

SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
QUALITY & STANDARDS COMMITTEE

held on 26 June 2025 at 09:15
at Sparsholt Campus

¹PRESENT G Baker (C)²; (St) J Loretto (E) (except minutes x to y); J Milburn (P);
N Moody (E); R Palmer (E); H Perry (S); A Rowley (E) (Chair); C Wilson (C)

In attendance: D Mernagh, Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education
R Price, Director of Learning & Quality
B Stokes, Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover)
M Treagust, Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt)
S Willson, Head of Corporate Governance

MEMBERSHIP AND ATTENDANCE

61. The Committee Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and noted that the HE and FE Student Governors had completed their terms of office.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

62. There were no interests to declare.

MINUTES

63. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 February 2025 (Parts 1 and 2) be confirmed as a correct record.

64. WiFi coverage (minute 9/25): The committee welcomed confirmation that WiFi had now been upgraded in all halls of residence, and this had been well received by the residential students. Additionally, works were planned over the summer to upgrade the WiFi on the Andover campus.

65. The committee noted that the resolutions of the committee had been implemented and that there were no other matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Quality & Performance

66. The committee had received for scrutiny and assurance the report of the Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education (HE) on the current progress in the quality of HE provision and the HE student experience.

67. The committee discussed the reported outcomes of the follow up with the University of Portsmouth on its assessment of performance data, seeking and being assured by additional

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

² Via online video conference

information in relation to student withdrawal data that there were no systemic issues of concern.

68. The committee reviewed the feedback from discussions at the Student Association meeting in April and the management actions arising, in particular in relation to supporting students to plan and independently manage their workload across the year.
69. The committee noted the progress report on Veterinary Nursing provision and accreditation following the inspection of the practical exams (OSCEs) in May. The committee was assured by the commendations in the OSCE quality monitoring report to the Veterinary Nurse Education Committee (VNEC) of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and noted that an action plan responding to further recommendations identified during the inspection had been submitted to the RCVS and all actions completed. The committee recorded its thanks to the team for their work over the year to ensure compliance with RCVS requirements.
70. Confirmation of the VNECs decision on the college's accreditation and risk rating was expected shortly and the committee requested that confirmation of the outcome be circulated to members by email.
71. The committee commended the team for the successful outcome of the five-year periodic review of all the University Centre Sparsholt (UCS) degree courses by the University of Portsmouth and the review of the partnership with the college. The committee endorsed the recommendation of the review in relation to strengthening the partnership following previous alerts by the Dean of HE to the committee about the quality review and communication mechanisms.
72. The committee was satisfied by the report and discussion that UCS was taking reasonable steps to maintain compliance with external expectations and that there was evidence that UCS management were listening to and responding to the student voice to support a continued focus on quality improvement.

University Centre Sparsholt Policies

73. The committee had received and reviewed the report of the Vice Principal & Dean of HE on the introduction of a new Prevention of Harassment & Sexual Misconduct Policy in response to the new Office for Students (OfS) regulatory condition E6 (effective from 1 August 2025) and updates to two existing policies.
74. The committee noted the summary of key elements of the OfS requirements and that the college's approach was set out in the new policy and would include the launch of a new website page for UCS students as the required 'single source of information'.
75. Responding to questions, it was confirmed that the OfS requirements and the new policy related specifically to protection of students (from other students, staff or third parties) and that a separate policy was in place in relation to preventing the sexual harassment of staff.
76. The Dean of HE explained that, after the policy being drafted, the OfS had issued new regulatory guidance on the duties of registered higher education providers under the Higher

Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. All relevant policies would be reviewed to ensure they were in line with the new guidance.

77. The committee noted that the UCS Student Engagement Policy had been updated to reflect the latest version of the QAA's UK Quality Code for Higher Education. The policy reflected current practices in relation to involving students in HE quality processes. The RCVS & VetSkill Qualifications Closure Policy was a requirement of the awarding bodies and only minor updates were proposed.
78. **Resolved** – that the Board of Governors be recommended to approve the:
 - a. New UCS Prevention of Harassment & Sexual Misconduct Policy
 - b. Updated UCS Student Engagement Policy
 - c. Updated RCVS & VetSkill Qualifications Closure Policy

FURTHER EDUCATION

Quality & Performance

79. The committee had received and reviewed the progress report of the FE Vice Principals Curriculum, Director of Learning & Quality, and Apprenticeships Manager on FE performance and the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).
80. The committee reviewed the assessment of key performance indicators for each campus, noting overall improvements in retention data and positive expectations for achievement rates for 2024-25, albeit with exceptions in some curriculum areas. Areas of development and focus include better attendance, especially within English and Maths lessons for all learners.
81. A member prompted a discussion about the underlying reasons for improved retention on the A-level first year linear programme as a potential learning point and the benefits of having stable staffing in place, support by the Quality team, and strong leadership were acknowledged.
82. The committee also recognised actions to support improvements in a curriculum area with a large proportion of Level 1 learners through introducing trauma-informed practices to improve attendance and retention. The Committee Chair endorsed this approach, referencing discussions at her recent Safeguarding Lead Governor visit.
83. Responding to a member's challenge as to whether best practice from areas who were performing strongly was shared with other areas, the Vice Principal (Sparsholt) confirmed this was encouraged and gave the example of the Horticulture team which would be sharing their experience with the Motor Vehicle team in relation to learners with EHCPs.
84. Members also discussed external research about male mental health and it was noted that the college was providing additional support on mental health and wellbeing aimed at male students to support retention.
85. The committee welcomed the evidence of continued commitment to, and investment in, the SEND and Foundation provision and to responding to the continuing growth in High Needs Funded learners, with examples discussed of specific activities put in place to support learners. Responding to a member's point about Ofsted expectations in terms of inclusiveness of the local community, the Principal confirmed that the appointment of a new

High Needs Manager would support the Director of Inclusion and Student Experience in widening her remit for inclusivity.

86. The committee noted the progress report on apprenticeship retention, achievement and attendance and that achievement was forecast to increase as further learners completed their end point assessments. It was also noted that, following the recent government policy decision to exempt adult apprentices from completing Maths and English as part of their apprenticeship, some sectors had embraced this change, while others recognise the value of apprentices attaining these qualifications, viewing them as essential for furthering career progression within the industry.
87. The committee noted the report on student conduct data, including exclusions and conduct reviews over the year, and the assessment of changes from the previous year. Members recognised the importance of trying to retain learners in education wherever possible and the Staff Governor gave an example of the support provided to learners.
88. The Director of Learning & Quality drew the committee's attention to additional key areas of progress in delivering the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and actions which would be taken forward to the next year.
89. The committee reviewed feedback from the spring/summer FE Pulse learner survey results and sought further information and assurance about the question relating to steps next year and how to achieve these goals. The Director of Learning & Quality explained that management had identified actions in relation to ensuring clearer explanations across all areas of the requirements to progress to the next the level and was reviewing the delivery of information and guidance at the Futures and Choices events. The Staff Governor also gave the example of an action in Professions at Andover to support staff and students by developing a matrix to understand and track progress visually.
90. The committee also reviewed the Landex peer review of the Agriculture curriculum area which confirmed that the college had maintained the standards to continue to be eligible for full membership of Landex. In relation to positive future developments for Agriculture, it was confirmed that a new Farm Manager had been appointed who also had experience as an instructor at the college and that the new Head of English & Maths was developing a programme contextualised for Agriculture learners, including some teaching using the Farm's practical facilities.
91. Overall, the committee was satisfied to report to the Board that there continued to be clear evidence of positive progress made by the college towards fulfilling the targets identified within the 2024/25 QIP and of the commitment to inclusive curriculum delivery.

Maths and English

92. The committee had received for review and assurance the report of the Assistant Principal English, Maths & Adult Education and FE Vice Principals on progress with the performance action plan for English and Maths.
93. The committee reviewed the latest analysis for both GCSEs and Functional Skills, noting positive levels of attendance reported at the GCSE summer exams and the revision support which had been put in place for learners and projected improvements for Functional Skills from the previous year. Overall attendance across the year had declined slightly and

remained a key component of the quality improvement plan informed by analysis of the underlying factors linked to different main programme curriculum areas.

94. The committee also noted the updated teaching and learning observation (TALO) outcomes and that analysis of the learner survey feedback was also informing actions for next year.
95. Asked by the Committee Chair about the availability of early intervention with English and Maths students at secondary school level before learners joined the college, the Vice Principal (Andover) explained that the college had run GCSE revision sessions for some local feeder schools and that both campuses worked with schools and applicants to gain information about their learning journeys and access their GCSE scripts from the exam boards.
96. The committee was assured by evidence in the report and discussion that significant improvements had been achieved from the additional investment and management actions taken during the year. However, given the importance of English and Maths to learners' progression and achievement, the committee agreed that it should continue enhanced scrutiny with termly reports in 2025/26 to monitor and support the consolidation of this progress and continuing improvements.

Curriculum Delivery, Teaching & Learning, and Quality Improvement Strategy

97. The committee had received the report of the Director of Learning & Quality on the proposed Curriculum Delivery, Teaching & Learning, and Quality Improvement Strategy 2025-28.
98. The Director of Learning & Quality explained the reasons for introducing a three year strategy, in place of the previous annual strategies, noting that the strategy would still be reported to the committee annually but now set out a longer-term vision with new and enhanced learning and quality processes to be implemented over the three-year period.
99. The committee welcomed the evidence of the ambition to improve and the mechanisms set out in the strategy, with members recognising how the strategy had continued to develop over a number of years and the drive to support staff to achieve consistently high levels of teaching across the FE curriculum. Challenged by a member as to the role for external quality scrutiny under the new 'Six Pillars of Quality', the Director of Learning & Strategy assured the committee of the continuing commitment to external quality reviews and explained that these would inform the delivery of the Six Pillars.
100. At a member's request, the Director of Learning & Quality undertook to feed back the impact of the buddying system for curriculum self-assessment meetings. Members also discussed the availability and value of formal qualifications for staff linked to teaching skills/standards.
101. The committee supported the identification of curriculum areas for enhanced Quality scrutiny for 2025/26 through internal review processes, and noted that, where external assessment results and year-end outcomes indicated the scope of enhanced quality scrutiny needs to widen, this would be factored into the 2025/26 Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) to be presented to the committee and the Board in the Autumn term. Strengthening the behaviours and attitudes of learners was also a priority, including in relation to attendance and completion of homework.
102. It was noted in discussion that minor revisions may be required to the strategy document once the new Ofsted education inspection framework was finalised, for example if the terminology in the proposed grading scale changed from 'exemplary'.

103. The committee commended the introduction of the new ‘The Way We Teach and Learn’ handbook for staff and a member highlighted the advantages which could be realised in the future by developing an interactive AI version which could provide real time prompts and checks as teaching staff developed their lesson plans and teaching materials.
104. **Resolved** – that the Board of Governors be recommended to approve the Curriculum Delivery, Teaching & Learning, and Quality Improvement Strategy 2025-28.

FE Policies

105. The committee had received the report of FE Vice Principals on proposed updates to policies to address emerging operational considerations in relation to learner attendance, work placements and use of AI.
106. Members questioned the controls in place to prevent the improper use of AI for assessments, and it was noted that a combination of AI content detection systems in conjunction with the knowledge of teaching staff about their individual learners’ work were used to check written assessments. The college was also working with exam boards to understand and mitigate against the improper use of AI in digital non-written work.
107. In relation to the changes to the conduct policy, it was recognised that some behaviours linked to complex learning difficulties or trauma-based experiences and were more appropriately managed through safeguarding and wellbeing routes. It was also noted that, as the college further embedded the trauma-informed approach, it might be necessary to further review learner policies to align with this. The committee was supportive of this direction of travel.
108. The committee noted that the current Sexual Misconduct Policy for learners was being repositioned as an FE policy, alongside the introduction of the new UCS Prevention of Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy which was specifically for HE students.
109. **Resolved** – that the Board of Governors be recommended to approve the
- a. Updated FE Promoting Effective Learner Performance Policy
 - b. Updated FE Managing Learner Conduct Policy
 - c. Change of title of the FE Sexual Misconduct Policy (Learners) and removal of references to HE students.

DIGI-ED AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

110. The Director of Learning & Quality presented a progress update on delivery of the DigiEd strategy, including the roll out of AI tools for teaching and learning.
111. The committee welcomed the evidence of the enrichment of the teaching and learning environment from the increased use of digital and AI platforms and new interactive teaching spaces. This included evolving the Study+ programme to increase students’ technical proficiency and critical thinking. It was noted that new AI platforms were trialled to test their applicability before being rolled out further.
112. The committee discussed examples of how the immersive spaces were used and the CPD support for staff and tutorial programme to increase their digital skills, including the importance of writing effective prompts to generate optimum outcomes from use of AI.

COMPLAINTS & COMPLIMENTS

113. The committee received and reviewed a report from the Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) and Vice Principal & Dean of HE on Complaints, Comments and Compliments covering the College Group.
114. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) highlighted the analysis of the causes of FE complaints, providing additional information for the assurance of the committee that, where necessary, appropriate remedial actions had been taken. The committee was pleased to note that the decisive actions taken by management to respond to an increase of complaints from parents of Animal Management students earlier in the year (over the quality of cover teachers and university admissions policies) and that timely communication with learners and parents (for example of staffing changes) would be reinforced in 2025/26.
115. The committee also noted the reduction in FE complaints relating to behavioural incidences compared to the previous year as a result of greater consistency of behaviour management processes and use of the 'Ready, Respectful, Safe' campaign.
116. The Dean of HE confirmed that the small number of complaints in HE had reduced further this year through encouragement of informal and timely resolution of any concerns and addressing issues raised at Student Association meetings. There were no complaints to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.
117. The committee discussed the trend over recent years reported by the Dean of HE of complaints being received from parents rather than directly from HE students and were assured by the Dean of HE that the complaint handling complied with GDPR requirements (with students giving permission for their parents' involvement).
118. The committee was content to advise the Board of management's continued commitment to effectively monitor, investigate, and address complaints.
119. Both FE and HE reported that more compliments continue to be received through various in-person verbal and informal routes than are currently captured in the college's systems. Further efforts were underway to increase the number of compliments recorded in 2025-26 to support celebration with staff of 'good news'.

HEALTHCHECK REPORT

120. The committee had received and reviewed the latest Healthcheck (KPIs) report (2024/25-Issue 05), noting that key quality performance data (including student surveys) had been covered earlier in the meeting.
121. The Principal drew the committee's attention to the staff turnover data, noting that vacancies for academic staff had decreased to below 10% in April and May, continuing a downward trend since 2023. This was positive in terms of quality of teaching and the student experience and in relation to staff workload. It was noted that the annual staff survey had been issued in June and that analysis of the outcomes would follow to the Resources Committee in November, giving qualitative information about the staff experience to inform management actions.

COMMITTEE PERFORMANCE REVIEW

122. 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.
123. The committee considered a range of questions about its operation, endorsing the quality of the management reports and agreeing, with the SLT members who were present, that there was an appropriate level of constructive challenge given by committee members and openness in the responses from management. It was noted that keeping oral introductions to the reports concise, encouraged more questioning and discussion by the committee.
124. The committee was satisfied that the overall skills mix and balance of experience of the members supported the committee to deliver its remit. It was noted that the FE and HE Student Governors completed their enrolment at the college and terms of office in June and that the vacancies would be promoted to the student community at the start of the Autumn term. The HCG reported that the two student governors had completed exit surveys which provided positive feedback about their experiences and would be helpful in planning the recruitment and support for new student governors.
125. The committee endorsed the chairing of the committee and supported the use of the 3 A's model (Alert – Assure – Action) of reporting by the Committee Chair to the Board.
126. In terms of training needs, a member raised the developing uses of AI from a practical application perspective as an area to consider for further training (following the AI presentation at the meeting and a Governors' Seminar on AI in January 2024). The HCG undertook to capture this in the Board's 2025-26 training plan and explore further with the member outside of the meeting.
127. The committee was satisfied to report to the Board that it had undertaken its activities in 2024-25 in line with its terms of reference and business plan.
128. The committee considered the review of the terms of reference, noting it was proposed that the committee monitor the sections of the new UCS Strategic Plan and Access & Participation Plan which aligned closely with the committee's remit. This would involve the development of a new termly report and the new approach would be kept under review to ensure it was deliverable and effective.
129. **Resolved** – that the Board of Governors be recommended to approve the revised terms of reference of the Quality & Standards Committee.
130. The meeting concluded at 12:05.

Approved: Quality & Standards Committee Meeting 27 November 2025