

**SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE**  
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE**  
**CURRICULUM, SKILLS & STAKEHOLDERS COMMITTEE (CSS)**  
**held on 2 March 2023 at 09:30**  
**at Sparsholt College**

**PRESENT** S Duckering (C); T Floyd (E) (Chair); J Milburn (P); S Morgan (E).

In attendance: R Burrows, Interim Marketing Manager (min 52-57)  
S Grant, Deputy Principal  
S Hermiston, Director of Information & Funding (min 15-33)  
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**

1. Apologies were received from N Moody, G Morris and M Serridge.

**DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

2. There were no interests to be declared.

**MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING**

3. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.
4. There were no matters arising not covered by items on the agenda.

**STAKEHOLDERS**

5. The committee had received the report of the Principal, 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. In addition, the committee had received a position statement which set out the College's strategic intent and means by which the College contributes to making skills needs.
6. The committee noted the update on the development of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and the 'long list' of priority sectors which had been identified by LSIP work to date. The College was being represented by the Chair of Governors, a Vice Chair, the CSS Committee Chair and members of the SLT at a collaborative event in March to discuss the proposed sector priorities and delivery of skills needs across the region.
7. The committee discussed the alignment of the provisional priority skills with the College's understanding of skills needs and the curriculum offer, noting the inclusion of the rural economy and land-based industries and that 'green skills' had been identified as a cross-cutting priority theme rather than a separate sector. It was also noted that the need for horticulture skills previously identified in EM3 LEP LMI data came under rural economic in the LSIP work.

8. The Principal also highlighted that colleges would be expected to respond to the DfE's national priorities and that there was a likelihood these would cover the areas of food security and environmental protection.
9. The committee noted the update on the delivery of the £2.6m Strategic Development Fund (SDF) green skills project in collaboration with Central Hampshire (EM3) and Surrey colleges and that a new LSIF fund linked to the LSIP was anticipated.
10. The committee commended College management for being an AOC Beacon Finalist, with partner colleges, for the project supporting 'industry relevant' knowledge to academic staff through employer sabbaticals.
11. The committee noted that the College has actively working with over 1,500 employers to date this year over a range of activities from Industry Curriculum Boards, to delivering visits/guest lectures to apprenticeships and industry work placements. The report provided details and examples to evidence the activities taking place. In addition, it was discussed that the work to map and analyse stakeholder engagement was enabling management to identify areas where engagement could be strengthened and put actions in place.
12. The Deputy Principal confirmed that DfE/ESFA funding would not be available for Industry Work Placements after 2022/23 and that this caused a resourcing and financial challenge for the College due to the desire to retain the effective Industry Work Placements team but the deferral of some T Levels leading to a funding gap in the short term. This had been highlighted by the College to the ESFA at the Annual Strategic Conversation meeting.
13. The committee went on to review the progress with engagement with stakeholders in the Civic, Education and Community groups, noting a number of significant developments and examples of good practice. This included development of a short course programme for the care industry in conjunction with Hampshire County Council, a partnership in conjunction with The Westgate School to support sustainable education goals with eight local primary schools and a programme to deliver construction qualifications to former military personnel. In relation to Community engagement, it was noted that this continued to be a developing area and that there were a range of projects underway.
14. The committee commended the ongoing extensive and collaborative activity with stakeholders, being assured by the evidence of College management's commitment to ensure that learners were ready for the needs of industry.

## **ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION**

15. The committee had received the termly report of the Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education on progress with delivery of the Access and Participation Plan (APP) 2020-21 to 2024-25.
16. The committee noted that the financial support for students studying in 2022-23 was on target.
17. The committee noted that revisions to the APP had been approved by the Office for Students (OfS) for the 2023-24 academic year and the initial steps outlined in the report for moving to the new and more ambitious plan. This included new ways of working with targeted local schools and broadening of range of HE, such as through new higher apprenticeships. A new internal APP management group had been set up to take forward the new initiatives.

18. A member shared the recently reported story of the youngest ever black professor at Cambridge University as an example of access for students from target groups and the Vice Principal & Dean of HE explained the approach to identifying target schools and involving University Centre Sparsholt students as role models.
19. Members discussed the particular barriers in relation to land based HE where representation from black and people of colour in the sector was traditionally low and the Principal highlighted speakers at the Landex conference who she hoped would work with the College to support progress in this area. It was recognised that nationally there was an increasing proportion of black and people of colour at primary and secondary school age and an imperative to support their progress through education to positive employment outcomes, including their awareness of career opportunities within the land-based sector. It was also recognised that, although Hampshire generally was less ethnically diverse and had less economic deprivation than some areas of the country, there were areas where the APP was targeted to support young people to progress to FE and HE.
20. It was noted that, to meet the new APP requirement to provide information to students and parents in an easily accessible format, an updated summary booklet for applicants identifying sources of support under the APP was being prepared in time for the next recruitment cycle.
21. The committee was satisfied by the evident continuing commitment of College management to meet the obligations outlined in the APP.

## **CURRICULUM**

### **T Levels**

22. 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.
23. The Vice Principal Curriculum highlighted the plans for delivery of the Agriculture, Environment and Animal Care T level and confirmation of the structure of the T Level, which was based on two main pathways with a 'common core' and then five 'core pathways', each with one or more 'occupational specialisms'. One of two pathways, Animal Care and Management (ACM) had been deferred until 2024. This followed a number of other changes which had seen previous deferrals and changes to the T level offer. The Agriculture and Land Management and Production (ALMP) pathway continues for September 2023.
24. The committee noted that the deferral of the ACM pathway and the delay in the qualification specifications and information being issued for the other pathways was having a direct result on student applications and the ability to prepare for delivery of the T Level curriculum. The committee was assured that the impact on the curriculum was being carefully managed to mitigate the financial impact and to support the student experience. It had been decided that the occupational specialism of Trees and Woodland Management (Arborist or Forestry) and Livestock Production would go ahead in September 2023, with further occupational specialisms in Crop Production, Land based Engineering and Ornamental Horticulture in September 2024.

25. The committee noted that existing technical qualifications in Agriculture, Land based Engineering and Horticulture would continue in 2023-24 and were assured that there would be an opportunity for students to transfer from the T Level to an existing Level 3 if needed through the 'Flying Start' programme (legacy qualifications will remain for a one year overlap period)
26. Other key preparations for T Levels noted by the committee were the DfE Specialist Equipment allocation (to be announced shortly), extensive work with the Education Training Foundation (ETF) to support academic staff with training, collaboration with external stakeholders, including City & Guilds and the AOC to develop the qualifications and transition programme, and marketing activities with applicants. It was noted that the T Level capital funding awarded to support land-based delivery was not at risk by the deferral.
27. In relation to T Levels generally, the committee noted that management was seeking to mitigate the potential retention risk of students on T Levels moving into employment without completing the qualification by working closely with employers on sequencing of teaching and learning and industry work placements.
28. The Principal highlighted the longer-term risks associated with the planned withdrawal of funding for Level 3 qualifications in 2025 if there were further postponements with the roll out of T Levels and that she would be writing again to the DfE to set out the specific impacts on the College's learners.
29. The committee 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.

#### Curriculum Contribution Analysis

30. The committee had received the report of the Director of Information & Funding on the FE and HE curriculum contribution model findings. The analysis was provided to the committee to inform its consideration of the curriculum plan and was also due to be presented to the Resources Committee in relation to evidencing the College's strategic approach to ensuring efficiency of curriculum delivery and value for money.
31. The Director of Information & Funding set out the key adjustments to the model this year and summarised the headline outcomes for the campus and curriculum areas, noting the impact of the increase in energy costs (based on the 2022-23 budget) on the central costs' allocation. It was noted that the model had also been used to provide three case scenarios regarding the strategy for the Andover campus at the Governors' Seminar, with the aim to improving efficiency through an aligned strategy of income growth, increased class sizes, reduction in direct costs and reduction in central costs.
32. In discussion it was noted that the contribution of General FE (non land-based) courses delivered at the Sparsholt campus was negatively impacted by the allocation of central costs which were higher than at the Andover campus. These courses received a lower funding rate than land-based courses.
33. The committee welcomed the continuing use of the contribution analysis as a tool to inform decisions about the management of the curriculum, alongside the SLT's review of staff utilisation and operational planning.

## Curriculum Plan

34. The committee had received the 3 Year Curriculum Plan, together with an overview of the landscape and rationale of the College offer and a summary of planned changes for each key sub-sector of provision (14-16, 16-18, Apprenticeships, higher education, and adult) from the Vice Principals Curriculum and Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education.
35. The Committee Chair emphasised the committee's role in reviewing the curriculum plan on behalf of the Board and highlighted the proposals for developing the curriculum at Andover College which followed a discussion of the strategy for Andover campus at the Governors' Seminar in January which had endorsed the option for rationalising the A-level provision.
36. The SLT had undertaken further work to review the courses on offer within the portfolio of qualifications and had identified five subject areas where rationalisation could be achieved. The SLT's analysis considered the forecast impact on future recruitment, quality of teaching and learning, the wider curriculum offer, and the curriculum contribution analysis. Alongside the proposed changes to the qualifications offered, it was noted that management were also looking at covering specialist areas of interest as part of the Study+ programme and changes to the timetable to support delivery.
37. Members discussed the proposals, seeking and receiving assurance about risks of operational disruption, including the awareness of the SLT to mitigate the impact on teaching staff.
38. At the Sparsholt campus, the committee noted in particular interruptions to the roll out of T Levels (which had also been scrutinised under a separate agenda item) and the significance of sustainability as a core theme of curriculum development.
39. The committee also noted the development of the Foundation offer, including the 14-16 link provision with schools, the increasing numbers of learners (and related progression to main programmes), and the cross-campus High Needs Focus on Life Skills courses. The number of funded High Needs learners had significantly increased year on year over the last five years which enabled the College to plan and invest in resources to meet individual needs.
40. The committee reviewed the developments to the HE curriculum, noting in particular plans to further enhance engagement with employers and diversify the portfolio, including the introduction of research degrees with opportunities for part-time study and introducing the option of a year in industry for BSc courses. It was noted that the HE offer in Animal Welfare & Rehabilitation had received stage 1 approval from the University of Portsmouth and that it was being developed for introduction in 2024-25.
41. The committee also noted the collaborative partnership Strategic Development Fund (SDF) project had enabled the development of five new online courses, including at L4 Arboriculture, L5 Conservation and Land Management, L5 Sustainable Resource Management and L5 Sustainable Agricultural Systems.
42. Members welcomed the introduction of 'sandwich courses' and discussed the previously identified risks around how graduate outcomes were measured externally.
43. The committee noted that development of the apprenticeships curriculum offer responded to developments in the available apprenticeships standards, to changes in the

FE 16-18 offer, such as the introduction of T Levels, to the needs of local businesses and to availability of specialist staff. The HE apprenticeship offer was also being developed to support the needs of employers with, for example, a Level 4 Countryside Ranger apprenticeship and a planned Level 7 apprenticeship for ecologists.

44. In Adult education, the committee noted the opportunities being explored in Construction in partnership with Building Heroes and development of offers linked to sustainability and adult social care to meet local skills needs.
45. The committee was content that the strategy for the curriculum continued to maintain a strong land-based offer at FE, Apprenticeships, and HE at Sparsholt and a broad Tertiary offer at Andover despite the need to rationalise the A-level offer.
46. The committee noted that the curriculum continued to evolve in order to align with the FE sector education reforms, with the introduction of T Levels as the technical alternative to A Levels. It was also noted that the continuing reforms of Level 3 presented a potential risk to the College in relation to the proposed removal of certain qualifications, such as Criminology which was a popular course at the Andover campus.
47. **Resolved** – that the scope and ambition of the 3 Year Curriculum Plan was fit for purpose to deliver the College’s strategic ambitions, particularly in relation to student progression, future employability, professional development of the employed and to meeting the needs of employers.

#### Curriculum Deep Dives

48. The committee had received curriculum ‘subject profiles’ for the Health & Social Care offer (Andover) and the Horticulture offer (Sparsholt). The subject profiles set out the offer in the areas of 14-16, 16-19, specialist SEND, apprenticeships, 19+ funded provision, and adult and community (primarily full cost) provision. In addition, the subject profiles gave examples of key curriculum external stakeholders for each subject and how the employers informed the curriculum intent, together with specific activities which contributed to the steering and design of the curriculum, progression of students, and interactions with stakeholders within the curriculum delivery.
49. The Vice Principals Curriculum drew the committee’s attention to areas of curriculum development and gave examples of how stakeholders/employers were engaged with the curriculum.
50. The committee welcomed the subject profiles as a way of demonstrating the reasons for and the extent of the curriculum offer in each area, showing the pathways for student progression and enabling the College to identify any gaps in the offer or areas which would benefit from more stakeholder engagement.
51. Asked about the monitoring of FE student progressions, the Vice Principals confirmed that the information was being collected and would be presented at the May meeting of the committee.

#### **MARKETING**

52. The committee had received the report of the Deputy Principal and Interim Marketing Manager on progress with the marketing strategy and priorities for the operational plan for 2022-23 to realise the College’s growth ambitions.
53. The committee reviewed the summary of the current position, noting some positive trends in new FE and HE applications for 2023-24 compared to the previous year. There

remained challenges, particularly in relation to the Andover campus and to internal progression to HE.

54. The Principal assured the committee that the recruitment risks were understood by the SLT, and that the internal targets had been set on the basis of analysis of recruitment over several years.
55. The committee noted the priority actions being taken across HE and FE and the activities built on existing strengths and success but were also being actively developed to focus on specific areas of challenge, such as the 'Keep Warm Campaign' for FE applicants. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) also gave the example of the Southern Universities Network (SUN) collaborative partnership and supporting Level 3 learners to consider HE by discussing the options and helping to allay concerns.
56. Other examples noted included inviting the wider community to attend key events, such as the March Careers Fair at Andover campus, and delivering taster sessions such as 'celebrating female equestrians'.
57. The Deputy Principal noted that the new Head of Marketing started at the College on 6 March and thanked the Interim Marketing Manager for her outstanding commitment to covering the post.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

58. The committee had received the report of the Principal on the DfE accountability reforms and preparations for the new accountability agreement and FE performance dashboard. It was noted that the report was being presented for information and endorsement at meetings of the Quality & Standards Committee, Resources Committee and Audit Committee, ahead of the Board of Governors meeting on 30 March.
59. The committee had also received a first draft of statements as to how the college contributed to national, regional and local skills needs, mapping these to the College's strategic plan and the curriculum plan. This was based on DfE's national skills priorities (issued in draft) and the emerging draft priorities from the development of the Local Skills Improvement Plan.
60. The Principal explained the intention to differentiate priorities by campus due to the different curriculum offers and employer relationships on each campus, while also defining some cross-cutting priorities.
61. Members discussed the approach to the accountability statement, recognising the potential value of articulating the priorities with stakeholders but the need to design out any unintended consequences from the process. It was noted that the accountability statement would be a reference point for future Ofsted inspections and for the annual strategic conversation with the ESFA.
62. The Principal concurred with these points and also noted the aim to capture the future ambitions of the College in meeting skills needs, linked to future funding.
63. The committee endorsed the approach to the accountability statement proposed by the Principal and noted that the statement was required to be reviewed and approved by the Board.

## **CAREERS**

64. The committee had received the report of the Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt), the SLT careers lead, on the updated statutory DfE 'Careers Guidance and Access for Education and Training Providers', together with a copy of the guidance.
65. It was noted that this was an interim update before the committee's annual review of the implementation of the Careers Strategy at its next meeting.
66. The Vice Principal highlighted the changes to the guidance in relation to the 'Baker Clause', with the introduction of a minimum level of access for education and training providers to provide information and guidance to year 8-13 learners.
67. Members of the SLT gave examples of ways in which the College was engaging with schools.
68. The Principal also reported that she had agreed the College be part of the DfE's Immersion Programme during National Careers Week and that the College would be hosting a visit from the DfE Careers Research and Strategy Lead to look at examples of careers related activities within the College.

## **HEALTHCHECK REPORT**

69. The committee had received and reviewed the most recent Healthcheck report (2023-03) and noted that T Level recruitment data had been added to the report.
70. The meeting ended at 12.30.

*Approved: 24 May 2023 Curriculum, Skills & Stakeholders Committee Meeting*