

**Northern College**

# **LOCAL NEEDS DUTY & ACCOUNTABILITY AGREEMENT**

**2025-2026**

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 fulfil 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 small non-devolved ASF 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 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, Digital and Education.

Enabling inclusive growth is at the heart of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) and South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) Adult Skills Fund (ASF) commissioning strategies, as well as the individual Local Authority skills strategies, and is a central pillar of the Northern College curriculum. In 2025, Northern College won the Liverpool Hope Prize; Outstanding Achievement for Social Mobility at the Educate North Awards. 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 (December 2023), 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 6% point difference at Level 4 and above, (only 41% of the working age population are qualified to this level). This is compounded by higher rates of economic inactivity (871,000 people) and long-term sickness (246,400). Yet of these people, 124,900 are recorded as wanting to work, creating a large pool of people who require support and skills to move into work.



## National Skills Priorities

The national skills priorities incorporate the Skills England report, Industrial Strategy Priorities, and Plan for Change. These areas have high volumes of vacancies that are projected to rise, face long-term structural barriers to recruitment, retention, and progression issues, and play a crucial role in offering employment opportunities in key growth sectors such as green jobs and net zero, creative industries, and science and technology (including AI and quantum computing).

There is a need to provide essential skills in English and Mathematics up to Level 2, and Digital skills up to Level 1. The Northern College context and expertise ensures we are well placed to focus on this area which has seen a national decline in recent years.

## South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority Context Consideration

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



# Key Facts

### Digital Futures

- Digital is a growing sector, South Yorkshire's digital sector employs around **20,000 people**, with projected **employment growth of 8.2%** by 2035.
- **82% of online job vacancies require digital skills.** Key skills include general office software, security, privacy, GDPR, and social media/digital marketing.
- Employers report difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff with data skills, social media/digital marketing, and project management skills.

### Greener Futures

- Significant investment and coordinated action required to de-carbonise South Yorkshire's economy and reach **Net Zero by 2041.**
- Green Jobs are set to grow from an estimated **3,900 in 2019**, with projected **growth to 19,616 green jobs by 2030** and **32,441 by 2050.**
- **Addressing skills gaps** is crucial for workforce readiness.

# Key Facts

## Healthier Futures

- South Yorkshire residents live shorter lives and fewer years in good health compared to national averages. There are significant disparities in life expectancy within the region.
- The health and social care sector is the largest employment sector in the region with 93,000 workers, projected to grow by 15.1% by 2035.

## Better Business

- There is mixed job quality in South Yorkshire, with low pay and limited career progression opportunities. There is a need to improve job quality to support a more inclusive economy.
- There are significant employment gaps in ethnicity, gender, and disability. Increasing diversity in leadership and senior roles is crucial for creating better businesses.

## Innovation

- Basic literacy and numeracy, technical skills, soft skills, and adaptability are crucial. South Yorkshire needs to improve basic skills and STEM education to support innovation.
- Diversity and inclusion in innovation lead to better outcomes. South Yorkshire needs to increase diversity in its workforce to enhance creativity and innovation.

## Enterprise

- South Yorkshire has a small business base relative to its population, with fewer high-growth firms and lower business density than national averages.
- Technical, management, and entrepreneurial skills are essential. South Yorkshire needs to develop these skills to support business start-up, survival, and growth.
- There has been a decline in self-employment since the pandemic. Need for support to help self-employed workers thrive.

**Key recommendations of the South Yorkshire Local Skills Improvement Plan that the College will be focusing on in 2025-26 include:**

## Digital Skills

- Identified as a key concern for the region, with 74% of employers surveyed believing digital skills are important for their current workforce.

## Employer Engagement

- Working with employers to give them more direct input into the skills system to ensure that local residents can prosper in the workplace.

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

- **54,500 adults** are economically inactive but who 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 over representation 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 the 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 2025-26 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.

### 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 Mayoral 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), 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. Further information about the work of the partnership can be found in the supporting information section.

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, 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.



In our 24/25 Accountability Statement we set out a series of targets to achieve in the previous academic year.

### As a result we have:

- Significantly grown our Adult Skills Fund delivery, including Tailored Learning as part of a 3 year development journey.
- Delivered new online and blended provision within teaching and teaching support at level 2 and level 3.
- Significantly increased the proportion of our students moving into work because of our employer partnership provision.
- Successfully introduced a new Level 4 Counselling provision.
- Successfully launched our new Digital Hub and Immersive Classroom that provides access to high quality facilities to all students within the Northern College community.
- Launched a new revised digital curriculum including introductions to robotics, app creation and digital promotion.
- Undertaken key capital transformation work which support our net zero targets in areas such as electrical works, luminaries, and secondary glazing which have resulted in a reduction of carbon emissions through fabric heat loss and provided energy efficiencies.



### Aim & Outcome

**Continue to grow and Diversify our Adult Skills Fund provision aligned to national and regional needs and priorities.**

**Specifically, this will include:**

- Ensuring our provision focuses on supporting adults who are economically inactive to develop the skills for work.
- Focusing on employer engagement and working with a wide range of employers to give them more direct input into our provision.
- Continuing to grow the range of flexible / blended pathways on offer.
- Embedding our innovation projects in horticulture and learning difficulties / disabilities.
- Embed our immersive ESOL programme focused on language development for professional and social settings.
- Embed a new impact framework that meets the needs of our funders and allows them to champion our work.

**Increase the digital literacy of our students and staff through the delivery of the final stages of the 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:**

- Launching and embedding the Immersive classroom technology into delivery.
- Delivering a programme of support and Training to ensure staff can integrate technology into their teaching and working practices.
- Continue to increase the number of adults improving their digital skills through our provision.

**The College will continue to progress our net zero aspiration of de-carbonisation by 2045 and increase awareness across the staff and student body.**

**Specifically, this will include:**

- Prioritising our Capital Transformation Funding into further electrical works including the installation of building energy management systems, and external luminaries to deliver our net zero targets.
- Work with partners both locally and nationally to deliver a Net Zero training programme to staff and students across the College.

## Impact on / contribution 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.
- Increased diversity in the workforce enhancing creativity and innovation.
- Increased employers with a direct input into the skills system ensuring local residents can prosper in work.
- Increased evidence of the wide ranging economic and societal impact of engaging in adult education.
- Increase in adults with the digital skills needed for employment across all occupational skill levels.
- Increased flexibility of delivery to meet learner demand including on employer premises and in community venues.
- Improved quality of training and skills development in key sectors / target areas leading to higher skilled professionals entering the labour market as a result.
- Sustained reductions in use / spend on electricity and gas.
- Increase staff knowledge and awareness of de-carbonisation impacting on behaviour in work, with students and in personal settings.

## Corporation Statement

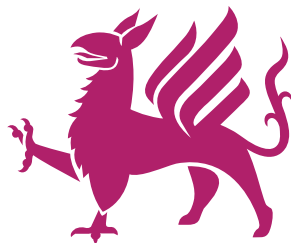
On behalf of Northern College, it is hereby confirmed that the College conducts reviews in line with the local needs duty. The annual accountability statement as set out reflect an agreed statement of purpose, aims and objectives as approved by the Board of Governors at its meeting on 26 March 2025.

## Publication

This statement is published on our website [www.northern.ac.uk](http://www.northern.ac.uk)

## Supporting Documentation

- Annual Financial Statements 2023-24
- Ofsted report - Northern College Ofsted Report 2023
- South Yorkshire College Collaboration Statement (March 2025)



# Northern College

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