

SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CURRICULUM, SKILLS & STAKEHOLDERS COMMITTEE (CSS)
held on 22 February 2024 at 09:30
at Sparsholt College

PRESENT¹ J Brant (St); T Floyd (E) (Chair); J Milburn (P); S Morgan (E).

In attendance: L Asbridge, Director of Careers & Stakeholder Engagement (to min 24)
S Grant, Deputy Principal
S Hermiston, Director of Information & Funding (mins 30 to 34)
D Mernagh, Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education
J Middleton, Head of Marketing (mins 49-53)
B Stokes, Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover College)
M Treagust, Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt College)
S Willson, Head of Corporate Governance

APOLOGIES & MEMBERSHIP

1. The Committee noted that S Duckering had been appointed a member of the Board of Governors and her apologies had been received for this meeting.
2. The Committee Chair welcomed the new FE Student Governor (Sparsholt), J Brant, to his first meeting of the committee.
3. It was noted that recruitment was underway for the vacancies for co-opted committee members and the vacancy which was shortly to arise when S Morgan completed his term of office as a governor.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

4. There were no interests to be declared.

MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

5. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.
6. Meeting skills needs (min 149/23): The Ofsted inspection report had been published and the college had been judged to make a strong contribution to meeting skills needs, the highest judgement. The committee congratulated college teams for this excellent outcome.
7. Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) (min 151/23): The Deputy Principal reported good progress with delivery of the LSIF expenditure and confirmed compliance with funding return requirements.
8. Local Enterprise Partnership (LEPs) (mins 152/23): The Deputy Principal updated the committee on disbandment of current EM3, Surrey and Solent LEPs and the committee discussed the potential impact on funding streams. There was also uncertainty over the

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

longer-term sustainability of the EM3/Surrey LSIF colleges collaboration structure and of the direction for local government devolution in Hampshire and the south.

9. T Levels (min 156/23): The government have confirmed there is no plans to allow adults to be funded to study T Levels, and that an equivalent Level 3 offer for 19+ learners would not be available before September 2026 which presented a risk to the college in terms of enrolments and meeting adult learners' skills needs.
10. In relation to the Livestock Production T Level which was underway, the committee was assured on questioning that there had been no degradation of the student experience due to the redevelopment of the dairy and beef barn, with alternative arrangements put in place for practical experience with cows and the continued availability of other livestock (pigs and sheep). It was also noted that the new land now leased by the college at Christmas Tree Hill provided additional flexibility for the farm and options for both livestock and arable in the future.
11. The Principal reported that the college had been successful in seeking an extension to the expenditure deadline for the T Level capital funding grant to expand the Construction Skills Centre on the Andover campus to support delivery of T levels.
12. There were no other matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

13. The committee had received and reviewed the termly report of the Director of Careers & Stakeholder Engagement providing an overview and progress report on key elements of stakeholder engagement in relation to development of the curriculum offer and meeting skills needs.
14. The committee commended the recognition by Ofsted of the effective relationships in place with employers and stakeholders, the role of employers in curriculum planning, and the college's strong civic and community partnerships which were supporting the student experience through development of curriculum delivery and facilities.
15. The committee sought feedback from the FE Student Governor of his experiences in relation to engagement with employers on his course and the ambitions of his cohort in terms of progression into employment or further study.
16. A number of the areas covered in the report were discussed in more detail, including the hosting by the college of one of a series of careers events across the region as part of the Local Skills Development Plan in collaboration with the schools and colleges careers hub. This would showcase Higher Apprenticeships, including the college's growing offer. A member emphasised that these apprenticeships were a positive option for gaining skills and progressing into employment in the land-based sector. Asked about the financial feasibility and deliverability of the Higher Apprenticeships, the Principal confirmed the funding was sufficient and that the college had experience in delivering complicated models.
17. The committee sought additional information and assurance about the planning for delivering the higher number of work placements which would be required with the further rollout of T Levels in 2024-25. While the college was able to build on existing relationships with employers, particularly in land-based subjects, it was understood that certain subjects raised particular challenges and the college was working closely with employers to plan appropriate delivery models. For example, timing work experience in line with the crop growing cycle so that learners gained relevant practical experience and

working around the challenges of the construction industry in terms of staffing gaps and building project timespans.

18. A member also stressed the value of learners gaining experience with different employers during their course and the imperative of ensuring learners had been taught skills to keep them safe. The Principal confirmed this was integrated into the planning and also noted the purchase of new tractor simulators which would provide additional learning opportunities.
19. Other areas covered in the discussion included careers support and the progression of FE learners to higher education and actions to continue to strengthen engagement with military families.
20. The Committee Chair summed up that the committee took assurance from the evidence of effective engagement with employers and other stakeholders to support the college to meet skills needs and was actively involving stakeholders in a range of new developments and challenges.

ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

21. The committee had received the report of the Principal on progress with the college's Annual Accountability Statement objectives and the proposed process for the Board to undertake the statutory review of how the college was meeting local, regional and national skills needs.
22. The committee noted that excellent progress had already been made against the 2023-24 Accountability Statement objectives with 95% of actions well underway or complete. The challenges in relation to meeting enrolment targets linked to T Levels and the delay to development of a bespoke teacher training programme in priority specialist subject areas, and the actions being taken as a result, were explained. In relation to staff recruitment, the committee also discussed the links with the military community and routes for retraining military service leavers. Overall, the committee was content to confirm to the Board that the college is meeting regional skills needs effectively.
23. The committee noted the publication of updated guidance by the DfE on the duty for FE governing bodies to review how well the education and training provided meets local skills needs and what actions might be taken to meet those needs better (the Local Needs Duty), including actions in conjunction with other governing bodies. The review would be undertaken and reported as part of the new Accountability Statement for 2024-25 and a process was proposed which included collaboration with other colleges in the LSIP region.
24. **Resolved** – that the proposed approach to fulfilling the statutory Local Needs Duty and the approvals process for the 2024-25 Accountability Statement be endorsed and recommended to the Board for approval.

FE DESTINATIONS

25. The committee had received the report of the Vice Principals Curriculum on the review of FE student destinations (July 2023), together with some case studies of individual students.
26. The committee praised the high proportion of 'known' destinations (99.1%) which the college had been able to identify through the hard work of the teams involved and the level of these which were positive (98.1%) and demonstrated the impact of the curriculum in supporting learners to progress to employment and continuing education.

It was noted that around half of the 1.9% whose destinations were not defined as 'positive' had categorised themselves as unemployed and the other half were learners who had studied Foundation provision and whose learning needs were such that employment opportunities at present were not possible and support was being accessed through agencies.

27. Since the last annual report, the data analysis had been broken down by area of learning and by the proportion of leavers employed in industry specific careers (linked to their college qualification). The committee discussed the areas of learning where there was a lower than average proportion of leavers in industry specific employment and acknowledged that there were a range of factors, depending on the course subject, the level of qualification achieved, and the industry. It was recognised that some sectors were more challenging and competitive, for example drama and dance, but that the learners experience at college also developed wider skills to support employment in a range of sectors or progression to higher education.
28. The committee welcomed the examples of individual learner case studies, noting how the learners had been supported to achieve positive destinations.
29. Overall, the committee was assured by the report and discussion of the commitment to collect and analyse destinations data to understand and evidence the attainment of relevant qualifications and employability skills.

CURRICULUM

Curriculum Contribution Analysis

30. The committee had received and reviewed 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 emphasised that there were a number of key factors which needed to be taken into account when assessing the strategic significance of the outcomes, in particular the FE lagged funding model, the use by the model of the annual budget approved in July, recruitment trends, and the increase in the programme weighting factor for specialist land-based provision this year.
32. The committee discussed the findings in relation to changes year on year and variation between curriculum areas and between campuses. It was noted that Agriculture and Agricultural Engineering had significantly improved due to the increase in the programme weighting and in enrolments, although efficiencies were limited by the maximum class sizes for practicals. It was noted that the changes made to A Level provision at the Andover campus as a result of the strategic review undertaken the previous year had started to have a positive impact in relation to class sizes.
33. The Committee Chair highlighted the value of the analysis in enabling the SLT and committee to understand the financial efficiency of curriculum areas, and the reasons behind variations, so that the development of the curriculum plan supported affordable delivery.
34. The committee welcomed the continuing use of the contribution analysis as a tool to inform decisions about the efficient planning and management of the curriculum.

Curriculum Plan

35. The committee had received the 3 Year Curriculum Plan, together with an update on qualification reforms, an overview of 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.
36. The Committee Chair commented on the significant extent and complexity of the curriculum reforms in the FE sector and the role of the committee in ensuring, through the reporting from management, that the college was alert to the risks and opportunities and was continuing to plan curriculum developments to prepare for and respond to these.
37. The Principal assured the committee that members of the SLT and the Head of Corporate Governance kept abreast of the latest developments through AOC and other external updates so that changes to the roll out of new qualifications and defunding of others were understood and built into curriculum planning.
38. The committee discussed some of the challenges with the planned change from the T Level Transition offer to the new T Level Foundation qualifications and the risks around progression of learners and design of course delivery. It was noted that management was making careful choices about when to continue offering legacy qualifications, while still funded, if these were in the interest of students and could also be resourced with appropriate staffing. The college had also been actively engaging with the awarding body to help develop land-based T Levels so that the content was relevant (for example including sufficient science knowledge) to support progression to HE.
39. The committee also discussed the mitigation of risks in relation to enrolments and noted management's strategy of communicating openly with prospective students and their parents about the qualification options available.
40. The Vice Principals (Curriculum) highlighted specific developments on each campus, explaining the DfE's timetable and process for reform and funding of the qualification landscape and there were still uncertainties in relation to planning beyond 2025.
41. It was noted that the college was already placed to offer the new Alternative Academic Qualifications (AQQs) as these could only be offered by colleges which also offered A Levels. These might provide a good opportunity in non-T Level subjects, providing that the university sector accepted them.
42. It was also emphasised that academic staff were being supported to adapt teaching practices to meet the needs of learners on the different qualifications.
43. In relation to University Centre Sparsholt (UCS), the committee noted the further diversification of the HE offer with professional certificates and apprenticeships, broadening the appeal and the opportunities and ensuring close liaison with the relevant industries. A number of new developments were noted, including the introduction of an Access to HE offer for Veterinary Sciences in 2025/26.
44. Finally, the committee discussed a range of developments for the adult education offer, linked to local skills needs, including green technology and construction. It was noted that, while Technical Occupational Qualifications (TOQs) were being developed for 19+ learners, these would not launch before 2026 and the development timetable for the land-based subjects was hugely challenging.

45. **Resolved** – that the scope and ambition of the 3 Year Curriculum Plan was endorsed as 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.

Lifelong Learning Entitlement

46. The committee had received and reviewed the report of the Vice Principal & Dean of HE briefing the committee on strategic opportunities for UCS with regards to the introduction by the government of the new Lifelong Learning Entitlement from 2025.
47. The Vice Principal & Dean of HE highlighted the key aspects of new policy and the likely timelines, noting that the university sector had yet to be consulted as to how a system of credit accumulation across different providers would work in practice.
48. The committee noted the update, and that the college was alert to the opportunities and would be engaging with employers and seeking to design programmes to include modules which would deliver for lifelong learning credits and could be taken as standalone courses, as more information became available.

MARKETING

49. The committee had received and reviewed the report of the Head of Marketing on progress with the marketing key strategic themes and the priorities for the operational plan for 2023-24.
50. The Head of Marketing reported an increase of applications in FE at both campuses and to UCS and highlighted key outcomes from the analysis of the marketing campaigns for 2023 starters and the activities underway and planned for the campaigns for 2024 starters.
51. The committee discussed a number of aspects of the marketing activity, including the strategies for digital spend, the approach to open days, and schools liaison in light of variations year on year on applications from feeder schools.
52. The value and long history of the Sparsholt brand was recognised by the Student Governor as relevant to his experience of deciding to apply to the college.
53. The committee welcomed the encouraging data on applications and the evidence of assessing the value of marketing activity to inform future planning.

HE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

54. The committee had received and reviewed the termly report of the Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education on progress with delivery of the University Centre Sparsholt (UCS) Access and Participation Plan (APP).
55. In terms of increasing participation in the future, the Vice Principal & Dean of HE highlighted awareness raising activities undertaken with schools year to date, with an increased focus on pupils in year 11 and the addition of direct outreach by UCS lecturers focusing on the UCS offer. The introduction of a more diverse range of HE courses was also intended to support broadening the HE intake.
56. In terms of the support for current students, the report provided an update on the award of HE bursaries and the provision of academic support, including a new system of monitoring withdrawals and additional tutorials. It was noted that about 40% of tutorial

interactions were non-academic in nature, often addressing wellbeing and learning support concerns.

57. The Vice Principal & Dean of HE also provided assurance to the committee about progress in meeting the APP 2024-25 targets for under-represented groups.
58. The committee noted the requirement to submit an updated APP, to comply with new Office for Students (OfS) guidance, to the OfS by the end of July 2024 and that it was proposed to invite governor input into the development of the APP, ahead of presentation to the Board at its July meeting for approval.

HEALTHCHECK REPORT

59. The committee had received and reviewed the most recent Healthcheck report (2024-02). There were no matters identified under the remit of the committee requiring further review.

MEMBERSHIP

60. The Committee Chair and Principal thanked S Morgan at his last meeting for his valuable contribution to the work committee as the inaugural chair and through his continuing membership. The Board had recorded its gratitude to S Morgan for his long service as a governor and his support of the college at the Governors' Seminar in January.
61. The meeting ended at 12.30.

Approved: Curriculum, Skills & Stakeholders Committee Meeting 23 May 2024