

SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CURRICULUM, SKILLS & STAKEHOLDERS COMMITTEE (CSS)
held on 24 October 2024 at 09:30
at the Andover Campus

PRESENT¹ T Floyd (E) (Chair); J Milburn (P); F Obiero² (E); S Thompson (C).

In attendance: L Asbridge, Director of Careers & Stakeholder Engagement (minutes 156 to 166)
S Grant, Deputy Principal
S Hermiston, Director of Information & Funding (to minute 140)
J Middleton, Head of Marketing (to minute 145)
D Mernagh, Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education
A Robertson, Governance Co-ordinator
N Shorter, Governor (E)
B Stokes, Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover College)
M Treagust, Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt College)
S Willson, Head of Corporate Governance

APOLOGIES & MEMBERSHIP

122. Apologies were received from S Duckering and D Rees.
123. The committee noted that there was a vacancy for a Student Governor on the committee, J Brant having stepped down as FE Student Governor (Sparsholt), and recruitment activities were underway.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

124. S Thompson explained her new role as Head of Business, Commercial and Skills in the Enterprise and Growth Team at Hampshire County Council (HCC) which was recorded in the register of interests. The committee agreed that it would be necessary to be and remain cognisant of the potential for conflicts of interest to arise in relation to the local authority's responsibilities and the college's interests and to take action to manage the committee's business accordingly if necessary.
125. There were no other interests to be declared.

MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

126. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.
127. Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) (mins 66 & 71/24): The 'Annex G' audit of the first year of LSIF expenditure was clear and was reported to the Audit Committee. The project was on

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

² Via online video conference

course to deliver all spend by the grant deadlines, with contingency plans in place to manage potential risks.

128. T Levels capital projects (min 68/24): On the Sparsholt campus, the new robotic dairy was confirmed to be in full operation. On the Andover campus, the Lights facility was confirmed to be in use for Performance & Dance teaching space and had freed up additional teaching space for T Levels while the Construction Future Skills Centre extension was being built.
129. Accountability Statement (min 69/24): The Accountability Statement 2024-25 had been submitted to the Department for Education ahead of the deadline.
130. Curriculum plans (min 77/24): Following the launch of the Digital Production, Design & Development T Level pathway (Andover campus), management were exploring introducing the Digital Support (technician) pathway to respond to local/regional skills needs. Following the government's ongoing review of qualification reforms, it was now expected that the eSports qualifications would retain funding but the continuing uncertainty over the future of some qualifications made planning challenging.

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 Chair highlighted the key strands of reporting during the year and it was noted that the plan aligned with the AoC Code of good Governance recommended practices and sources of assurance as relevant to the committee's remit.
133. **Resolved** – that the committee's annual business plan 2024-25 be approved.

RECRUITMENT & MARKETING

Curriculum Enrolments

134. 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 and demographic data.
135. The Director of Information & Funding updated the committee on the latest enrolment numbers since the report was issued, noting that, although there was an overall increase in FE enrolments compared to the previous year, this was below the threshold for additional 'in-year' funding.
136. In relation to the Andover campus, members discussed with the Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) the enrolment trends from schools in the Andover campus catchment area. Reasons for variations between schools and year on year, examples of school engagement activities, including the level of access to the schools for sharing information about the college's curriculum offer and a refreshed Andover heads network were reported
137. In relation to the Sparsholt campus, it was noted that there remained a level of uncertainty among potential students and their parents about the new land-based T Levels which, while overall full-time numbers had increased, was likely to be a factor in the numbers of new students enrolling. The college and Landex were lobbying the awarding body to work with universities to ensure a clear understanding about the allocation of UCAS points and the eligibility of the qualifications for university entrance.

138. The committee noted that apprenticeship new starts were up compared to the previous year and the number of apprentices currently ‘in-learning’ was also up.
139. The committee sought additional information about the recruitment trend for HE which showed a decline in first years, with a mixed picture across the subject areas. It was noted that this decline presented a risk to student numbers and HE income for the next two years and would be followed up by management actions. The COO and Vice Principal & Dean of HE reported that decliner research with applicants who had not enrolled confirmed that the majority had decided not to go to university at all and that their decisions were based on personal circumstances.
140. In conclusion, the committee recognised the overall positive outcomes and the collective effort by college teams to support recruitment and enrolment activities.

Marketing Strategy

141. The committee had received and reviewed the report of the Head of Marketing on the marketing strategy, together with the marketing operations plan for 2024-25.
142. The Head of Marketing summarised key points from the performance of the previous campaigns and the marketing priorities in relation to acquisition, conversion and progression for University Centre Sparsholt (UCS), Andover FE and Sparsholt FE and highlighted the addition of Employers and Full Cost Courses as the fourth strand of the strategy.
143. In relation to HE recruitment, the Principal noted that the review of the HE strategy which was underway and being overseen by a governors’ working group would consider the geographic reach of UCS. The committee also discussed the redevelopment of the applicant communication journey and specific actions taken to support conversion, with examples given of experience from the commercial sector.
144. The committee noted the launch of marketing activities linked to the 125th anniversary of the land-based FE education offer and 50th anniversary of the Andover campus.
145. **Resolved** - The committee endorsed the marketing operational plan 2024-25 as supporting the delivery of the college’s strategic plan.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT, STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT & CAREERS

Qualification Reforms & T Levels

146. The committee had received and reviewed the report of the Vice Principals Curriculum on FE curriculum reforms and the college’s response to developing the curriculum.
147. The committee noted the continuing uncertainties for curriculum planning and delivery with a DfE review of qualifications and assessment launched (Curriculum Assessment Review) following the new government pausing the defunding of some Level 3 qualifications.
148. The committee was assured by the actions management was taking in seeking to mitigate associated risks, including being represented at a focus group meeting for the land-based sector. College management remained committed to the continued adoption of the T-level qualifications but recognised that alternative provision and future developments were imperative to support improved progression of Level 2 learners onto T-levels as well as providing a curriculum for 19+ learners to access.

149. In the current year, it was noted that management had sought to balance offering an alternative qualification in some subjects to respond to learner needs with the resourcing requirements for delivering two qualifications in the same subject area. In addition, there were no changes to Equine, Fishery and Gamekeeping where there was no T Level available and de-funding of current qualifications was still technically possible, however highly unlikely.
150. At the Andover campus, the committee noted that the rollout of T Levels had enabled the college to open up new curriculum opportunities for learners in areas where local skills needs had been identified through the Local Skills Improvement Plan. However, clarification was still awaited in relation to the implementation of alternative assessment qualifications (AAQs). Where funding was removed, this potentially presented a risk to progression opportunities.
151. The committee also noted that there was currently a high level of uncertainty about the timetable and details for proposed government reforms to apprenticeships, including in relation to use of levy funds, establishment of new apprenticeships, changes to the length of apprenticeships, and the development of a new foundation apprenticeship.
152. The committee continued to be assured and to report to the Board that college management was actively assessing the risks and opportunities and taking steps to influence the decision-making process in order to fully prepare learners for a broad range of careers.
153. A member reported student feedback from his engagement with a group of students about the range of farming skills and the opportunities for practical work covered by the T Level Livestock Production pathway, and whether these could be extended. The Vice Principal (Sparsholt) reassured the committee that farm duties and work experience were a significant part of the delivery of T Level programmes, explaining that, at this early point of the two-year programme, there was a necessary focus on delivering core learning. In addition to the T Level qualification, students were provided with opportunities to obtain additional related skills and competencies through courses recorded in a 'skills passport' and the tutorial programme. Responding to the Chair's question, the Vice Principal confirmed that these additional skills would also support the development of 'soft' employability skills.
154. In response to the feedback, the Vice Principal undertook to consider whether there was more that could be done at the start of the T Level programmes to explain to the students the range of activities covered over the two years.
155. A member noted his governor Link visit to the butchery curriculum area, commending the butchering facilities and asking whether there were opportunities to further utilise these. The Principal explained the wider use of the facilities for butchery apprenticeships and full cost provision.

Stakeholder Engagement, Employers & Careers

156. 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, together with the Matrix Standard accreditation report.
157. The committee commended management on the successful outcome of the Matrix review which had recognised the high quality of advice and guidance provided by the college and

that the college placed a strong focus on giving students the ‘edge’ in the workplace, through an increase in employer engagement, the adoption of new emerging career technologies, and a continued emphasis on student progression and the development of industry specific skills. The Director of Careers & Stakeholders confirmed that the development suggestions in the Matrix report would be followed up, with the provision of information, advice and guidance by a range of staff included in their induction.

158. The committee was assured by the progress which had been achieved since the last meeting in resourcing the careers team, including the appointment of two Level 6 qualified careers advisors, and noted a range of new developments to the careers provision.
159. The committee also noted the reported examples of employer engagement, including new digital newsletters for employers to support a range of activities.
160. Responding to the Committee Chair’s query, the Principal confirmed the continued commitment to engagement with wider stakeholders in the civic, education and community categories. Examples included involvement in a new schools/colleges partnership scheme launched by the University of Winchester, representation on the new Hampshire Prosperity Partnership Board, and expansion of the land-based education programme for female military personnel with the HighGround military charity and Cornwall College Group.
161. It was also noted that college management continued to respond to changes in government funding and to employer representative and local authority structures for discretionary skills based funding, including in relation to further development and funding of the Innovation South Virtual Campus.
162. The Principal reported that the Hampshire Rural Forum would cease to operate following the withdrawal of administrative funding from Hampshire County Council due to budget constraints. Although a non-statutory body, the forum had provided a means of collaboration for a range of organisations, including the college, with interests in the economic prosperity and wellbeing of rural businesses and communities in the county. The forum had also subsumed the Wessex Rural and Farming Network, which had been created to feedback local rural issues to Defra. The Principal/Vice Principal would continue to attend the Farming and Rural Issues Group South East (FRIGSE).

Curriculum Deep Dives

163. The committee had received and reviewed curriculum subject profiles for Engineering (Andover) and Equine (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 employers within the curriculum delivery.
164. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) highlighted how the Engineering offer at Andover had been expanded to respond to the skills needs of local employers, both introducing new qualifications and adding the teaching of new skills to the delivery of courses. The strategic aim was to develop formal partnerships with employers to provide direct progression opportunities for selected students to employment.

165. Members also discussed with the Chief Operating Officer the development of the electric vehicle ‘first responder’ adult course offer, noting that this used new technology funded through the Local Skills Improvement Fund and the aim for continued regional collaboration with other colleges.
166. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) reported a number of challenges in both recruitment to and delivery of Equine qualifications, including stagnation in Equine enrolment numbers across colleges, the cancellation last year of the launch of a new T Level, and the challenges and complexities of working with the equine industry, including in relation to apprenticeships. Despite this, and some shortfalls in certain staffing categories, which were being addressed, the team had been working hard to improve employer engagement and there were some strong stakeholder relationships in place.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Access & Participation Plan

167. The committee had received and reviewed 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).
168. The committee noted the positive impact reported of financial support provided to students in 2023-24 through bursary and other funds, and discussed the progress reported in meeting the APP targets for specific categories of students. It was noted that the aims of reducing gaps in certain entry rates had been constrained by the socio-economic demographics of UCS’s main catchment areas and the specialist curriculum.
169. The committee also noted the summary of outreach activities to schools and sixth form colleges and the diversification of the curriculum to offer more alternative opportunities to engage with higher education than through full-time degrees.
170. It was confirmed that the new APP for 2025-26 to 2028-29 had been submitted to the Office for Students and approval was awaited.

Graduate Outcomes

171. The committee had received and reviewed the report of the Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education on the outcomes of the Graduate Survey for the 2021/22 cohort, conducted by the Higher Education Statistics Agency HESA.
172. The committee noted that the survey response rate at 51% was in keeping with the previous year, with 93% of graduates who responded in employment or study (above the national average and the Office for Students (OfS) threshold).
173. It was noted that there had been no change year on year in the proportion of respondents recognised under the classification of ‘highly skilled’ employment and the committee discussed the ongoing challenge of the highly skilled classification system in relation to the land-based sector, discussing the benchmark data with other land-based providers and actions being taken by the college.
174. It was also noted that UCS had begun monitoring the percentage of graduates in roles which were relevant to their degrees and had set a strategic target and action plan to grow this over the next five years.

HEALTHCHECK REPORT

175. The committee had received and reviewed the most recent Healthcheck report (2024-25 Issue 02) and noted the positive progress reported securing industry placement and work experience for FE students
176. There were no other matters identified under the remit of the committee requiring further review.
177. The meeting ended at 12.00.

Approved: Curriculum, Skills & Stakeholders Committee Meeting 17 February 2025