

SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF GOVERNORS
held on 8 October 2025 at 9.30 am
at Sparsholt College

¹PRESENT: G Davies (E); J Emm (SCS) (to min 325); N Hopkins (E, Chair); P Jordan (E); C McCormack (E); J Milburn (P); A Neal (E); F Obiero (E) (from min 263); H Perry (St) (to min 325); A Rowley (E, Vice Chair); N Shorter (E, Vice Chair) (to min 283); N Wall (E).

In attendance: C Davies – Health, Safety & Environment Manager (min 308 to 313)
S Grant – Chief Operating Officer (COO) (except min 333)
N Heslop – Chief Financial Officer (CFO) (except min 333)
S Hermiston – Data Protection Officer (min 300 to 304)
D Mernagh – Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education (to min 325)
J Payne – Director of Estates (min 308 to 313)
R Price – Director of Learning & Quality (to min 267)
A Roberston – Governance Co-ordinator (to min 325)
B Stokes – Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) (min 268 to 283)
M Treagust – Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) (to min 325)
S Willson - Head of Corporate Governance

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

254. There were no new interests to declare. The Board’s Register of Interests records members who hold (unremunerated) directorships of the college’s subsidiary companies.

APOLOGIES

255. Apologies were received from S Duckering, J Loretto and N Moody.

MINUTES

256. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2025 (Part 1) be confirmed with minute 125/25 reworded to confirm compliance with the DfE College Financial Handbook.

257. College policies (minute 186/25 & 198/25): It was confirmed that (i) the wording of the University Centre Sparsholt (HE) and FE student policies had be amended so that it was clear which policies would apply in the event of a conduct related incident involving a HE and a FE student, and (ii) the health and safety policies had been updated to include restrictions in relation to e-bikes and e-scooters for safety reasons.

258. It was noted that the resolutions of the Board had been enacted and that there were no other matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

CHAIR OF GOVERNORS’ REPORT

¹ (E) = External; (P) = Principal; (S) = Staff; (SCS) = Sparsholt College Services Staff Governor; (St) = Student

259. The Board had received and noted the report of the Chair which summarised activities he had undertaken since the July 2025 meeting of the Board and forthcoming events and matters requiring his consideration.

2024-25 PERFORMANCE

Strategic Operating Plan

260. The Board had received the report of the Principal summarising outcomes in relation to the Strategic Plan Annual Milestone Objectives for 2024-25.
261. The Board noted that progress achieved during the year towards delivering the three-year Strategic Plan was largely good and commended the maintenance of strong financial health, significant progress made in GCSE English and maths outcomes, delivery of major capital projects to enhance teaching facilities, the strength of stakeholder relationships, and commitment to sustainability.
262. Governors sought additional information for assurance about the few key performance indicators which had not been met, discussing the underlying factors. In relation to teaching and learning observations, the Principal recognised that setting a target for at least 60% of teaching to be assessed as exceptional was stretching but that it drove quality interventions and support to underpin an outstanding quality of education.

FE and HE Quality and Performance

263. The Board received a presentation on the FE and HE quality review process and performance indicators for 2024-25, ahead of completion of end of year quality assessment reports and improvement plans.
264. The Board considered the key points presented by the Vice Principals Curriculum in relation to FE achievement data at the Sparsholt and Andover campuses. The discussion included the impact of the availability of end point assessments (EPAs) on the apprenticeship achievement rate and actions available to the college to mitigate this going forward, the effect of entry level requirements and review of FE qualification pathways, sharing successful practices between curriculum areas, and targeted interventions for the coming year.
265. The Vice Principal & Dean of HE presented the overall outcomes for MSc, BSc and FdSc students and governors sought more information about the progression requirements from an FdSc to a BSc and the impact of the HE Access & Participation plan on student outcomes.
266. The Board also noted the update on HE enrolments and questioned the data in relation to targets defined in the new UCS Strategic Plan and evidence as to the impact of investment in the new HE Science & Research Centre.
267. The Director of Learning & Quality presented a briefing on the final version of the Ofsted further education inspection toolkit, due for implementation from November 2025, for governors' information. The Board noted the new developments and discussed the expectations of governors and governance.

PRINCIPAL'S REPORT AND STRATEGIC PLAN

268. The Board had received and reviewed the report of the Principal summarising key developments at the college since the previous meeting of the Board and in relation to progress with the Strategic Plan.

269. The Principal drew the Board’s attention to key points in the report and provided verbal updates on matters since the report was issued.
270. The Board explored implications of the changes to the education and skills landscape, new government strategies, curriculum reforms, and the move of Skills England to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Responding to questioning from the chair of the Audit Committee, the Principal confirmed that the SLT was reviewing the related risks and controls in the strategic risk register.
271. The Board also reviewed the latest enrolment data for FE and HE students in relation to the budget forecasts, discussing the underlying trends and causal effects, and noting that additional analysis would follow to the Curriculum, Skills & Stakeholders Committee.
272. The Board recorded its appreciation to the teams involved in the Animal Health, Welfare & Research Centre and the Aquatic Research & Conservation Centre for the successful outcome of the full zoo licence inspection.
273. Governors also welcomed the introduction of a new student transport monitoring service to improve user experience and safety, and commended the branded buses now in use.

HEALTHCHECK REPORT

274. The Board had received and reviewed the latest Healthcheck report (202/26 Issue 01), noting the positive RAG ratings of the key performance indicators.
275. The Principal highlighted the safeguarding data and explained the impact of the implementation of the CPOMs system to expedite the identification and assessment of safeguarding cases.
276. Governors sought additional information in discussion about benchmarking of staff turnover data and variations in recruitment to T Level courses, and challenged the SLT as to whether measures could be taken to raise the participation rate in the staff survey in the future to extend the value of undertaking the survey.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

277. The Board had received and reviewed the annual report on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), including progress with the college’s equality objectives, the updated EDI operational action plan and the latest employee and learner equality data for publication.
278. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover), the SLT EDI lead, acknowledged feedback received from a governor in advance of the meeting cautioning about using short-form terminology/ acronyms to refer to categories of people which could have the unintended consequence of appearing to favour or exclude groups and agreed to look at how terminology was used in documents.
279. The Board noted the progress reported on the objectives in the EDI operational plan and the examples illustrated by the Vice Principal, including the aim of expanding the membership of the college EDI Strategy Working Group, the actions being taken to eradicate learner achievement gaps and new initiatives to support the mental health of male learners.
280. Members particularly commended the work supporting learners from military families and the commitment in the action plan to address the retention gap between learners with SEN from military families and other learners from military families, as well as the new actions in relation to neurodiverse learners and learners from ethnic minority backgrounds.

281. Members discussed Ofsted’s focus on inclusion and the governance and training mechanisms to support governors in ensuring the college fulfilled its objectives. It was noted that a Brief Bite training session on EHCPs (education, health and care plans) had taken place with the Director of Inclusion & Student Experience in July and agreed to follow this up with further development opportunities going forward, including shadowing the SEND Lead Governor’s visits.
282. Responding to a member’s question as to whether the college had experienced any issues arising due to community tensions over the public display of national flags, the Vice Principal confirmed that this had been discussed with Curriculum Leaders and also with the Safeguarding Lead Governor. No significant issues had arisen in the college to date. A Staff Governor also gave an example of discussions as part of Prevent related tutorials about fact-checking of information online, and the impact of algorithms and echo chambers, and reported that learners had a good level of awareness.
283. In response to a member seeking assurance about the reporting and monitoring mechanisms for the EDI action plan, the Vice Principal confirmed that a progress report was reviewed by the Wellbeing Committee termly, with headlines reported via the committee’s minutes and the Principal to the Board.

SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

284. The Board had received and reviewed for assurance the annual progress report on the College Group’s Sustainability Strategy, together with the updated actions for 2025-26.
285. The Principal confirmed that the progress report had been published on the college’s website in line with the college’s commitment as a Universities & Colleges Race to Zero campaign signatory.
286. Responding to a member’s question about the reporting and oversight mechanism for the College Green Group, the Principal confirmed that the group inputted into the Sustainability Action plan which was reviewed termly by the Resources Committee.
287. The Board endorsed the progress achieved and the updated Sustainability Strategy actions for 2025-26 and noted that the annual Streamlined Energy & Carbon Reporting (SECR) report would follow to the Resources Committee.

FINANCE

288. The Board had received and reviewed the report of the Chief Financial Officer providing assurance in relation to the expected 2024/25 financial outturn and the financial performance in 2025/26 to date, together with the (unaudited) management accounts to 31 July 2025.
289. The Board noted the surplus year end position for 2024/25, before any FRS102 pension and SWAPS and audit adjustments, and that the DfE financial health grade for 2024/25 was expected to be ‘good’ and the bank loan covenants were expected to be met.
290. The CFO provided additional context for the Board’s assurance, including in relation to the causes of the variation in the end of year forecast between the June and July management accounts which included the cashflow impact of the strategic decision by management to procure before year end, IT hardware to enable timely upgrade to Windows 11.
291. The Board noted that a DfE public finance audit of FE funding in 2024/25 was underway and that the financial statements auditor would require a copy of the DfE auditor’s report before finalising the college’s audit opinion.

292. The CFO drew the Board’s attention to the FE Commissioner’s financial benchmarks in the management accounts which all continued to be met or exceeded other than the adjusted current ratio. The Board was assured by the CFO’s explanation of the context for the current assets calculation and noted that the accounts did not include the post-16 education National Insurance contributions grant which had now been received by the college.
293. Members sought additional information above several aspects of the accounts, including the approach to the depreciation of new capital builds and to management of bad debt.
294. **Resolved** – that authority be delegated to the Resources Committee to approve a staff pay award in November should the SLT bring forward a recommendation in advance of the December Board of Governors meeting, subject to the decision being affordable within the approved College Group budget 2025/26.

RISK MANAGEMENT

295. The Board had received and reviewed proposed updates to the Risk Management Policy and Risk Register 2025-26, informed by feedback from the Audit Committee and finalisation of the Strategic Operating Plan for 2025/26.
296. The Board endorsed the Principal’s proposals in relation to the identification and description of risks in the risk register in response to recent developments and the introduction of a new dashboard with key words in the description of each risk presented in emboldened text.
297. The Board also commended the classification of risks into strategic, operational, financial and compliance groupings linked to the introduction of definitions of risk appetite, endorsing the approach as supporting the Board and SLT to focus on the impact of strategic decisions and to prioritise management actions to mitigate risks.
298. Responding to a member’s challenge as to whether the proposed categorisation of the operational risks grouping as ‘cautious’ had the potential to be too restrictive, the Board explored the options in discussion, with a range of points raised by members of the Board and by the Principal on behalf of the SLT. It was noted that introducing risk appetite definitions was a new approach and that there would likely be a need for some variation at times in relation to individual risks and to evolve the approach as it was tested in practice. It was acknowledged that the proposed approach demonstrated the care exercised by the SLT in the management of the college’s operations and reflected the nature of the four current operational risks. It was also recognised that tolerance for exposure to a ‘moderate’ level of operational risk might be appropriate in certain circumstances.
299. **Resolved** – that the Risk Management Policy 2025-26 and the Risk Register be approved with the amendment of the definition of risk appetite for operational risks to ‘moderate’ with sufficient protections in place to protect the college.

DATA PROTECTION

300. The Board had received and reviewed for assurance the annual monitoring report of the Data Protection Officer (DPO) on activities related to Data Protection and Freedom of Information (FOI) legislation during the 2024-25 financial year.
301. The DPO highlighted the continuing upward trend in data subject requests compared to the previous year and confirmed that responses to both data and FOI requests had complied with legal requirements.

302. The DPO had dealt with 10 reported data breaches and two near misses in 2024-25, a reduction in the previous year, confirming all were of a small scale and carrying no significant risk and therefore had not warranted reporting to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).
303. The DPO reported details of an appeal to the ICO following an FOI request where the college had partially refused to disclose information based on keeping learners safe and that the detail requested could not be justified as being in the public interest. The ICO had upheld the college's decision.
304. The Board thanked the DPO for the clarity of his reporting, his management of data and FOI requests, and the evidence of compliance with legal requirements.

HE TUITION FEES

305. The Board had received and reviewed the report of the Vice Principal & Dean of HE on student fees for 2026-27.
306. The Vice Principal & Dean of HE confirmed that it was proposed to maintain all categories of University Centre Sparsholt HE tuition fees at the 2025-26 levels other than if the Office for Students (OfS) raised the maximum undergraduate tuition fee cap.
307. **Resolved** – that the HE tuition fees for 2026-27 for each category in the report be approved as unchanged from 2025-26 and that the SLT be authorised to increase the undergraduate tuition fees for 2026-27 to the eligible maximum fee cap should this be raised and taking into account market conditions.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Health & Safety Annual Report

308. The Board had received and reviewed the annual College Group Health and Safety Report of the Health, Safety & Environmental Manager for the year 2024-25, covering key aspects of the implementation of policies and procedures and health and safety management.
309. The Director of Estates drew the Board's attention to the accident data analysis which showed similar trends across the year as in previous years and explained the increase in overall accidents correlated to the increase in students numbers year on year.
310. The Health, Safety & Environmental Manager confirmed the actions taken in response to the previous challenge from the Board to increase the reporting of 'near misses' in order to identify and address potential risks and further strengthen the health and safety culture. An awareness raising campaign and new mechanism for reporting near misses had been implemented and ensuring near misses were captured and reviewed would continue to be a priority going forward.
311. The Head of Corporate Governance reported that one of the members who was absent from the meeting would be providing further feedback for management to consider on best practice in reporting and monitoring accidents and near misses.
312. In discussion, members also asked for and received additional assurance about insurance requirements for study tours abroad and first aid training for farming activities.
313. The Board welcomed the comprehensive report and noted the assurance provided regarding the proactive management of health and safety across the College Group,

including the identification of actions to further improve health and safety practices, and the implementation of policies and procedures relating to the health, safety and welfare of staff and students.

GOVERNANCE

Written Resolutions and Chair of Governors' Approval

314. The Board had received the report of the Head of Corporate Governance on written resolutions by the Board and approvals by the Chair of Governors where urgent action was required since the July meeting of the Board. There had been no written resolutions.
315. The Board noted five approvals by the Chair of Governors:
- a) The addition of a section to the Staff Code of Conduct restricting access to student accommodation (in line with established policy and practice).
 - b) A rewrite of the E-Safety and Online Communications Policy (Staff) to respond to feedback at the July meeting of the Board.
 - c) Updates to Ofsted grading terminology in the FE Curriculum Delivery, Teaching & Learning, & Quality Improvement Strategy following publication of the new Ofsted FE inspection toolkit.
 - d) An update to the maximum limit for childcare support and payment method in the FE Bursary Policy in line with DfE 16-19 bursary fund requirements.
 - e) A change to the nomination process for FE student governors to introduce selection by interview as set out in the Governors Selection & Appointment Policy and the Instrument & Articles of Government.

Annual Board Performance Review

316. The Board had received and reviewed the report of the Head of Corporate Governance to inform the Board's performance effectiveness review. The review comprised an evaluation of activities over the last year and delivery of the Board's effectiveness action plan, indicators of performance derived from feedback from governors and SLT members, assurance provided by external scrutiny and alignment with the AoC Code of Good Governance, and an assessment of responsiveness to regulatory and governance developments.
317. The Board considered the outcomes of the feedback surveys of members of the Board and SLT, the review of Board operations and developments, and other supporting information, and was content to confirm that the Board continued to operate effectively overall and was committed to continuous improvement.
318. **Resolved** – that the Board of Governors effectiveness action plan for 2025-26 be approved.
319. The Board noted the latest position in relation to Board membership and the launch of a recruitment campaign to seek to fill vacancies arising, informed by the Board's succession plan.
320. The Head of Corporate Governance updated the Board on the recruitment of FE and HE Student Governors, explaining that the selection process for FE Student Governors had identified more than one appointable candidate and, to maximise the opportunities for students and to minimise the period of time that vacancies existed, it was propose to appoint Student Governors for 2025-26 and 2026-27, with an invitation to the Student Governor

taking over in 2026-27 to attend some meetings this year as a guest. The process for the FE Student Governor (Andover) had been delayed and therefore delegated authority was sought in order that an appointment could be made in time for the student to attend the next Quality & Standards Committee meeting. The recruitment process for a HE Student Governor was ongoing.

321. **Resolved** – that

- a. Noah Justin be appointed FE Student Governor (Sparsholt) from 9 October 2025 for the period of his enrolment at Sparsholt College and as a member of the Curriculum, Skills & Stakeholders Committee.
- b. Leah O’Neil be appointed FE Student Governor (Sparsholt) from 1 July 2026 for the period of her enrolment at Sparsholt College and as a member of the Curriculum, Skills & Stakeholders Committee.

322. **Resolved** – that authority be delegated to the Chair of Governors and Chair of Quality & Standards Committee to approve the appointment of the FE Student Governor (Andover) for 2025-26 and 2026-27 and their membership of the Quality & Standards Committee.

323. **Resolved** – that N Shorter be appointed to join the Governance & Search Committee selection panel while N Moody was unavailable to participate.

324. **Resolved** – that the updated Board of Governors Code of Conduct be adopted.

CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

325. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2025 (Part 2) be confirmed.

326. Confidential matters were recorded separately.

327. The meeting ended at 1.30 pm.

Approved: Board of Governors Meeting 11 December 2025