

SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CURRICULUM, EMPLOYERS & MARKET REQUIREMENTS COMMITTEE
held on 4 November 2016

¹PRESENT Dr S Eden (C); Mr R Fawcett (E); Mr T Jackson (P); Mr S Morgan (E); Mr S Ward (E).

In attendance: Mrs Z Carter, Governor
Mrs C James, Head of Faculty: Higher Education (minutes 80 to 86)
Mr M Simmons, Deputy Principal
Mrs S Willson, Clerk to the Corporation

APOLOGIES

69. Apologies were received from Miss M Brett.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

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

MINUTES

71. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2016 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

MATTERS ARISING

Healthcheck Report (minute 37/16)

72. TDJ confirmed that the SLT would bring forward market intelligence and sector trend data through the relevant substantive reports to the Committee, rather than seeking to expand the Healthcheck Report.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

73. The Committee had received the Employer Engagement Strategy and accompanying report from the Vice Principal, Corporate, which provided an overview of the local labour market to inform strategic decisions including curriculum delivery and investment strategy.

74. The Deputy Principal summarised the core strands of the strategy, noting that College management's keen understanding of the composition of the labour market and local economic development plans enabled the College to focus its curriculum offer on employers' requirements and products which optimised yield. College management had identified a need to better align and capitalise on employer engagement activities across the College and that a simplified, more focused Customer Relationship Management system could enable improved marketing to some targeted employers.

75. Members questioned whether the focus on the Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs)'s strategy would be at the detriment to land-based industries and smaller businesses. The Deputy Principal assured the Committee that over 60% of apprenticeships continued to be delivered to land-based SME employers. Nonetheless, there was a need to offer

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

relevant skills to sectors identified as local economic priorities, including in the Andover area, where employers were also usually SMEs.

76. Members discussed whether there would be a benefit to targeting large land-based related employers located outside Hampshire and whether the College could win business from private training providers or provide an alternative to in-house apprenticeship schemes, recognising the new challenge of the apprenticeship levy. National contracts had been targeted in the past but without much success and the additional costs of delivering long distance training had to be taken into account. Once the details of the new funding regime were clear, College management would be developing and marketing appropriate offers to new employers but making extensive use of the demonstrably successful tactics of data led engagement on businesses (e.g. through data purchased from Dun and Bradstreet).
77. The Principal explained the different tariff values allocated to different subjects and noted that land-based colleges were lobbying Government in reaction to recent announcements about lower tariffs for land-based apprenticeships.
78. Responding to a Member's question about the development of the curriculum in relation to sustainable energy, the Deputy Principal confirmed that College management were researching options and that this was reflected in the Curriculum Plan and HE Strategy.
79. The Committee welcomed the Employer Engagement Strategy and asked the Deputy Principal to relay thanks to the Vice Principal, Commercial, for the comprehensive information provided. The Committee acknowledged the report's conclusions that the College had seized opportunities afforded from LEPs, as well as the European Social Fund (ESF) and European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), and used its understanding of the local labour market to develop its training offer and improve its approach to business engagement in relation to professions courses. This had also had the benefit of securing discretionary investment in the College estate.

HE STRATEGY

80. The Committee had received the updated Higher Education Strategy (2016-2020).
81. The Deputy Principal noted that the direction of travel of the HE Strategy was broadly in line with the Strategy approved by the Board of Governors in December 2014, although the HE policy and funding environment had been rapidly changing and the Strategy sought to grow HE numbers in a competitive sector and declining demographic.
82. The challenge for the HE team was to continue to develop and improve the offer, maintain standards and to look at ways of investing in areas such as research within a tight budget.
83. Under the new Teaching Excellence Framework, colleges were assessed in relation to the outcomes for students with an expectation that students should obtain "graduate employment". Graduates from the College were going on to excellent careers, in areas they wished to work, but at income levels which were not recognised as graduate employment.
84. The Principal reported that Landex was seeking to undertake further work with the GuildHE (HE institutions membership organisation) on another project to increase the understanding and recognition by Government of graduate employment routes in the land-based sector following the imposition of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)

which looked as though it might be ‘punishing’ some bona fides graduate jobs through sub-categories of the TEF scoring in awarding, Bronze, Silver or Gold under the TEF.

85. Responding to a Member’s question about the links between HE and employers’ needs and research, the Head of the HE Faculty confirmed that the College worked with employers when developing and validating degrees and that employer engagement was a strength of the HE provision. The Principal also reported possible developments in developing degree apprenticeship offers in specialist areas of agriculture.
86. **Resolved** – that Board of Governors be recommended to approve the HE Strategy (2016-2020), as amended to reflect the Committee’s discussion.

RECRUITMENT & ENROLMENT

87. The Committee had received the report of the Deputy Principal on enrolment trends across FE, Apprenticeships and HE which provide an overview of curriculum recruitment strengths and weaknesses.
88. The Committee discussed the recruitment challenges at Andover College and areas of growth at Sparsholt College, including the shift towards apprenticeships in land-based.
89. Responding to a Member’s question about routes of progression for learners, the Deputy Principal confirmed that the College sought to provide the best outcomes for individual learners within the curriculum offer. An ‘Access to HE’ offer (Level 3 equivalent programme) had been introduced and was supported by a FE learner loan, refundable if the learner progressed to HE and successfully completed the HE course.
90. The Deputy Principal also reported the longer-term aims around delivering “blended learning” in partnership with other colleges and/or the National Landbased College.

MARKETING

91. The Committee had received the report of the College Marketing Consultant on the impact of the 2015/16 marketing strategy.
92. The Deputy Principal confirmed that marketing plans and the Employer Engagement Strategy were aligned.
93. It was noted that the quality of marketing materials and activities had continued to improve, including the rapid growth in digital marketing, and that the College had increased overall numbers in a competitive and currently declining market place. As well as ambitious campaigns, marketing would be focusing in 2016/17 on an improved customer journey, from open days to enrolments, on both campuses.
94. The Chair suggested that marketing might be an area of interest for a future Governors’ Seminar and thanked the Deputy Principal and the Marketing team for their achievements in 2015/16.

HEALTHCHECK REPORT

95. The Committee noted matters in the Healthcheck report 2016/07.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS PLAN

96. The Committee had received the report of the Clerk which updated the annual plan of business. The plan included the HE Strategy on a three yearly cycle, previously considered by the Quality & Standards Committee.

97. Members discussed whether to seek to co-opt a further member from the local business community but agreed that feedback from a wide range of employers should continue to be sought through employer engagement, the LEP and in partnership with other colleges and reported to the Committee.
98. **Resolved** – that the Committee’s forward business plan for 2016/17 be approved with the addition of an annual employer perceptions survey in the summer term.
99. The meeting ended at 12.30 pm.