

ms to trailblaze Modern Baccalaureate

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THERE'LL be a new emphasis on citizenship activities and achievements outside the curriculum among scholarship students at Farnham Sixth Form College after half-term.

The youngsters are being challenged to trailblaze the introduction of the Modern Baccalaureate at the college, before it becomes available to all students in the next academic year.

In an interview with *The Herald* after his first term at the helm, college director Jonathan Stewart spoke of what he hopes the scheme will achieve for participants, whether they are following an academic path or a vocational one.

The end target of the Modern Baccalaureate is an official, nationally accredited portfolio of achievement and certification.

While its core comprises a curriculum element, such as A-level examinations or a BTEC programme, credit is also earned for personal development, for instance in community-based activities, and independent learning of skills for life and for work.

Sporting and musical achievements, work experience, Duke of Edinburgh Award, learning first aid or sign language, help in hospitals and old people's homes or involvement in community events such as Farnham Carnival are just a few examples of activity that will be recognised.

Mr Stewart anticipates

the college will soon be seeking opportunities for students with local businesses and community groups.

"We are going to offer it and challenge all our students to achieve it. We expect students here to do more than their qualifications alone," said Mr Stewart.

"It is good for young people to feel that they are playing a part in the community, but sometimes they need a college to help them understand that.

"We can steer them in the right direction and tell them where their opportunities are."

The director regards the Modern Baccalaureate as better than the English Baccalaureate offered by the government. "It is similar to the International Baccalaureate in terms of expectations, but more suitable to English colleges," he explained.

"We will be joining a national movement, part of a group of schools and colleges that think this is the way forward."

He views the Baccalaureate as helping the youngsters develop as more rounded individuals and believes the proof of their achievements can give them the edge with potential employers or university admissions staff.

"With unemployment rates among graduates and the problems we have with the economy, it is a tough



Man of vision - Jonathan Stewart

world," he pointed out.

"We are conscious that Russell Group [the 24 leading UK universities] expectations demand more of students. We want to give them the opportunity to stand out and shine."

Mr Stewart also sees the Baccalaureate as attracting students to Farnham College at a time of considerable competition in the sixth form field in the Farnham area.

Not that the college, now

in its 41st year and with students equally divided between academic and vocational courses, isn't already flying high.

This summer it achieved 100 per cent pass rate at A-level for the second successive year plus, for the first time, 100 per cent pass in BTEC Diplomas.

Having seen student numbers fall to 400 around 2005/6 when Farnham College merged with Guildford College, this year

Farnham has exceeded its benchmark of 600 students by 40.

Mr Stewart said that quality issues had been addressed and the college had broadened its curriculum appeal.

"We need to continue our success, maintain the 100 per cent pass rate and broaden our curriculum, strengthening our A-level repertoire," he explained.

Currently the college offers about 27 A-level subjects, but the aim is to introduce yet more, with expansion of science technology, maths and modern languages, also building on the uptake in music technology and offering A-level music.

Textiles and media are other areas where potential for growth may be explored.

Asked for his opinion on A-level reforms being introduced by the Education Secretary, Mr Stewart said his fear was that if only a traditional academic curriculum was offered, many young people would miss out.

"I think Michael Gove is right to focus on the basics of maths and English and the quality of what is happening in schools and colleges. This is an Education Secretary at the helm for virtually four consecutive years. That is a rarity. At least with Michael Gove we have consistency," he observed.

"But I think what I find challenging about Michael Gove's agenda is the narrow

focus on traditional academic subjects such as English and history and maths and science at the expense of subjects such as government and politics, economics and photography, which allow students to explore what they are really interested in."

Commenting on his first term as director, he spoke of "a whirlwind of action".

That action included preparing for three building projects, beginning with the conversion of an old classroom into a gym and sports fitness suite for sports students and any others who wish to use it.

The college is also proceeding with a long-planned project for proper sports changing room facilities, plus there was a successful bid to introduce a music production suite, now almost completed.

Mr Stewart is keen to mark this year - the 40th anniversary of the college being formed from the amalgamation of Farnham Grammar School and Farnham Girls' Grammar School - with celebrations involving the Old Boys and Old Girls of those two institutions.

"We want to build on the fact there has been a strong record of education in Farnham going back to 1585 and before then," said the director, pledging to invite former pupils back for a taste of modern day education.