

The students are back!

At the time of writing it is a year this week of living with, coping with and adapting to the pandemic, and I could not be more proud of the achievements of both the staff and students of Sparsholt College Group in response to such extraordinary circumstances. Our dedicated teams have changed tack on a daily basis, in response to the everchanging Public Health and Government updates, in order to keep the campus Covid secure whilst continuing to deliver the student experience which our young people signed up to.

Teaching delivery models have been much more fluid this year to provide the flexibility for staff to deliver theoretical components of the course during periods of lockdown, and condensed practical activities when we've been open to onsite teaching.

This term the campus has been really quiet, as the majority of students and staff switched to working remotely in January. Our expert lecturers have continued delivering engaging online lessons, including guest lectures from professionals in industry, and they've also been really creative in order to deliver some practical elements of the courses. For example, on the Fishery Studies and Aquatics course, students would have normally been on the River Itchen improving habitats and spawning conditions for salmon and trout populations, but instead were tasked with spawning their own Artemia cultures from their local area. Conservation, Countryside and Environment students would normally be found in local woodland sites and nature reserves carrying out coppicing and maintenance tasks, but instead have headed to their own nature sites to chart flora and fauna, and undertook virtual tours of the national parks.

The critical workers who have remained onsite to manage college operations have worked exceptionally hard during this period, i.e. at the farm, equine centre, animal management centre (AMC), and grounds team. To put into context, on a normal college day the AMC would function with a workforce of approximately 120 students undertaking practical duties, and yet all of the usual animal husbandry duties have still been necessary in their absence. In addition, the animal keepers, instructors and horticulturalists have filmed

aspects of their daily routines to share via Teams with students in order that they stay connected with this aspect of their studies.

There was an audible sigh of relief when all students moved back into their halls of residence and returned to on-site teaching this month. The campus is now a hive of activity as we support students who, despite our best efforts, have missed so much practical learning this year already. We're preparing ourselves for a busy summer term like none before, in our quest to ensure that this cohort of learners are not disadvantaged and progress to their next destination, whether that be further learning or employment. Whilst examinations on many courses have been cancelled this year nationally, many students at Sparsholt complete qualifications where there is a licence to practice or industry 'ticket' needed in order to secure employment, and therefore we are unable to predict grades for these aspects of their studies. Driving qualifications, use of chainsaws, RCVS exams (veterinary nursing) and fitness instructor assessments are just a few examples.

The pandemic has led to worldwide digital and technological advancements, changing curriculum needs, new ways of working and studying, and a greater appreciation of the benefits of social interaction and the 'great outdoors' on our mental health and wellbeing. As we look to recover from the impact of coronavirus on both the College and our own personal lives, Sparsholt will take the opportunity to do things differently, not least to protect future generations from climate change and habitat destruction. As a Strategic Leadership Team we're really looking forward to revisiting the College's strategic priorities next term, and we will shortly be relaunching the Sparsholt College Group strategic plan that will support the economic recovery post Covid-19 and equip our student community with the skills needed to be successful in the digital era.

And finally, I have recently been appointed as LEA Governor at Sparsholt Primary School, and therefore expect to see many of you regularly once restrictions are lifted.

Happy Easter from everyone at Sparsholt College

Julie Milburn, Principal and CEO