

SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CURRICULUM, SKILLS & STAKEHOLDERS COMMITTEE (CSS)
held on 23 October 2025 at 09.30
Sparsholt Campus

PRESENT¹ T Floyd (C); N Justin (St); D Rees (C); N Shorter (E) (Chair); S Thompson (C)

In attendance: L Asbridge, Director of Careers & Stakeholder Engagement (minutes 116 to 127)
S Grant, Chief Operating Officer (COO)
S Hermiston, Director of Information & Funding (to minute 107)
D Mernagh, Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education
J Middleton, Head of Marketing (to minute 113)
A Robertson, Governance Co-ordinator
B Stokes, Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover College)
M Treagust, Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt College)
S Willson, Head of Corporate Governance

WELCOME & APOLOGIES

92. The Chair welcomed N Justin to his first meeting as FE Student Governor (Sparsholt) and welcomed back T Floyd as a co-opted committee member.
93. Apologies were received from S Duckering, J Milburn and F Obiero.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

94. There were no interests to be declared.

MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

95. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2025 be confirmed as a correct record.
96. Qualification reforms (min 55/25): The COO reported headlines from the Government’s Post 16 Education and Skills White Paper published on 20 October 2025, outlining they key themes across FE and HE and noting confirmation of the Government’s continued commitment to T Levels and the intention to introduce V Levels as the vocational Level 3 pathway, alongside A Levels and T Levels.
97. Curriculum plan (min 60/25): The COO confirmed that the college had been approved as a supplier on Hampshire County Council’s Open Framework for Skills Development for Hampshire but that there was not relevant Skills Bootcamp contract currently available.
98. There were no other matter arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

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

COMMITTEE GOVERNANCE

99. The committee had received the report of the Head of Corporate Governance proposing revised terms of reference and the annual business plan for the committee, following consultation with the Committee Chair and members of the SLT.
100. It was noted that the core remit of the committee remained the same - the proposed updates were to support the committee to deliver this remit effectively, including advising the Board on key developments and risks and scrutinising the impact of activities. The committee's remit and business plan had been extended to cover oversight of aspects of the new University Centre Sparsholt (UCS) strategic plan and to separate core responsibilities for FE and HE.
101. Responding to questions, the Vice Principals confirmed that the implications of the Government's white paper would be assessed as part of the curriculum plan proposals to the committee in Term 2.
102. **Resolved** – that the Board be recommended to approve committee's revised terms of reference.
103. **Resolved** – that the committee's annual business plan be approved.

COLLEGE GROUP

Curriculum Enrolments

104. The committee had received the annual report of the Director of Information & Funding on recruitment and enrolment trends across FE, Apprenticeships and HE in relation to the curriculum offer.
105. The committee noted the assurance of the overall positive recruitment to FE full-time qualifications, an increase in both Apprenticeships new starts and carry-ins, and an increase in first year HE enrolments. Members sought additional context about the correlation between the enrolment data and the college's income budget for 2025-26.
106. The committee explored the detailed recruitment trends and analysis, focusing on areas where there had been changes year on year to understanding the underlying reasons and implications, and challenging management as to whether there were lessons from strongly performing areas which could be extended. The discussion focused on:
 - Variations between enrolments from different feeder schools to the Andover campus, the changes in circumstances in relation to individual schools, and factors which the college was able to influence (such as the extension of the student transport offer)
 - The relationship between application rates and conversion rates for FE and HE, the impact of the new UCS Science & Research Centre on HE enrolments, and the value of interactive engagement by the curriculum teams with prospective applicants at open days
 - Reshaping and promotion of the agriculture degree offer, responding to student feedback and seeking to differentiate the offer at UCS with relevant specialisms and research opportunities and to demonstrate the value of progression to HE

- The underlying factors in relation to progression data within Animal Management and ways of supporting Level 2 learners to engage and commit to their main programme and to English and Maths resits.

107. The committee thanked the Director of Information & Funding for his report and noted that the analysis would inform both curriculum planning and marketing activities during the year.

Marketing Strategy

108. The committee had received the report of the Head of Marketing on outcomes from the 2024-25 marketing campaigns and the key strategic priorities for 2025-26. In addition to HE and FE, the plan had been extended to include employer engagement and full cost courses.
109. The committee commended the examples of marketing for outreach events which had been provided in the meeting room to enable members to see the latest brand identities, printed information and digital displays in use by the team.
110. The Head of Marketing reported fast-evolving changes in relation to the use of online searches, with more reliance on AI generated content making previous online marketing methods less effective because of the way in which LLM (large language models) identified and filtered information. The committee recognised this as a strategic risk and questioned the work being done to understand and respond to the impact. The Head of Marketing gave examples of the ways in which marketing and communication activity would need to develop, illustrating the different challenges for each campus and between FE and HE.
111. A member reported the launch of an AI Growth Alliance co-ordinated by Hampshire County Council and suggested the potential opportunity for AI related partnership projects.
112. The committee also probed the extent to which the college targeted applications from the wider UK, noting the planned geographic range of university events being targeted during the coming year, and the intention to build an alumni community over time.
113. The committee endorsed the marketing operational plan 2025-26 as supporting the delivery of the college's strategic plan.

Healthcheck Report

114. The committee had received and reviewed the most recent Healthcheck report (2025/26-02).
115. Additional information and assurance were provided by the COO and Vice Principal (Andover) in response to questions from committee members about attendance data for English and Maths, and about the health and safety accident data.

FURTHER EDUCATION

Stakeholder Relationships

116. The committee had received and reviewed the report of the Principal and COO on key developments to strategic alliances and stakeholder relationships, including in relation to the creation of a Mayoral Combined County Authority for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.
117. The committee noted the award of a grant from Winchester City Council (WCC) for renewable energy equipment on one of the college's farm buildings and the submission of an application by WCC, in partnership with the college, to the UK Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund for digital tools to support upskilling both agricultural professionals while driving innovation, sustainability, and economic resilience.

118. The committee welcomed the evidence of continued commitment to maintaining and further developing partnerships with civic, community, and education stakeholders.

Curriculum Planning

119. The committee had received and discussed the report of the Vice Principals Curriculum which reviewed the alignment of the college's curriculum with the eight growth sectors defined in the Government's UK Modern Industrial Strategy and identified potential strategic opportunities and challenges to inform curriculum planning.
120. Members commended the analysis undertaken by the Vice Principals and noted the initial proposals for development of the curriculum. However, members also sought assurance about key existing curriculum areas which did not directly relate to one of the eight sectors but where there remained a demand for skills and about how AI and digital skills were built into the curriculum, recognising that these were increasingly considered key employability skills in all sectors.

Employer Engagement

121. The committee had received and reviewed the progress report on employer engagement in the design and delivery of the FE Curriculum, including the use of the Professional Learners Survey outcomes and feedback from employers through Industry Curriculum Boards (ICBs) to inform actions to support development of skills for the workplace.
122. The committee welcomed the attendance going forward of the Director of Learning & Quality (or members of his team) at ICBs and subsequent lessons to monitor the implementation of follow up actions during learning sessions, and that the Director of Learning & Quality would attend the committee in Term 3 to report on his findings.
123. Members sought further information about the underlying factors behind the greater effectiveness of some ICBs and assurance about the actions being taken to further develop others, discussing the level of engagement with employers and how to demonstrate a benefit to employers, the range of membership, and the role of the Curriculum Leaders.

Careers Education & Work-Related Learning

124. The committee had received and reviewed a progress report from the Director of Careers & Stakeholder Engagement on delivery of careers education and work-related learning, including details of the careers programme for 2025-26.
125. The committee discussed some of the approaches being taken, including the value of parental/guardian involvement, where possible, in helping students with considering potential future destinations and early engagement with new students at application stage about the choice of course and end goals.
126. Members questioned and were assured by the confirmation that staff resourcing challenges discussed by the committee in the past had been resolved, noting the strength of the team in place.
127. The committee welcomed the positive evidence of the college's continued commitment to the provision of strong careers guidance and the delivery of industry work placements and other work-related learning for students.

HIGHER EDUCATION

University Centre Sparsholt Strategic Plan

128. The committee had received the progress report from the Vice Principal & Dean of HE on implementation of the UCS Strategic Plan 2025-2030, focusing on the strategic priorities which related to the remit of the committee (strategic partnerships, course portfolio, and research and innovation).
129. The Dean of HE drew the committee's attention to a number of examples of activities underway or planned to support delivery of the strategic goals, assuring the committee that consideration was being given to alignment with developments set out in the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper.
130. The committee noted that UCS had set up a research and innovation committee to identify strategic themes and to co-ordinate and scrutinise research activities.
131. The committee was satisfied to note positive progress at this early point in delivery of the plan.

Graduate Outcomes

132. The committee had received the report of the Vice Principal & Dean of HE on the outcomes of the Graduate Survey for the 2022/23 graduate cohort conducted by HESA and reviewed the three-year trend data and actions arising from the analysis.
133. The committee noted that the survey response rate was consistent with the previous year and above the national response rate, with 93% of graduates in employment or study (above the national average and OfS threshold). Members probed the outcomes for other graduates given that 0% were shown as unemployed and the Dean of HE explained the 7% related to reasons such as refusal to disclose or career gaps.
134. There had also been an increase in the proportion of respondents recognised under the classification of 'highly skilled' employment but the OfS threshold for this measure remained a challenge for land-based providers because of the mismatch between the way the classification was assessed and the graduate entry/early employment roles in land-based industry.
135. The committee also discussed survey questions being used by UCS to judge the success of a course in preparing graduates for work, noting a positive trend, and questioned whether national benchmark data was available for these measures.

University Centre Sparsholt Access & Participation Plan

136. The committee had received and reviewed the report of the Vice Principal & Dean HE on the outcome of the Access and Participation Plan (APP) 2024-25 and progress delivering the new 2025-26 to 2028-29 APP.
137. At the conclusion of the previous APP, the committee noted the significant scale of outreach activity in the previous year to raise awareness of the opportunity of higher education and the UCS offer and the delivery of financial support through bursaries. The continuation and outcome data analysis illustrated the continuing need to target support through the new APP for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

138. The committee noted the progress reported at this early stage of implementing the new APP and that there were no significant risks identified to delivering interventions.
139. The meeting ended at 12.30.

Approved: Curriculum, Skills & Stakeholders Committee meeting 26 February 2026