

**Northern  
College**



## **Local Needs Duty & Accountability Agreement 2024-2025**

**Inspiring positive change through adult education**



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## Our Ambition for the Future

This 2023-26 strategy builds on a long and celebrated history of changing lives through education. It clearly states our ambition to ensure Northern College meets the needs of its students, communities and the economy in the coming years.

Our future is one of collaboration with our partners, where we reach out to others to maximise the impact of our work, ensuring our vision and values guide us.

A successful future is one where Northern College is thriving, and our students benefit from excellent learning experiences proving it is never too late to discover a joy for learning. It is one where we develop the whole person, giving equal value to the development of subject specific skills alongside the development of confidence and wellbeing. It is a future where residential education remains core to changing people's lives through learning. It is through this approach that Northern College will continue to enable people to fulfill their potential.

We are excited for this next phase in our journey and look forward to working with you to achieve our ambition.

**Mark Sanders (Chair of Governors)**  
**Emma Beal (Principal & CEO)**



## Our Values

**Always be ambitious** - we have high aspirations and expectations; we balance support and challenge, and we seek to improve in everything we do.

**Have people at our heart** - we share, innovate and collaborate, we value every individual, we are inclusive, and we celebrate diversity.

**Make things happen** - we are clear and straightforward; we take personal responsibility, and we listen so we can understand and take action.

## Our strategy's key themes:

**Be sustainable** - we will future proof the College by flexing our offer, ensuring maximum impact is gained from our unique assets.

**Elevate our profile** - we will be recognised nationally and regionally as a leader in adult education.

**High quality** - we will realise a clear and ambitious vision for high-quality, inclusive education and training building on our successful Ofsted inspection in 2023.





## Context and Place

Northern College for Residential Adult Education is based at Wentworth Castle, Stainborough, Barnsley. Founded in 1978, the College is a regional provider, offering a range of provision for adults on a residential and non-residential basis across South and West Yorkshire. Northern College is a relatively small College circa 3,000 enrolments per year and this creates a strong community feel. The College also holds a non-devolved AEB funding allocation. The College prepares adults to re-enter education, gain employment or to make career changes through an immersive residential learning and support experience. The College is set in acres of National Trust gardens and parkland that students can access as part of their studies at Northern College.

Northern College is the only adult residential College in the region and as such has a unique role in contributing to meeting local skills needs. Through residential education Northern College can offer a transformative learning experience, we accelerate personal growth, facilitate networking, and provide opportunities for specialised and immersive learning.

In March 2023, the College was inspected by Ofsted and judged Good across all areas and as making a reasonable contribution to the skills agenda.

The College offers a range of courses for adults from entry to higher level programmes (in partnership with the University of Huddersfield) enabling adults to succeed in line with their goals and ambitions. The College specifically supports skills growth in the key sectors of Health and Social Care, Business and Management and Education.

Enabling inclusive growth is at the heart of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) and South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) Adult Education Budget (AEB) commissioning strategies, as well as the individual Local Authority skills strategies, and is a central pillar of the Northern College curriculum. Providing adults with an opportunity to learn and raising the aspirations of some of the nation's most disadvantaged communities is vital if the UK is to bridge the current skills and productivity gap which evidence shows is holding back the economy. The College is focused on reaching these adults. According to NOMIS data (May 2022), Yorkshire and Humber continue to lag behind national averages for working age population qualified to level 2, level 3, and level 4 and above with the gap widening at each level point, to a 5% point difference at Level 4 and above, (only 31% of the working age population are qualified to this level). This is compounded by higher rates of unemployment and long-term sickness. Labour market inactivity rates are a key regional issue with 222,000 adults categorised as long-term sick within the region. Yet of these people, 148,100 are recorded as wanting to work, creating a large pool of people who require support and skills to move into work.

[View Our Performance 2022-23 on our website here.](#)

# South Yorkshire Key Local Context Consideration (as stated in the LSIP and South Yorkshire Skills Strategy)

The South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority Skills Strategy states three clear missions:

1. Move those far from the labour market into work or ready for work;
2. Raise attainment of core knowledge and skills; and,
3. Increase the supply of a high-skilled workforce.

## Key Facts

- 42,300 people aged 16-64 are economically inactive and would like a job.
- Long-term sickness accounts for nearly a third of economic inactivity in South Yorkshire compared to a quarter nationally.
- In 2021, 16% of South Yorkshire's working age population had no qualifications, compared to 12% nationally.
- If 1% of the population in South Yorkshire with no qualifications earned wages equivalent to those at level 1 or above in South Yorkshire, total earnings could increase by £17 million per annum.
- If 1% of the population in South Yorkshire with level 3 earned wages equivalent to those at level 4 or above in South Yorkshire, total earnings could increase by £20 million per annum.

Key sectors in South Yorkshire include healthcare, retail, manufacturing, and education. Growth sectors for the sub-region from 2020-21 include energy and water, manufacturing, construction and logistics and transport (Annual Population Survey, 2021). Areas for future growth include digital, specialised construction, low carbon, rail engineering and advanced manufacturing.

South Yorkshire has a lower proportion of high skilled jobs (44% compared to the England average of 48%). It faces high levels of deprivation on education, skills and training indicators. DfE Working Futures data shows there will be a sharp increase in the qualification levels needed by employees. SY has a low skills equilibrium, with an economy based on low value added, low skill and low wage jobs. Investment in skills and training will result in more prosperous lives.

SY is home to 49,020 local businesses, 9 out of 10 are micro businesses employing less than 9 people. It has a low business density and a lower-than-average business start-up rate.

Women, ethnic minorities, and disabled people face acute challenges within SY's labour market as do certain local areas. The Social Mobility Index (2020), which considers where children grow up and their opportunities in adulthood, notes Barnsley and Doncaster are 'cold spots' for social mobility.

The South Yorkshire Local Skills Improvement Plan has a strong focus on digital skills, identifying digital skills as a near-universal requirement for employment at all skill levels even among low skilled occupations. This is of specific consideration to Northern College as a College with a specialism in supporting the success of adults from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with learning difficulties / disabilities and those facing multiple barriers to education and for whom digital inclusion is a key consideration.

Key recommendations of the South Yorkshire Local Skills Improvement Plan that the College will be focusing on in 2024-25 include:

- Business Engagement and guidance
- Blended Learning
- Digital Literacy
- Workforce demographics
- Micro badging and credentialling





# West Yorkshire Key Local Context Consideration (as stated in the LSIP, West Yorkshire Plan and West Yorkshire Adult Education Budget Strategy)

A prosperous West Yorkshire – an inclusive economy with well paid jobs is the mission area within the West Yorkshire Plan. Closing the productivity gap between West Yorkshire and the UK and creating a diverse and inclusive workforce, where everyone who wants to work can, are key outcome drivers.

## Key Facts

- 53,000 adults are economically inactive but would like a job.
- Productivity levels are below the national average – this is impacted in part by skill levels below the national average at Level 4+, and an overrepresentation of residents with low or no qualifications.
- Two-thirds of employers cite upskilling needs, driven by new working practices, new technology, equipment and regulatory requirements.
- A relatively weak skills base and comparatively low educational attainments amongst young people, the latter concentrated in Bradford, Leeds and Wakefield. A lack of basic skills impacts on ability of individuals to both enter and progress in learning.
- Acute deprivation is widespread across WY's communities and is closely associated with a lack of skills within those neighbourhoods.

Key sectors in WY include health and social care, engineering and manufacturing, financial and professional services, low carbon, digital and technology, creative industries, construction, logistics & transport / distribution and education. Within Health and Social care skills gaps are persistent. Skills to support patients with mental health conditions are in demand as are digital skills and leadership and management. Within Financial and Professional services skills, shortages in accounting are key as is reskilling linked to digital transformation and project management. Within Digital and Technology there is a need for both specialist and basic skills. A lack of foundation digital skills is a key issue. Within education the demand for FE tutors is cited as a key demand area. Alongside this upskilling is required because of the digitisation of learning.

Key recommendations of the West Yorkshire Local Skills Improvement Plan that the College will be focusing on in 2024-25 include:

- Enabling access to technical skills focused on Health & Social Care and Education.
- Addressing thematic skills - net zero / sustainability, transferable skills, equality and diversity, leadership and management and digitisation and automation.
- Developing new ways of delivering to improve take up of provision by employers.

# Our Approach to Developing this Statement

## Identifying Key Priorities

The College has worked closely with its three funders, and key strategic partners including the Local Authorities in the region and the National Trust to develop the College 2023-2026 Strategic Plan as part of its curriculum planning cycle. This development is grounded in detailed analysis of local, regional and national priorities taking account of the direction of policy generally and specifically for adult residential education.

From early 2021, the College has been under FE Commissioner intervention. This status was initiated by the negative financial impact of the way residential funding was drawn down alongside, reduced recruitment as a result of Covid. The College went through a full Structure and Prospects Appraisal in the Spring/Summer of 2021 and the stakeholders involved unanimously decided the College should retain its independence. The Board of Governors and the Executive Leadership Team are focused on the future sustainability of the College and as such the College strategy is focused on growth and diversification.

## Consultation with Stakeholders

The College is well connected to national, regional, and local skills priorities and has utilised these connections to develop its key priorities. The College has demonstrated through the Enhanced Skills Inspection that it engages successfully with a broad range of stakeholders including employers, civic, community and education partners and their involvement influences the intent and implementation of the curriculum. The College has undertaken and continues to plan for significant curriculum changes in line with stakeholder feedback from a range of stakeholders within the Skills Eco System.

The College has consulted its key funders South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, West Yorkshire Combined Authority and the Department for Education as well as relevant Local Authority partners to test its key priorities. The College is working with sector experts in labour market analysis, estates and special educational needs and disabilities to research and establish its position in the education and skills market and its future market share.

The College works with a wide range of stakeholders including; employers, voluntary & community organisations, health services, housing services and local anchor Institutions.

## Working with Other Local Providers

The College is part of the South Yorkshire Colleges Collaboration ([Education, Innovation, Collaboration | South Yorkshire Colleges Partnership](#)), which has partnerships with key local Universities in South and West Yorkshire and is part of a local Higher Level Skills group all of which influence and shape the development of our skills provision.

The College works collectively with other Adult and Community Learning providers in the region to ensure clear pathways are available and utilised as part of a place shaping approach with specific reference to the development of Community Learning.



## Local Needs Duty

The Board of Governors regularly reviews how Northern College for Adults is meeting local, regional and national skills needs to enable long term planning and immediate responsiveness.

Key contributing mechanisms include the annual curriculum planning cycle, which ensures alignment to priority sectors, groups and labour market demand, the setting of the College Strategic Plan for 2023-2026 and its subsequent nested strategies including the Higher Levels Skills Strategy, Tailored Learning Strategy and Estates Strategy. The College has regular provider conversations with its funders looking specifically at the role and impact of residential education and this drives developments within the College.

Together these mechanisms of review enable regular scrutiny of how the College serves the region. They support the College to fill skills gaps, direct the focus of its unique residential offer and foster partnerships working with providers across the region to enhance the skills pipeline. Collaboration remains critical and work continues with key partners across the skills ecosystem including voluntary and community partners, statutory services, employers and other providers of education and skills. As a result of this review the College is developing new provision at level 4 and level 5, responding to changes within tailored learning by offering provision directly with employers and creating connected pipelines with other Colleges in the region.

## Review of 2023-24

In our first Accountability Statement we set out a series of targets to achieve in the previous academic year. As a result we have:

- Delivered Sector Work Academies that have enabled students to move swiftly into work.
- Grown our Free Courses for Jobs Provision
- Delivered new ESOL provision both in target communities and on campus as part of residential experience
- Successfully introduced a new Access to HE pathway in Psychology
- Seen the successful conclusion of a regional review into the transformative Impact of Residential Education which found widespread agreement about the benefits of the learning experience, the physical surroundings and the residential offer. Examples were provided of where studying at Northern College appears to have had a genuinely transformational effect on the lives of particular students.
- Worked with our funders SYMCA to develop a new system for capturing the impact of Tailored Learning.
- Refocused our Digital Curriculum

# Objectives 2024-25

## Aim & Outcome

Grow and Diversify our Adult Skills Fund provision aligned to regional needs and priorities.

Specifically, this will include:

- A refreshed approach to Tailored Learning
- New flexible / blended Level 3 pathways
- Building on the success of our Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAPS)
- Increasing access to digital entitlement qualifications
- New approach to Higher Level Skills including the introduction of new provision at Level 4 and Level 5

## Link to National and Local Priorities

- Increased opportunities for those defined as economically inactive to move into work and further learning.
  - Increase in the number of people with the basic digital skills needed for both life and work.
  - Increase in the supply of people with higher level skills linked to regional growth areas.
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## Aim & Outcome

Increase the digital literacy of our students and staff through the delivery of the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) programme. Our digital strategy will drive developments in this area and ensure a future focused approach to technology within the College.

Specifically this will include:

- Launch the Digital Hub
- Launching the Immersive classroom
- Create a range of new digital programmes utilising blending learning technologies
- Embedding the new Principles for the use of AI in FE colleges into college practice

## Link to National and Local Priorities

- Increase in adults with the digital skills needed for employment across all occupational skill levels.
- Development of a pre apprenticeship programme supporting progression into apprenticeships.
- Increased flexibility of delivery to meet learner demand including on employer premises and in community venues.

## **Aim & Outcome**

We will seek opportunities to accelerate our progress to net zero by 2045 and increase awareness across the staff and student body.

Specifically, this will include:

- Prioritising our Capital Transformation Funding on electrical works, luminaries and secondary glazing to deliver net zero targets
- Deliver a Net Zero training programme to staff and students across the College
- Roll out of a supplier/contractor environmental impact assessment process

## **Link to National and Local Priorities**

- Reduction in spend on electricity and gas by 10% each in 2024 - 25.
  - Increase staff knowledge and awareness of decarbonisation and Net Zero.
  - Increase student awareness of Net Zero and its personal impact.
  - Ensure supplier/contractors Net Zero policies meet the College supply chain requirements.
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## **Aim & Outcome**

Develop a robust staff training and development offer for 2024-25 focused on supporting staff to meet our key priorities.

This will include a refreshed approach to Digital Capability, a focus on sector / specialism upskilling, and ongoing work to promote the benefits of the natural environment for both productivity and wellbeing.

## **Link to National and Local Priorities**

Improved quality of training and skills development in key sectors / target areas leading to higher skilled professionals entering the labour market as a result.



# References

## Corporation Statement

On behalf of Northern College, it is hereby confirmed that the College conducts reviews in line with the local needs duty. The annual accountability statement as set out reflect an agreed statement of purpose, aims and objectives as approved by the Board of Governors at its meeting on 20th March 2024.

## Publication

This statement is published on our website 3rd June 2024.

## Supporting Documentation

[Annual report and financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2023](#)

[Northern College Ofsted Report 2023](#)

South Yorkshire College Collaboration Statement (March 2024)

# South Yorkshire Colleges Collaboration Statement (March 2024)

## Introduction

Collaborative working is a core feature of the way South Yorkshire Further Education Colleges operate across South Yorkshire. The desire for closer partnership working was clearly evidenced by the launch of a formal South Yorkshire College Partnership (SYCP) in 2022 and this now forms the basis for considering the way Colleges access and implement new curriculum and funding opportunities and how we secure the right offer for businesses and residents in the SY community.

## Collaboration Partners

FE Colleges in the Partnership include Barnsley College, Doncaster College (part of DN Colleges Group), Northern College, RNN Group (Rotherham College) and The Sheffield College.

The Partnership also includes The University of Sheffield AMRC Training Centre, Doncaster Deaf Trust and Chesterfield College (as an institution on the South Yorkshire boundary). This Partnership forms the basis for wider collaboration and strategic dialogue with stakeholders across the region including Sheffield Hallam University and the South Yorkshire Provider Network on behalf of Independent Training Providers. Individual members also bring to the partnership experience of their own collaboration - eg DNCG with Universities of Lincoln and Hull.

## Collaboration Projects

Specific examples of how the collaboration has worked together to review skills needs across the region and develop approaches include:

### Institute of Technology

Led by Doncaster College, SYCP has continued to work collaboratively with Sheffield Hallam University and leading employers on development of the South Yorkshire Institute of Technology (IoT). This includes reviewing the region's skills needs and the curriculum offer required.

## Higher Technical Qualifications

Development of Higher Technical Qualifications in South Yorkshire is underpinned by a formal Partnership Agreement between the SYCP and Sheffield Hallam University. The Agreement recognises the skills and expertise of respective members of the partnership and that alignment of activity is critically important in shaping the region's curriculum offer and ensuring it supports the IoT. Two rounds of HTQ delivery funding have been secured under the terms of the Agreement.

## T levels

As a Wave 1 adopter of T levels, Barnsley College used early adopter funding and support from the Education and Training Foundation to create a programme of support for other Colleges across South Yorkshire as their programmes came on stream.

## Apprenticeship Hub

SYCP has supported SYMCA in launching South Yorkshire's first Apprenticeship Hub. Led by The Sheffield College, Colleges have secured funding and approval for the Hub that will address as a priority the significant drop in take up of apprenticeships by younger people, as well as taking steps to address barriers to successful completion.

## Devolved Adult Education Budget (AEB)

SYCP Partners receive devolved AEB grant funding through the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA). SYCP Principals have worked collaboratively and with SYMCA to help shape the way in which more innovative funding methodologies can support the curriculum offer across the region in response to emerging skills priorities, such as the need for low carbon skills and welding.

## Local Skills Improvement Fund

Led by Barnsley College, the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) has been a key opportunity for collaborative activity between SYCP, the South Yorkshire Provider Network and Sheffield Hallam University responding to the Local Skills Improvement Plan. Having reviewed recommendations, prioritisation and responsibilities, the LSIF Partner Board has focused on opportunities to engage with employers, including further development of the South Yorkshire Skills website (initially funded through SDF2) a single-entry point for businesses to access information on skills.

In response to the LSIP, LSIF partners have focused on digital / technical skills, including investment in a network of immersive classrooms, establishment of a digital curriculum group, exploration of digital badge accreditation, and investment in digital spaces and mobile learning kit.

## Future work / SMART objectives

We expect future collaborative work to include:

- How to build on LSIF progress to make most effective use of innovation and new technology to transform the curriculum;
- How networked technology could help SYCP with shared teaching and curriculum development in the light of staffing challenges;
- SYCP Principals' Group to agree by 30th June the sustainability arrangements for future maintenance and development of the South Yorkshire Skills website and collaborative Employer Hub activity;
- By 31st July 2024 SYCP will put in place a collaborative LMI group to meet twice a year to consider data regarding new and trending skills and make curriculum recommendations to SYCP College Principals.