

SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
QUALITY & STANDARDS COMMITTEE
held on 23 NOVEMBER 2017 at 9.30 am

¹PRESENT Mr N Hopkins (E); Mr T Jackson (P); Dr R Palmer (E); Mr G Rake (S).

In attendance: Mr S Barlow, Director of Quality & Performance (from min 102)
Mrs C James, Dean of Higher Education (mins 90 to 106)
Mr M Simmons, Deputy Principal
Mr Ben Stokes, Head of Centre & 6th Form Academy, Andover College
Mr C Wilson, Governor
Mrs S Willson, Clerk to the Corporation

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

90. There were no interests to declare.

MINUTES

91. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Committee Chair.

Learner experience (ref. minute 76/17)

92. Asked about the action to issue a reminder to staff about how to log a compliment with the Quality team, it was confirmed that this had been communicated to staff. It was not known if there had been a noticeable increase in recorded compliments to date but it was noted that compliments were often received at the end of the academic year.

HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE

93. The Committee had received the annual report of the Dean of Higher Education on quality assurance, including current trends in recruitment and performance of HE provision, and the HEFCE quality assurance statement.

94. The Committee noted that the College continued to provide a high quality HE academic and student experience, evidenced by both internal and external indicators, progression to employment and verified by the University of Portsmouth, the new HEFCE Annual Provider Review (the report from HEFCE to the Principal was annexed) and the Silver Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) award.

95. The Committee also welcomed the University's response to the College's 2016/17 Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review (ASQER) and the high number of HE academic staff who had gained recognition under the UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning.

96. The Dean of Higher Education noted that, as well as reports on HE performance at the Quality & Standards Committee meetings, governors had attended the Board of Studies meetings, Poster Day and the ASQER course review panels to obtain an overview of the HE quality cycle and that there had been termly Link visits from governors.

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

97. The Committee noted that HE achievement and continuation (ie retention) data continued to demonstrate a quality student experience, although progression from Year 1 to Year 2 of Foundation Science programmes was highlighted by the Dean of Higher Education as a cause for concern. Members discussed the challenge of retaining students against the context of the widening participation agenda. The Dean of Higher Education explained the College had taken actions with first year students, acting on their feedback to improve the “step up to HE” induction week. The challenge was to help students understand and prepare for HE before they started their first year and to build their confidence. Students who had been on the first year of the Access course were now progressing well. Workshops had also been run for students coming to do a top-up from another college. Management were going to examine the students’ prior qualifications to assess whether the challenges could be linked to science related capabilities and/or lifestyle and independence and what further actions could be taken.
98. The Committee noted figures given for students from the POLAR 3 Quintiles 1 and 2, (‘Participation of Local Areas’, a measure of socioeconomic status of people entering Higher Education with Quintile 1 & 2 being most deprived) which were positive in relation to the previous year’s benchmark data, and the explanation that some young people from these backgrounds were put off HE because of concerns about student loans. The Deputy Principal highlighted the requirements in the OFFA agreement to both widen participation and improve success and explained that this was an ongoing challenge for the College.
99. The Dean of Higher Education highlighted the National Student Survey (NSS) results had shown a reduction from 88% to 84% year on year of overall satisfaction and, while the overall HE sector had also reduced to 84.2% following the introduction of new questions, management was not complacent.
100. The Committee noted the update on HE recruitment and commended the success in relation to Access to FE students and internal progressions from FE. However, it was also noted that it has been decided not to enrol a new intake onto FdSc Horticulture with Plantsmanship & Design or MSc Equine Behaviour & Training due to low applications.
101. Asked about the impact of changes to the Disability Students Allowance (DSA) funding, the Dean of Higher Education explained that new procedures to determine entitlement had led to undercutting of fees by external assessors and the College had reduced its hourly assessor rates to encourage students to use an internal assessor as this enabled an integrated approach to support in the interest of the students. Management now had a policy in place for external assessors coming onto site, including fees payable by the assessor in some cases.
102. The report also provided an assessment against the TEF metrics in October 2017 compared to October 2016. These indicated a potential improvement in the College’s scoring and therefore the Dean of Higher Education was going to make a new submission in January to see if the College could achieve a Gold award. However, the Dean of Higher Education cautioned that there had been changes to the TEF framework, with the value of the criteria linked directly to teaching excellence reduced and more focus on continuation and outcomes. Outcome metrics included an assessment of skilled employment based only on HMRC earnings data (at 3 and 5 years) and this was known to be disadvantageous for outcomes in the land-based sector.

103. Looking ahead at changes to Government policy, the Committee noted that the HE Reform Bill and the introduction of the new Office for Students (OfS) was expected to further increase the emphasis on compliance and reporting, as well as the flexibility needed to deliver the ongoing priority of the “student as consumer”. The report included a summary from the AOC on the OfS and Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The Dean of Higher Education set out the key points from the consultation documents issued in relation to the OfS, noting the focus on social mobility, value for money, student choice and widening participation and that the College could be required to provide student contracts as early as 2018/19. Institutions would be required to pay a registration fee of c£15-30k pa, on top of the current QAA fee and OFFA fee and the new HEFCE fee. These represented a significant and disproportionate financial burden for a small institution compared with a much larger university. The Dean of Higher Education confirmed that she was comfortable with the ESG standards.
104. The Deputy Principal noted that the growing demands of the funding, compliance and quality assurance framework validated the SLT’s decision to create the post of Dean of Higher Education but explained that, so far, management had not been able to recruit a new Head of HE Faculty and therefore C James was currently performing both roles.
105. The Committee commended the report from the Dean of High Education as clear and comprehensive and providing supporting evidence and information. The Committee agreed that the HE provision was being effectively managed to maintain high quality provision but noted the future risk of the increased administrative and financial burden on small institutions.
106. **Resolved** - that the Accounting Officer, on behalf of the Board of Governors, sign the annual return to HEFCE to confirm that:
- The Committee, on behalf of the Board of Governors, had received and discussed a report and accompanying action plan relating to the continuous improvement of the student academic experience and student outcomes. This included evidence from the provider’s own periodic review processes, which fully involved students and included embedded external peer or professional review.
 - The methodologies used as a basis to improve the student academic experience and student outcomes were, to the best of the Committee’s knowledge, robust and appropriate.
 - The standards of awards for which the Board of Governors was responsible had been appropriately maintained.

FURTHER EDUCATION QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE

Self-Assessment report

107. The Committee had received the report of the Director of Quality & Performance on FE success rates, including examination of the headline Self-Assessment Report for 2016/17.
108. The Director of Quality & Performance also gave a detailed presentation, highlighting the key outcomes of the SAR, and explaining that some of the final data in relation to destinations, study programmes and student surveys was still to be added to the SAR.
109. The Committee noted that the College had made “Good” progress against the targets set within the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) resulting from the previous year’s SAR and

that, for Education & Training Provision, the Overall College Achievement Rate remains “Good”.

110. The Committee discussed a number of areas of performance in relation to the presentation and the SAR, including those areas identified as needing to make further improvement.
111. Members sought more information about management’s approach to FE student withdrawals and to balancing aims for high retention with ensuring the best opportunities for students to achieve the best results. The Director of Quality & Performance assured the Committee that, although there had been a more robust approach to implementing the College’s policies in relation to learner performance, the College continued to strive to work with learners to improve their performance and behaviours.
112. Noting the difficulties which had arisen during the previous year in relation to apprenticeships provided through associates, Members noted that there had also been some issues in previous years and questioned whether the value to the College of these associate delivered apprenticeships was worth the potential risks to retention and achievement or the impact of mitigating those risks. The Director of Quality & Performance explained that the quality assurance work with associates had increased and that the College now had extensive access to associates’ internal systems to identify and act on any emerging issues. The Principal added that using associates provided the College with more flexibility to reduce or increase the apprenticeship offer depending on employer requirements and in the context of funding uncertainties. There would be a significant impact on volumes of apprenticeships (a key expectation of FE working for the needs of businesses) and adverse financial impact if associate activity was removed and therefore management’s emphasis was on strengthening scrutiny and support. Apprenticeship provision would be graded as “Requires Improvement” with a robust action plan to improve the results in 2017/18 already being implemented.
113. Members discussed the results in English and Maths, noting the report that while the proportion of students who achieved C or above (9-4) GCSE grades continued to improve significantly, it remained too low throughout the post 16 sector and at the College. Members noted that the actions explained by management as being taken by the College through the Quality Improvement Plan appeared to be comprehensive in addressing this.
114. Members recognised the excellent results in relation to the College “value added” measures and the Director of Quality & Performance explained the use of the A Levels Performance Systems (ALPS) to focus on individual students.
115. Asked about the embedding of British Values in the curriculum, the Director of Quality & Performance explained that this would be addressed in the final SAR and confirmed that feedback showed that students continued to feel safe and secure. Management continued to reinforce the awareness of British Values in the student community and has provided updated information displayed in classrooms and via IT.
116. The Committee commended the SAR process and the transparency of the outcomes, evidence and outcomes, noting that that some parts of the report were still be finalised.
117. **Resolved** – that the Committee recommend to the Board the Self-Assessment Report for 2016/17, and associated Quality Improvement Plan, provide a satisfactory basis on which to judge the quality of the FE and apprenticeship performance and quality improvement targets.

118. FE and Apprenticeships In-Year Performance

119. The Committee had received the monthly Quality Healthcheck report on FE and apprenticeship learners in-year performance.
120. The Director of Quality & Performance noted that future reports to the Committee and the Board would include a progress report against the new Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). The Committee Chair asked that future reports also include the numbers of students/enrolments in each of the curriculum areas to assist governors in interpreting the performance data.
121. The Committee also agreed that, going forward, governors should receive the first 2 pages of the report, together the QIP summary, with the supporting data made available online.

MEMBERSHIP

122. The Committee Chair noted that it was the last meeting attended by G Rake, before he left the College, and thanked him for his time and contributions to the work of the Committee during his time as Staff Governor.
123. The meeting concluded at 12.00 pm.