

SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CURRICULUM, SKILLS & STAKEHOLDERS COMMITTEE (CSS)
held on 26 February 2026 at 09.30
Sparsholt Campus

PRESENT¹ M Chinn (E); S Duckering (E); T Floyd (C); J Milburn (P); D Rees (C); N Shorter (E) (Chair); S Thompson (C)

In attendance: S Grant, Chief Operating Officer (COO)
S Hermiston, Director of Information & Funding (minute 17 to 23)
D Mernagh, Vice Principal & Dean of Higher Education
J Middleton, Head of Marketing (17 to 26)
B Stokes, Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover)
M Treagust, Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt)
S Willson, Head of Corporate Governance

WELCOME & APOLOGIES

1. The Chair welcomed M Chinn to his first meeting of the committee.
2. Apologies were received from N Justin and F Obiero.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

3. There were no interests to be declared.

MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

4. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2025 be confirmed as a correct record.
5. Curriculum plan (min 97/25): The COO reported that the college had proceeded with the roll out of Skills Bootcamps in a number of land-based subjects, with early positive feedback.
6. Curriculum enrolments (min 106/25): The Vice Principal Andover confirmed actions underway in relation to discussions at the previous meeting about levels of learners from the Salisbury area and achievement of GCSE English and Maths to support progression of learners from Level 2 to Level 3.
7. Employer engagement (122/25): The Principal confirmed that the Director of Learning & Quality would attend the committee in Term 3 to report on the impact of Industry Curriculum Boards (ICBs) on delivery of the curriculum.
8. There were no other matter arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

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

COLLEGE GROUP STRATEGY

Stakeholder Relationships

9. The committee received and reviewed the report of the Principal and COO on key developments to strategic alliances and stakeholder relationships.
10. The Principal assured the committee that the SLT continued to prioritise activities aligned with the college's strategic priorities and to manage stakeholder relationships effectively. It was noted that these updates were in addition to wider operational stakeholder engagement (including employers).
11. In discussion, the committee sought further information and noted in particular:
 - The timescales and implications of local government reorganisation and the establishment of the Mayoral Combined County Authority for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, acknowledging the actions taken by the college to build constructive relationships with key stakeholders and mitigate associated risks.
 - Confirmation of a £90k grant from the Rural England Prosperity Fund (via Winchester City Council) to invest in agri-tech together with assurance that the deadline for expenditure would be met.
 - Submission of a match-funded grant application to Hampshire County Council for LEP (Local Enterprise Partnership) legacy reserves to support additional multi-trade green technology facilities at Andover College, with the outcome expected shortly;
 - Development of a new Local Skills Improvement Plan for Hampshire by the Hampshire Chambers of Commerce, incorporating research led by University Centre Sparsholt on agri-tech and sustainable land management;
 - Collaboration with Farnborough College of Technology and other partners on a bid to the DfE for a Defence Technical Excellence College (DTEC) in Hampshire, noting there was expected to be strong competition from other regions;
 - An opportunity to submit a capital grant bid to the Office for Students (in partnership with the MoD and DfE) to support defence-related skills provision at Levels 4-6;
 - Submission of a funding application to Landex to develop umbrella AI infrastructure with a JISC-approved supplier, with the outcome awaited.
12. Overall, the committee welcomed the continued commitment to developing strategic partnerships with civic, community, and education stakeholders.

Accountability Agreement

13. The committee received and reviewed the Principal's report on progress against the 2025-26 Annual Accountability Statement objectives and on developments for 2026-27.
14. The committee noted the positive progress made, with 79% of actions well underway or complete. In response to questions, the Vice Principal Andover assured members of the appropriateness of the Level 3 Carpentry offer (which replaced the withdrawn Construction T Level) and confirmed the delivery of the new Mechanical and Electrical Engineering T Levels had been designed to provide a high-quality experience for the inaugural cohorts despite small numbers.

15. The committee was content to confirm to the Board that satisfactory progress was being made towards delivering the Accountability Statement objectives in line with national and regional skills needs.
16. The committee also noted the update on the development of a new Local Skills Improvement Plan and subsequent requirement to undertake a Local Needs Duty review of how well the college meets local skills priorities.

Curriculum Contribution Analysis

17. The committee received and reviewed the report of the Director of Information & Funding on the FE and HE curriculum contribution model findings to support strategic oversight of curriculum planning.
18. The Director outlined the impact of changes in the 2025/26 income and expenditure budget on contribution outcomes, including shifts in the proportion of FE and HE income and variations in cost structures.
19. Discussion focused on variations in contribution rate across curriculum areas, the underlying causes, and the levers available to management to address lower-contribution areas without adversely affecting other provision or the college's overall financial sustainability.
20. In relation to the Andover campus, the Vice Principal Andover referred to the rationalisation of the A level offer following the 2023 strategic review and confirmed that efforts were ongoing to raise awareness of the quality and availability of the offer. This was alongside wider opportunities, such as further developing STEM facilities and external partnerships such as university articulation routes.
21. It was noted that a further curriculum review would be required once the timetable and details of the government's qualification reforms (including V Levels) were confirmed.
22. In response to members' challenges about how the data was used, it was confirmed that contribution data was mapped against quality indicators (retention and achievement) and that this analysis informed proposed changes to the three year curriculum plan.
23. The committee was satisfied that appropriate mechanisms continued to be in place to assess the financial contribution of curriculum areas as part of an integrated curriculum-planning approach and welcomed the actions outlined in discussion.

Marketing Strategy

24. The committee received and reviewed the Head of Marketing's progress on the 2025-26 marketing strategic priorities.
25. In discussion, the committee questioned and explored further:
 - The reasons for year-on-year increase (as at end January) in FE applicants to Sparsholt, recognising that this was reflected in the wider land-based college sector but also underpinned by the effectiveness of marketing and communications activity.
 - The differing application trends at Andover, with continued growth in vocational courses applications contrasted with a current year on year decrease in A Level applications. The committee discussed the underlying factors and challenges and noted the range of actions underway to address the gap.

- The lower level of applicants submitted by the UCAS January equal consideration deadline to University Centre Sparsholt (UCS) and the resulting challenge of meeting the 2026-27 enrolment targets in the context of wider national decline in HE applications outside the Russell Group. The committee reviewed examples of current and planned activity to support recruitment, alongside the emerging pattern of late applicants at points up to the final September deadline for 2026 entry. Members recognised the challenging HE environment but acknowledged the strength of the UCS specialist offer and industry links, as well as developments to diversify and grow the UCS offer. The committee also noted actions to support the retention of current UCS students, including those progressing from FE.
 - The positive performance indicators for commercial and part-time courses, including positive early outcomes from the initial four Skills Bootcamps subject areas.
26. The committee endorsed the evidence that the marketing strategic priorities and activities continued to be aligned with the college's strategic plan and noted that management also continued to develop targeted interventions in response to performance indicators.

Curriculum Plan

27. The committee received and reviewed a summary of planned changes to the Three Year Curriculum Plan across 14-16, 16-18, Apprenticeships, higher education, and adult provision.
28. The committee was assured by the Vice Principals that the plan presented had been informed by the analysis of destinations data, curriculum contribution analysis, engagement with employers, skills priorities, progression and inclusion considerations, sustainability strategy, and key government policy developments. This included the UK Modern Industrial Strategy and Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper and responding to insights from governors about sector needs at the January Seminar. It was also noted that the curriculum plan was likely to require further review once the details of the government's qualifications reforms were confirmed.
29. The committee's discussion with management explored:
- The potential risks and opportunities arising from the Level 3 and Level 2 qualification reforms, particularly the need to offer content remains aligned with industry requirements and provides clear routes to progression and employment.
 - The Government's policy response to rising NEET (young people not in education, employment or training) levels and opportunities to build on existing college actions and to work with schools and other external partners to support both young and adult NEETs. The committee noted alignment with the college's inclusion strategy and the extension of the GROWTH programme, recognising the significant challenges faced by some young people.
 - The alignment of new FE and HE curriculum developments with national skills priorities and capital and equipment funding opportunities, including computing and engineering skills relevant to the defence sector and the expansion of the electrical offer.
 - The college's participation in a City & Guilds working group to address uncertainty around land-based Level 3 qualifications where no T Level alternative exists.

- The timescale for launching new HE courses, taking into account staff capacity and the need to develop high-quality provision. It was recognised that this could affect UCS strategic plan KPIs in the short-term.
 - The development of the viticulture curriculum and establishment of an Industry Curriculum Board to ensure the vineyard investment was accompanied by high-quality provision that meets sector needs.
 - The mechanisms in place to monitor and report the delivery of the curriculum plan, including analysis of enrolment data at the start of the year, oversight of learner experience through retention and achievement data, employer feedback (including via Industry Curriculum Boards and work placements), and quality reviews of curriculum areas.
30. **Resolved** –the developments to the Three Year Curriculum Plan were endorsed as fit for purpose to deliver the college’s strategic ambitions, recognising this was a live, working plan and further updates were expected in relation the Government’s qualification reforms and the new Local Skills Improvement Plan.

HIGHER EDUCATION

University Centre Sparsholt Access & Participation Plan

31. The committee received and reviewed the Vice Principal & Dean of HE’s progress report on delivery of the UCS 2025-26 to 2028-29 APP priorities within the committee’s remit (land-based higher education and progression into employment).
32. The committee noted that delivery of the planned interventions continued, although some planned interventions had been paused in order to enable UCS to focus resources on maintaining high-quality teaching and the student experience during a period of some short-term staffing absences/vacancies. The committee noted the assurance that this did not present a significant risk to delivering the APP overall.
33. The committee noted that additional resource was planned to support UCS in meeting the ongoing requirement to evaluate and monitor the impact of interventions, in order to evidence effectiveness and report accordingly.

University Centre Sparsholt Strategic Plan

34. The committee received and reviewed the Vice Principal & Dean of HE’s progress report on implementation of the UCS Strategic Plan 2025-2030, focusing on priorities which related to the committee’s remit (strategic partnerships, course portfolio, and research and innovation).
35. The committee discussed the progress reported, noting that a number of actions were at an early stage. Management confirmed that actions for the remainder of the year were being reviewed and prioritised to maintain delivery against the overall five-year plan.
36. In relation to equipping students for meaningful and sustainable employment, members shared some examples from their industry experience of the recruitment processes and the skills that support successful applications and interviews.
37. In response to the Committee Chair’s challenge as to whether the RAG categorisation of the action plan provided a sufficiently clear indication of progress, it was agreed to review for the next meeting and that a key to the RAG ratings would be provided.

FURTHER EDUCATION

FE Destinations

38. The committee received and reviewed the Vice Principals Curriculum's report on the review of FE student destinations (July 2025), together with case studies of individual students.
39. The committee commended the high proportion of 'known' destinations (98.4%) and that the vast majority of those were positive (99.4%), demonstrating the effectiveness of the curriculum in supporting learners to progress to education and employment. In relation to the 14 learner destinations not categorised as 'positive', it was noted that the analysis had not identified any underlying concerns.
40. The committee welcomed the continued development of analysis to map curriculum areas to the proportion of industry specific employment, apprenticeship or HE and the intention to map the data to national skills priorities.
41. The committee was assured destinations data was used to inform management actions in relation to curriculum planning and delivery and that the curriculum was supporting learners to progress to education, employment or training.

Careers Education & Work-Related Learning

42. The committee received and reviewed the Director of Careers & Stakeholder Engagement's progress report on delivery of careers education and work-related learning.
43. In the absence of the Director, the COO highlighted key developments and responded to points raised in discussions, including in relation to:
 - The positive uptake so far of new AI-supported personal progression plans, alongside in-person activities;
 - The successful introduction of Skills Bootcamps in Horticulture, Butchery, Tree Surgery and Green Keeping, funded through Hampshire County Council, and the use of early delivery to inform further Bootcamps, subject to confirmation of funding;
 - Capacity constraints in adult education arising from funding limitations, and the actions being taken in response;
 - Continued strong delivery of T-Level industry placements and the potential impact on the proportion of learners progressing directly to employment rather than into HE;
 - Regional skills needs in defence, security, cyber, engineering and AI, noting that the college had joined the Hampshire AI Growth Alliance.
44. The committee noted the evidence of the college's ongoing commitment to the provision of careers guidance, industry work placements and other work-related learning.

HEALTHCHECK REPORT

45. The committee received and reviewed the most recent Healthcheck report (2025/26 Issue 05).
46. The Principal drew the committee's attention to the positive progress with English and Maths achievement, recognising the important to learners ability to progress to the next level of education.
47. The meeting ended at 12.40.

Approved: Curriculum, Skills & Stakeholders Committee Meeting 14 May 2026