

ANNUAL ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

2024/25



THE GROUP'S PURPOSE

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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.

OUR VISION

To be the best and most authoritative post-16 educator in the South East Midlands

OUR PURPOSE

To help individuals, communities and society flourish through education by raising aspirations and reducing inequality to create a sustainable future

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Achieve consistent standards of educational excellence by making quality of education our top priority

Expand Technical and Professional Education and Higher Skills programmes

Provide a better, more comprehensive service to employers

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND REPUTATION

Be recognised as a leader in further education and a major source of civic leadership within our communities

Extend our market leadership, size and scale in the areas we serve

SUSTAINABILITY

Attract, retain and develop high performing staff

Maintain financial strength and continuous capital investment

Invest in digital transformation to support the plan

Make strong progress towards becoming a net zero organisation and a leader in sustainability practices

DEPARTMENTAL PLANS

OUR PEOPLE

OUR VALUES

- Valuing teamwork
- Improving continuously
- Student centred
- Inclusive
- Open and caring
- Nurturing educational excellence

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 pillars: 1) educational leadership; 2) community leadership and reputation; and 3) sustainability.

The plan was developed in consultation with key stakeholders and approved by the Board on 20th January 2022, with further refinements made to the plan in June 2024.

The plan has nine key aims for the period ending 2027:

- To achieve consistent standards of educational excellence by making quality of education our top priority
- To expand technical and professional education and higher skills programmes
- To provide a better, more comprehensive service to employers
- To be recognised as a leader in further education and a major source of civic leadership within our communities
- To expand our market leadership, size and scale in the areas we serve
- To attract, retain and develop great staff
- To maintain financial strength and continuous capital investment
- To invest in digital transformation to support the plan
- 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 5, and 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 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, Kettering and Wellingborough.

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 are 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, adult education, apprenticeships, workforce training and higher technical education.



BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC PROFILE

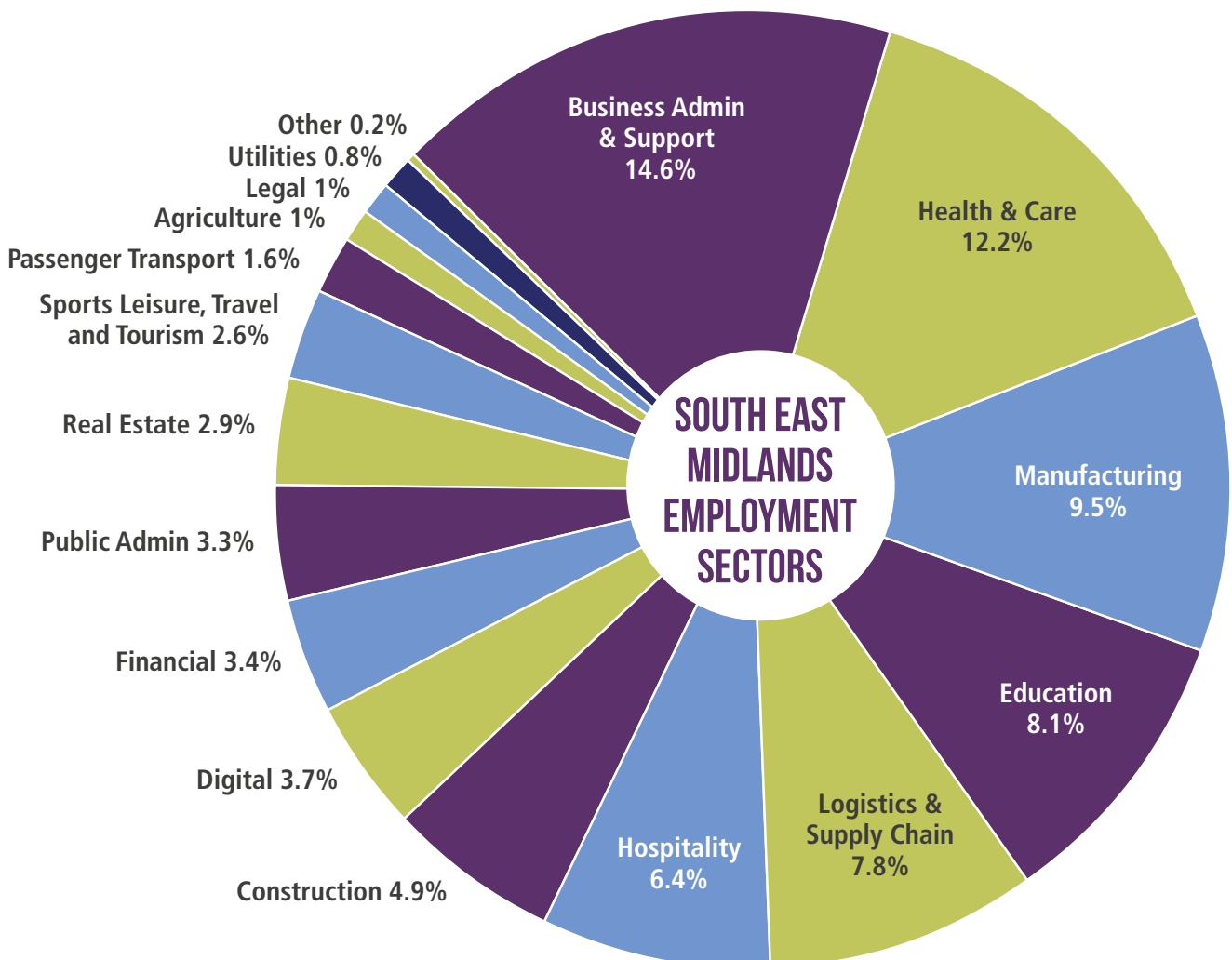
The South East Midlands is a £55 billion economy¹³, with a total of 73,605 businesses across the region¹. There is a higher concentration of micro businesses with less than 10 employees (90.2%) than the national picture (89.2%), and a lower concentration of small businesses with 10-49 employees (7.9% compared to 8.8% nationally)¹.

The main employment sectors in the region are logistics and supply chains, health and social care, business and administration support, education, manufacturing, construction and hospitality².

In addition, the following sectors are considered a priority for the local economy to grow³:

- High performance technology
- Advanced manufacturing
- Logistics and supply chain
- Cultural and creative
- Health and social care
- Retail and wholesale
- Education
- Business and financial services
- Accommodation and food
- Construction.

Digital technology (digital literacy and specialist digital skills) is a vital integral element within these growth sectors, along with green skills. There is also an increasing need for employability skills relating to basic skills, attitudes and behaviors, core competencies, technical and vocational skills, and qualifications and certification¹¹.



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 outside of London, with Bedford Borough experiencing the fastest growth of all authorities in the East of England over the past 10 years⁷.

Whilst the majority of the population in Central Bedfordshire and North Northamptonshire identify their ethnic group as white (90.2% and 90.3% compared to a national average of 80.7%), Bedford and Luton are more diverse. 37% of Luton residents and 12.6% of Bedford resident identify their ethnic group as Asian or Asian British, whilst 10.1% of Luton residents and 5.3% of Bedford residents identify their ethnic group as Black, Black British, Caribbean or African⁷.

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 63,531. This age group is forecast to grow by a further 10% by 2030, with the highest growth forecast in Corby (17%)⁸.



SOCIAL FACTORS

Unemployment across the South East Midlands mirrors the national picture of 3.7%, along with the percentage of the working population claiming out-of-work benefits (3.7% compared to 3.8% nationally). However, this varies by local authority with Luton having a higher percentage (5.3%) of the working population claiming out-of-work benefits⁴.

Across the four local authorities, there are 41,550 children under 16 years living in low-income families (relative), with Luton (28.5%) and North Northamptonshire (21.0%) 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 the South East Midlands have qualifications at Level 3 or above (62.2%) compared to the national picture (67.8%), and it is similar at Level 4 or above (42.4% versus 47.3% nationally). 62,700 residents have no qualifications at all (6.0% compared to 6.5% nationally). Luton and North Northamptonshire are 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.

APPROACH TO DEVELOPING THE ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

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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 the South East Midlands 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, and is working closely with other education and training providers and employer representative bodies to respond to the priorities identified.

The priorities also align with TBCG Curriculum Strategy which aims to provide all students with the skills they need to build a successful career. TBCG supports employers to meet their skills needs by delivering a high-quality suite of technical and academic qualifications that anticipate and supply the skills of the future workforce, as well as meet the local skills needs of the communities we serve.

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
- Strategically important employers, such as GK Aerospace, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), Tata Steel, Vauxhall and Weetabix
- Chamber of Commerces in Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire
- Northamptonshire Business Network (NNBN)
- Local MPs and Mayors.

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



ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHER PROVIDERS IN THE AREA

Schools

We engage with over 80 secondary schools across the South East Midlands to complement our provision, widen the career opportunities for local school pupils and enable transition to post-16 education. We are a member 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. Tresham College also leads the education and skills work as part of North Northamptonshire's Vision 2050 project which sets out the future aspirations for the area.

Universities

In addition to having our own direct higher skills 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 HNCs, HNDs, degrees, Higher Apprenticeships and 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 higher skills courses locally to improve social mobility and increase the number of skilled people at Level 4 and above.

Independent Training Providers

We have an arrangement with JTL to deliver electrical and plumbing programmes, and with CITB for construction trades.

Colleges

TBCG is part of the Colleges of South East Midlands Group (CoSEM), whose members are Luton Sixth Form College, Milton Keynes College, Moulton College, Northampton College and West Herts College Group. The CoSEM Group have worked together on the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF), securing funding to support the following projects, all of which align with key priorities in the LSIP and are key themes for TBCG when meeting local skills needs:

Green skills and jobs for construction

TBCG is leading on this project which responds to priority 8 of the LSIP: Supporting employers working on green/sustainable/decarbonisation projects or those who have recognised green jobs to interact with SMEs and support knowledge transfer about what green jobs are. Whilst focusing on the construction sector initially, it will also expand to other industries such as engineering.

Improve communication and understanding with employers

Milton Keynes College is leading this project, responding to the following priorities:

- **Priority 3:** Raise awareness of existing provision that satisfies demand in the way employers understand.
- **Priority 5:** Communicate and engage with employers who haven't been working with colleges and Chambers of Commercies on their skills needs to develop a real understanding of how education and training works in England.
- **Priority 6:** Engage with more existing niche/key employers in local areas on their skills needs to highlight provision, develop a blended business and learning language, and bring up-to-date relevant skills into further education.

Tackling digital skills gaps

Milton Keynes College is leading this project which connects closely to the following priorities:

- **Priority 1:** Help businesses, particularly SMEs, to identify new shifts in business needs and to understand, develop, work with and take advantage of skills provision available through identified future technologies (and developments in practice), as well as new technologies already being used or available.
- **Priority 4:** Provide accessible training opportunities for employers.

Health and science capacity building

This project is led by West Hertfordshire College Group. Care and health services are identified within the LSIP as having occupational shortages and facing significant skills gaps.

CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL PRIORITIES

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In our first Accountability Statement, we set out a series of targets to achieve in the academic year 2023 to 2024. As a result, we have:

- Opened The Corby Sixth Form with a total of 84 students enrolled for 2024.
- Re-purposed our Leighton Buzzard Centre to offer apprenticeships and short courses that reflect national, regional and local skills priorities, with a particular focus on engineering, manufacturing, green construction skills and logistics.
- Introduced our Digital Strategy to roll out the upskilling of students' and staff's digital skills.
- Expanded our T Level offer to 16 T Level qualifications, including pathways in Accountancy, Agriculture Land Management, Management and Administration.
- Introduced our Higher Skills Strategy, expanding our HTQ offer in the priority sectors of Engineering, Construction, Digital and Business.
- Expanded both apprenticeship and commercial offers in response to skills needs at a local, regional and national level in construction (interior systems installer, fitted interiors installer), engineering (health care engineering specialist technician, lean manufacturing operative), logistics (transport and warehouse operations supervisor), agriculture and horticulture (countryside worker), and motor trades (vehicle damage paint technician).
- Developed our 16 to 18 programmes to include transferrable skills for 2024/25 in response to employer feedback.
- Invested in our Health, Science and Digital Skills Centre and Kingshill Farm to ensure students study in high quality learning environments that give them realistic industry experiences.
- Piloted a number of initiatives to embed sustainability into full-time students' schemes of work to 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.



CONTRIBUTING TO NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL PRIORITIES

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The table below sets out our key priorities and target outcomes relating to national, regional and local priorities for the academic year 2024/25:

Strategic plan aims	Priorities	Target outcomes for 2024/25	Impact and contribution towards national, regional and local priorities for learning and skills
To provide a better, more comprehensive service to employers.	Improve communication and understanding with employers.	<p>Sign up a minimum of 12 new employers to the employer partnership scheme.</p> <p>Hold a minimum of three Employer Advisory Board meetings per year, per department.</p>	By bridging the gap with employers, this will ensure TBCG develops skills that align employers' current and future skills needs. Students of TBCG will become the chosen workforce of the future.
	Tackle the digital skills gaps.	Increase the number of enrolments for short training courses in digital from 825 to 1000.	This will address the digital skills gap and support employers to train staff in an agile way.
	Build capacity in the health and science sector.	Engage with the NHS and other associated services to offer a minimum of 10 apprenticeships in Healthcare Support Workers and a minimum of 70 industry placements for T Level Health and T Level Science students.	This training will address the skills gap and demand for health care workers both locally and nationally. TBCG will further develop strong, collaborative links with health and care employers and support them in their workforce development.
	Develop green skills for jobs in construction.	<p>Develop three new Level 3 courses aligned to green skills and jobs for construction which deliver 50 enrolments in September 2025.</p> <p>Develop two new higher-level courses aligned to green skills and jobs for construction which deliver 50 enrolments in September 2025.</p>	This will support employers to meet the challenges and skills gaps when working on green, sustainability and decarbonisation projects.
	Support local skills development.	Offer five new skills bootcamps to meet needs in priority sectors.	Ensure adults receive the appropriate training and entry criteria to successfully fill employment gaps in the high priority areas.
	Respond to the demand in logistics for industry-based training.	<p>To form and deliver a minimum of three logistics employer forums across the Group.</p> <p>Launch Level 3 First Line Manager Skills in Logistics bootcamps (minimum of two to run across the Group).</p> <p>Launch First Line Managers in Logistics Environment commercial courses which deliver 24 enrolments.</p>	<p>The employer engagement events will continue to ascertain the business needs of the logistic industry, tailoring the skills needs required for the sector and supporting a high class workforce.</p> <p>This new provision will provide potential logistics managers with management training, business improvement techniques and basic project management skills to fill skills gaps.</p>

CONTRIBUTING TO NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL PRIORITIES

5

Strategic plan aims	Priorities	Target outcomes for 2024/25	Impact and contribution towards national, regional and local priorities for learning and skills
<p>To achieve consistent standards of educational excellence by making quality of education our top priority.</p>	<p>Tackle the digital skills gap.</p>	<p>Expand the digital literacy skills offer for adults in all four Learning Centres.</p> <p>Embed digital skills into all full-time study programmes.</p> <p>Develop a Digital Hub in all three general further education colleges to enable both students and staff to utilise virtual reality (VR) and digital technology.</p> <p>Design and deliver a tutorial programme that provides students with work readiness and transferrable skills.</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.</p>
<p>To expand technical and professional education and higher skills programmes.</p>	<p>Address the skills and technical needs according to occupational standards and promote the development of a highly skilled workforce.</p>	<p>Continue to develop the curriculum by introducing new T Levels as they are approved. This will include Animal Management and Foundation T Levels in September 2024.</p> <p>Exceed T Level recruitment target of 643 students by September 2024.</p> <p>Meet Foundation T Level targets of 200 students by September 2024.</p> <p>Expand our HTQs, increasing student numbers to 180 by June 2025.</p>	<p>Increasing our T Level and HTQ offer reflects national policy relating to the post-16 education landscape.</p> <p>Developing T Levels will equip students with the knowledge, skills and behaviors required to secure highly skilled and sustainable employment and meet the expectations of employers.</p> <p>Expanding courses at Level 4 and above will contribute to meeting advanced skills needs identified at local, regional and national level. This will include higher technical qualifications that employers look for.</p>
<p>To make strong progress towards becoming a net zero organisation and a leader in sustainability practices.</p>	<p>To raise awareness and meet growing demand for skills in renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable construction, and environmental conservation.</p>	<p>Achieve a Green Gown Award for our sustainability practices.</p> <p>Ensure at least 500 students at each college (Bedford College, Central Bedfordshire College and Tresham College) study the Green Skills for Careers programme and engage in research on the Sustainability Development Goals.</p> <p>Ensure all staff and students engage in sustainability training by July 2025.</p>	<p>Developing students' knowledge in this area will equip students with the skills required for green jobs and enable them to become better global citizens in line with the government's sustainability and climate strategy for education.</p>

LOCAL NEEDS DUTY SELF-ASSESSMENT

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TBCG makes a reasonable contribution to local skills needs and will continue to strive towards a judgement of 'strong' during the next academic year.

We will continue to meet the needs of students by preparing them to meet their aspirational destinations, so that they can progress on to successful careers that support national, regional and local priorities and the economy. Some students will achieve this directly from college whilst others, who require higher technical skills, will achieve this once a degree or further training has been completed.

The curriculum is planned in collaboration with external stakeholders to ensure breadth of opportunity and work readiness of students, as well as to ensure we are meeting employer demands and the skills needs of the communities we serve.

Our Work Experience Policy will continue to be the key driver in preparing students to have the knowledge, skills and behaviours to meet the needs of local, regional and national employers.

Employer engagement will continue to be strong when supporting students to identify career opportunities and support their aspirations to achieve positive destinations.

We will continue to respond to stakeholder feedback on skills gaps when transitioning into either educational or employer destinations.


Our Adults Skills Strategy integrates a culture of careers not courses across our local communities to ensure adults are equipped for employment at every opportunity to meet place specific technical and higher skills demands. Courses will be delivered on site, campus based, at our Learning Centres and through distance learning. This will ensure an agile delivery model is available to meet the needs of our communities.

We will continue to focus on courses for inactive adults with prior attainment below Level 2 to prepare adults with the skills needed to fill workforce gaps both locally and at a national level.



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 12th June 2024.

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: [*Accountability Statement*](#)



Allan Schofield
Chair of Governors
12th June 2024



Yiannis Koursis OBE
Chief Executive Officer
12th June 2024

Annual financial statements: *Annual Financial statements | The Bedford College Group*

Local Skills Improvement Plan (South East Midlands): *LSIP_(Parts_1_and_2)_31_July_2023_(002).pdf (northants-chamber.co.uk)*

Ofsted inspection report: *Ofsted | The Bedford College Group | Good*

Strategic plan: *Strategic Plan | The Bedford College Group*

References:

1. Unit for Future Skills Local Skills Dashboard, available at *department-for-education.shinyapps.io/local-skills-dashboard*; accessed 4th June 2024
2. South East Midlands Skills and Employment Briefing May 2024
3. SEMLEP Skills Plan 2017; available at *download.php (semlep.com)*; accessed 4th June 2024
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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 2023 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)*; accessed 4th June 2024
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 4th June 2024
7. ONS Census 2021, available at *How your area has changed in 10 years: Census 2021 - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)*; accessed 4th June 2024
8. *Population projections for local authorities: Table 2 - Office for National Statistics*; accessed 4th June 2024
9. RCU Vector Ethnicity by District, available at *Ethnicity by District | RCU*; accessed 4th June 2024
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