

SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CURRICULUM, SKILLS & STAKEHOLDERS COMMITTEE (CSS)
held on 24 May 2023 at 09:30
at Sparsholt College

PRESENT¹ T Floyd (E) (Chair); J Milburn (P); N Moody; S Morgan (E)² (min 93 to 127).

In attendance: S Grant, Deputy Principal
D Mernagh, Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education
J Middleton, Head of Marketing (min 108-131)
A Robertson, Governance Co-ordinator
B Stokes, Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover College)
M Treagust, Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt College)
S Willson, Head of Corporate Governance

APOLOGIES & MEMBERSHIP

- 71. Apologies were received from S Duckering and G Morris.
- 72. It was noted that M Serridge had resigned as a co-opted member of the committee as of 24 May 2023 due to changes in his circumstances.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

- 73. There were no interests to be declared.

MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

- 74. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.
- 75. Meeting Skills Needs (min 6-8/23): It was noted that the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) had been issued to colleges and that the confirmed priority sectors included Land-based (including animal health and welfare). Additionally, there was a recognition in the LSIP of the difficulty in recruiting teachers which could assist with using future funds for teacher training. It was also noted that DfE's national skills priorities had been published, with the addition of engineering and science and maths to the final list. Food security and environmental protection had not been included but was still being championed by DEFRA. The details of the new Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) had not yet been published.
- 76. Industry Work Placements (IWP) (min 12/23): The committee noted the significant financial impact on 2023-24 of the removal of funding for IWPs at the same time that the launch of some T Level pathways had been delayed, given that the T Levels had higher funding rates than other FE courses due to the work placements element. It was important not to lose the skills and experience of the IWP team in the gap between the T Levels launching and to continue to provide placements for students.

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

² Via videoconference

77. T Levels Specialist Equipment Allocation (SEA) (min 26/23): It was noted that the college had been successful in being awarded £2.97m SEA to develop facilities for T Levels being rolled out in September. However, there would be some temporary clawback as the College had decided to postpone the launch of the Legal/Finance T Levels until September 2024.
78. Curriculum Plan (min 35/23): The Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) confirmed that the changes to the A Level offer at Andover College from 2023-24 were being implemented. The aim was to reorganise the staffing without redundancies if possible. There did not appear to be a negative impact on overall applications as a consequence of the plans.
79. High Needs (min 39/23): Funding for 150 high needs learners (up from 120) had been confirmed in advance for 2023-24.
80. Building Heroes Andover College Partnership (min 44/23): It was noted that the first cohort of 12 Adult learners had completed their construction training through the partnership with Building Heroes and further enhancement were planned to the partnership offer going forward, possibly with an extension into retrofit green skills training. There followed a discussion about other opportunities for expanding the adult education offer and responding to construction skills needs in the region.
81. FE student progression (min 51/23): The Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) provided an update to the committee on projected internal student progression data at Andover and Sparsholt at entry/Foundation level, Level 1 and Level 2 and the emphasis on providing progression pathways and supporting students.
82. Accountability Statement (min 63/23): It was noted that an updated draft statement had been reviewed and approved by the Board of Governors on 17 May 2023, subject to final updates to be approved by the Chair of Governors and submitted by the deadline of 31 May 2023.
83. There were no other matters arising not covered by items on the agenda.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

84. The committee had received the report of the Principal, Deputy Principal and Vice Principals for FE and HE on progress with stakeholder engagement and meeting skills needs, together with the skills position statement which had been drafted in preparation for an Ofsted inspection and draft Employer and Community Charters.
85. The committee agreed that the skills position statement demonstrated the range and extent of current stakeholder engagement activities undertaken to inform the college's understanding of local/regional skills needs and to ensure that the knowledge, skills and behaviours developed by learners were aligned to these training and employment opportunities.
86. The committee reviewed the draft Employer and Community Charters, seeking clarity about the status of the charters and raising a number of suggestions about the drafting.
87. The Principal confirmed that the charters were devised to provide an outward facing summary of the aims and approach of the college's engagement with employers and other stakeholder in the community. They aligned with the College Group's strategic plan and with external expectations of colleges around consulting and engaging with stakeholders but there was no specific requirement to publish charters. Management also had operational strategies in place for community and employer engagement. The

charters were being presented to the committee to review and recommend to the Board for approval so that the Board was content with the college's public commitments.

88. The committee welcomed the development of the charters and the Principal undertook to revisit the drafting to consider points raised during discussion and to share the updated charters with the Committee Chair for endorsement prior to the Board meeting.
89. **Resolved** – that the Board of Governors be recommended to approve the publication of the Employer Charter and the Community Charter.
90. The committee noted the reporting of the statutory Armed Forces Covenant Duty which places a legal duty on specified public bodies to have due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when exercising certain statutory functions in the fields of healthcare, education and housing. The committee noted the assurance provided of the activities undertaken by the college to support learners whose parents are in the armed forces, with relevant reporting via committees to the Board.

CURRICULUM & DESTINATIONS

T Levels

91. The committee had received the report of the Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) on the implementation plan for delivering T Level routes at the Sparsholt campus.
92. The Vice Principal Curriculum highlighted that the launch of Equine Care occupational specialism under the Animal Care and Management (ACM) T Level pathway had been deferred due to concerns about curriculum content. This had been planned to be delivered from September.
93. The committee discussed the preparations for industry placements, the plans for transition from current technical qualifications to T Levels, progress with purchasing equipment funded by the SEA allocation, application numbers for the Trees and Woodland and Livestock Production T Level occupational specialisms, and the uncertainty around future funding for 19+ learners wishing to study T Levels. The committee also noted that the Education T Level would be introduced at Andover College from September, replacing the current Early Years Level 3 qualification.
94. The Principal suggested that learner enrolments data on T Levels as a proportion of overall Level 3 learner enrolments by curriculum area be reported to the committee at its next meeting.
95. A member reiterated the challenge and importance of promoting an understanding of land-based T Levels to progressing and prospective students, highlighting the concerns about delays in confirmation of the curriculum from the qualification bodies.
96. The Vice Principal reported that, as part of this year's internal audit programme, RSM had undertaken an audit of T Level Preparedness which would report to the Audit Committee in June. The audit provided 'substantial assurance' about the College's approach.
97. The committee continued to be assured and to report to the Board that the considerations for preparing for T Levels were understood by management and continued to be addressed as a priority.

FE Learner Destinations

98. The committee had received the report of the Vice Principals Curriculum on the review of FE student destinations from July 2022, together with some case studies of individual students.
99. Responding to previous challenges from the committee to increase the number of 'known' destinations and to identify whether learners were progressing to industry related employment, the committee was pleased to note that, at headline level, 97.1% of destinations were currently 'known', the majority of which were positive (96.8%). The committee also noted that the analysis of the data had also been further developed from the previous year to show those students who had chosen to take a gap year to travel, work abroad, or to undertake volunteering opportunities (1.7%).
100. The committee scrutinised the data in relation to links between the curriculum and industry employment, noting some positive evidence, including in relation to Foundation students. It was also noted that certain curriculum areas were more challenging, such as Humanities (where key transferable skills were developed which could lead to employment in a range of sectors, as well as to progression to higher education) and Drama, Dance and Music (where employment in associated sectors locally was limited but the students had gained wider employability skills and character development and progressed to other positive destinations).
101. The committee noted that, where there had been an increase in progression to employment accompanied by a decline in progression to Higher Education, it was considered that the cost-of-living crisis was a major factor.
102. Responding to a challenge about the range of positive destinations in relation to Animal Studies, the Vice Principal explained that there were a number of underlying factors, including that the sector had been recovering post-pandemic, that some students elected to take a gap year to gain experience with animals, and that a high proportion of Level 1 students were benefiting from developing employability skills. This would lead to them finding satisfactory employment, which might not be related to the course subject area.
103. The Principal proposed that the data reported in the next annual report be expanded to break down curriculum areas by level of qualifications and to provide year on year data for comparison.
104. Members welcomed the individual learner case studies as providing examples of the opportunities offered by the curriculum delivery and progression pathways.
105. In conclusion, the committee emphasised the importance of positive destination outcomes for learners and commended management's commitment to measuring and assessing progression data. The committee noted the impact of the curriculum offer in supporting its leavers to secure a positive destination through the attainment of relevant qualifications and employability skills.

Curriculum Deep Dives

106. The committee had received curriculum subject profiles for Sport, Public Services & Outdoor Education (Sparsholt), Arboriculture (Sparsholt) and Early Years (Andover). The subject profiles set out the offer, where relevant, in the areas of 14-16, 16-19, specialist

SEND, apprenticeships, 19+ funded provision, higher education, 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.

107. Members raised a number of points in discussion, including the range of employer stakeholders and the levels of engagement of employers with the Industry Curriculum Boards, the links between industry/employer engagement and learner destination data, the role of employers in reinforcing the importance of achievement of English and Maths, and areas of further curriculum development.

CAREERS

108. The committee had received the annual progress report of the Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) and SLT careers lead on the Careers Strategy 2021-25, including progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks and the outcome of the Matrix Standard annual continuous improvement check (CIC).
109. The Vice Principal Curriculum highlighted key points in the progress report, noting that careers provision had developed to retain some of the elements of online and hybrid delivery, building on experiences during the pandemic. For example, Futures Week in January had a blend of in-house delivery, guest lecturers and recorded input from industry links. The Vice Principal Curriculum also explained the introduction of the new Insights Week in April to offer taster sessions for internal progression routes and the move of Choices Week to May, when information was available about results/projected achievement, and which included engagement with employers and sessions with Progress Coaches to develop learners' individual progression plans.
110. The committee noted that the Matrix CIC had endorsed the adapted approach to careers guidance, with provision by Hampshire Futures and the Southern Universities Network (SUN), which had been implemented while the Head of Careers post had been vacant. The areas of focus going forward identified by the CIC were in preparation for the full Matrix accreditation in 2024.
111. Asked about the challenges around recruiting the Head of Careers and whether the revised careers education approach had any adverse effects, the Principal reported that a new role of Director of Careers and Stakeholder Engagement was now being introduced which would manage careers and the college's wider activities in relation to meeting skills needs and strategic partnerships. The Principal assured the committee that the external careers education provision was used by other colleges and had been working effectively.

ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

112. 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) and HE recruitment for 2023-24.
113. The Vice Principal & Dean of HE explained that the report covered progress in moving from the previous APP to the more ambition APP for the 2023-24 academic year. It was also noted that the Office for Students (OfS) had issued further guidance which required new plans to be submitted in 2024 for 2025-26 with greater emphasis on data and impact.

114. The committee reviewed the reported data in relation to financial support for University Centre Sparsholt (UCS) students in 2022-23 and academic and wellbeing support for students. Retention data confirmed that no group identified within the APP was at a greater or lesser chance of withdrawal or taking a study break than any other student demographic.
115. Asked about the accessibility of the hardship fund in light of the report that no applications had been received this year, the Vice Principal & Dean of HE assured the committee that tutors were aware of the fund and raised the opportunity with students. It was probable that the high take up of other bursaries and scholarships was a factor.
116. The Vice Principal & Dean of HE updated the committee on the progress of outreach and support activities with schools and the development of new higher apprenticeships to offer a more diverse choice of HE courses.
117. The committee noted the data on HE applications for 2023-24, with the area of greatest decline being FdSc progressors and internal FE progressors, and sought additional information about the actions being taken as a result to ensure that any barriers were understood and being addressed as far as possible. It was explained that there were a range of factors informing students choices.
118. The committee also sought further information about the application numbers compared to the previous year in relation to factors which could impact conversion rates. It was noted that offers which had not been accepted would be declined by default on 9 July under the UCAS system.

COMMITTEE PERFORMANCE

119. The committee had received the report of the Head of Corporate Governance providing information for the committee's annual performance self-evaluation and review of its terms of reference.
120. The committee noted the developments to the regulatory and governance framework which informed the work of the committee and the proposed updates to the terms of reference to reflect the new duties for governing bodies under the Skills & Post-16 Education Act (2022).
121. **Resolved** – that the revised committee terms of reference be recommended to the Board of Governors for approval.
122. In relation to the of relevance and quality of evidence provided to the committee, members welcomed the increase over time of the depth of reporting from management and the introduction of the curriculum deep dives (with the added value that the subject profiles were also useful for management and curriculum teams).
123. It was suggested that, given the regularity and strategic significant of the HE APP, the progress reports could be further developed to include more explanation of the objectives and actions which the college was seeking to achieve.
124. It was also questioned whether the opportunities and risks from the development of AI should be subject to future consideration by the committee and suggested that the Quality & Standards Committee would be best placed to consider the impact in relation to matters such as teaching delivery and workload. It was also proposed that the college's response to AI would be a relevant topic for a future Governors' Seminar.

125. In relation to the membership of the committee, members considered that the effectiveness of the committee was supported by some longevity of membership to build knowledge and a relevant breadth of experience. The committee discussed the vacancy which had arisen for a co-opted member, suggesting the possibility of appointing a new co-optee on a one year trial basis initially if helpful.
126. The Head of Corporate Governance reported feedback from the online survey about the chairing of the committee which had provided very positive feedback.
127. The committee was satisfied to report to the Board that it had undertaken its activities in 2022-23 in line with its terms of reference and business plan.

MARKETING

128. The committee had received the report of the Head of Marketing on progress with the marketing strategy and priorities for the operational plan for 2022-23.
129. The Head of Marketing drew the committee's attention to key developments and performance indicators, giving specific examples across University Centre Sparsholt, Andover College and Sparsholt College and explaining key points of planning for next year.
130. The committee welcomed the clarity of the report and the evidence of actions being taken, noting the latest areas of focus and key projects.
131. The committee also noted the session on perceptions and position of Andover College which had been led by the Head of Marketing at the recent Governors' Seminar.

HEALTHCHECK REPORT

132. The committee had received and reviewed the most recent Healthcheck report (2023-04) and noted that progress on applications had been discussed under other agenda items.
133. A member raised a question about quality performance data in relation to attendance and achievement for English and Maths, given the link with progression and employability. The Principal concurred that the attendance rates were a concern (although the register data was also being checked) and confirmed that English and Maths performance was being closely monitored by the Quality & Standards Committee. The Principal also summarised some of the key actions being taken to raise achievement levels, including the remodelling of the English and Maths staffing structure and strengthening links with the students' main programme curriculum areas with a focus on the importance of English and Maths to progression.
134. The committee was assured by the responses that English and Maths was a priority for college management and that enhanced quality scrutiny was in place.
135. The meeting ended at 12.30.

Approved: Curriculum, Skills & Stakeholders Committee meeting 19 October 2023