

**SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE**  
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE**  
**QUALITY & STANDARDS COMMITTEE**  
**held on 21 July 2016 at 9.00 am**

**<sup>1</sup>PRESENT** Mr J Charles (C); Mr T Jackson (P); Dr R Palmer (E); Miss A Robbins (St);  
Mr G Tabcart (S).

In attendance: Mr S Barlow, Vice Principal – Curriculum  
Mr M Simmons, Deputy Principal  
Mrs J Venables, Governor  
Mrs S Willson, Clerk to the Corporation

**APOLOGIES & MEMBERSHIP**

35. Apologies were received from Mr Hopkins.
36. Mr Tabcart was welcomed to his first meeting, following his recent appointment as a member of the Board of Governors, and Mrs Venables was welcomed as a guest.
37. **Resolved** – that Dr Palmer chair the meeting in the absence of Mr Hopkins.

**DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

38. There were no interests to declare.

**MINUTES**

39. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2016 be confirmed as a correct record, with a minor correction, and signed by the Chairman.

Residential Provision (ref. minute 21/16)

40. Following recommendations in Ofsted’s report (graded “Outstanding”) on Sparsholt College’s residential provision, the Committee sought an update on managing smoking restrictions. The Deputy Principal confirmed that processes were in place to seek to prevent smoking near residential doorways.

Higher Education Fees (ref. minute 28/16)

41. The Principal noted the resolution of the Board of Governors to apply to OFFA to set the HE fees at £9,250 pa for 2017/18 in response to OFFA agreeing that HE providers could adjust their fees in line with the anticipated changes in regulation which would allow providers with satisfactory quality assessment to raise their fees in line with inflation. College management was considering options for providing an IT device to new students enrolling in 2017/18, linked to widening access.
42. The Deputy Principal reported that, to date, OFFA had agreed the rise of fees to £9,000 pa for 2017/18 as set out in the OFFA agreement submitted before the new guidance was issued. A decision on the further inflationary rise was awaited but would need to be announced in time to give students the ability to borrow the full amount from the Student Loan Company.

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

## COLLEGE HEALTHCHECK

43. Members noted an error in the percentage increase/decrease figure for apprenticeships in Healthcheck report no. 2016/06. Other matters were covered on the agenda.

## COLLEGE POLICIES

44. The Committee had received the report of the Vice Principal, Curriculum on updates to key policies relating to the delivery, assurance and improvement of the curriculum and management of the learner experience. The Board of Governors had resolved to delegate authority to the Committee to consider the proposed Curriculum Delivery and Quality Improvement Policy, the FE Learner Performance Policy and the Learner/Student Conduct Policy.
45. Following a review led by the Vice Principal, Curriculum, it was proposed that a number of policies be integrated into an overarching policy for FE Curriculum Delivery and Quality in order to provide a more coherent policy structure. The strategy elements of these policies would be reviewed annually as appropriate to curriculum improvement needs and delivered through a new FE Curriculum Delivery and Quality Improvement Strategy.
46. The policies which would cease to exist as separate documents were: Assessment Policy; Internal Verification Policy; Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy; Quality Policy; Staff Development Policy; Teaching and Learning Observation (TALO) Policy; and the Tutorial Policy.
47. A small number of changes were proposed to the FE Learner Performance Policy to promote effective administration, in particular clarifying the role of Pastoral Tutors and Course Co-ordinators, and to the FE/HE Learner/Student Conduct Policy to reflect internal role changes and ensure continuing compliance with University of Portsmouth Academic Regulations.
48. Members were content with the overall approach to integrating the policies under a coherent overarching policy and discussed the drafting of the documents.
49. **Resolved** - that College management review all the policy documents to ensure that there was a consistent and appropriate use of the terms “will” and “should”, with the expectation that “will” would be used as standard, in order to avoid ambiguity, except where there was an explicit intention to enable some flexibility.
50. Management were also asked by the Committee to consider whether the approach to descriptions of the College intended to cover both campuses were sufficiently clear and consistent (for example, “Sparsholt College Hampshire” or “the College”).
51. With reference to the FE Learner Performance Policy, the Staff Governor commended the close working between the Pastoral Tutors and Course Co-ordinators. Members raised a number of questions about the approach to learner performance, including the appeals process.
52. The Deputy Principal explained the shift over recent years away from a system focused on performance measurement and discipline towards a system with more pastoral awareness of performance and/or conduct issues to support learners to meet their full potential. An appeal route for Performance Alerts was included to ensure any reasons for poor performance, such as attendance, had been identified and that correct processes had been followed.

53. **Resolved** - that the new Curriculum Development and Quality Improvement Policy and the revised Learner Performance Management policy and Learner/Student Conduct Policy be approved, subject to the drafting checks agreed, and that the seven policies replaced by the Curriculum Development and Quality Improvement Policy cease to apply.

## **PREVENT DUTY**

54. The Committee had received the report of the Deputy Principal proposing the addition of a policy for external speakers to the Safeguarding Learners Policy and providing a Prevent Duty Risk Assessment and Action Plan. The Board of Governors had resolved to delegate authority to the Committee to revise the Safeguarding Learners Policy and to agree the Prevent Duty Action Plan.
55. The Deputy Principal explained the actions being undertaken by College management in response to risks in relation to the Prevent Duty, including the need to increase awareness and develop further communications with the student body.
56. Members discussed whether there should be a requirement to have a policy for off-campus events, such as sporting tournaments organised by students. Although the likelihood that such events would raise concerns relevant to the Prevent Duty was low, the Deputy Principal agreed that a short policy or checklist should be developed as a safeguard.
57. Members also discussed the College's approach to Freedom of Expression. The Principal reported that this had been debated by the Strategic Leadership Team who had concluded that the College's existing Codes of Conduct and College Values provided a sufficient framework for both supporting Freedom of Expression and managing associated risks.
58. Following discussion of the section on Faith Facilities, the Deputy Principal agreed to amend the Risk Assessment to "facilities for reflection" and to provide a clear explanation of the facilities in place.
59. The Committee was supportive of the introduction of a policy for External Speakers and proposed a number of revisions which College management agreed to address:
- Checklist: remove reference to "Age" and add reference to course/level of the audience
  - Visitor Code of Practice: revised to "...British Values are consistent with..."
  - Replace "should" with "will" where appropriate
60. **Resolved** – that Safeguarding Learners Policy be revised to include the External Speakers Policy and that the Prevent Duty Risk Assessment and Action Plan be finalised as discussed and reported to the Board of Governors.

## **QUALITY & PERFORMANCE**

### Learner Performance

61. The Committee had received the report of the Vice Principal, Curriculum setting out current in-year performance information of FE learners, Apprenticeship learners, HE students and satisfaction rates amongst learners and parents.
62. The Vice Principal, Curriculum gave a detailed explanation of the context and performance data provided, noting that performance of both FE and HE learners

continued to be strong and the College was on track to record improvements in FE achievement rates and maintain the already high HE achievement.

63. The predictions were based on analysis at monthly Internal Quality Reviews and outputs from Faculty Exam Boards. There had been a change over the past year of the approach to quality assurance activity and pastoral support, with a tighter focus on monitoring learner progress and earlier intervention and increased support where needed. As a result of further work to ensure that all elements of curriculum delivery were more closely aligned, it was expected that the number of late withdrawals on main programmes would be very low.
64. HE performance remained strong and the Vice Principal, Curriculum also highlighted achievements in relation to retention by Equality and Diversity Impact Measures.
65. The Vice Principal, Curriculum, explained a small number of areas in FE where performance was still being improved and the actions being taken. There had also been some challenges for Apprenticeship retention as a result of problems arising with two associate providers. The issues had now been addressed but could have an impact on end of year performance results.
66. It was also explained that there had been an unsuccessful attempt to move the Parental Survey to an electronic format and, as a result, time had only allowed for asking parents who were attending the End of Year Presentations to complete the surveys. The results were therefore not representative of the wider parental body.
67. The Committee recognised that there was a significant amount of positive news in the performance data but sought further clarity about areas which were performing less well.
68. Members discussed the way in which the performance information was presented in the report, and in the Healthcheck Report, specifically the use of red/amber/green (RAG) ratings. The Vice Principal, Curriculum explained that RAG ratings provided an individual assessment for each measure based on factors such as past performance, national trends and the direction in the current year.
69. While Members recognised that the RAG ratings were intended to provide a top level management view and that the fuller report gave more context which could then be scrutinised further, there remained some concerns that the RAG ratings could be misleading or opaque. For example, there had been a significant decline in retention year on year in Hair & Beauty but the performance was rated “amber”, rather than “red”, because management believed the necessary actions were in place and there were indications of the beginning of a recovery.
70. The Committee agreed the need for reports from management to signpost clearly where performance issues existed and what was being done to respond to them, including the timescale and expected outcomes, in order that the Committee could hold College management to account effectively.
71. Dr Palmer undertook to communicate the key elements of the discussion to the Chair of the Committee.
72. In conclusion, the Committee welcomed the evidence of improving performance in FE and continuing high performance in HE and the actions being taken to monitor and report performance indicators more accurately. The Committee noted that there were some areas of concern and that these would be revisited in the context of the Self-Assessment Report at the next meeting of the Committee.

### Quality Improvement Plan

73. The Committee had received the report of the Vice Principal, Curriculum setting out progress with the 2015/16 Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and an interim update on planned Quality Improvement actions for 2015/16.
74. The Committee noted that good progress had been made in addressing development areas in the 2015/16 QIP with 8 of the 21 key actions expected to be fully achieved and substantial progress achieved with the remaining actions. This followed the two year programme of quality improvement, embedding “Our College Way” as a cultural underpinning and implementing further targeted interventions. As well as changes to quality assurance processes, there had been significant improvements in supporting the personal development, behaviour and welfare of learners. There had been notable improvements in retention of learners reporting disabilities relating to mental health and/or emotional/social difficulties and to attendance and engagement with English and Maths sessions.
75. Key areas to be full addressed in 2016/17 centred on the wider learner experience, including embedding literacy and numeracy skills throughout the curriculum, further work in relation to British Values and Diversity and work experience.
76. Responding to a member’s questions about the overall effectiveness grade target for 2015/16 of “Good”, the Vice Principal, Curriculum reported that he believed the College had been close to achieving an “Outstanding” grade at its last inspection but that achieving a “Good” or “Outstanding” grade was now more stretching because of the increased demands of the new Common Inspection Framework (CIF), particularly in relation to Maths and English qualifications. The 2015/16 overall target of “Good” was based on continuing improvements and the intention to achieve outstanding performance in some areas.
77. A member sought further information about the type of employability skills that the College aimed to support. The Vice Principal, Curriculum explained the aim was to provide meaningful external work experience, which was required to be delivered in addition to high quality work based experience within the College, as well as support with CVs and job searches.

### Curriculum Delivery & Quality Improvement Strategy 2016/17

78. The Committee had received the proposed new Curriculum Delivery & Quality Improvement Strategy developed by the Vice Principal, Curriculum to provide an annual programme of activity to support the implementation of the new Curriculum Development and Quality Improvement Policy.
79. The Vice Principal, Curriculum proposed that the Committee receive a progress report on the Strategy alongside that of the QIP, underpinned by relevant in-year metrics. He explained that it might be necessary to make some revisions to the Strategy as a result of the Self-Assessment process and the resulting QIP.
80. Members raised a number of questions about the detail of the Strategy. Asked whether there should be references to Head of Faculties and Curriculum Leaders in the definitions of accountability and responsibility, the Vice Principal, Curriculum explained that the roles listed had direct delivery responsibilities and crossed reference to the management roles in the accompanying policy. He also explained that “learning walks” referred to informal teaching observations to test whether key priorities were being delivered.

81. In response to the Staff Governors’ reflection that the timely scheduling of half termly performance reviews was improving but that there were different approaches in different areas, the Vice Principal, Curriculum concurred and explained that there was work underway to further imbed the new practices.
82. The Committee welcomed the introduction of the Curriculum Delivery and Quality Improvement Strategy as a coherent and appropriate plan of action for the coming academic year.

### **LEARNING EXPERIENCE**

83. The Committee had received the annual report of the Deputy Principal on Complaints, Comments and Compliments and an overview of the College’s disciplinary processes.
84. The Deputy Principal reported that the revised Complaints Management Policy had been successfully implemented. There had been 102 complaints in the year and no trends had been identified which suggested any structural disadvantage or systemic failure.
85. The Committee was noted that compliments were under-reported and social media compliments not currently captured.
86. The approach to disciplinaries was considered by College management to be working effectively, with fewer exclusions year on year due to earlier disciplinary interventions to correct behaviour and a greater awareness throughout the community of the rules on under-age drinking.

### **HIGHER EDUCATION**

87. The Deputy Principal gave a presentation on changes to the HE landscape, including the introduction of the Office for Students (OfS) to replace HEFCE and OFFA and changes to performance measurement, quality assurance and the teaching excellence framework (TEF).
88. The Deputy Principal noted that quality reviews would in future include more input from the governing body and also that the College would need to introduce a “student protection plan” to ensure that students were able to continue to achieve their academic outcomes in the event of the provider not be able to fully delivery their course. Details of some aspects of the changes, including the TEF were still be confirmed.
89. The Committee noted that one challenge, particularly for land-based colleges, was the assessment of whether graduates had gone on to some form of “professional” employment given that measures based on income levels might not recognise graduate employment in the land-based sector. This was also an issue in some other sectors and the measurement of employment was still to be decided.

### **PERFORMANCE OF THE COMMITTEE 2015/16**

90. The Committee had received the report of the Clerk which posed a series of questions to prompt members in discussing the Committee’s performance in 2015/16.
91. Members also discussed the Committee’s terms of reference and whether they remained fit for purpose.
92. The Committee discussed the challenges of undertaking its responsibilities effectively given the extent of agendas across the year and the evolution of College strategies, policies and performance reporting, as well as changes to external regulation and quality assurance.

93. **Resolved** – that the Clerk review the structure of the agenda and annual plan of business for the Committee and report to the following meeting.

**APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN FOR 2016/17**

94. **Resolved** – that Mr Hopkins be reappointed as Chairman of the Committee for the academic year 2016/17.
95. The meeting concluded at 12.30 pm.