University Centre Sparsholt, Hampshire 10006050- Context statement

Sparsholt College is a specialist land-based college situated in Hampshire providing predominantly vocational Further Education to approximately 1600 students with the University Centre Sparsholt (UCS) delivering Higher Education to 400 students at Levels 4-7. Higher Education started in the late 1970s with Fishery & Aquaculture and has diversified to meet the needs of industry and progression demands of the increasing FE cohort. Programmes include Animal & Zoo Management, Equine Science & Performance, Fisheries, Aquaculture & Marine Studies, Horticulture, Veterinary Nursing and Wildlife Ecology & Conservation.

Degree programmes are validated by the University of Portsmouth (UoP) and the close working relationship with the validating partner has been key to the development of the Higher Education offer, the academic rigour and the quality assurance standards. Adherence to the UK Quality Code is implicit in course development, delivery and assessment to ensure students receive a high quality, 'value for money' experience. National Student Survey (NSS) scores consistently place the college in the top 5 land-based colleges in the country for student satisfaction.

In the academic years 2015/16 and 2016/17 UCS enrolled 51 (31, 20) young students with academic qualifications, 112 (56, 56) young students with vocational qualifications and 177 (76, 101) mature students. The majority mode of delivery is full-time, part-time enrolment has been declining steadily with only 20 (9, 11) new entrants enrolling in the last 2 years. However, recruitment has been from further afield than previous years (where local students were 70-80% of most cohorts), with Animal Studies, Veterinary Nursing and Equine programmes reducing to 50-60% local, and Wildlife Ecology & Conservation reducing to 65% local. Fish programmes are more specialist and as a result recruit less than 40% from within 30 miles and recruit a further 35% from in excess of 100 miles from UCS.
The College's three-year strategic plan articulates its priority for UCS as "*High quality provision within an environment that ensures outstanding teaching, personalised guidance and support, which enables learners to develop their curiosity, knowledge skills, and achieve qualifications for their career success*". The plan is realised through a tangible emphasis upon:

- The development of independent learners through personalised learning
- Industry engagement and employer liaison.
- Development of employability skills through applied educational experience.
- Support for the transition to Higher Education, especially for Widening Participation learners
- Embedding the use of Technology Enhanced Learning in the curriculum to develop digital literacy.

A dedicated HE Faculty was implemented for 2015/16 with the aim of providing a consistent and research-led experience for the students within a HE community. Strategically, this has created an environment of sharing of good practice and rigorous processes to bring the subject areas together combined with a culture of scholarly, student focussed teaching. The Year 2 TEF award of Silver, based on two positive flags and one negative flag was the result of initial developments, whilst the Year 3 TEF metrics of four positive flags and no negative flags demonstrate the ongoing impact of the HE Strategy. Consequently, whilst we have made further progress on teaching excellence and student outcomes, much of the content of this submission is similar to that of last year based on continuing with our defined actions.

However, this submission places an emphasis on the value of vocational land-based degree programmes and the development of specialist employability skills.
The submission was prepared following consultation with the student body, a brief presentation on the aims of the TEF was given to all tutor groups who were invited to collate comments against the criteria which have been incorporated into the text. Similarly, the HE Faculty team contributed by providing additional evidence during the production of the text.

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Teaching Quality

1. Engagement (TQ1)

The TEF metric for teaching on the course is 3.8% above benchmark with a z-score of 1.9% for full-time delivery (not-reportable for part-time delivery), therefore is very close to a positive flag. There is no difference between the core and split metrics indicating that the quality of teaching is appreciated by all groups. High quality teaching is embedded into the college ethos and teaching staff pride themselves on sharing their knowledge and enthusing the students, vindicated by consistent National Student Survey (NSS) scores, evidenced by high levels of satisfaction with the 'Teaching on My Course' (88.06% compared with sector 84.62%) and particularly that 'Staff have made the subject interesting', (94% compared with sector 82.65% NSS 2017), and that the 'Course is intellectually stimulating' (87.78% compared with sector 85.25% NSS 2017).
Appropriately qualified and knowledgeable staff who provide a sense of aspiration for the students are a key element of student engagement. See TQ2 for more detail.
Standard contact hours are 14 hours per week comprising a mixture of lectures, workshops, lab sessions, vocational practicals, in addition to group and individual tutorials. This rich mix of programme delivery creates the exceptional levels of student engagement and epitomises the student experience. All sessions are compulsory and attendance is recorded via an electronic register system with attendance in excess of 91% expected. Absenteeism is noted and followed up by the appropriate tutor to ensure students understand the importance and value of attendance. Attendance is mapped against achievement which shows a direct correlation between these factors, this information is used to demonstrate the value of attendance to new students. Engagement and commitment to studies is demonstrated by high levels of attendance (at around 90%) across all cohorts and levels.
"The students receive a high level of support and academic contact, and this is excellent for their development." – Fish EE
A typical timetabled week for Level 4 students is 6-9 hours theory, 2-3 hours labs, 2-4 hours practical, tutorials and study coach session, at Level 5 theory teaching increases to 8-10 hours with a reduction in practical teaching and by Level 6 practical teaching has been largely replaced by individual support for research and dissertation, with the expectation that students will undertake independent practical tasks.

To complement the contact teaching and develop digital literacy skills the college uses three Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) platforms, Moodle, L-Edge and Mahara – see LE1

Small group teaching is a feature across all levels of provision, with a typical classroom group size of 14-20, decreasing to 8-12 for practicals. This ensures that individual students are known and supported by every member of staff who teaches them. The opportunity for interactive teaching, group work and debate that engages all students is enhanced by these small group sizes, providing a more individually tailored learning experience to all students evidenced by student feedback

"*small group sizes are more personal, makes for a more confident environment"* Level 4 student.

The applied nature of the degree programmes through vocationally related and practical delivery is valued by students utilising a variety of delivery methods to embed theory into vocational study; these are enhanced by work placements, field trips and study tours, whilst the importance of employability skills is emphasised by regular 'use' of visiting industry speakers. Many are ex-students who are well placed to contextualise knowledge into industry practice and promote employment opportunities – see SO2.

Off-site practical teaching and research is embedded in industry and partnerships with employers that highlight the value of the theory that is delivered in the classroom. The links with these industry partners are extended into Applied Industry Research projects (Level 5 FdSc unit) and Dissertation projects. Level 6 students exhibit their dissertation findings annually; this includes representatives from industry who have sponsored or supported data collection providing an opportunity for students to discuss their findings, building on a very positive effect on student engagement and application to their studies whilst allowing them to foster relationships and develop their industry networks.

"*The dedicated course team continue to foster a very experiential and engaging student experience, integrating practical learning opportunities into the programmes, the diversity of residential field courses continues to be a strength*" – Wildlife Ecology & Conservation EE

Student NSS feedback indicated that communication concerning Organisation and Management of the course was not as good as other aspects of the programme (NSS 2016 68%). Consequently, for 2016-17, a more consistent approach to providing updates and messages to students via a smartphone App was adopted resulting in a 4% improvement to 72% (NSS 2017) in satisfaction and enabling continued engagement from the students with their timetabled commitment.

The annual Exam Board requires the reporting of exceptional units, which identifies any unit where students are under or over-achieving expected distribution of results. This identifies the potential issue of grade inflation or where inadequate teaching or assessment may be disadvantaging the students. In 2017 only one unit was exceptional as a result of the practical format of the assessment, subsequently this will be modified to ensure parity across units and courses.

External Examiner reports recognise the engagement "*innovative assessments ensured student engagement in the less vocational units*" (Equine), "*Data teaching and assessment appears to once again be a highlight of the courses*" (Animal Management).

Internal surveys are completed during the academic year to ensure that any issues with the quality of teaching are identified at an early stage and modifications can be put in place if required. The positive themes throughout all surveys are the high levels of satisfaction relating to the quality of teaching, the interest and intellectual stimulation provided together with the assessment arrangements and criteria. Access to specialist resources and study support also demonstrate high levels of satisfaction across all courses.

"Students provided high praise for the teaching team. This is evidence of the efforts made by the teaching team to deliver a high student satisfaction." - Fish EE

2. Valuing Teaching (TQ2)

The TEF review panel for 2016 stated that the Year 2 submission evidenced 'an institutional culture that facilitates excellent teaching through high quality support for new tutors, systematic observation of teaching and a comprehensive professional development programme.' This ethos continues in the following strategy;

All full-time teaching staff are supported to enrol with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) for approval as a HEA Fellow and are vocational experts in their field whilst also being suitably qualified to teach. 21 staff have formal teaching qualifications with 2 working towards, 8 are Fellows of HEA and 3 are Senior Fellows of the HEA with 4 working towards Fellowship with a further 2 working towards Senior Fellowship. HEA Fellowship is undertaken in conjunction with the validating partner (UoP) through their Academic Professional Excellence Framework programme (APEX) which aligns with the UK Professional Standards Framework. One member of the teaching team is an assessor for HEA Fellowship, consequently well placed to coach and mentor new members of staff throughout the process.

All teaching staff within the HE Faculty hold a minimum of a L6 qualification, 17 hold L7 qualifications with 2 working towards this, 4 have PhDs with 3 working towards. Additionally, 3 staff are Registered Veterinary Nurses, 2 are Registered Animal Scientists with the British Society of Animal Science & the Royal Society of Biology and 1 is a Certified Clinical Animal Behaviourist.

New staff are allocated a subject specific mentor, weekly coaching sessions led by a HEA Senior Fellow, are regularly observed on an unannounced drop-in basis and have access to experienced staff who provide 'open' classrooms for peer observations. All new HE staff undertake an introductory teacher training course to gain classroom management skills and interactive teaching methods and then enrol onto the APEX programme to gain HEA Fellowship status.

"*Very good processes in place to support new tutors…particularly in relation to their assessment practice*". – Vet Nursing EE

The college has a Professional Development Support (PDS) Fund that staff can apply to on an annual basis to undertake additional qualifications e.g.; MSc or PhD study. A CPD fund is available for training that provides technical updates in their vocational area e.g.; survey licences, specific software training, data analysis etc. Evidence of the impact of this scholarly activity is assessed during teaching observations. Formal teaching observations occur annually and include action plans for development together with student feedback. Peer observations are conducted in triads to encourage reflection and sharing of good practice. Teaching staff collect regular feedback from their student groups in order to identify areas of good practice as well as teaching activities and methods that require amendment, development or improvement. Annual appraisals and twice termly 'catch-up' meetings with the Head of Faculty create a platform to monitor this process of self-reflection and development in pedagogy. HE staff can access the teacher training team for support with teaching strategies whilst ILT training is provided to all staff as these skills are recognised as essential in current teaching practice.

CPD is a significant feature of the college and is differentiated for the HE Faculty to ensure that current policy and practice is embedded. Staff attend workshops and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) events at the partner University. Research Activity meetings occur twice termly to share and disseminate research practice. The HE Faculty also has a weekly team meeting to communicate organisational or strategic information. The benefit of the HE Faculty development is evident in the improved communication between HE teaching staff and the sharing of ideas, pedagogical practice and vocational expertise. Consequently, students are being taught by a diverse range of teaching staff who provide specific knowledge that previously was not readily available when the college HE community was dispersed in subject specific areas. Furthermore, in recognition of teaching performance staff are

supported in attendance at conferences, encouraged to liaise with industry partners to conduct research which includes student involvement wherever possible.
In 2016/17 the college introduced the role of Teaching Fellow which attracts a financial honorarium in recognition of additional contribution within the HE Faculty.
Eight teaching staff act as External Examiners or reviewers for degree validation in other HEI's to develop their knowledge and understanding of programmes in other institutions and to ensure rigour of academic standards. The Head of Faculty holds an MSc in Education and has a focus on current educational research.

3. Rigour and Stretch (TQ3)

The TEF review panel for 2016 stated that the Year 2 submission evidenced '*course design and assessment practices that provide scope for high levels of stretch, including by working closely with industrial partners in course development and review*'
Industry linked research and employability underpins the content of all degree programmes from the Step-up to HE induction week activities through to dissertation projects at Level 6
Course development, course review and partner collaborative reviews include extensive industrial consultation to ensure relevance of content that is mapped to industry standards and needs and are future proofed by alignment to industry strategies.
In order to ensure academic standards are upheld the college implements a rigorous Internal Verification (IV) policy (subject to twice yearly moderation with actions reported to the unit coordinator for implementation and inclusion into the Unit Evaluative Report (UER) to ensure improvement and development). A minimum of 6 pieces of graded work or 10% are subject to the post IV process plus all work graded as a fail or 1st class. Assessed work marked by a new member of staff with prior HE teaching experience is subject to post-IV whilst 100% is double marked for staff who are new to HE teaching.
External Examiner feedback relating to Internal Verification includes the following;
"*process was of a high standard… clear evidence of quality control and rigor throughout… well-structured supportive comments for learner improvement*" "*A rigorous and effective system...ensured that marking standards were appropriate, consistent, thorough and fair*"
"*The work produced… is of a consistently high standard … particularly at level 6".*
The FdSc Vet Nursing programme is the only programme overseen by a PSRB, the college has direct awarding powers from the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and the most recent PSRB report was very positive with no actions required.
"*Excellent and entirely appropriate assessments across all units, and robust quality assurance procedures in place*" – PSRB Vet Nursing report
All cross-college units have a unit coordinator who is responsible for summative assessments that can be contextualised for use across a range of programmes to ensure a standardised and moderated experience for all students. The unit coordinator chairs annual unit meetings to agree delivery and assessment methods.
"*I am really enjoying the variety of assessment platforms being set …., including case studies, essays, reports, exams and interpretive boards"* - Level 6 Zoo Biology student.
"*There is now greater consistency between subject areas*" – Animal Management EE
Board of Studies is a bi-annual quality review of actions. University representatives and a college Governor attend as well as student representatives who provide the student voice, as well as feeding back to the student body on actions agreed that impact their experience.
An annual ASQER report is produced for the University and prior to this each course team produces their own ASQER which is challenged by a panel (consisting of Head of Faculty, Deputy Principal and a College Governor) to ensure that appropriate actions are in place. The Faculty ASQER is presented to the Governors Quality & Standards committee for challenge, to ensure rigour and receive validation prior to its submission to the University.
An initiative to develop independence and realise student potential is the use of Study Coaches introduced in 2013, following EE feedback, to provide additional support for student

transition from FE to HE. Level 5 and Level 6 students are recruited, within their vocational specialism, trained in coaching study skills and provided with an outline programme and resources to use to meet the identified lack of confidence in coping with the increased rigour of HE, particularly amongst the high proportion of Level 4 students who enrol with Vocational qualifications. Study Coaches reinforce the academic skills taught within Level 4 units and have the flexibility to adapt and repeat as required without working within the confines of unit content. Students report that coaching from peers increases their confidence and understanding. To further improve the adoption of independent study skills the Level 4 Academic Skills unit has been redeveloped as blended delivery using on-line activities to support taught sessions and is standardised across all programmes culminating in a 'special interest project'. This assesses the range of skills gained and prepares students for presenting, and defending, their research using accepted scientific conventions.

"*We are encouraged to be independent and are given the means to independently research and work whilst still having the support of lecturers*" – L 5 Animal Management student

Employer focussed research and trials provide challenge in an industry context – see LE2

4. Feedback (TQ4)

Assessment and feedback continues to be a strength of University Centre Sparsholt and is 5.5% above benchmark. The University partner contact stated in the 2016/17 Collaborative Partner annual report "*I would like to congratulate the team on the effort they put into their mark verification and feedback as this has come out in all areas via the external examiners reports".*

Assessments (both formative and summative) and feedback are verified by the teaching team via the IV process (see TQ3) and the External Examiners (EE) who have praised (across all degrees) the industry relevance, academic appropriateness and challenge of assessments "*an outstanding range of techniques and excellent lab based assessment – very challenging and realistic but the students do very well indeed! Very applied teaching and assessment*" Animal Management EE and the "*extremely detailed, constructive and comprehensive*" (Equine EE), "*constructive*" (Fish EE) "*overall excellence – thorough, critical, supportive and very helpful in relation to their academic development*" (Vet Nursing EE) "*excellent standard, both constructive and challenging"* (Horticulture EE) of feedback.

During the 'Step-up to HE' induction week Level-4 students complete a 'Flying start' formative assignment; students utilise the feedback in a resubmission.

"Induction week assessment was beneficial to show how marking works, learn from the feedback and get the best grade I can' L4 Animal Management student

'Feed Forward' is incorporated into some Level 4 summative assessment e.g.; lab portfolios where laboratory skills are evidenced, graded with feedback, which must be acted upon in subsequent section to improve practical and academic skill, and overall grade. This approach was adopted following reporting of Foundation Science as an Exceptional Unit. Students benefit from general feedback on a draft version of summative assignments. At Student Association meetings students reported how valuable this opportunity is, but the need to standardise this provision across degrees became apparent. Newly introduced for 2017/18, current practice provides feed forward opportunities at Level 4 via draft reads for the first half of the academic year by which time the expectation is that students will be more independent in their study. At Level 5-7 all students are set a 'Step-up to Level x' formative assignment in the first week to support the transition to the next level of study. Additionally, all units include class-based formative feedback opportunities e.g. class quizzes, exam paper review, peer-marking exercises, and personalised feedback is provided during tutorials at all levels – see LE3.

Return date of summative feedback is monitored through bi-annual Board of Studies and ASQER reports to ensure that students receive feedback in a timely manner. Teaching staff frequently provide interim verbal feedback to the cohort prior to the return of the graded work.

Learning Environment

5. Resources (LE1)

Academic support is 5% above benchmark and in 2016 the TEF review panel identified;
"*an institutional approach to developing physical and digital resources, which are used by students to aid and enhance learning and develop study and research skills*" which includes the use of Moodle, L-Edge and Mahara platforms integrated into the curriculum to develop digital literacy and transferable skills for employability. This provides access to teaching materials, assignment briefs and assignment submission (including the return of feedback and grades), additional reading and visual resources, Forum communication and interactive tasks for completion to supplement taught elements.
"Evidence of high quality teaching material available for learners on the VLE site" - Hortic EE.
Increasingly, and in response to student feedback, L-Edge is used for distance learners, BSc top-ups and students with long periods of work placement (e.g.; Vet Nurses) because it is hosted externally and has greater flexibility. The impact is better continuity between academic years and improved access to resources. Remote access to lectures has been provided using Skype for Business and has developed into Lecture Capture utilising Planet e-stream enabling students who are unable to attend to participate in active teaching and learning.
BSc top-up Applied Animal Behaviour blended delivery affords mature students the flexibility to study part-time and juggle home, work and study commitments.
Physical resources at the college are extensive, meeting and often exceeding industry standards. Student access to, and use of subject specific resources is recognised by both the students and External Examiners;
"*The programme has outstanding horticultural resources… designated teaching room and excellent facilities in the grounds have contributed to the rich learning experience for the students*" – Horticulture EE
"*AMC facilities and small groups allow us to have more time and to work with wider range of animals*" - Animal Management student
"*Dissertations sampled were novel, topical and written with a great deal of conviction indicating a high level of support from staff to encourage study skills development*." – WEC EE
Furthermore, laboratory and marine survey resources are accessed through the collaborative partnership with the University
A dedicated HE Study Centre has been built to provide an IT study area, small study rooms for group working, a relaxed social space for quiet study plus a landscaped external area for socialising. Bespoke software e.g.; Minitab for data analysis, Zootrition for nutrition formulation and Vectorworks for garden design are available here. There are dedicated HE teaching rooms, 100 capacity lecture theatre, range of industry standard laboratory equipment (rarely found in education) to support HE delivery, all focussed in an HE area of the campus.
"The separate HE centre is very good" – Ecology & Conservation student
HE students are provided with out of hour's access to practical resources e.g.; labs, aquatic centre, animal centre, habitat areas and equine centre as required for data collection and analysis plus a system is in place to allow the loan of equipment to use at off-campus sites enabling students to take advantage of research options in industry locations. Many of these sites are of national importance e.g.; National Trust and Heritage sites.
Electronic Individual Learning Plan (e-ILP) provides access for student, tutor, plus any additional support e.g.; learning support, pastoral support, counselling – see LE3.

6. Scholarship, Research and Professional Practice (LE2)

Contact with industry partners is extensive and sponsorship of research and scholarship is embedded into the curriculum through the provision of products and resources for student use plus a range of commercial industry trials expose students to research in the practical facilities at all stages of their study. This approach is introduced during the initial Step-up to HE week

at the start of Level 4 and ensures that students engage in professional practice, whilst enabling staff to maintain and update their scholarship.
Study tours, field trips and External speakers – see TQ2
"*Practical work is innovative and diverse equipping the students with important skills both in the laboratory and in the field*"– Fish EE
The college regularly hosts industry training and conferences which students are able to attend, providing opportunities for networking and industry technical updates e.g.; BIAZA, Hampshire Chalkstream Headwaters Forum, equestrian training clinics, whilst staff regularly provide CPD opportunities to industry professionals in specialist areas e.g.; fish health, exotic herptile welfare and husbandry, technical updates in veterinary nursing and large animal handling for RSPCA and emergency services.
Many of the teaching staff are involved in industrially relevant current research which students can participate in 'spin off' research for dissertation and data analysis. Current research partners include; Dodson and Horrell, Breast Biomechanics, Natural Animal Feeds, BIAZA Research Group, Pet Remedy, Butterfly Conservation, Hawk Conservancy Trust, Hampshire Carp Hatcheries, Coppens Feeds, Skretting Aquaculture feeds, National Trust, Vitacress Salads, Peoples Trust for Endangered Species.
"*industry-relevant and research informed teaching"* – Equine EE
In recent years numerous students have presented papers or posters at conferences including e.g.; Institute Fishery Management, Animal Nutrition, British Society of Animal Science, International Society for Equitation Science, whilst teaching staff have been published in peer reviewed journals and attended a range of conferences to present their research findings. The focus is on collaborative research between industry employers, students and staff.
"*student work reflected the fact that several members of staff and students are engaged in industry relevant primary research. Developing a research ethos can be challenging when delivering Higher Education within a Further Education College and should be commended*"– Equine EE
"Dissertations that are linked in with organisations and industry are often doubly motivating for those involved" – Ecology & Conservation EE.
"I was especially pleased with the standard of some of the analysis and statistics… students welcomed the opportunity to design and test their hypotheses, suggesting the courses deliver strong research training" – Fish EE.
The Higher Education Scholarly Activity Policy requires staff to 'draw on scholarship, research and professional activity to facilitate student learning' and are supported through funding – see TQ2. This is facilitated through the provision of working time and resources and the sharing of good practice through the Research & Standards group.

7. Personalised Learning (LE3)

Whilst continuation rates are impacted by a range of factors including; quality of teaching, assessment & feedback, resources and the industrial context of the programmes, the personalised nature of the provision at University Centre Sparsholt is reflected in the positive flags for both full-time (2.5% above benchmark) and part-time (24.9% above benchmark and top 10% of absolute performance) students. Of particular note are the positive flags for mature and male groups in full-time delivery, a priority group in the widening participation agenda. This strength in personalised learning was recognised by the TEF 2016 review panel "*academic experiences, tailored to the individual student through a provision of individual tutorials and effective attendance monitoring which supports student retention and progression*".
'*exceeded my expectations due to the outstanding tutors; who strive to support and encourage students, recognising individual requirements, providing appropriate and extensive guidance, support and feedback'* – mature part-time Applied Animal Behaviour top-up student.

75% of applicants with vocational qualifications enrol onto FdSc programmes, with 50% (14/15 cohort) increasing to 58% (15/16 cohort) progressing onto BSc top-up programmes. The academic experience promotes academic skills, independent learning and enables these non-traditional groups with vocational qualifications, or of mature age, to thrive and succeed in Higher Education.

To meet individual needs the following support is provided;

1. Group tutorials; weekly, for all Level 4 students to reinforce academic skills and support independent learning, focusing on keeping students on track.
   "*Transition support is provided from FE to HE*" Animal Management student
2. Study coaches; peer support is recognised as valuable for all Level 4 students - TQ3
3. Individual tutorial system; regular contact with personal tutor (who is also a vocational expert), minimum of 4 per year (with additional for 'At risk' students) to discuss personal progress, identify skills gaps, set targets and, if appropriate, signpost to additional study skills or pastoral support. An e-ILP is used throughout, shared with teaching and support teams to ensure relevant and suitable adjustments can be facilitated.
4. Academic support tutor; for part-time students who attend block weeks – provides academic support on-line between block weeks, on-line tutorials conducted in the evening to fit around work commitments, learning resources uploaded weekly between block attendance.
5. Attendance monitoring and alerts to identify consistent absenteeism.
6. Open door policy operated by tutors

"*The lecturers are accessible all the time via email if not in person, I have always received prompt and useful replies…. Above and beyond this, the lecturers usually offer a meeting in person to discuss the email topic if preferred*" - Zoo Biology student

"*Staff work tirelessly with student groups to ensure a quality experience – that personal touch is very much in evidence here".* - Wildlife Ecology & Conservation EE

time and effort clearly spent helping students to improve and develop their knowledge and skills…clear evidence that the support provided for the students with both personal and academic challenges is excellent". - Vet Nursing EE

"There are robust protocols in place which ensure students are well-supported" – PSRB Vet Nursing report

The lack of positive flags for continuation for students with a disability or from disadvantaged backgrounds is recognised by the University Centre and additional measures have been put in place to support them. As a result, continuation for disadvantaged students is 0.8% above benchmark (compared to 1.5% below in 2015/16) and for students with disability is 0.8% below benchmark (an improvement from 5.2% below benchmark in 2015/16). The proportion of students enrolling with declared disabilities is increasing annually; the inclusion of the Disability Support Advisors into the HE Faculty, collaborative working between HE disability advisors and Student Support team, and CPD to improve teaching strategies provided by our collaborative university partner are all measures taken to address this. Consequently, teaching staff have become more confident in recognising students who require additional support and adjust their delivery accordingly. *"teaching staff adapt around the needs of students – content is detailed and challenges us, yet is within our ability"* - Animal Management student

Academic year	% students enrolled with declared disability	% Additional special needs
2011/12	7	
2012/13	6.2	
2013/14	9.2	

2014/15	10.8	
2015/16	10.7	4
2016/17	13.3	

The dedicated HE Disability support team who provide DSA funded support to the HE community have been relocated this year following student feedback and this has increased attendance and self-referral for support.
Lecture capture facility to enable students to access teaching materials – see LE1
Library workshops are provided for individuals or small groups of students who request additional support to access on-line resources via Athens, clarification on library searches and to reinforce the protocol for citation and referencing. These workshops are frequently attended by mature students seeking confidence in their ability to study at HE. Additionally, all students have full access to the University of Portsmouth library, Shibboleth (on-line journal database) and Purple Door (UoP careers, advice and guidance centre).
Journal Club (where students present the findings of pertinent independent research to their peers) is an initiative used at Level 4 to develop independent research and presentation skills.
The Land-based Access to HE course introduced in 2016/17 resulted in 75% progression to HE programmes and early indications are that the students are well prepared for the rigours of studying at HE and in-year continuation is currently 100%.

Student Outcomes

8. Employment and Further Study (SO1)

A positive flag, 2.4% above benchmark, is an improvement on 2016 metrics, meaning the indicator for University Centre Sparsholt has risen when the benchmark nationally fell. Employment and Further Study for part-time students has also improved from 1.3% below benchmark to 0.2% above benchmark. Numbers of part-time students are very small and over half of the cohort are students repeating units prior to continuing with their full-time programme. However, both indicators demonstrate the success of supporting students who have found their full-time programme challenging, yet continue to completion and achieve successfully.
The DLHE data from 2015-16 (the most recent available) shows that there has been a very small decline in full-time employment (43% to 41%), a decrease of 6% for part-time work (16% to 10%), which have been offset by increases in full-time study (31% from 28%), and, work and study (9% from 6.5%). Unemployment has remained static at 1%.
Highly skilled or graduate level employment (1.7% below benchmark and no flag compared to the 2016 position of 4.5% below benchmark and a negative flag) has increased from 9% in 2014-15 to 22% in 2015-16, whilst the summation of graduate level employment plus post-graduate study at 58.2% has returned to 2013-14 levels.
The land-based industries tend to offer relatively low salaries and classification into SOC codes is not necessarily representative of the level of professional skill required for those roles.
'*I have good industry experience but no degree and each job I applied for specified a degree as essential'* – Wildlife Ecology & Conservation student
Additionally, 100% employment is standard for graduating vet nurses, who are entering a professionally and statutorily regulated industry, yet who are classified as animal care workers (not highly skilled).
'*high demand for vet nurses so plenty of employment opportunities and the degree sets you apart from others'* - Level 4 Vet Nursing student
Similarly, graduates achieving employment as zoo-keepers (highly sought after and prestigious roles) are classified as Leisure and Theme Park Assistants, which is not an accurate depiction of the graduate status of their position within the industry.
External Examiner comments recognise the value of the vocational programmes delivered;

"*Participation in project-based learning has broadened their employability skills and the majority of students will be benefitting from employment in garden design after graduation*" – Garden Design EE.

Sustained employment is 2.9% above benchmark and within that the indicator for POLAR Q1 & Q2 are comparable with the indicator for Q3,4,5 which demonstrates that all students irrespective of background are well prepared for entering and remaining in employment or study. Furthermore, both male and female graduates are above benchmark (4.3% and 1.5% respectively). Part-time graduates are 5.2% above benchmark (top 10% of absolute performance) clearly demonstrating the cohesive, contextualised delivery of their programmes of work preparation, which optimises continued employment or study.

"*my experience within the industry indicates high calibre graduates with good knowledge and practical skills, preparing them for careers in fisheries and aquaculture….excellent preparation for the world of work…. graduates from Sparsholt are valued in the workplace".* Fish EE

The Longitudinal Educational Outcomes Data reported that for those who graduated in Agriculture and related subjects or Biological Sciences, after 5 years, declared earnings were 16th and 21st respectively out of 23 categories (HE Guild, 2017) indicating that land-based industry employment is inherently low paid and this is reflected in the negative flag (10.1% below benchmark) for above median earnings. However, it is pleasing to note that the most disadvantaged students are performing well and are 0.4% above benchmark (out-performimg their more advantaged peers by 4.8%). This is a strong indicator of the social mobility value of vocational degrees. Students are aware of this challenge but view the prospects of a career in animal health and welfare or conservation as more worthwhile than just financial reward.

"*A qualified RVN; never brilliant money but I wanted the outcome due to the love of the career*" - Level 5 Vet Nursing student. The RCVS (2017) states that veterinary surgeons report a shortage of experienced vet nurses but feel unable to pay higher salaries.

The difference between male and female earnings is consistent with national benchmarks, the difference is particularly apparent in Agriculture and related industries at approximately £5000 (Guild HE 2017), and is a reflection of the graduate roles in vet nursing and animal welfare that are dominated by females (97% of vet nurses are female and 20% work part-time, RCVS 2017), whilst ecological consultancy and aquaculture science attract predominantly male graduates. Students are encouraged to network with role models who are employed in these sectors and advocate the more highly paid employment prospects. Guild HE (2017) also states "*clear that the gap in pay is not only a national issue, but one that affects graduates from small and specialist institutions*". University Centre Sparsholt prides itself on personalised learning that is possible with small cohorts within its land-based specialism and learner feedback highlighting the acquisition of specialist skills as a much greater motivator than income per se.

'*money doesn't matter, it is the overall goal….. passionate about animals and its enjoyable to learn about something you love'* – Animal Management student

A recent survey by Animal Management students identified 11 job vacancies that required an Animal Science degree, 9 offered salaries in the range £18-23,000 and 2 offered salaries of £30-35,000 that additionally required a post-graduate qualification plus relevant experience.

Many land-based careers require a minimum number of years of practical experience after graduating prior to commencing a managerial position e.g.; adverts for managerial roles in aquaculture will demand 2-5 years of practical fish-farming experience. Conversely, a considerable proportion of Ecology & Conservation students who have been employed in the industry state that the reason for studying their degree is that progression within their employment was restricted without a degree. Consequently, land-based graduates are more likely to be in managerial positions later in their careers. This claim is supported by the Guild HE report (2016) which states ''*in terms of employability, the overall data shows that specialist institutions do very well compared to non-specialists 5 years after graduation*"

'*I expect to go into a lower than average paid job……I expect to work for several years before getting a managerial role'* Animal Management student

Examples include; Aquaculture graduates; starting as a fish farm assistant one has progressed to the role of Senior Marine Manager, responsible for a team of 14 people operating 4 marine sites with an annual production value of £20+ million, others include Quality Assurance officer at Interpet, Brand Marketing Co-ordinator at Hagen, Technical Officer at Environment Agency. '*Students from UCS are in demand in the industry……degree is required for aquaculture industry when applying for high skill jobs'* – Fish student

Equine graduates; Marketing manager for events at the Federations Internationale Equestriane in Lausanne, Welfare manager at the British Horse Society (BHS) coordinating the national equine welfare team, Research officer at the Horse Trust responsible for the management of PhD research grants, Managing director of Aubiose UK.

Ecology & Conservation graduates; Invertebrate Survey Officer with the St Helena National Trust, Ecological consultant, Forestry Commission ranger, Volunteer Coordinator

Animal Management graduates: Survey and Conservation Manager at ORCA (cetacean conservation charity), Press Officer at Whipsnade Zoo, area manager at Rentokil, Science manager with the RSPCA.

Internal progression from FdSc to BSc top-up is steadily increasing; 57% (2014/15), 66% (2015/16), 74%(2016/17), and is now consistently around 70%, (similarly, 75% FdSc Marine who are not included in this figure progress to UoP to top-up).

Subject	2015-16 FdSc Yr2 to Top-Up	2016-17 FdSc Yr2 to Top-Up
Animal	74%	72%
Ecology	52%	67%
Equine	67%	67%
Fish	75%	78%
Horticulture		86%

The college has introduced a range of top-up options, enabling students who have started on a generic Animal Management FdSc to specialise in Animal Behaviour, Zoo Biology or Animal Management. Additionally, variable modes of study are available including campus based, block weeks or distance learning to facilitate participation.

Staff maintain contact with graduates in professional positions, many of whom return as guest lecturers to share their experiences and industry knowledge, as well as advising and mentoring on wider employability skills such as interview technique

9. Employability and Transferrable Skills (SO2)

The TEF review panel in 2016 noted evidence of **"***the incorporation of work experience that enable students to acquire knowledge, skills and attributes that are valued by employers***"**

Work placement and Professional Industry Development (PID) units are embedded throughout the curriculum. Each programme completes an assessed period of work placement or PID in each academic year enabling the application of knowledge to industry situations and facilitating networking opportunities. The Level 6 PID unit requires students to be 'career ready' through a focus on industry needs, making contact with employers and developing their CV. Additionally, work placement may be linked with study tours e.g.; Level 4 study tour to Scotland for Aquaculture students generates work placement opportunities resulting in 15% of 2016 and 20% of 2017 graduates taking full-time employment in Scotland. The Leisure Enterprise Management unit for Level 6 Equine students allows real work based skills to be developed and honed through planning and hosting an event for the equine industry.

"encouraging that learners with this level of industry engagement and academic skillset are being prepared so effectively for the work environment. Animal Management EE

Applied Animal Behaviour students, who study on block release, are all employed in industry and the combination of completing a L6 qualification whilst compiling a portfolio of case studies

in industry contributes to their application to become a Certified Clinical Animal Behaviourist (CCAB) with the Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour, the industry body for animal behaviourists.

"*Employability skills were integrated well into the curriculum delivery……the development of these skills through a more student focussed Industry Skills Unit"* – Equine EE.

"*Annual work placement gives you a good idea for potential careers*" – Wildlife E & C student

"*The skills, knowledge and experience that the students acquire over their course is highly vocational… and should lead to career opportunities in what is a relatively narrow field of work – a high proportion I spoke to at the end of their degree had employment in place*," -Fish EE

Practical competencies integrated into delivery alongside theory through work placements, field trips and study tours – see LE2.

'*Work placements help make connections and networks'* – Equine student

Regular industry liaison with research projects – see LE2.

Use of visiting speakers from relevant industry roles to contextualise theory and demonstrate their career pathway, many of whom are University Centre Sparsholt graduates – see TQ1.

Even if a first graduate post is not managerial, students have the skills set to progress into such posts once further experience has been gained, as is the norm for all sectors of the land based industry. – see SO1.

'Embedded skills - analysis -development- problem solving, are all part of the experience' – Wildlife Ecology & Conservation student

Varied assessment methods (see TQ4) include Case Studies and Business plans to prepare graduates for employment and managerial positions.

'*will need the qualification to gain the job I want working with domestic species'* An Man student

Students have the opportunity to achieve other recognised professional qualifications alongside their academic programme, in order to enhance their employability and contribute to industry best practice. Examples of this include, River Fly monitoring, water vole surveying, managing volunteers, electro-fishing, BVNA council membership, BHS coaching qualifications. By facilitating these courses at the University Centre, graduates are better prepared and work ready for their chosen industry.

Extensive industry links between staff and industry promote networking and 'leading edge' opportunities for students. – see LE2

Course development with industry involvement – see TQ3

Valuable employability and transferable skills can be gained by students through active opportunities to represent their cohort as a representative on the HE Student Association, contribute to course development at Board of Studies, collaborative reviews and as a Student Governor. Additionally, the HE Study Coach scheme (see TQ3) develop soft skills that are highly regarded by employers.

"Employability skills continue to be integrated …. allowing students to develop a considerable range of transferable skills…. of particular importance for the Equine Industry where personal attributes can be as influential as academic achievement for successful career development". Equine EE

10. Positive Outcomes for All (SO3)

Exceptional levels of pastoral and academic support promote student achievement and this is provided to all students irrespective of background. Students who are 'at risk' are enabled to access increased one to one tutorials in conjunction with pastoral support, specialist mentoring, counselling etc. The size of the college HE community makes personal contact easier but clear delineation between academic support and pastoral support still exists. Academic tutors signpost students to specialist support and will arrange initial meetings; their focus is academic progress.

"support during their mandatory veterinary practice placements has been effective". VN EE

The high proportion of mature students (57%) respond well to the high levels of support resulting in above benchmark rates of completion this group - See LE3.
26% of the HE cohort are from POLAR 3 Quintile 1 (11%) and Quintile 2 (15%) (most deprived backgrounds) with 30% (14% & 16% respectively) of young 1st year enrolments and 23% (7% and 16% respectively) of mature enrolments from this group. This evidences the effectiveness of the UCS provision to address the widening participation agenda.
Level 4 enrolments of POLAR 3, Quintile 1 students indicate a preference (70% 2015/16, 89% 2016/17) for FdSc programmes with the remaining 30% and 11% respectively enrolling to BSc. The vocational nature and assessment structure of the FdSc programmes are designed to support non-traditional entrants to HE and whilst the metrics do not indicate positive flags for the disadvantaged group, the outcomes are showing an improving picture, with the completion rate of disadvantaged students exceeding that of less disadvantaged students. Furthermore, over the same period an increasing proportion of this group are electing to top-up to BSc demonstrating the confidence of this group to continue with their studies.

1st yr enrolment	% Completion of all FdSc	% Completion of POLAR 3, Quintile 1 FdSc	% POLAR 3, Quintile 1 progressing to BSc top-up
2010/11	77	56	10
2011/12	79	67	20
2012/13	76	73	40
2013/14	68	71	25
2014/15	88	80	45
2015/16	92	93	70
2016/17	80	83	67

Closing the gap between FdSc top ups and straight through BSc – by Level 6 there is no discernible difference in achievement – see SO1
'*FE based students are more likely to be studying HE qualifications such as Foundation Degrees*' (RCU, 2016) is consistent with recruitment at University Centre Sparsholt combined with the option to study close to home. The RCU report (2016) states that full time students travel (on average) 56 miles to an HEI compared with 19 to a college, which reinforces the importance of local, college based HE to widening participation.
'*the convenience and financial benefit of staying at home'* – Level 4 vet Nursing student.
The TEF Year 3 datamaps identify recruitment as local to the 6 or 7 counties immediately surrounding Hampshire and whilst graduate employment is still predominantly focused in the south and south-west of England, graduates in highly-skilled jobs are more likely to travel to all regions of England and into Scotland for employment, much of these opportunities arise as a direct result of study tours and work placements.
Students justified their choice of land-based degree accepting that pay and salary would most likely be lower than other careers; *not expecting a high paid job as the industry doesn't offer this', 'help my employment prospects but doubt it will affect my pay', 'require a degree, essential as more investment is being made within the industry', 'degree is vocational, the employment prospects are rich'*, however, their personal quality of life; *'don't care about the money as much as happiness and wellbeing', 'to simply get a job that I enjoy', 'quality of life as important in influencing decision to move from better paid job' 'value my degree for my own self-worth', 'career change for job satisfaction', 'quality of life as important in influencing a decision to retrain and move from better paid jobs',* concern for the environment; *'the environment is the future', being strongly influenced by problems and issues occurring in the natural world',* and animal welfare; *passion for animal welfare….which are typically low paid', making a difference in the animal industry',* '*to make a difference to equine welfare and the public's understanding',* were key factors in their decision making.

Many students described the reputation that UCS holds within the land-based industry and that graduating with associated benefits of specialist skills was as important for employability as the degree itself '*to have a degree that has a reputation that precedes it', 'industry contacts advised me to do the degree at UCS…. very well regarded within the industry', 'the high calibre of tutors and its reputation', 'in my industry this degree (AAB) is highly respected'.*

Summary

Within the context of a Further Education College, the introduction of a dedicated Higher Education Faculty has created a coherent teaching team enabling inter-disciplinary collaboration from individuals who had hitherto worked in a more isolated way within their areas of technical expertise. The structure has promoted an ethos of a Higher Education community and higher standards as a result of improved communication, the opportunity to share good practice, standardisation of delivery and assessment plus the ability to draw on a range of teaching expertise providing students with an improved and more diverse taught experience.

Excellent teaching at the college includes interesting and innovative assessment methods, substantial, high quality feedback, an improving standard of student work incorporating technology enhanced learning to develop digital literacy, high quality research, data collection and analysis undertaken at Level 6, and the application of practical skills to activities conducted on and off-site that are related to industry and employability.

The development of independent learning is a strength, using a range of support methods personalised to the student. The accessibility of tutors and the industrial relevance of the teaching programmes ensures exceptionally high standards of student engagement and commitment.

Extensive employer engagement and provision of employability skills delivered by sector experts lead to high levels of relevant employment and progression to further study.

Recruitment of widening participation groups is increasing and outcomes for these students are comparable to those from less disadvantaged, or more academic backgrounds. The vocational nature of the degree programmes coupled with the predominantly local recruitment indicates the importance of HE provision within FE colleges to give confidence that Higher Education is accessible and achievable.

A reputation for producing 'work ready' graduates within a sector that is embryonic in its embrace of higher order skills and knowledge results in high levels of employment in industry related positions with progression into senior roles within two to five years.

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