

# ANNUAL ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

2025/26



# THE GROUP'S PURPOSE

1

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

# THE GROUP'S PURPOSE

1

## STRATEGIC AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

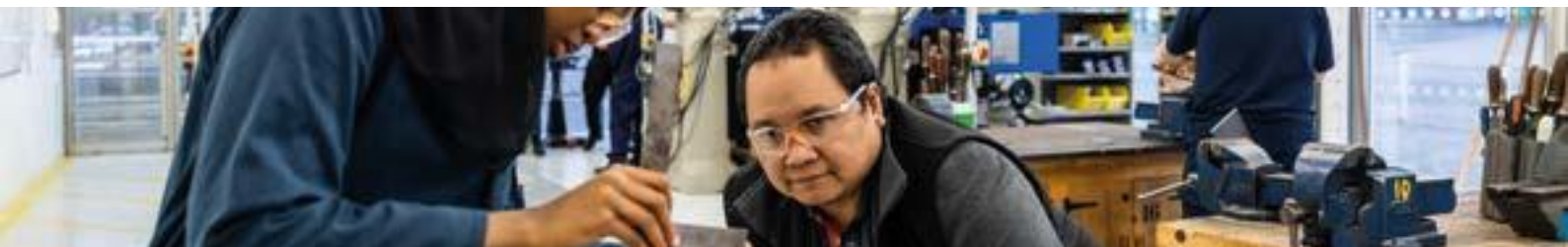
Our strategic plan outlines how we will achieve our purpose and vision to be the best and most authoritative post-16 education provider in the South East Midlands, and is underpinned by three strategic pillars: 1) educational leadership; 2) community leadership and reputation; and 3) sustainability.

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:

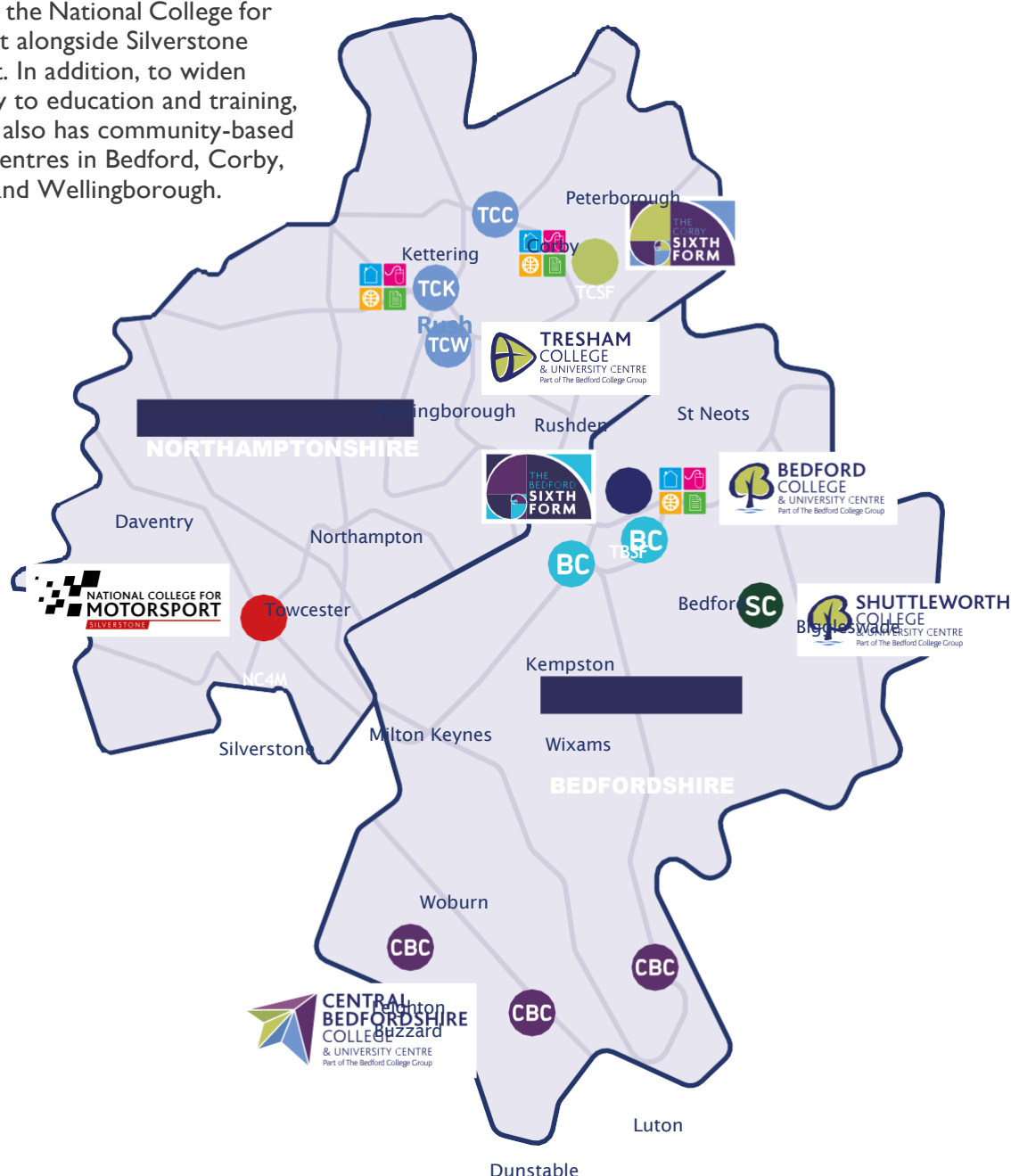
- To achieve consistent standards of educational excellence by making quality of education our top priority
- To expand technical and professional education and higher skills programmes
- To provide a better, more comprehensive service to employers
- To be recognised as a leader in further education 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*



TBCG is the largest college group in the South East Midlands, 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

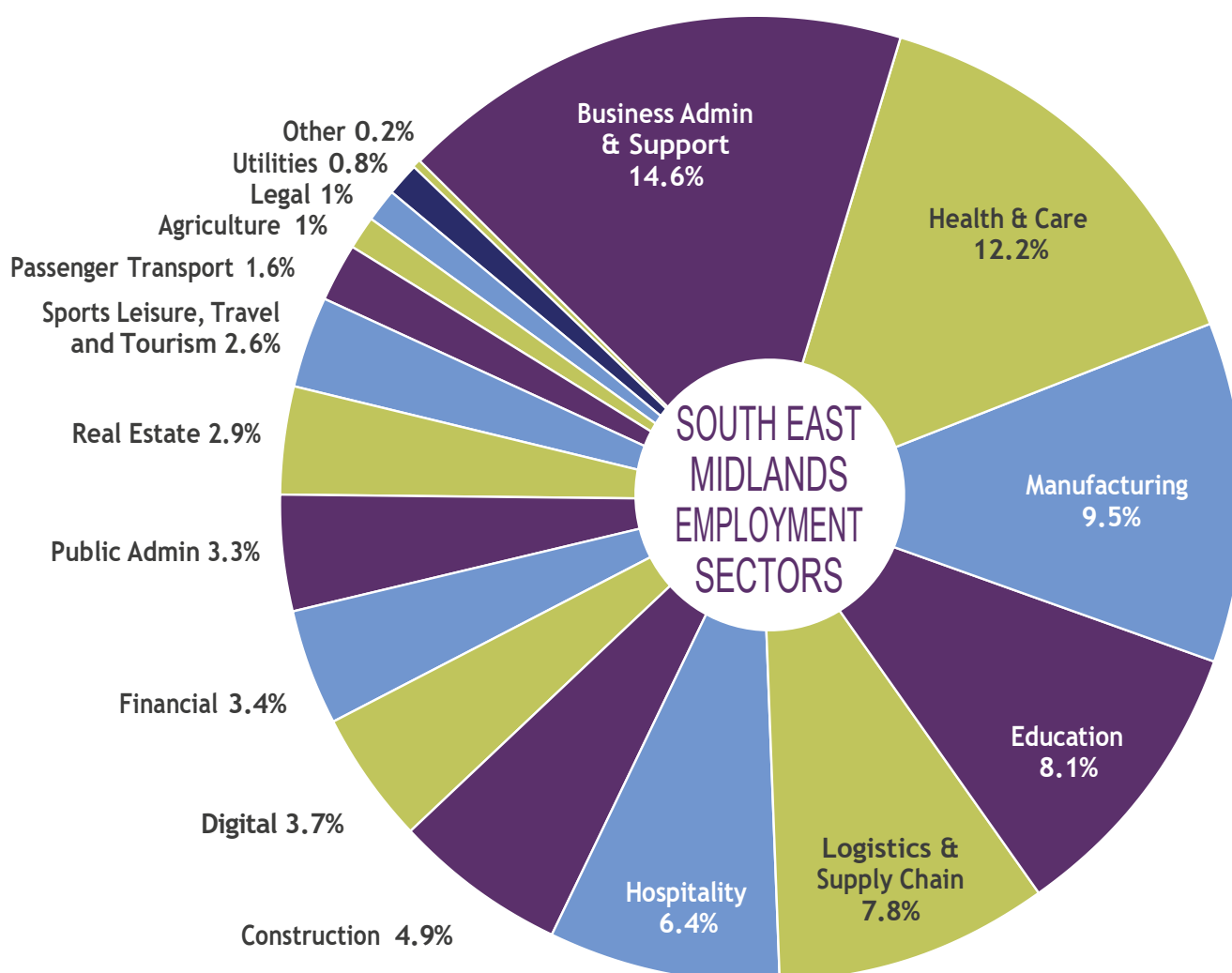
The South East Midlands is a £55 billion economy<sup>13</sup>, with a total of 74,035 businesses across the region<sup>1</sup>. There is a higher concentration of micro businesses with less than 10 employees (90.4%) than the national picture (89.2%), and a lower concentration of small businesses with 10-49 employees (7.7% compared to 8.7% nationally)<sup>1</sup>.

The main employment sectors in the region are logistics and supply chains, health and social care, business and administration support, education, manufacturing, construction and hospitality<sup>2</sup>.

In addition, the following sectors are considered a priority for the local economy to grow<sup>3</sup>:

- 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 certification<sup>11</sup>.



## 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 years<sup>7</sup>.

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 African<sup>7</sup>.

Just over half a million people aged 16 and over are economically active and, in addition, around 37,000 are in education<sup>7</sup>. 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%)<sup>8</sup>.

## SOCIAL FACTORS

Unemployment across the South East Midlands mirrors the national picture of 4.2%, along with the percentage of the working population claiming out-of-work benefits (4.3% compared to 4.2% nationally). However, this varies by local authority with Luton having a higher percentage (6.9%) of the working population claiming out-of-work benefits<sup>4</sup>.

Across the four local authorities, there are 41,550 children under 16 years living in low-income families (relative), with Luton (34.1% having a higher percentage than the national average of 21.8%)<sup>5</sup>. 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 skills<sup>6</sup>.

Fewer residents across the South East Midlands have qualifications at Level 3 or above (64.4%) compared to the national picture (67.9%), and it is similar at Level 4 or above (44.2% versus 47.6% nationally). 75,300 residents have no qualifications at all (7.1% compared to 6.7% 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 averages<sup>4</sup>. Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, Luton and North Northamptonshire were identified as 'cold spots' of the country where school outcomes are the weakest<sup>12</sup>.





# APPROACH TO DEVELOPING THE ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

3

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 through our labour market information and feedback from stakeholders.

The Group actively engage with Northamptonshire Chamber of Commerce and Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce to collect stakeholder views and input into the development of local skills, 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 Commercies 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.



# APPROACH TO DEVELOPING THE ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

3

## 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

# 4

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.
- 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.

Our activities continued to develop in 2024 to 2025 to include:

- Engaged with local authorities on a number of skills initiatives and research such as leading on education work as part of North Northamptonshire's Big 50 project
- Expanded 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.
- 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

5

The table below sets out our key priorities and target outcomes relating to national, regional and local priorities for the academic year 2025/26:

Strategic Priority	LSIP Priority	Proposed Targets
Extend our market leadership, size and scale in the areas we serve	A priority is to 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 27 future technologies (and developments in practice) as well as new technologies already being used or available.	<p>Establish an employer Hub in Tresham College.</p> <p>Develop an employer event with the JCP in Bedfordshire to mirror activity in Northamptonshire.</p> <p>Run an employer event for SMEs in Northamptonshire.</p> <p>Establish Digital Learning Hub in Central Bedfordshire College.</p>
Be recognised as a leader in further education and a major source of civic leadership within our communities	A priority is to work with employers and stakeholders to identify why existing “soft skills” provision may not be relevant to the changing (post covid) workplace and how “readiness for work and essential skills for work – communication, attitude, resilience, problem solving etc”) can be effectively developed and evidenced within academic, technical and vocational provision. We need to change language, moving from “soft skills” to “core transferable, attitudes and behaviours” etc. in an easily, commonly understood way	<p>Map the whole curriculum to the skills matrix detailed in the LSIP.</p> <p>Host two Chamber events.</p> <p>Extend the ‘Tresham Trailblazers’ has been a scheme launched to bring businesses and students together to develop entrepreneurial skills.</p> <p>Undertake learning schemes for 100 learners with Bedford Giving and the Northamptonshire Community Foundation to give students opportunity to explore work with the VCS.</p> <p>Undertake NEET reduction activities for 200 individuals by developing transferable skills to support employment or further learning.</p>
Expand Technical and Professional Education and Higher Skills programmes	A priority is to raise awareness of existing provision that satisfies demand in a way that employers understand and to continue to map provision against job demand and employer skills challenges so that further identified gaps in provision can be made available. This includes getting greater collaboration between colleges and Independent Training Providers. As part of this, a number of employers working closely with Further Education that provide skills training that meets their needs were positive about extending and further developing this work.	<p>1100 students to undertake T-Levels or Foundation T Levels.</p> <p>Launch T Level in sales and marketing.</p> <p>125 students studying HTQs.</p> <p>Launch social care learning activities with TSA.</p> <p>Launch logistics academy.</p> <p>Launch aviation academy.</p>
Invest in digital transformation to support the plan	A priority is providing accessibility and flexibility of training opportunities. Alongside this is a priority to engage with employers to	1000 students studying in learning centres.

# CONTRIBUTING TO NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL PRIORITIES

5

	identify how these can continue to be relevant	Develop a digital learning proposition in all study programmes.
Provide a better, more comprehensive service to employers	A priority is to communicate and engage with employers who haven't been working with colleges, chambers, LEPs on their skills needs to develop a real understanding of how education and training works in England, what is available in their local area in a language they understand and how they can benefit from engaging with training providers to access the provision already available	Develop a new CRM to better connect employer interactions with the Group and plan follow up activity.  Launch a new employer engagement strategy.
	A priority is to engage with more existing niche/key employers in local areas on their particular skills needs to highlight provision, develop a "blended" business and learning language and bring up to date, relevant skills into FE. A number of employers expressed the view that it important that existing relationships are also supported	Develop 5 new employer academies with existing partners.  Host an employer event in each LSIP and National priority sector with existing partners.
	A priority is to look at how employers can both work with FE (and ITP's) to build capacity to support delivery and also where the value of training is recognised so that some costs can/should be met by employers	Play a significant role in the Big 50 Place Board.  Work to develop a 'Skills Bedfordshire' approach.  Map systems leadership to ensure that the Group can actively respond to any devolution proposition.
Make strong progress towards becoming a net zero organisation and a leader in sustainability practices	A priority is to look at the development and availability of capital and human resource in partnership with sector specialists, supporting employers working on green/sustainable/decarbonisation projects or those who have recognised "green" jobs to interact with SME's and support knowledge transfer about what "green jobs" are, facilitating an understanding of future skills needs in this area. Also to work with SME's to help them think strategically about future skills needs and recruitment in these areas, including accessing wider groups of people such as those at risk of exclusion in order to build skills and enter further education, training, and employment.	Run 10 sustainability projects in 5 SSAs.  Run a skills bootcamp in Agri-tech.  Engage 200 pre-16 students in sustainability education to support progression to post learning.  Top 10 placing in the Teach In Leadership Board for Sustainable Development.

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. We are developing a new curriculum strategy which will continue to develop a curriculum which develops deep subject knowledge in students as well as developing their transferable, collaborative, evaluative and problem solving skills.

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.



# CORPORATION STATEMENT

7

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 21<sup>st</sup> May 2025.

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*



**Alasdair  
Simmons**  
Chair of Governors  
21<sup>st</sup> May 2025

**Yiannis Koursis OBE**  
Chief Executive Officer  
21<sup>st</sup> May 2025

**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 8<sup>th</sup> May 2025
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
4. NOMIS Official Census and Labour Market Information, available at *Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics (nomisweb.co.uk)*; accessed 8th May 2025
5. Department for Work and Pensions Children in Low Income Families Local Area Statistics, available at *children in low income families: local area statistics financial year ending 2024 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)*; accessed 8th May 2025
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
10. ONS Ethnic Groups 2021, available at *Ethnic group, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)*; accessed 4th June 2024
11. Northamptonshire and Milton Keynes Chamber of Commerce in a partnership with Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce Local Skills Improvement Plan ( SEMLEP Region), available at *https://www.northants-chamber.co.uk/cdn/uploads/LSIP\_Report\_2023\_(South\_East\_Midlands).pdf*; accessed 4th June 2024
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 4th June 2024
13. ONS Regional Gross Domestic Product: Enterprise Regions, available at *Regional gross domestic product: enterprise regions - Office for National Statistics*; accessed 4th June 2024





The Bedford College Group  
Bedford College (registered office)  
Cauldwell Street  
Bedford  
MK42 9AH

01234 291000  
[bedfordcollegegroup.ac.uk](http://bedfordcollegegroup.ac.uk)