

SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CURRICULUM, SKILLS & STAKEHOLDERS COMMITTEE (CSS)
held on 23 May 2024 at 09:30
at Sparsholt College

PRESENT¹ S Duckering (E); T Floyd (E) (Chair); J Milburn (P); F Obiero (E) (from min 71);
D Rees (C); S Thompson (C).

In attendance: L Asbridge, Director of Careers & Stakeholder Engagement (to min 97)
S Grant, Deputy Principal
J Middleton, Head of Marketing (mins 106-112)
C Rapley, Assistant Principal Higher Education (mins 98 to 105)
B Stokes, Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover College)
M Treagust, Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt College)
S Willson, Head of Corporate Governance

APOLOGIES & MEMBERSHIP

- 62. Apologies were received from J Brant.
- 63. The Committee Chair welcomed new members to their first meeting.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

- 64. There were no interests to be declared.

MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

- 65. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.
- 66. Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) (min 7/24): The Deputy Principal reported the ‘Annex G’ audit of the first year of LSIF expenditure was expected to be clear and would be reported to the Audit Committee.
- 67. Regional stakeholders (min 8/24): It was noted that a new Leader of Hampshire County Council, Councillor Nick Adams-King, had been appointed.
- 68. T Levels capital projects (min 10/24): On the Sparsholt campus, the first part of the farm project had been completed, with the new manual dairy in operation. The new robotic dairy was due to be completed shortly, to be followed by the introduction of a new dairy herd for robotic milking. On the Andover campus, the committee was assured by an agreement with Test Valley Borough Council to use The Lights for Performance & Dance teaching space to free up temporary additional teaching space for T Levels while the Construction Future Skills Centre expansion was completed during 2024/25.

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

69. Accountability Statement (min 24/24): The Accountability Statement 2024-25 had been approved by the Board of Governors for submission to the Department for Education.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

70. 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.
71. The committee noted positive progress with delivery of the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) capital and revenue programme, including substantial investment at the college in new careers materials and technologies, and examples of employer engagement through the Industry Curriculum Boards and other activities. This included the first termly employer network event with the Hampshire Chambers, held at Andover College, and resulting in offer of work placement opportunities and a STEM workshop. Examples were also given of actions to support progression of SEND learners into employment.
72. The committee was assured by the progress reported on delivering extended work placements for the current T Levels and short-term work experience.
73. The committee welcomed the evidence of continuing high levels of employer engagement overall and sought and discussed additional information about the geographical reach of engagement and areas of the curriculum where engagement was more challenging.
74. The committee also sought an update on the Building Heroes charity partnership which delivered construction skills training to former military personnel and others. The scheme continued to successfully deliver four-week training courses and there were considerations as to whether training could be extended in the future to horticulture. The college was also in discussions with another charity about a feasibility study for hosting residential training courses at the Sparsholt campus in land-based skills for military service leavers.

CURRICULUM

Curriculum Deep Dives

75. The committee had received and reviewed curriculum subject profiles for Computing, IT and Digital (Andover) and Agriculture (Sparsholt). 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.
76. The committee had also received for background information LMI reports on employers' skills needs in the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) region for the IT and land based sectors.
77. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) highlighted the strategic skills needs drivers for the Computing, IT and Digital offer, emphasising that the skills gained supported employment in a range of sectors. Developments included introduction of a Level 1 offer from 2024/25, exploring an alternative T Level pathway, further focus on widening stakeholder engagement following the Digital facilities opening event, and raising the aspirations for progression.

78. From their career experiences, two members pointed to the powerful impact of former students providing positive role models to inspire students about courses and career paths.
79. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) emphasised the expansion of Agriculture, both in terms of student numbers and the investment in facilities and highlighted the changing components of the curriculum offer in response to qualification reforms and opportunities to build on successes. The focus for enhancing employer engagement was on finding creative ways to seek further input into course design and delivery. Alongside very positive progression rates into employment there was an aim to show the merits of progression to HE.
80. Responding to a member’s challenge about delivering the range of skills needed in the agriculture industry, particularly given the seasonality of some farming, the Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) explained the relative constraints of the T Level course requirements with the occupational specialism restricting the flexibility, although the core programme covered skills including health & safety, sustainability and business.
81. The Principal noted that the college and Landex had lobbied DfE, DEFRA and the awarding bodies to explain the wider needs of the agriculture sector. The college was also looking at other routes to develop and deliver wider skills through, for example, training modules which would be funded through the new Lifelong Learning Entitlement, short courses and working with stakeholders such as local farming clusters and the Hampshire Rural Forum.
82. Members endorsed the approaches outlined, noting in particular the benefit of building future agility in the HE offer to respond to opportunities arising from the challenges faced by the HE sector generally, the growth in regenerative farming and the use of mixed farming models, and the value of work experience for future employment prospects.

Qualification Reforms & T Levels

83. The committee had received and reviewed the report of the Vice Principals Curriculum on the college’s response to qualification reforms and the continuing implementation of new T Levels.
84. At the Sparsholt campus, the committee noted the actions reported to support the planned implementation of further occupational specialisms in the Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Management T Level from September 2024, building on the Livestock Production occupational specialism.
85. At the Andover campus, the committee noted the course planning underway for new Motor Vehicle, Media, Broadcast and Production, and Business T Levels due to commence in September and the Foundation offer in Engineering. It was noted that, since the previous report on qualification reforms, there has been an announcement that the current suite of eSports qualifications would not attract funding. Therefore, the sector and key organisations such as the British eSports Association were lobbying to ensure appropriate alternatives would be developed.
86. The Principal reported that a potential change of government following the General Election could slow down the defunding of qualifications. Longer availability of funded courses could benefit the 19+ offer but create challenges for the academic teams if needing to deliver two different qualifications in a subject at the same level.

87. The committee noted the assurance that T Level Specialist Equipment Allocation (DfE grant funding) has been allocated with the equipment now in use or identified for use in redeveloped buildings.
88. The committee continued to be assured and to report to the Board that the considerations for expanding the delivery of T Levels with new qualifications from September 2024 and mitigating the risks arising from qualification reforms were understood by management and continued to be addressed as a priority.

CAREERS

89. The committee had received and reviewed the annual report of the Director of Careers & Stakeholder Engagement on delivery of the Careers Strategy 2021-25, including progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks, together with a revised Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) Policy and new Provider Access Policy.
90. The committee noted the confirmation of a full programme of careers activities undertaken across the year and new developments planned for 2024/25. This included addressing the strategic challenge of a shortage of Level 6 qualified careers advisors in the region in order to provide high quality careers 1-2-1 advice, both through the Hampshire Futures service (supplemented by a full time Southern University Network mentor) and seeking to appoint a college employed advisor. Members discussed the potential for upskilling of other staff to Level 6 and the potential for more advisors becoming available from the HE sector.
91. The committee also welcomed the roll out of new virtual and AI careers technologies funded through the Local Skills Improvement Fund to extend the range of resources and methods available to students for accessing careers education, together with the targeted increase in student usage of the UniFrog platform.
92. The committee noted that the next Matrix Standard annual continuous improvement check (CIC) was due in September and the Director of Careers & Stakeholder Engagement confirmed that there were no issues anticipated in relation to Information, Advice and Guidance requirements.
93. The CEIAG Policy had been reviewed and rewritten as a more concise document, outlining the college's legal responsibilities and how these are met through the Careers Strategy and key activities.
94. Responding to the Committee Chair's challenge, the Principal confirmed that there would be sufficient staffing resource to commit to delivering the actions outlined in the policy, with external resources used where necessary. A member also emphasised the value of the aim of the policy to enable students to understand the range of opportunities available to them and to support them to acquire the knowledge, skills, and qualifications they need to succeed in their career and educational aspirations. This linked to the work of the committee in reviewing FE destinations data.
95. **Resolved** – that the revised Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) Policy be recommended to the Board of Governors for approval.
96. In addition, a mandatory Providers Access Policy had been written to outline and make available on the college's website how the college met specific provider access requirements.

This would be reviewed and approved by the SLT three yearly and reviewed by the Director of Careers & Stakeholder Engagement annually.

HE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

97. The committee had received the report of the Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education on progress with delivery of the University Centre Sparsholt (UCS) Access and Participation Plan (APP) and the development of a new APP for 2025-26 to 2028-29.
98. The Assistant Principal HE gave a presentation on the Office for Student's (OfS's) requirements for the new plan and the approach being taken to developing the plan, including the emerging outcomes of UCS's analysis of the risks to equality of opportunity and objectives to improve these and next steps for developing intervention strategies and setting targets. This would need to include the planned accompanying investment to deliver the strategies.
99. This followed oversight by the HE Strategy Group and a presentation and discussion with two governors who had been invited to contribute to the Board's oversight of the work in their capacity as a current and former member of CSS and related external areas of interest.
100. The committee endorsed the proposed approach not to seek to target all 12 of the risks on the OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register given the size of the cohort and scope of the specialist curriculum, but to select 4-5 of the most relevant risks and consider linked additional risks in the intervention strategies. This appeared to be in keeping with the plans of other HE institutions of a similar size/type and would link to the wider approach to equality, diversity and inclusion across the college community.
101. A number of considerations were raised in discussion, including:
 - The need to better understand the lower continuation, completion and attainment rates for students of ethnic minority which was an issue across the HE sector.
 - The benefits and risks of targeting (or not targeting) progression to highly skilled employment given the known issue that the national Standard Occupational Classification of 'highly skilled' did not recognise many positive outcomes in the land-based sector and the use of alternative qualitative graduation survey data to measure and demonstrate positive outcomes.
 - The link between the key risk of mental health and ongoing impacts of coronavirus (which was still being experienced with school age children).
102. The Assistant Principal HE highlighted that consultation with UCS students as part of the development process was challenging given the time of year and it was noted that the college could collaborate with other providers to take into account relevant student research.
103. It was noted that the APP governors' group was due to meet again in June to review the draft APP, with an open invitation to CSS members to take part or provide further comments outside of the meeting. The finished APP would be presented to the Board of Governors for approval in July, prior to submission to the OfS, and it was anticipated that further work could be required in response to any feedback from the OfS before the final plan was approved by the OfS and published.
104. The committee noted the updates reported for the current year in relation to value of bursaries awarded (down on the previous year), no applications to the Disabled Students'

Allowance external scheme which students fed back was an overly onerous process, and good progress with outreach events to schools and colleges.

MARKETING

105. 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.
106. The committee discussed progress in relation to the 2024 and 2025 campaigns for UCS, Andover campus and Sparsholt campus, with members endorsing a number of points from specific areas of their experience. Matters covered included:
 - Good progress meeting the target for applications to UCS for September 2024, acknowledging the enrolments target is challenging and being supported with a range of conversion activities, particularly in the context of falling enrolments in the HE sector (especially post-1992 universities).
 - Applications to Andover for 16-18 above the same day last year (19+ lower), a new Saturday open event in June in collaboration with Test Valley Borough Council's 'behind the scenes' events at The Lights and the leisure centre.
 - Applications to Sparsholt for 16-18 marginally above the same day last year (19+ lower).
 - Use of social media and online paid advertising, recognising the further potential of some social media platforms but also challenges in producing content which achieves and maintains high virality (reach and engagement).
107. The committee noted that marketing focus over the next quarter would seek to ensure that the application numbers trends continued and to target specific areas that are not ahead of target, ensure an impactful conversion campaign that these applicants convert and continue to engage and stay active in their application journey ahead of enrolment in September, and to develop and prepare an impactful Campaign 25 for major launch in September.
108. The Head of Marketing also explained the intention to redevelop the marketing strategy and reporting for 2024-25 to include marketing to employers as an individual component.
109. In response to a member highlighting the college's role in supporting young people to overcome adversity and mental health challenges and to build resilience and positive aspirations for the future, the Principal outlined the processes in place to support students struggling to engage with education post-16 and to work with schools and students to put measures in place to support them to remain at college once enrolled. The Deputy Principal noted that as some learners were reluctant to declare mental health concerns on application, a Next Steps process had been introduced after the young person received their offer to help plan support needs. The committee also discussed potential barriers to access to education and support for equality, diversity and inclusion.
110. The committee welcomed the assurance provided by the positive application numbers and the evidence of continued review and development of marketing activity to support 2024 and 2025 enrolments.
111. The committee also congratulated the Horticulture team on their Silver-Gilt award at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

HEALTHCHECK REPORT

112. The committee had received and reviewed the most recent Healthcheck report (2024-04). There were no matters identified under the remit of the committee requiring further review.

COMMITTEE PERFORMANCE

113. The committee had received and reviewed 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, including a review of the new AOC Code of Good Governance in relation to stakeholder engagement.
114. The committee noted the positive affirmation of the college's approach to working with employers and other stakeholders to inform curriculum development and delivery provided by the Ofsted judgement of 'strong' in relation to meeting skills needs (October 2023). The Principal emphasised that this endorsed the value of the committee's remit and its work with college management over a number of years.
115. The committee had continued during the year to provide strategic oversight across relevant regulatory and governance requirements and the committee's business plan had been developed to include a review of delivery of the annual Accountability Statement (confirming 95% of targets had been met, the remainder outside of the college's control).
116. The Committee Chair highlighted the outstanding work by the Vice Principals Curriculum and colleagues on evidencing and analysing FE student destinations as a core mechanism by which the committee was able to measure the effectiveness of the FE curriculum offer in achieving positive outcomes for students.
117. The committee had continued during the year to alert the Board to developments and mitigation of relevant risks, particularly in relation to FE qualification reforms.
118. The review of Principle 4 of the AOC Code of Good Governance (stakeholder engagement) confirmed the alignment of the committee's terms of reference with the definitions of behaviours and outcomes in the code and provided examples of the recommended practice and sources of assurance relevant to the remit of the committee.
119. In conjunction with the Governance & Search Committee, actions identified in the previous annual performance review in relation to committee membership had been completed. Given the turnover of members during the year, with three new members attending their first meeting, a survey of members on chairing of the committee had not been undertaken.
120. The committee was satisfied to report to the Board that it had undertaken its activities in 2023-24 in line with its terms of reference and business plan. No required updates to the terms of reference were identified.
121. The meeting ended at 12.30.

Approved: 24th October 2024 - Curriculum, Skills & Stakeholders Committee Meeting