarity for strategic decision-making while also providing detailed underpinning evidence in a way which enabled open and informed discussions at meetings.

122. The Principal welcomed the range of skills and knowledge of the committees' members in acting as a sounding board for management.
123. The committee was satisfied to report to the Board that it had undertaken its activities in 2021-22 in line with its terms of reference and business plan. There were no updates to recommend to the committee's terms of reference.
124. The Committee Chair noted that it was the last meeting of the Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education, Caroline James, and thanked her for her enormous contribution to the governance and leadership of the College's HE provision.
125. The meeting concluded at 12.35.