

**SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE**  
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE**  
**CURRICULUM, EMPLOYERS & MARKET REQUIREMENTS COMMITTEE**  
**held on 25 May 2017**

**<sup>1</sup>PRESENT** Dr S Eden (C); Mr R Fawcett (E); Mr S Morgan (E); Mr S Ward (E).

In attendance: Mrs S Grant, Vice Principal – Corporate (from minute 57)  
Mr M Simmons, Deputy Principal  
Mrs S Willson, Clerk to the Corporation

**APOLOGIES**

38. Apologies were received from Miss C Duffy and Mr T Jackson.

**DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

39. There were no interests to be declared in matters to be discussed at this meeting.

**MINUTES**

40. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 February 2017 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

**MATTERS ARISING**

Leaver destinations (minute 17/17)

41. The Deputy Principal reported that management had continued to gather evidence of FE leaver destinations and around 85-95% of destinations were now known. The final analysis was not yet complete and a report would follow to the Committee in the Autumn term.
42. The Committee welcomed the increase in the proportion of known destinations, acknowledging that it was challenging to gather this information, and looked forward to reviewing the outcomes. The Committee discussed the fact that the leaver destinations information did not include the location of employment, which would be one way of looking at how the College benefited different local economies.

Marketing (minute 33/17)

43. Responding to a question about the rebranded University Centre Sparsholt, the Deputy Principal confirmed that it was too early to assess the impact of the new designation and reported that further branding activity was planned, including more new signage on campus.

**CURRICULUM PLAN**

44. The Committee had received the report of the Deputy Principal on the Curriculum Plan for 2017/18 to 2019/20 which set out the direction of the curriculum over three years for 16-18 year olds, 19+ adult skills, apprenticeships and HE.

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<sup>1</sup> (C) = Co-opted; (E) = External; (P) = Principal; (S) = Staff; (St) = Student

45. The Committee agreed that the report be annexed to the minutes of the meeting on this occasion for the information of the Board, following up the recent presentation at the Governors' Seminar on the Architecture of the Curriculum and to inform the Board of the approach taken by management to the three year planning process.
46. The Deputy Principal reminded the Committee of the strategic drivers which informed curriculum planning, and the need to reconcile the requirements of the economy and employers and the desires of potential students, both locally and, in the case of some subject offers, nationally.
47. Members recognised the challenge of investing in the development of new courses in a tight funding environment, endorsing the focus on the College's core strengths and on innovative delivery and increasing the relevance of skills for employability, such as digital skills and new agricultural technology.
48. Members sought more information about the planned development of offers around sustainable resources, renewable energy and bio fuels to understand the timing of new offers being made available. The Deputy Principal confirmed that discussions were underway with potential external partners and explained some of the complexities involved in developing offers which were pitched at the right technical level and contained the appropriate specialist skills, particularly in an evolving and diverse sector and where there was not yet an established curriculum or employment pathway.
49. Members discussed alternative routes to a university partnership for developing these new offers, such as directly with employers, and the need to ensure that any offer provided the practical skills required by the industry.
50. The Committee discussed the range of the curriculum and how to maintain the strength and innovation of land-based provision. The Deputy Principal explained the challenges for maintaining or growing student numbers in some land-based subjects, given the increase in national competition over the years, the changes in demand in different specialisms and the demographic decline. Other colleges were experiencing a decline in or the closure of some subjects, although also growth in certain areas. The strategic ambition of the College remained to maintain as much of the land-based curriculum offer as possible.
51. The Committee Chair endorsed the Deputy Principal's account of the increase in competition for the College from his own experience and also pointed to the increasing need of the agriculture industry for skilled operators who had the potential for taking on more responsibility which might be supported via a L4 apprenticeship.
52. The Deputy Principal noted that this was an area the College had researched but that there was not yet evidence of sufficient interest. Currently, there was not a L4 agriculture apprenticeship framework/standard in place. However, the College was actively seeking to develop other apprenticeships where the College was able to work with the relevant sector.
53. The Committee Chair questioned whether there were other opportunities for the College to hear from employers and sectors about their skills needs. Members discussed examples of organisations which worked with advisory boards and industry representatives and the benefits of employers sharing how skills needs would be likely to develop in their sectors at a strategic level to inform long-term curriculum planning.

54. The Deputy Principal gave an overview of the ways in which the College already sought the views of employers and sectors on their current and future skills needs, citing the range of apprenticeships developed with employers, the LEPs, Landex and the previous report to the Committee on the FE employer matrix. While the level of engagement varied somewhat by and within sectors depending on the nature of employers, the Deputy Principal assured the Committee that the management teams put considerable effort into working with employers. The development of the curriculum at Andover College in relation to “Digital Futures” was an example of how the College was positioning itself to support learners in gaining the skills needed for the future. The Deputy Principal agreed there was merit in having strategic level discussions about industry/sector development where these conversations could be brokered in a meaningful way for both the employers and the College.
55. The Committee Chair recognised the range of employer engagement undertaken by the College and was reassured that this engagement could extend into strategic discussions about the changing future skills needs of employers.
56. **Resolved** – that the scope and ambition of the Curriculum Plan for 2017/18 to 2019/20 be endorsed and reported to the Board of Governors as a fit-for-purpose working document to deliver the College’s strategic ambitions, particularly in relation to student progression, future employability, professional development of the employed and the needs of employers.

#### **APPRENTICESHIP REFORM**

57. The Committee had received the report of the Vice Principal – Corporate on the implementation of operational requirements and funding rules for apprenticeship delivery.
58. Under the new apprenticeship regime, the College had successfully applied to be re-registered on the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (RoATP). However, the announcements about funding had been delayed and the ESFA had informed the College in April that only an interim funding allocation would be issued for 1 May until 31 December 2017 (in place of the 18 month allocation expected), at a very significant reduction in funding - in common, though not as severe in some cases, as other providers.
59. The Vice Principal – Corporate outlined the contingency measures that management was therefore putting in place to mitigate the impact on the bottom line and to protect the funding for existing learners until completion of their programme. This included limiting associates’ (subcontracting) delivery to “carry in” learners and apprentices funded by the new employer levy until the future funding position was known. This presented a risk to the College’s relationships with its associates and there were concerns across the sectors as to the financial sustainability of some providers if the funding was not increased. A further possible impact would be to reduce access to levy funded delivery by associates.
60. The Vice Principal – Corporate also reported a number of further changes to apprenticeship delivery, including a funding requirement for English and Maths delivery to be delivered in addition to the 20% “off the job” training requirement. This was a challenge in an environment where employers did not want to lose their apprentice from the workplace for more than a day a week and it was anticipated that the ESFA might change this requirement.

61. The Committee discussed the opportunities and risks arising from the most recent developments to the operational requirements and funding rules for apprenticeship delivery and noted the actions being taken by College management to seek to ensure that the College continued to meet the needs of apprentices and employers, and to be able to respond positive if funding improved.
62. Responding to Members' questions, the Vice Principal – Corporate confirmed that the funding announcements and uncertainties put 19 of the College's 37 apprenticeship frameworks at risk because these were delivered by associates and that the employers, mainly SMEs, were not in a position to pay more.
63. As reported at the most recent Governors' Seminar, an inability to grow apprenticeships would also prevent the College, and other colleges, from meeting this aspect of the LEP funding agreements and the Principal and Vice Principal – Corporate had raised this with the EM3 LEP.
64. Asked about the potential for developing Level 4 apprenticeships, the Vice Principal – Corporate explained that management were looking at the progression route in land-based professions where students had the capability of moving up to Level 4. Management was being cautious about the conversion of apprenticeship frameworks to the new standards until there was confidence in the costed end point assessment services in order to protect the College's reputation.

#### **LEARNER DESTINATIONS**

65. The Committee had received the report of the Deputy Principal on the College's annual collection of the destinations data of Higher Education students who left the College in July 2016, commissioned as part of the Destination of Learners leaving Higher Education (DLHE) funding requirement.
66. HEFCE guidance made colleges aware that there would be more emphasis in future HE quality assessment on the use of data to provide evidence of positive student outcomes. Any areas identified as a concern would require discussion between the HEFCE and the college.
67. The Committee noted that the new method of collecting data had given the College a clearer picture of destinations than had previously been the case. This showed that a sizeable number of graduates were in relevant employment and a strong Net Promoter Score, as well as providing useful anecdotal evidence about the student experience. The data provided the College with a solid baseline from which to measure trends and improvements in future years.
68. Members discussed the finding that around half of leavers had not required their qualification to gain their employment, noting that this could be due to a number of factors such as leavers taking temporary jobs or joining sectors in junior roles and that the expertise gained from their studies could nonetheless have been beneficial in achieving their employment and in their future careers.
69. Members discussed whether there would be value in future surveys of discovering the geographical location of the leavers' employment in order to understand which markets were being served.
70. Asked about the response rate and the sample size, the Deputy Principal explained the survey had achieved an 81% response rate (above the DLHE requirement) from a sample size of 135 leavers, the latter being constrained by the number of HE leavers each year.

71. The Committee welcomed the new report and endorsed the approach taken by College management to improve the collection and analysis of destinations information for HE leavers, noting that it would assist the College to monitor HE student progression and employability in future years.

### **STRATEGIC PLAN**

72. The Committee had received the draft objectives and annual milestones under Priorities 1 and 4 in the College's Strategic Plan 2017-20, including a number of Objectives and Annual Milestones which were particularly relevant to the Committee's terms of reference.
73. The Vice Principal – Corporate explained the Annual Milestones and key measures for Objectives 13 and 14 and the early discussions with the FE and HE sector within the Enterprise M3 area in relation to an Institute of Technology referred to under Objective 15.
74. Asked whether the use of the term "assess" in Annual Milestone 43 was appropriate, the Vice Principal – Corporate assured the Committee that management was always pushing forward funding bid opportunities but that these particular opportunities required first building alliances and developing projects for joint bids.
75. **Resolved** – that the Objectives 5, 13 and 14 and related annual milestones under Priorities 1 and 4 of the College's Strategic Plan 2017-20 be recommended to the Board of Governors.

### **MARKETING**

76. The Deputy Principal gave a presentation on headline data from the in-year marketing metrics and an update on the College's current marketing priorities and activities. The focus remained on converting applicants to enrolments and continuing to attract more applicants for 2017.
77. Responding to a question about the disparity between social media performance between Sparsholt College and Andover College, the Deputy Principal explained that the Sparsholt College had a greater amount of social media activity because of its high profile events, external connections and the curriculum at the Sparsholt campus.

### **HEALTHCHECK REPORT**

78. The Committee noted the most recent Healthcheck report (2017/04).

### **PERFORMANCE OF THE COMMITTEE IN 2016/17**

79. The Committee had received the report of the Clerk which posed a series of questions to prompt members in discussing the Committee's performance over 2016/17 and to review the Committee's terms of reference, including in relation to compliance with the Code of Good Governance.
80. Members discussed the remit of the Committee, how these areas of oversight were approached in other colleges, whether the Board found the work of the Committee useful, and the views of the SLT members present. It was noted that the Committee provided the opportunity for its Members to gain a more comprehensive understanding of areas under its remit, to report to the Board any risks emerging and to hold more detailed discussions with the SLT. There were no changes proposed to the terms of reference.

81. The Committee welcomed the attendance at its meetings during 2016/17 by three other Members of the Board and suggested that other Members might wish to attend as guests in the following year to learn more about the work of the Committee.
82. The Committee noted the review of provisions in the Code of Good Governance relating to responsiveness to workforce trends and external stakeholders and was satisfied that there was evidence that the provisions were being met satisfactorily.
83. The meeting ended at 12.30 pm.