

**SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE**  
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE**  
**CURRICULUM, SKILLS & STAKEHOLDERS COMMITTEE (CSS)**  
**held on 15 May at 09:00**  
**via online videoconference**

**PRESENT<sup>1</sup>** S Duckering (E); T Floyd (E) (Chair); J Milburn (P); F Obiero<sup>2</sup> (E) (to minutes 53-82);  
D Rees (C).

In attendance: L Asbridge, Director of Careers & Stakeholder Engagement  
S Grant, Chief Operating Officer  
J Middleton, Head of Marketing (minutes 80 to 82)  
D Mernagh, Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education  
N Shorter, Chair Designate  
B Stokes, Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover College)  
M Treagust, Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt College)  
S Willson, Head of Corporate Governance

#### **APOLOGIES**

48. Apologies were received from S Thompson.

#### **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

49. There were no interests to be declared.

#### **MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING**

50. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2025 be confirmed as a correct record.

51. T Levels (min 5/25): The committee received an update on progression routes to university in relation to technical and T Level qualifications.

52. There were no other matter arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

#### **CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

##### Qualification Reforms

53. The committee had received and reviewed the report of the Vice Principals Curriculum on FE curriculum reforms, including the interim findings from the DfE commissioned ‘independent review of the curriculum and assessment system in England’.

54. It was noted that the review confirmed a continuing commitment to T Levels, alongside A Levels, but also recognised that the need for alternative Level 3 pathways for some learners. The Vice Principals were actively engaged in contributing to the national reviews, as well as to development of new land-based qualifications.

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<sup>1</sup> (E) = External; (P) = Principal; (C) = Co-opted; (St) = Student

<sup>2</sup> Via videoconference (intermittent attendance)

55. The committee discussed the impact of curriculum changes and examples of how the college was responding seeking further information and assurance about:
- the opportunities and risks in relation to learner enrolment numbers;
  - the fit of the qualifications with industry skills needs, pathways to employment and delivering work placements;
  - the process for considering the impact on resources and facilities, including in relation to efficiency and the curriculum contribution analysis;
  - the offer for 19+ learners and the timeframe for the anticipated new OTQs (occupational technical qualifications).
56. In relation to apprenticeships, it was noted that the impact of the removal of English and Maths required for 19+ apprentices was having a positive impact on achievement. It was also noted that the government announcement that Level 7 apprenticeships for learners under 21 years old would be funded would have minimal impact in the sector.
57. The committee welcomed the evidence of the continued agility of college management to adapt the curriculum offer while maintaining a commitment to delivering qualifications which are fit for purpose for learners to progress in their education and to employment.

#### Curriculum Deep Dives

58. The committee had received and reviewed curriculum subject profiles for Construction (Andover) and Arboriculture & Forestry and Horticulture (Sparsholt). The subject profiles set out the offer, where relevant, in the areas of 14-16, 16-19, specialist SEND, apprenticeships, 19+ funded provision, higher education, and adult and community (primarily full cost) provision. In addition, the subject profiles gave examples of key curriculum external stakeholders for each subject and how the employers informed the curriculum intent, together with specific activities which contributed to the steering and design of the curriculum, progression of students, and interactions with employers within the curriculum delivery.
59. The Vice Principal (Andover) highlighted key developments to the Construction offer informed by feedback from local employers and the community about specific skills and training needs and provided assurance in response to members' questions about the impact on staffing requirements, the data for learners progressing to relevant employment, and the development of employability skills.
60. In relation to the plans for a new Retrofit Skills Bootcamp, the COO confirmed that the college had been approved as a skills training supplier for Hampshire County Council (HCC) but that the application process to deliver new Skills Bootcamps had not yet opened.
61. The Principal highlighted the government's intention to invest £600m into training new construction workers, including through Skills Bootcamps, foundation apprenticeships, supporting employers to provide work placements, Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) funding to increase the number of teachers with construction experience, and 10 new 'technical excellence colleges'. The detail of the bidding process for colleges to become specialist technical excellence colleges had not yet been announced but would be considered by the SLT when available.

62. The Vice Principal (Sparsholt) introduced the subject profile for Arboriculture & Forestry, emphasising the strength and depth of employment engagement in all aspects of the curriculum design and delivery, noting that this was being extended into links with overseas employers.
63. A member shared his experience of the Forestry sector, giving examples of types of skills and experience valued, and asking about the connections with employers through the Industry Curriculum Board (ICB) and inclusion of these skills in the curriculum. The Vice Principal confirmed that the college sought to identify and deliver relevant skills as part of the study programme, even if these were not part of the T Level specification, and undertook to follow up with the member outside of the meeting.
64. The Vice Principal (Sparsholt) highlighted the growth areas of the Horticulture curriculum, emphasising the success of the 14-16 and Specialist SEND courses and ability to support learners to progress to qualifications which were appropriate to them, as well as the continuing development of the apprenticeships offer.
65. The committee noted that the Horticulture curriculum area had well established and symbiotic relationships with a number of key employers in the region, providing excellent opportunities for learners. Actions were in place to deliver the new L3 Crop Technician in Viticulture apprenticeship and expand viticulture industry contacts.

## **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT & CAREERS**

### Employer Engagement

66. The committee had received and reviewed a report of the Director of Careers & Stakeholder Engagement providing a deep dive into the college's engagement with employers.
67. The Director of Careers & Stakeholder Engagement gave a presentation highlighting the importance of employer engagement in raising the aspirations, achievements and progression of learners. The presentation summarised the extensive ways in which staff and learners engaged with employers, emphasising how the strength of employer engagement enhanced the student experience, and summarising the priorities going forward. New activities included plans for an agri-tech focused conference for employers and learners in the Autumn.
68. The committee noted that the review of the work of the ICBs had found high impact being achieved by the majority of the ICBs and the operation and effectiveness of the other ICBs continuing to improve. A member suggested that it could be worthwhile to consider whether the membership of the ICBs enabled an understanding of regional and national, as well as local, skills needs in the land-based sectors. The role of study tours in providing further industry experience was also discussed.
69. The committee welcomed the positive evidence of the college's continued commitment to, and effectiveness of, employment engagement from the evaluation of current strategies and endorsed the approach to further improvements.

### Careers Strategy

70. The committee had received the annual review of delivery of the current Career Strategy, including a detailed report confirming alignment with the Gatsby Benchmarks for Good Career Guidance, together with the proposed Careers Strategy for 2025-2029.

71. The committee noted the summary of new careers and progress related activities which had taken place during the year and the activities planned for the remainder of the year, noting that all internal actions to align with the Gatsby Benchmarks had been completed other than two relating which related to new technology being rolled out.
72. The Principal highlighted a potential risk to the funding currently received from the Southern University Network (SUN) for a careers mentor who provided targeted support for learners in the college with identified disadvantages (such as care leavers) to progress to higher education. It was anticipated that this funding would only be in place for another year and management would need to consider actions in response.
73. The committee noted the confirmation that the review of the Careers Strategy and the updates for 2025-29 took into account the updated DfE statutory careers guidance and the updates to the Gatsby Benchmarks (implemented from September 2025). An operational plan was also being developed to support delivery of the new elements.
74. Members commended the strength of leadership and delivery of the Careers Strategy and the Director of Stakeholder Engagement and Careers explained the intention to further develop this through reviewing careers responsibilities across the college to ensure the strategy was fully embedded and enabled, including in relation to SEND support.
75. **Resolved** – that the Board of Governors be recommended to approve the Careers Strategy 2025-29.

#### **HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS & PARTICIPATION**

76. 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).
77. The committee noted the latest data on awarding of financial support through bursaries during 2024-25 and the assurance of continued academic support for students during the exam period. Responding to a member's question, the Dean of HE confirmed that the availability of bursaries was promoted to students and that the HE team took a personalised approach to seeking to understand individual students' circumstances and encourage them to apply.
78. It was confirmed that the new APP 2025-26 to 2028-29 bursary scheme had been launched and applications would be considered in line with the APP targets.
79. The committee commended the commitment to access and participation activities and noted a final report on the 2024-25 APP would follow to the next meeting.

#### **RECRUITMENT & MARKETING**

80. 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 illustrations of communication and social campaigns.
81. The Head of Marketing highlighted the current position and priority actions, noting the focus on conversion activity for both FE and HE. FE 16-18 applicants are currently slightly higher than last year once timing differences are taken into account at Andover. However, 19+ applicant numbers are well down at both campuses. HE applicant numbers are down, although the number of accepted offers is currently higher than this time last year. Other key

developments included the development of a new UCS website for 2025-26 and launching specific campaigns focused on Adult education, Apprenticeships and Foundation.

82. Members explored the recruitment data in discussion with the Head of Marketing, noting that UCS recruitment continued to be challenging, although the data was not out of line with the HE sector and there were some encouraging signs. It was also noted that a new software tool to enable personalised videos for applicants was being explored.

### **HEALTHCHECK REPORT**

83. The committee had received and reviewed the most recent Healthcheck report (2024-25 Issue 07).
84. There were no matters not covered earlier in the agenda under the remit of the committee requiring further review.

### **COMMITTEE PERFORMANCE**

85. The committee had received and reviewed the report of the Head of Corporate Governance providing information for the committee's annual performance self-evaluation and review of its terms of reference.
86. The Committee Chair highlighted the responsiveness of the SLT to external policy and regulatory developments and the commitment to stakeholder engagement and meeting skills needs was evidenced through the work of the committee.
87. The committee was satisfied to report to the Board that it had undertaken its activities in 2023-24 in line with its terms of reference and business plan.
88. **Resolved** – that the Board of Governors be recommended to approve updated membership of the committee from 1 September 2015 to state 'The membership of the Committee shall be five governors, one of whom shall be the Principal and one a Student Governor, and up to three co-opted members. Other Student Governors may be invited to attend'.
89. The committee endorsed the proposal for a further review of its terms of reference and business plan ahead of the October meeting, and in consultation with the new Committee Chair, to take into account the outcome of the Ofsted education inspection framework and consider the governance oversight mechanisms for the new UCS Strategy.
90. The Principal recorded the gratitude of the committee to the retiring Committee Chair, T Floyd, for his leadership of the committee during his tenure as chair, citing his championing of the evaluation of destinations data and the value of developing soft skills as two areas benefiting student experience and outcomes.
91. The meeting ended at 11.10.

***Approved: Curriculum, Skills & Stakeholders Committee Meeting 23 October 2025***