

**SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE**  
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE**  
**CURRICULUM, EMPLOYERS & MARKET REQUIREMENTS COMMITTEE**  
**held on 20 October 2022 at 09:30**  
**via online videoconference**

**PRESENT** S Duckering (C); T Floyd (E) (Chair); J Milburn (P); S Morgan (E); G Morris (St);  
N Moody (E).

In attendance: J Chapman, Marketing Manager (min 156-170)  
S Grant, Deputy Principal  
S Hermiston, Director of Information & Funding (min 156-170)  
D Mernagh, Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education  
B Stokes, Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover College)  
M Treagust, Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt College)  
S Willson, Head of Corporate Governance

**APOLOGIES & MEMBERSHIP**

125. Apologies were received from M Serridge.
126. The Committee Chair welcomed G Morris to his first meeting of the committee in his capacity as FE Student Governor.

**DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

127. There were no new interests to be declared. The Register of Interests recorded that S Morgan's son is enrolled as an FE student at Sparsholt College.

**MINUTES**

128. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

**MATTERS ARISING**

Employability skills (min 81/22)

129. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) confirmed that systems had been implemented to monitor and support the development of students' 'soft' employment skills through their progress reviews. This followed feedback from employers and previous discussions at the committee. The Vice Principal confirmed that the outcomes would be monitored via the FE performance reports to the Quality & Standards Committee.
130. There were no other matters arising not covered by items on the agenda.

**COMMITTEE BUSINESS PLAN**

131. The committee had received the report of the Head of Corporate Governance proposing the annual business plan for the committee, following consultation with the Committee Chair and members of the SLT.
132. The committee noted that the developments to the plan responded to the increased regulatory requirements in relation to reviewing and reporting on how the College met skills needs and aligned with Ofsted's Enhanced Inspection Framework, including through

a new termly report to the committee on engagement with stakeholders and employers. The plan also introduced ‘deep dives’ into areas of the curriculum at the October and May meetings, alongside the annual review of the three-year curriculum plan at the February meeting

133. The committee considered proposals about renaming the committee.
134. **Resolved** – that the Board be recommended to approve the renaming of the committee to the Curriculum, Skills and Stakeholders Committee.

### **MEETING SKILLS NEEDS**

135. The committee had received the report of the Deputy Principal and Vice Principals for FE and HE on key elements of employer and wider stakeholder engagement by the College which inform the development and delivery of the Colleges’ offer to meet the skills needs of employers and the local, regional and national economy.
136. The Deputy Principal emphasised that employer engagement had been a long-standing strength of the College and that this continued to be development further, highlighting examples of recent actions and future plans. This included taking a leading role in collaborative projects with other colleges and working in partnership with employers through a range of activities from Industry Curriculum Boards and Industry Work Placements to employers providing guest lectures and sabbatical placements for College staff.
137. The committee acknowledged the breadth and depth of stakeholder engagement outlined in the report, noting also the examples given of stakeholder engagement with County Councils and Local Authorities and with the wider education sector and community groups.
138. The committee sought further information in a number of areas, including in relation to the benefits and impact on the curriculum of the staff industry sabbaticals, the impact should the DfE decide to remove funding from Industry Work Placements, and about the reasons why some students did not complete their full placements.
139. A member also observed that, from her experience, sabbaticals and other activities could also have benefits for the employers themselves and encourage further engagement.
140. The Committee Chair highlighted the new statutory duties of the Board to reviewing how the College meets skills needs and the requirements for colleges to evidence stakeholder engagement as part of the Ofsted Enhanced Inspection Framework.
141. The Principal confirmed that the information in relation to the four Ofsted stakeholder groupings would be updated and shared in the event of an Ofsted inspection and that College management was also identifying around 40 stakeholders to seek their agreement to be approached by Ofsted for feedback.

### **CURRICULUM**

#### Curriculum Deep Dives

142. As the first of a series of ‘deep dives’ into areas of the curriculum plan, the committee had received the report of the Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) on the A Level curriculum at Andover campus and the Vice Principals Curriculum gave presentations on Construction at Andover campus and Land and Wildlife at Sparsholt campus for the committee’s consideration.

143. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) summarised key points about the overall decline in enrolments to A Levels at Andover campus, the trends by subject area and the research conducted with local schools to understand the data and inform actions in relation to future curriculum planning and outreach activities.
144. The committee recognised that this had been recognised by the SLT and the Board as an area of strategic risk and that the SLT were undertaking a strategic review of the curriculum offer at Andover campus and how the College engaged with local schools and parents. The initial stage of this review in 2021/22 had led to the closure of A-level Statistics and Further Maths due to learner numbers not being viable and showing limited potential for future growth.
145. Members sought further information about, and discussed, the population demographics in the Andover area and the pupil capacity of local schools, the financial viability of small cohorts and the benefits of a curriculum which offered a range of qualifications, whether T Levels would have an impact on A Level enrolments, and the challenge of a significant number of Year 11 pupils in one area leaving NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and initiatives funded by Hampshire County Council to respond to this.
146. The committee noted that management was considering further opportunities to refine and consolidate the offer, while allowing the College to be agile enough to respond to the needs of the local area and maximise future growth, and that the strategic review would inform the three-year curriculum plan to be presented at the following meeting.
147. The Vice Principals Curriculum presented the Subject Profiles for Construction (including Electrical) and Land and Wildlife, showing the offers across all parts of the curriculum – from 14-16 and Specialist SEND to 19+ and HE provision, with examples of some of the key external stakeholders in each subject area and the actions in progress to further develop the offer.
148. Asked about the T Levels transition programme, the Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) confirmed that this was a one-year programme, followed by a two-year T Level.
149. The committee welcomed the subject overviews as providing clarity about the curriculum offer across the different areas of provision and a means of identifying any gaps in how the College was meeting skills needs.

### T Levels

150. The committee had received the report of the Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) on the implementation plan for delivering T Level routes from September 2023 at Sparsholt campus. While good progress was being made where possible, there were a number of key uncertainties and risks relating to reforms to Level 3 qualifications and the roll out of T Levels.
151. It was noted that, while the College had been successful in its application to run the Agriculture, Environment and Animal Care T-level over two pathways (Animal Care and Management and Agriculture, Land Management and Production), the Animal Care and Management Pathway (and its two occupational specialisms Animal Care and Management and Equine Care and Management) have been deferred for a year while the science content of the qualification is reviewed and enhanced. Additionally, there was limited information available from the awarding bodies about the programmes to share with applicants.

152. Members discussed the differences in the T level programmes to the existing qualifications and how these could be delivered to meet student and industry needs, for example by providing core units in agriculture before learners undertook specialist pathway units (livestock or crop production). The risks around early specialism were recognised and had been fed back to the awarding body by land-based colleges.
153. The committee also noted that a transition programme would be developed in conjunction with the AOC for the T Level pathways at Sparsholt campus for those who did not meet the T level entry requirements, recognising that this would need a large vocational element alongside English and maths.
154. The committee noted that the DfE continued to consult on the future of level 3 provision, the outcome of which had the potential to lead to significant change in the qualifications available to the College. Funding for existing Level 3 technical courses had been extended until the end of 2024/25. The other uncertainty was Land and Wildlife where the T level pathway had been indefinitely paused and there was currently no suitable replacement beyond 2026.
155. The committee noted the monitoring report and was satisfied that the necessary preparations for, and risks around, delivery of T Levels were understood by management and continued to be addressed as a priority.

## **RECRUITMENT & MARKETING**

### Curriculum Enrolments

156. The committee had received the annual report of the Director of Information & Funding on recruitment and enrolment trends across FE, Apprenticeships and HE in relation to the curriculum offer.
157. The committee sought additional information about, and discussed, the underlying context for the data, including in relation to the progression rates from Level 2 to Level 3 and from year one to year two of Level 3, and related management actions.
158. The committee noted that the projected decline in overall FE 16–18-year-old numbers compared to the previous year would have a negative impact on income in 2023-24.
159. The committee also reviewed the data for Higher Education which showed a decline in overall numbers compared to previous year, although Agriculture and Vet Nursing enrolments had grown. Members questioned why number of students in certain subject areas had declined. The Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education summarised his assessment of the underlying reasons and examples of actions planned as a result, with further work to follow to review some areas.
160. Members noted that the wider HE sector was experiencing some similar post-pandemic challenges in relation to student mental health, young people's ability to enter HE, and higher grades opening up other choices for these students in the short-term.

### Marketing Strategy

161. The committee had received the report of the Marketing Manager on progress with the marketing strategy and priorities for the operational plan for 2022-23 to realise the College's growth ambitions.

162. The Deputy Principal explained that the report provided an overview of the priority actions for University Centre Sparsholt, Andover College and Sparsholt College and the Marketing Manager explained some of the key activities.
163. Members discussed the use of decliner research and the headlines emerging for each of the areas and noted the context for Andover College of other colleges in the region providing competitive offers.
164. The committed noted that the post-Covid era had seen changes to enrolment trends, including a high level of individuals in Andover choosing not to engage, a higher-than-normal proportion choosing to study out of area and a lower-than-normal number of learners progressing. Sparsholt College had remained popular but needed to further improve conversion and progression outcomes. It was noted that the Operations Plan would become a working document to enable the College to respond to the challenges.
165. The Committee Chair thanked the Marketing Manager for the update and, noting that it was her last meeting before she left the College, expressed appreciation for her contributions to the committee's considerations and to supporting the success of the College.

### **ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION**

166. The committee had received the termly report of the Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education and the Director of Information & Funding on progress with delivery of the Access and Participation Plan (APP) 2020-21 to 2024-25.
167. The committee noted that substantial progress had been made to date on meeting the 2021/22 "Access" and "Success" targets, indicating that consistent progress was now embedded within the organisation. The committee noted that management recognised that the lack of continued and consistent progress and the worsening of the target relating to recruiting POLAR4 Q1, Q2 males, despite a targeted marketing campaign, was concerning and an updated action plan was being developed. Members discussed the data and the issues arising.
168. The committee noted the proposal to track those who had benefited from support and measure the levels of success in each area, to then take appropriate action in order to assure that appropriateness of the current approaches.
169. It was noted that the revised APP for 2023-24 had been submitted to the Office for Students (OfS) as required by the end of July and final agreement for the plan was being awaited. The report set out for the committee's information the four new aims, and related measurable objectives, which had been added to the APP. An updated action plan would accompany the revised APP. It was also noted that consultation for APPs from the 2024-25 academic year and beyond had been opened by the OfS.
170. The Vice Principal & Dean of HE set out that, going forward, a simplified tracker of progress, using more accessible language, would be developed in order to enable greater levels of monitoring and for progress to be easier for all to understand in keeping with the new updated guidance.

### **HE STUDENT OUTCOMES**

171. The committee had received the report of the Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education on the outcomes of the Graduate Survey for the 2019/2020 cohort conducted by HESA.

172. The committee reviewed the outcomes of the survey. The number of UCS graduates who had completed the survey (53%) and the overall number of UCS graduates in employment or further study at the time of the survey (92%) were marginally higher than the national rates. However, there was a significant risk identified in the percentage of graduates classified as in highly skilled employment (33%) compared to the national figure (76%) and the OfS B3 threshold of 60%.
173. The Vice Principal & Dean of HE reported that the risks arose from the lack of understanding about and recognition of highly skilled roles in the land-based sectors by the survey takers and the Standards Occupational Classification. This was exacerbated by the effect on the data of small cohort sizes, the timing of the survey in relation to progression from FdSc to BSc degrees, as well as to MScs, and the differences between entry level and career development paths compared to other sectors. This was noted to be a common issue for land-based colleges.
174. The committee noted that College management was focusing on actions to seek to address this issue, ensuring an employability and career focused curriculum, raising employment aspirations, and encouraging a higher response through adopting ways to maintain contact (such as an alumni association via social media).

#### **HEALTHCHECK REPORT**

175. The committee had received the most recent Healthcheck report (2022/06), noting that the key performance indicators in relation to student numbers had been reviewed in detail under previous agenda items.
176. The Committee Chair requested that, if available, the enrolment and recruitment data for T Level and transition to T Level courses be added to future Healthcheck reports given this was a key development area of the curriculum.
177. At the Committee Chair's request, the Principal and Deputy Principal undertook to consider whether appropriate key performance indicators in relation to meeting skills needs could be developed and included as part of the Healthcheck performance reporting.
178. The meeting ended at 12.25.