

SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CURRICULUM, SKILLS & STAKEHOLDERS COMMITTEE (CSS)
held on 27 February 2025 at 09:30
at the Sparsholt Campus

PRESENT¹ S Duckering (E); T Floyd (E) (Chair); J Milburn (P); F Obiero² (E) (to minute 24); D Rees (C); S Thompson (C).

In attendance: L Asbridge, Director of Careers & Stakeholder Engagement (minutes 21 to 24)
S Grant, Deputy Principal
S Hermiston, Director of Information & Funding (minutes 25 to 28)
J Middleton, Head of Marketing (minutes 41 to 44)
D Mernagh, Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education
A Robertson, Governance Co-ordinator
N Shorter, Governor (E)
B Stokes, Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover College)
M Treagust, Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt College)
S Willson, Head of Corporate Governance

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

1. There were no interests to be declared. It was noted that the committee was aware of S Thompson's role at Hampshire County and this was not anticipated to present a conflict of interest in relation to the matters on the agenda.

MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

2. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.
3. Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) (mins 127/24): The college had successfully overseen delivery of the multi-colleges LSIF project with contingency plans enacted to avoid underspend. This had included installation of an additional immersive suite for Motor Vehicle at the Sparsholt campus, enabling live co-teaching across both campuses. The college was also exploring co-delivery and staff collaborations with other colleges.
4. The committee commended the project management and welcomed the example of the benefits to the teaching and learning experience from the range of innovative technologies introduced to both campuses.
5. T Levels (min 137/24): The committee received an update on lobbying of the DfE and universities regarding degree entry requirements. In response to concerns identified by colleges, it was reported that there had been progress in more universities confirming the eligibility of T Levels but that there remained some universities/degrees which were resistant.

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

² Via online video conference

The college was taking a range of actions to address these concerns and mitigate the associated risks to progression and enrolments, working with awarding organisations and Landex.

6. Apprenticeships (min 151/24): The committee discussed the potential impacts of the key reforms to apprenticeships announced by the DfE, including Maths and English obligations for 19+ apprenticeships and the introduction of shorter apprenticeships (with the minimum length reduced from 12 to eight months) initially in three trailblazer areas linked to key shortage occupations.
7. There were no other matter arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

CURRICULUM PERFORMANCE

FE Destinations

8. The committee had received and reviewed the report of the Vice Principals Curriculum on the review of FE student destinations (July 2024), together with some case studies of individual students.
9. The Committee Chair emphasised the value of destinations data to informing the development of the curriculum and assessing the effectiveness of the curriculum in enabling learners to progress to positive outcomes.
10. The committee commended the high proportion of ‘known’ destinations (98.7%) which the college had been able to identify and the level of these which were positive (98.4%). The data included internal progressors. Of the 1.6% (44) learners not categorised as in employment or education, around a third were Foundation learners in supported living and the others, at the point of being contacted, were not in employment but indicated they were looking for work.
11. Members sought further assurance in relation to:
 - Verification of data, where it was noted that the knowledge of the teaching teams of the learners and relevant industries was helpful in judging the reliability of information provided by former learners but that there was not a verification process directly with employers.
 - Specific curriculum areas which appeared to be outliers in terms of either response rates or destinations, with additional context provided.
12. The committee welcomed the examples of individual learner case studies, discussing the learners’ journeys and emphasising the value of opportunities for development of skills and wider experience, such as through the Turing Scheme, which prepared the learners for their next steps.
13. Overall, the committee was assured by the report and discussion of the evidence of the curriculum offer in supporting learners to secure a positive destination through the attainment of relevant qualifications and employability skills.

Accountability Statement

14. The committee had received and reviewed the report of the Principal on progress with the college’s Annual Accountability Statement 2024-25 objectives and developments for 2025-26.

15. The committee noted that positive progress made against the 2024-25 objectives with 75% of actions well underway or complete and scrutinised the deliverability of the remaining objectives, with responses to members' questions covering:
 - The Deputy Principal provided an improved assessment of the ability to achieve the apprenticeships targets given that concerns about changes in the funding context had been mitigated by more clarity about the government's apprenticeship reforms.
 - The college had performed well in relation to English and Maths sector benchmarks but had set itself ambitious strategic targets and these were reported in the Accountability Statement.
 - The underlying variation in enrolments in different T Levels reflected the numbers of learners enrolling in a T Level 'Foundation Year' to prepare for progressing to a T Level and was not therefore a concern to management.
16. The committee noted the recent publication of DfE guidance covering requirements for the Annual Accountability Statement 2025-26 which included the government's updated national skills priorities. The committee discussed the changes to the national priorities and the fit with the college's offer, noting that some of the skills priorities linked to occupation codes as opposed to sector subject areas where there was a need for a wide breadth of skills and disciplines (eg defence) This presented potential opportunities as well as strategic risks in terms of qualifications and funding.
17. It was noted that management would further review the three year curriculum plan in relation to the updated national skills priorities to inform the development of the new Accountability Statement. The Committee Chair would be updated on any significant curriculum plan developments. and the new Accountability Statement would be presented for approval at a Special Board meeting on 15 May 2025.
18. The committee also discussed that a further review of how the college was meeting skills needs might be required to comply with the statutory Local Needs Duty to have regard to the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) priorities, if there were to be substantial changes as a result of the plans for devolution in Surrey and for a Mayoral Combined County Authority for the Hampshire and the Solent region.
19. Members provided some insights in relation to the devolution process and skills funding from their areas of experience and the Principal reported her participation in the Hampshire Skills Partnership. It was confirmed that the committee and Board would be informed as discussions progressed with Surrey and Hampshire and when the availability of any new discretionary funding was known.
20. The progress on the Accountability Statement would also inform the annual strategic conversations with the DfE in March.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT & CAREERS

21. The committee had received and reviewed the termly report of the Director of Careers & Stakeholder Engagement providing an overview and progress report on key elements of stakeholder engagement.
22. The committee noted the careers focused actions being taken to support the progression of learners, including working with an AI Careers platform to produce individualised 'next steps

passport’ for Level 2 learners, and discussed the progression of Level 3 learners to university in the context of changing high education sector application trends.

23. The committee noted the evidence of continued strong emphasis on engagement with employers and examples of some employer engagement activities, including apprenticeships and T Level industry placements.
24. The committee noted a range of recent collaborative activities with civic, community and education stakeholders and received confirmation of a continuing positive relationship with the Building Heroes charity to deliver construction skills and a new arrangement with the HighGround charity to provide a land-based course to female veterans, starting in October.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Curriculum Contribution Analysis

25. The committee had received and reviewed the report of the Director of Information & Funding on the FE and HE curriculum contribution model findings to inform the committee’s consideration of the curriculum plan.
26. The Director of Information & Funding highlighted the key factors in the model and the adjustments from the 2023-24 year.
27. In discussions, members sought further clarity and discussed:
 - How commercial income was treated in the model and management actions to grow commercial income through full cost delivery in certain curriculum areas to increase their overall contribution.
 - The use of the analysis by the SLT to inform decisions relating to class sizes, staffing and use of teaching spaces, actions to promote recruitment to curriculum areas, and the introduction of new courses or closure of courses.
 - Opportunities relating to technological innovation and new facilities, including responding to regional skills needs.
 - The relationship with the quality performance of curriculum areas, noting that learner achievement levels were also a key factor in curriculum planning.
28. The committee welcomed the continuing use of the contribution analysis as a tool to inform decisions about the efficient planning and management of the curriculum.

Curriculum Plan

29. The committee had received and reviewed the 3 Year Curriculum Plan, together with an update on qualification reforms, an overview of rationale of the College offer, and a summary of planned changes for each key sub-sector of provision (14-16, 16-18, Apprenticeships, higher education, and adult) from the Vice Principals Curriculum and Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education.
30. The Vice Principal (Sparsholt) assured the committee that the curriculum planning process included consideration of achievement rates, progression pathways, employers’ skills needs, application numbers and contribution analysis.
31. In relation to areas of FE qualification reforms and risks identified at previous meetings, it noted that the college had taken part in the DfE consultations and confirmed that:

- The T Level in Onsite Construction was being withdrawn which was a disappointment for the Andover campus where there were positive indications of growing enrolments and therefore an alternative Level 3 would be offered from September 2025. Current learners would be able to complete their second year of the T Level to achieve their qualification. There was no impact on the DfE specialist equipment or capital grant funding already awarded which would support the continuing provision of construction skills training.
 - Funding for eSports qualifications had been extended to 2027 but, to mitigate the uncertainty of funding, the college planned to introduce a UAL Level 2 Diploma in Creative Media Production and Technology which covers a wider range of media-related subjects and pathways to Level 3.
 - Defunding of Equine, Game & Wildlife, Conservation Studies and Fishery Studies current qualifications had been deferred until 2027, and the college was working with qualification bodies on future provision options, including apprenticeships and occupational technical qualifications (OTQs).
 - The DfE had confirmed the flexibility to continue to offer two Level 3 Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs) alongside an A Level in a mixed study programme which was welcomed by management as supporting the Andover curriculum provision model.
32. Responding to members' questions, it was confirmed that the roll out of T Levels had generally been successful with learner and employers reporting positive experiences and the work placement element supporting progression to employment. The strategic issues around pathways from FE to HE discussed earlier in the meeting and the uncertainty around development and delivery of new adult only technical qualifications were also noted.
33. The committee noted that the curriculum plan for HE included further diversification of the offer with professional certificates, more apprenticeships, and blended learning options; developments which would also support Access & Participation Plan objectives by broadening the opportunities for applicants. It was also planned to rename and reposition some courses to build on University Centre Sparsholt's (UCS's) strengths as a specialist provider and to develop short commercial courses delivered by UCS to grow income.
34. A member shared his experience of the value of specialist licences (such as in relation to protected species) and project management training in the land-based sector and the committee acknowledged the value to students of gaining 'added value' skills for industry.
35. The committee also noted the developments in relation to the college's apprenticeships offer and adult education full cost provision.
36. **Resolved** – that the scope and ambition of the 3 Year Curriculum Plan was endorsed as fit for purpose to deliver the college's strategic ambitions, particularly in relation to student progression, future employability, professional development of the employed, and to meeting the needs of employers.

HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS & PARTICIPATION

37. The committee had received and reviewed the report of the Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education on progress with delivery of the University Centre Sparsholt (UCS) Access and Participation Plan (APP).

38. It was confirmed that the new APP for 2025-26 to 2028-29 had been approved by the Office for Students (letter to the Chair of Governors 7 November 2024) and a summary plan published alongside the plan on the UCS website in line with OfS requirements.
39. The committee was assured that planning for delivery of the new APP was underway, including launch of the new bursary scheme, and that the development of the new HE Strategy was aligned to the APP and overseen by the HE Strategy Governors' Working Group.
40. The committee noted the progress report on access and participation activities during 2024-25, including the awarding of financial support through bursaries and the range of academic and pastoral support provided to current students. Examples were also given of engagement with schools, colleges and UCAS events and the widening of the UCS provision to offer a more diverse range of courses.

RECRUITMENT & MARKETING

41. The committee had received and reviewed the progress report of the Head of Marketing on delivery of the marketing strategy and the marketing operations plan for 2024-25. This included supporting analysis of digital activities, social media and open days.
42. The Head of Marketing highlighted the challenging environment for recruitment for 2025-26, giving examples of variations being experienced in FE and HE in patterns of applications and the causal factors and responding management actions.
43. In discussion, members again acknowledged the risks to student recruitment linked to the wider developments in the HE sector, as a whole and noted the changes to the college's marketing activities as a result, including the benefit offered by the new UCS facilities.
44. Members also considered the approaches being taken to support recruitment of FE learners and apprentices at both the Andover and Sparsholt campuses and were assured by the report and examples discussed that management sought to understand the differences in behaviour this year, some of which were localised and some societal, and to prioritise resources and activities to address these.

HEALTHCHECK REPORT

45. The committee had received and reviewed the most recent Healthcheck report (2024-25 Issue 05).
46. There were no matters not covered earlier in the agenda under the remit of the committee requiring further review.
47. The meeting ended at 12.40.

Approved: Curriculum, Skills & Stakeholders Committee Meeting 15 May 2025