

ANNUAL ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

2023/24



The Bedford College Group's (TBCG) purpose is to help individuals, communities and society flourish through education by raising aspirations and reducing inequality to create a sustainable future. This is achieved through our relentless focus on community needs which drives our curriculum provision, determines our people and sets our budget priorities.

To guide our approach are our six core values:

- **Valuing teamwork:** We are one team who by working together can achieve great things, respecting the opinion and valuing the contribution each of us makes
- **Improving continuously:** We challenge ourselves to always do better by trying new things, sharing knowledge, reflecting on practice and learning from others
- **Student centred:** At our heart is always doing what is best for our students. We consider students in all of our decision making to create positive outcomes and memorable experiences for every student
- **Inclusive:** We celebrate differences and diversity, recognising that we can learn from each other
- **Open and caring:** We care about the wellbeing of our staff, our students, our community and wider society, creating an environment built on trust where we listen, engage with and support each other
- **Nurturing educational excellence:** We promote educational excellence by delivering programmes that stretch and challenge our students to achieve their ambitions.

STRATEGIC AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Our strategic plan outlines how we will achieve our purpose and vision to be the best and most authoritative post-16 education provider in the South East Midlands, and is underpinned by three strategic themes: 1) educational and community leadership; 2) educational sustainability; and 3) financial sustainability.

Educational and financial sustainability are fundamental if we are to serve our communities for the long-term. In addition, our goal of educational leadership will need to embrace community leadership, recognising the interplay between education, other public services, the need to help regenerate economies post-Covid, and the need to move towards a net zero economy.

The plan was developed in consultation with key stakeholders and takes account of Central Bedfordshire College joining the Group in March 2023, with eight key aims/objectives for the period ending 2027:

- To be recognised as a leader in further education and a major source of civic leadership within our communities
- To achieve consistent standards of educational excellence by making quality of education our top priority
- To expand higher education, T Levels and our academic programmes
- To maintain outstanding financial strength and high capital investment
- To provide a better, more comprehensive service to employers and respond to changes in the way people work and learn
- To invest in technologies that underpin the transformation required to achieve our plan
- To seek to extend our market leadership, size and scale in the areas we serve
- To make strong progress towards becoming a net zero organisation and a leader in sustainability practices.

The link between our strategic plan and the objectives and targets in this statement is outlined in section 4. A copy of the full strategic plan, which was approved by the Board on 20th January 2022, can be found at *Strategic Plan | The Bedford College Group*

THE COMMUNITIES WE SERVE

TBCG is the largest college group in the South East Midlands, and the seventh largest (by income) in the country, with over 18,000 students each year attending one of our seven colleges based across Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire: Bedford College, Central Bedfordshire College and Tresham College in the towns of Bedford, Corby, Dunstable, Kettering, Leighton Buzzard and Wellingborough; Shuttleworth College, a specialist land-based college near Biggleswade; The Bedford Sixth Form and The Corby Sixth Form, the only dedicated A Level provision in the towns of Bedford and Corby; and the National College for Motorsport alongside Silverstone race circuit. In addition, to widen accessibility to education and training, the Group also has community-based Learning Centres in Bedford, Corby and Kettering.

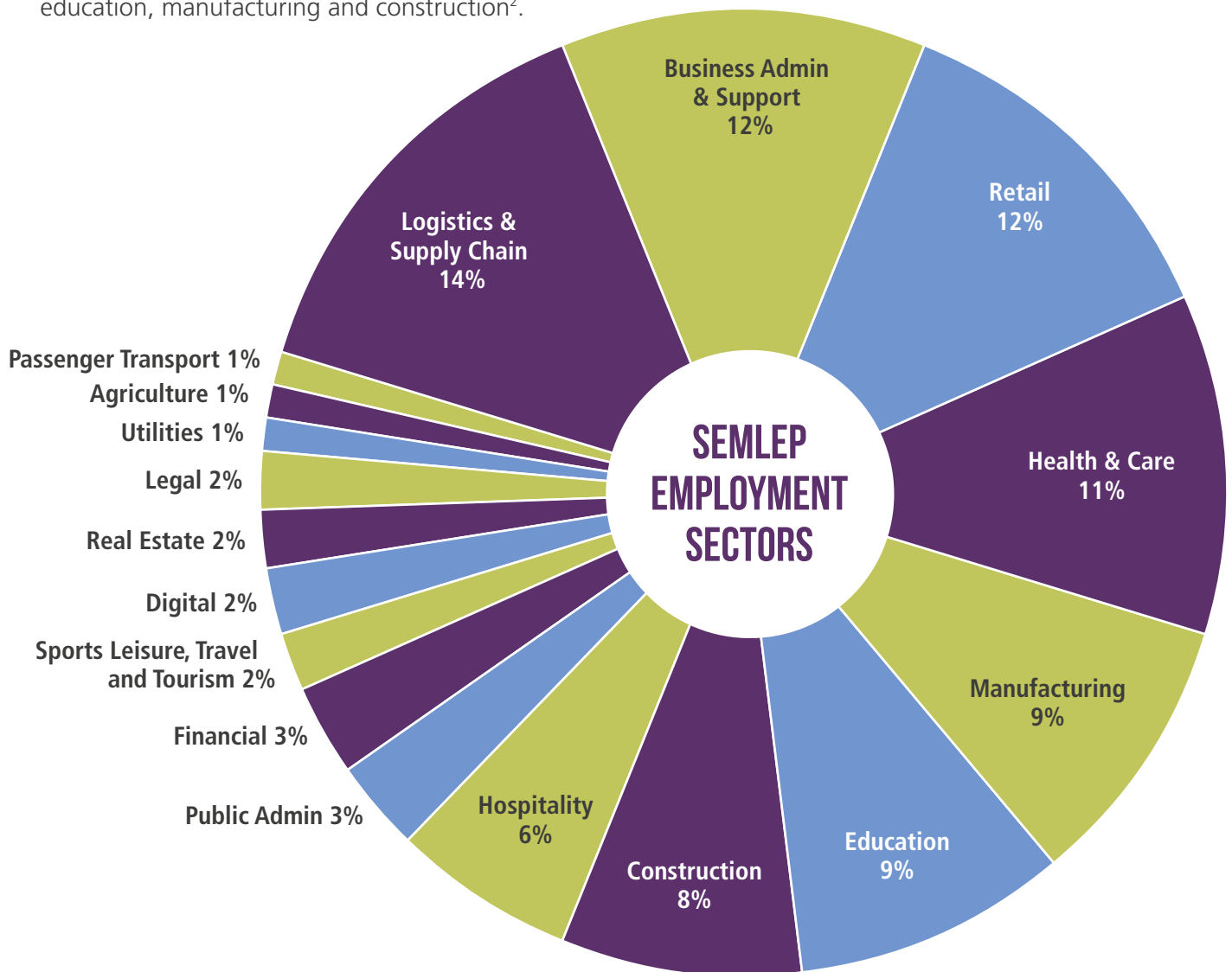
89% of TBCG's students live in the South East Midlands region, with 83% residing in just four local authorities: Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, Luton and North Northamptonshire. The Group is viewed as a major strategic asset within these authorities and works in partnership with key stakeholders to ensure the economic, social and skills needs of each community is met through its broad curriculum spanning further education, apprenticeships, workforce training and higher education.



BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC PROFILE

The South East Midlands is a £50 billion economy, with the highest population growth outside of London and home to one in 25 new businesses in England¹³. There are a total of 71,115 businesses across the region, with a higher concentration of micro businesses with less than 10 employees (90.9%) than the national picture (89.6%), and a lower concentration of small businesses with 10-49 employees (7.3% compared to 8.5% nationally)¹.

The main employment sectors in the region are logistics and supply chains, retail, health and social care, business and administration support, education, manufacturing and construction².



DEMOGRAPHICS

The Group serves a population of nearly 1.1 million people across the four key local authorities of Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, Luton and North Northamptonshire. These authorities have some of the fastest growing populations in England, with Bedford Borough experiencing the fastest growth of all authorities in the East of England over the past 10 years⁷.

Across these local authorities, 78% of the population identify their ethnic group as white, 12% Asian or Asian British, and 5% black, black British, Caribbean or African⁹. There are however large variations by local authority, with both Bedford Borough and Luton having a much more ethnically diverse population, particularly Asian or Asian British (12.6% and 37% respectively) and black, black British, Caribbean or African (5.3% and 10.1% respectively)¹⁰.

Just over half a million people aged 16 and over are economically active and, in addition, around 37,000 are in education⁷. In 2023, the number of 15-19 year olds in these local authorities was estimated at nearly 62,000. This age group is forecast to grow by a further 13% by 2030, with the highest growth forecast in Corby (23%) and Bedford Borough (17%)⁸.

SOCIAL FACTORS

Unemployment across SEMLEP is relatively low compared to the national picture (2.6% compared to 3.7% nationally), along with the percentage of the working population claiming out-of-work benefits (3.4% compared to 3.8% nationally). However, this varies by local authority with Luton (5.3%) having a high percentage of the working population claiming out-of-work benefits⁴.

Across the four local authorities, there are 42,296 children under 16 years living in low-income families (relative), with Luton (29.1%) and North Northamptonshire (21.5%) having a higher percentage than the national average of 20.1%⁵. There are also significant pockets of deprivation, particularly in Luton and Corby. Luton is the 45th most deprived local authority in England (out of 317 local authorities) for education, skills and training, with 28 neighbourhoods in the top 20% most deprived areas nationally, whilst Corby is the 10th most deprived local authority for education, training and skills⁶.

Fewer residents across SEMLEP have qualifications at Level 3 or above (57.5%) compared to the national picture (61.5%), with an even greater gap between the number of residents who have a Level 4 or higher qualification (37.1% versus 43.6% nationally). 61,700 residents have no qualifications at all (5.8% compared to 6.6% nationally). Luton is particularly affected by low educational attainment, with the percentage of residents having qualifications at any level (Level 1 to Level 4+) below the national averages⁴. Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, Luton and North Northamptonshire have all been identified as 'cold spots' of the country where school outcomes are the weakest¹².



The key priorities and target outcomes in this accountability statement have been developed following a review of the government's national skills priorities, the priorities identified in SEMLEP's Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), and through our own labour market information and feedback from stakeholders.

The Group actively engaged with Northamptonshire Chamber of Commerce and Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce to collect stakeholder views and input into the development of LSIP for the South East Midlands, and is now working closely with other education and training providers and employer representative bodies to respond to the priorities identified.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Key to achieving our strategic objectives and meeting the skills needs of our communities is effective stakeholder engagement. TBCG has a multi-faceted approach to stakeholder engagement, with key college stakeholders having a senior manager assigned to them to foster mutually beneficial partnerships, such as:

- Bedford Borough Council
- North Northamptonshire Council
- Central Bedfordshire Council
- SEMLEP
- Strategically important employers, such as GK Aerospace, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), Tata Steel, Vauxhall and Weetabix
- Chamber of Commerce in Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire
- Local MPs and Mayors.

In addition, curriculum teams lead on developing relationships with local employers and community links to jointly construct the curriculum and provide opportunities to students.

ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHER PROVIDERS IN THE AREA

Schools

TBCG engages with over 80 secondary schools across SEMLEP to complement their provision, widen the career opportunities for local school pupils and enable transition to post-16 education. We are also members of the Bedford Borough Learning Exchange, a collaboration of over 100 head teachers and leaders of education across the area, and the Sixth Form Heads Exchange in Corby.

Universities

In addition to having our own direct higher education (HE) provision, we partner with the University of Bedfordshire, University of Huddersfield and University of Northampton so that we can provide a broad portfolio of higher-level qualifications to our communities such as the new Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs). Through these partnerships we have a positive impact on regional economic growth by meeting the growing skills needs of employers and industry, and expanding the availability of HE courses locally to improve social mobility and increase the number of skilled people at Level 4 and above.

Independent Training Providers

TBCG works with a number of independent training providers to widen our offer and meet regional skills needs. For example, we work with Aston to broaden our offer in logistics and engineering pathways to meet skills gaps. We also have an arrangement with JTL to deliver electrical programmes and, with CITB for construction trades.

Colleges

We actively engage with other colleges in the region. This can most recently be seen in the work carried out on the Strategic Development Fund (SDF) project, which involved collaboration with nine other colleges across two Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). A key focus of the project was to reshape and develop the curriculum to better meet needs identified in health and care, life sciences, agri-tech, sustainability and digital. Project outputs included launching 10 new courses, purchasing industry standard equipment, providing CPD to 240 teaching staff and sharing good practice to a further 815 colleagues.

CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL PRIORITIES

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The table below sets out our key priorities and target outcomes relating to our curriculum for the academic year 2023/24, which are aligned to our relevant aims/objectives in our strategic plan.

Strategic plan aims/objectives	Accountability statement objectives and target outcomes for 2023/24	Impact and contribution towards national, regional and local priorities for learning and skills
<p>1. To be recognised as a leader in further education and a major source of civic leadership within our communities</p>	<p>1.1 Launch a town centre academic provision in Corby, working with Corby Town Bid, North Northamptonshire Council and other key stakeholders. Target: 120 enrolments.</p> <p>1.2 Launch new apprenticeship and short non-accredited provision at our Leighton Buzzard centre to reflect national, regional and local skills priorities, with a particular focus on engineering, manufacturing, green construction skills and logistics. Target: 50 enrolments.</p>	<p>North Northamptonshire is a ‘cold spot’ where educational outcomes are the weakest, with Corby the 10th most deprived place for education and skills in England. We will open a new Sixth Form College in Corby to contribute to the national priority to level up education by improving access and driving up skills levels, enabling students to gain the academic and transferable skills to progress into national priority sectors long term.</p> <p>Leighton Buzzard sits within Central Bedfordshire local authority. It is the largest town in England that doesn’t have a comprehensive further education provision and is a ‘cold spot’ where educational outcomes are the weakest. By growing further education provision in the town, we will contribute to the national priority to level up education by improving access and driving up skills levels. From conducting our own independently commissioned research, we have identified skills need in engineering, manufacturing and construction in Leighton Buzzard, which reflects LSIP and national skills priorities, and the provision will focus on these areas to reduce these gaps. It is planned to introduce T Levels at the centre from 2024/25, which is also a national priority.</p>
<p>2. To achieve consistent standards of educational excellence by making quality of education our top priority</p>	<p>2.1 Collaborate with other colleges in SEMLEP to embed digital skills into the curriculum. Target: All full-time students to study digital skills during academic year.</p> <p>2.2 Utilise VR and digital technology to enable students a real time experience of an interview. Target: All full-time students to be offered a VR experience of an interview.</p> <p>2.3 Train all staff responsible for tutorials to full-time students in delivering core transferrable skills so that they can be embedded into the student experience. Target: All staff who deliver tutorials to undertake training using ‘train the trainer’ model during academic year.</p>	<p>Digital skills are a national skills priority and an essential complement to English and maths skills to enable students to engage safely in the digital world we live in and to have the digital skills needed in the workforce.</p> <p>Developing students’ core transferable skills will improve students’ attractiveness to employers as these are important in many occupations and make students more resilient to move from one job to another, as identified by the Skills & Productivity Board and embedded in national policy. Developing these skills has also been identified as a priority area in LSIP.</p>

CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL PRIORITIES

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Strategic plan aims/objectives	Accountability statement objectives and target outcomes for 2023/24	Impact and contribution towards national, regional and local priorities for learning and skills
<p>3. To expand higher education, T Levels and our academic programmes</p>	<p>3.1 Expand our T Level provision by recruiting to the following new provision in September 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accounting at Bedford College and Tresham College Agriculture Land Management & Production at Shuttleworth College Management & Administration: Business Support at Bedford College and Tresham College Healthcare Science at Central Bedfordshire College. <p>Target: Recruit to four new T Levels in September 2023.</p> <p>3.2 Expand our HTQ provision by recruiting to the following new provision in September 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modern Methods of Construction (three pathways) at Bedford College. <p>Target: Recruit to one new HTQ in September 2023.</p> <p>3.3 Expand our A Level provision by offering at least 30 A Level subjects in Corby as part of the new The Corby Sixth Form. Target: Recruit to at least 30 new A Levels subjects in Corby in September 2023.</p>	<p>The expansion plans, which focus on T Levels, A Levels and Level 4 qualifications reflects national policy relating to the post-16 education landscape. Expanding courses at Level 4 and above contributes to meeting advanced skills needs identified at local, regional and national level. This will include higher technical qualifications that employers need. Offering an A Level provision in Corby and further developing T Levels reflects the two clear pathways (academic and technical) for Level 3 qualifications.</p> <p>Healthcare is a national skills priority, whilst business administration, financial planning and construction have been identified as priorities in the LSIP. Agriculture is also a regional skills priority for the land-based sector.</p>
<p>4. To maintain outstanding financial strength and high capital investment</p>	<p>4.1 Invest in a new Health, Science and Digital Skills Centre at Bedford College's Cauldwell Street campus Target: Open new skills centre in September 2023.</p> <p>4.2 Invest in the development of Kingshill Farm at Shuttleworth College to enable the delivery of the new T Level in Agriculture. Target: Open Kingshill Farm facility in September 2023.</p>	<p>Maintaining outstanding financial strength will ensure that we can invest in our buildings, facilities and equipment so that students can study in realistic environments that mirror industry. It will also enable us to invest in the priorities identified as national priorities (such as health, science and digital) and those identified in LSIP and regionally (such as agriculture).</p> <p>Part of our approach will be to collaborate with other education and training providers to access funding to support new initiatives to address skills needs, such as the Local Skills Infrastructure Fund (LSIF).</p>

CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL PRIORITIES

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Strategic plan aims/objectives	Accountability statement objectives and target outcomes for 2023/24	Impact and contribution towards national, regional and local priorities for learning and skills
<p>5. To provide a better, more comprehensive service to employers and respond to changes in the way people work and learn</p>	<p>5.1 Expand our portfolio of apprenticeship standards to address local, regional and national skills needs, with a particular focus on engineering, construction, land based, business improvement, digital, and teacher education. Target: Increase apprenticeship offer to 48 different standards in priority areas.</p> <p>5.2 Launch the delivery of apprenticeship standards from our Leighton Buzzard Centre in response to identified skills needs. Target: Deliver a minimum of three new apprenticeship standards, focussing on engineering manufacturing, maintenance, electronics and machining, and attracting at least 24 enrolments.</p> <p>5.3 Expand our commercial offer across the Group in key sectors such as engineering, green construction skills, logistics, business and professional, working with existing and new employers to identify and deliver short training solutions to meet industry skills gaps. Target: Work with a minimum of two key employers to develop a training partnership for the upskilling of their employees in the sectors identified above.</p>	<p>Engineering and manufacturing, digital, land based, construction, green skills, logistics and teaching have been identified as both a national and regional skills priorities.</p> <p>Part of our approach will be to seek out and develop partnerships with key employers using apprenticeship, AEB and full cost initiatives to address skills needs.</p>
<p>6. To make strong progress towards becoming a net zero organisation and a leader in sustainability practices</p>	<p>6.1 To pilot a number of initiatives to embed sustainability into the curriculum. Target: 1) Embed UN sustainability goals into all schemes of work for full-time courses at Tresham College; 2) Introduce a short additional course to all full-time students at Shuttleworth College.</p>	<p>Embedding sustainability into the curriculum will give students the knowledge and skills required for green jobs and to become better global citizens in line with the government's sustainability and climate strategy for education.</p>

CORPORATION STATEMENT

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On behalf of The Bedford College Group corporation, it is hereby confirmed that the accountability statement as set out above reflects an agreed statement of purpose, aims and objectives as approved by the corporation at their meeting on Thursday 6th July 2023.

The plan will be published on the Group's website within three months of the start of the new academic year and can be accessed from the following link: <https://bedfordcollegigroup.ac.uk/public-information/annual-accountability-statement>



Allan Schofield
Chair of Governors
6th July 2023



Ian Pryce
Chief Executive Officer
6th July 2023

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

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Annual Financial Statements: www.bedfordcollegigroup.ac.uk/annual-financial-statements

SEMLEP Local Skills Improvement Plan: To follow

Ofsted Inspection Report: www.bedfordcollegigroup.ac.uk/about/ofsted

Strategic Plan: www.bedfordcollegigroup.ac.uk/about/strategic-plan

References:

1. Unit for Future Skills Local Skills Dashboard, available at www.department-for-education.shinyapps.io/local-skills-dashboard accessed 5 April 2023.
2. South East Midlands Local Skills Report 2022; available at *Skills Plan 2022* (www.semlep.com) accessed 5 April 2023.
3. SEMLEP Skills Plan 2017; available at *download.php* (www.semlep.com) accessed 5 April 2023.
4. NOMIS Official Census and Labour Market Information, available at *Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics* (www.nomisweb.co.uk) accessed 5 April 2023.
5. Department for Work and Pensions Children in Low Income Families Local Area Statistics, available at *Children in low income families: local area statistics 2014 to 2022 - GOV.UK* (www.gov.uk) accessed 24 April 2023.
6. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government English Indices of Deprivation 2019, available at *English indices of deprivation 2019 - GOV.UK* (www.gov.uk) accessed 26 April 2023.
7. ONS Census 2021, available at *How your area has changed in 10 years: Census 2021 - Office for National Statistics* (www.ons.gov.uk) accessed 26 April 2023.
8. Population projections for local authorities: *Table 2 - Office for National Statistics* accessed 26 April 2023.
9. RCU Vector Ethnicity by District, available at *Ethnicity by District | RCU* accessed 26 April 2023.
10. ONS Ethnic Groups 2021, available at *Ethnic group, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics* (www.ons.gov.uk) accessed 26 April 2023.
11. SEMLEP Local Skills Report, available at www.semlep.com/modules/downloads/download.php?file_name=2313 accessed 27 September 2023.
12. Department for Education How we are Levelling up Education all over the Country, available at *How we are levelling up education all over the country - The Education Hub* (blog.gov.uk) accessed 1 May 2023.
13. South East Midlands Local Industrial Strategy, available at www.semlep.com/modules/downloads/download.php?file_name=1595 accessed 12 May 2023.



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