



Accountability Statement

May 2024

Our Purpose

West Herts College Group Vision

Our vision is to transform life chances and create a better everyday life for many people.

Mission

Our Mission is to provide high-quality education and training in a safe, respectful and inclusive environment that prepares people for success in work and life and builds a foundation for lifelong learning.

Public Value Statement

We will provide a broad range of provision and services to meet the needs, interests and aspirations of the communities we serve.

The College

- Will inspire interest in lifelong learning, working with employers to develop the skills needed for success in life and at work. We commit to this in the knowledge that:
 - Professional skills are central to individual earning power and the collective productivity of our local, regional and national economies
 - English, Maths and Digital skills are essential to accessing opportunities
 - The aspirations of many in our communities are challenged by economic, health and social pressures
- We will engage with as many people and organisations as possible, working in partnership to maximise benefits across our communities, with the views of stakeholders represented at College Board level.
- We recognise our responsibilities as a community asset for the people we serve, understanding community issues and making a meaningful contribution to providing solutions to these challenges.
- We will maintain a thorough understanding of local labour markets and facilitate positive relationships between employers and prospective employees.
- We value community well-being and are fully committed to providing lifelong learning opportunities through a range of courses.

- We ensure the College secures and develops a workforce that is able to provide the skills and experiences required to deliver provision of the highest quality.
- We will be professional in all undertakings and accessible wherever possible, providing a safe and welcoming place for people to gather and engage in learning and recreational activities
- We will take responsible decisions, utilising public funds appropriately and always seeking to prioritise expenditure and investment to benefit local people.
- We will play our part in the net zero economy – taking action to reduce our climate impact, calculating our emissions annually and taking action to reduce them.

Relationship between strategic plan and annual Accountability Statement

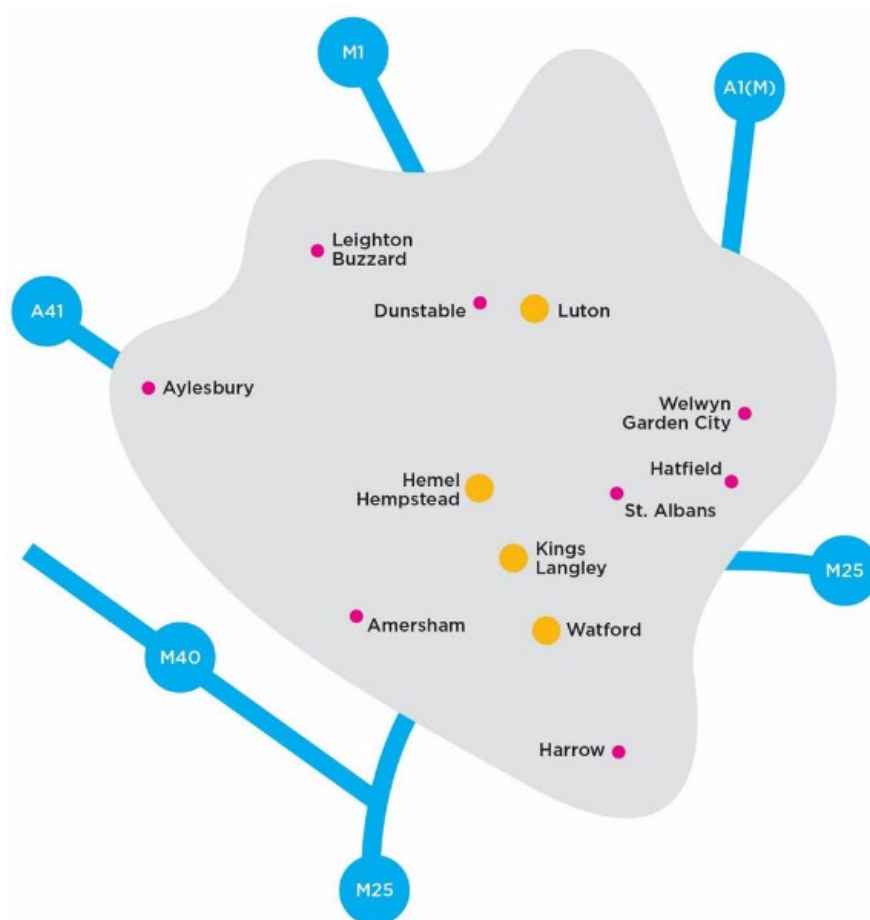
Our Strategic Plan sets the direction for all of our work. This Accountability Statement offers a top-level summary of the way in which we work to meet local skills needs. Beneath this sit sector-level skills plans for the implementation of our strategic planning.

Context and Place

West Herts College Group is a large, general Further Education college comprising West Herts College, with campuses in Watford and Hemel Hempstead, and Barnfield College, with two campuses in Luton. Annually, we deliver a broad range of full- and part-time courses to around 6,600 16-18 year-olds and 3,900 adults.

Geographical areas we serve

The college group falls into two LSIP areas: Hertfordshire, and the South East Midlands. The main geographical areas served by the group are Dacorum District including Hemel Hempstead, Watford, the wider Hertfordshire area, North London, Luton, Dunstable, and the wider South-East Midlands. This diagram shows the areas within one hour's travel of our campuses by public transport. Transport links are good. Where travel costs are a barrier to attending college, we provide financial support; over 1,500 learners are currently in receipt of a bursary to enable them to attend college.



Economic and social characteristics of the areas we serve

Both Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire are a mix of semi-rural areas and towns. Luton is a large town with a population of over 225,000 people. Watford, with a population of 102,000 people, is the smallest of the College's three main boroughs, with its eight square miles dominated by the town centre and surrounding mixed-use areas. Our Hemel Hempstead campus lies in Dacorum, which has a population of 155,000. In Dacorum, the requirement from central government for unprecedented

housing development had led to the development of a 25-year plan of building and infrastructure expansion which potentially includes developing Hemel Hempstead into a Garden City.

Luton is ranked 12,124 in the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (this ranks Lower-layer Super Output Areas from 1 (most deprived) to 32,844 (least deprived)). Watford (at 19,649) and Dacorum (at 22,055) are comparatively less deprived. Although Hertfordshire ranks 135 of 151 upper-tier local authorities in England on indices of multiple deprivation, some parts of Hertfordshire rank more highly for neighbourhood deprivation. Hertfordshire is a county characterised by inequality, with 45 wards in the bottom 3 percentiles of deprivation in England in 2019. There are pockets of deprivation in all of the regions we serve, and we offer a range of financial support to learners according to need.

In Luton the unemployment rate is 5.95%, a little higher than the country-wide average of 3.91%. Helping adults into employment, and helping prevent young people from becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) is a priority. In Luton, youth unemployment is also higher than the national rate. Addressing poverty is a key focus of Luton Borough Council, which is aiming to ensure the town is free of poverty by 2040. Unemployment is better than the national rate in Watford and Dacorum, at 4.1% and 3.04% respectively (DWP, February 2024). This does not mean that there is no need to help those furthest from work to gain employment, however. Those over 50 and the disabled are priority groups identified by Hertfordshire County Council for support into work.

Education levels in Watford and Dacorum are good compared to the national picture. The rate of those over 16 with no qualifications is below the national rate (18.08%) in both Watford (15.86%) and Dacorum (14.68%). Luton has more residents with no qualifications than the national rate, at 22.86% (Census, 2021). One-third of those living in Luton were born outside the UK and double the UK percentage hold qualifications not recognised in the UK.

Across both regions we serve, transport links are strong and residents often travel to work in London and other major cities such as Milton Keynes. Businesses are predominantly SMEs: there are some large but few medium-sized businesses.

The South-East Midlands is an innovative area with cutting-edge high-tech industry. It has experienced rapid growth in recent years, and the population is also growing quickly. Luton is located between Oxford, Cambridge, and London, with excellent rail, road and air transport links. It also has one of the highest rates of business start-ups in the country, and excellent high-speed internet.

The airport is a major employer in Luton, owned by the Council who have plans for substantial development. Another key employer in this area is the Vauxhall vehicle manufacturing plant.

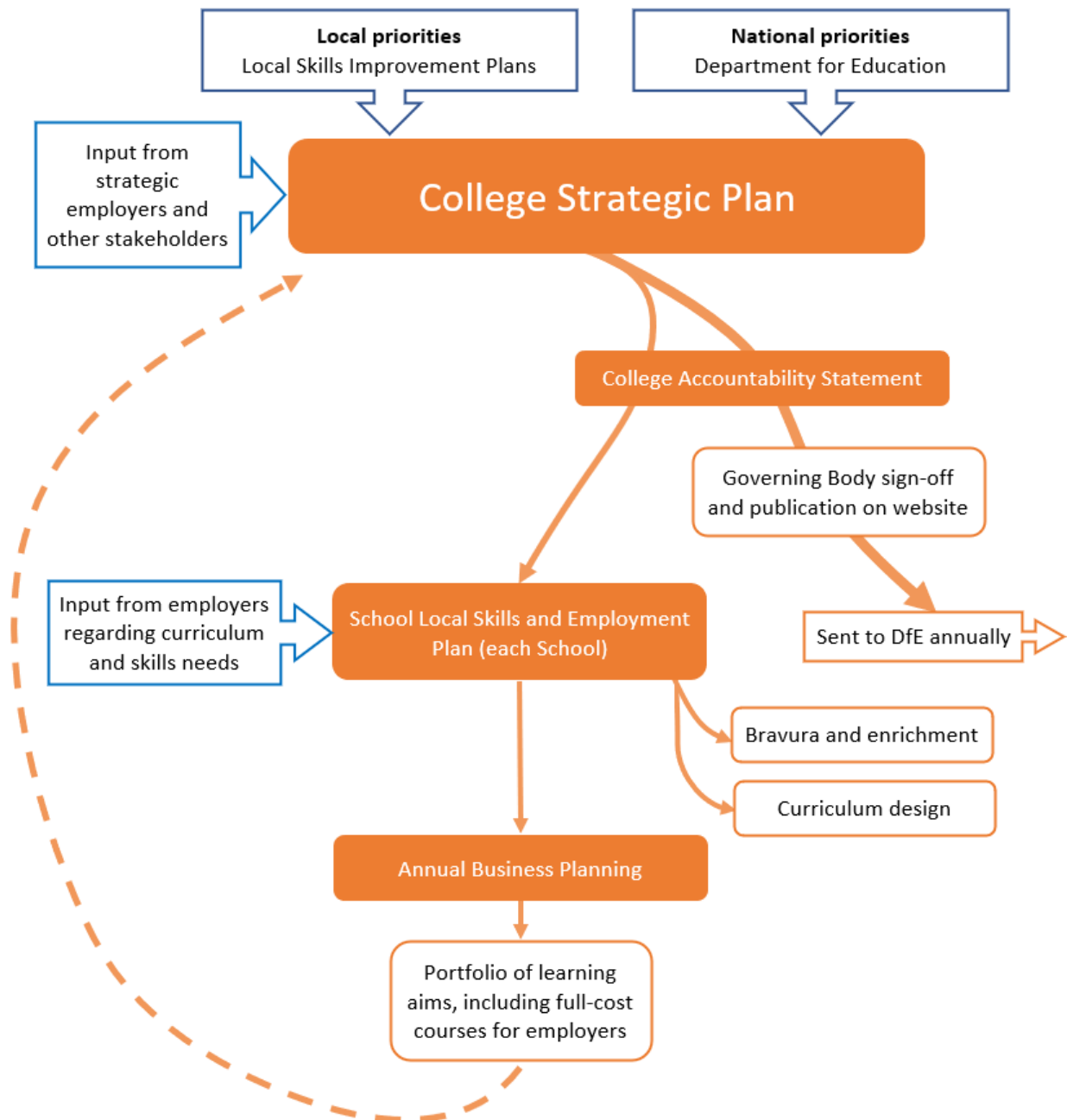
Stevenage has the third-largest cell and gene therapy cluster globally; the enterprise zone in Hemel Hempstead is a centre for agri-tech, construction, and digital technologies; and the UK's film industry is based the south-west of the county. The creative industries are a significant source of employment

and growth in West Hertfordshire. TV and film production is of particular importance in this region: key employers include Warner Bros based in Leavesdon, Sky and BBC studios in Elstree Studio, and the new Sunset Studios in Broxbourne. Construction has also begun for a new studio in Bedfordshire, only a little over ten miles North of our campus in Luton. Both regions are home large NHS hospital trusts. Employment opportunities are diverse, however, and are not limited to these key sectors.

LSIP priorities across both regions are not dissimilar to national priorities published by the Department for Education: they include construction, manufacturing, digital and technology, health, engineering, and science. Hospitality and tourism, and the creative industries, are also priorities in Hertfordshire. In the South-East Midlands, additional focus areas are specified in business; catering and hospitality; legal, finance, and accounting; sales, marketing and procurement; cleaning; and logistics. Both LSIPs also emphasise the importance of soft skills for employers, particularly communication skills. Digital skills for work, and green skills, are important in both regions.

Approach to developing annual accountability statement

We undertake annual business planning to evaluate and develop our response to national and local priorities. This process is shown here:



The business planning process takes into account a range of intelligence on skills and training needs.

Staff at all levels are involved, and input is sought from stakeholders and employers to inform curriculum portfolio planning, curriculum design, and enrichment.

Employer input into the curriculum

Employer input into the curriculum occurs at strategic level, confirming local needs and priorities. This helps to shape our curriculum portfolio, the learning aims and other courses which we offer. A key part of this employer input is through the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). LSIPs were published in both of our regions (Hertfordshire and the South-East Midlands) in Spring 2023. We worked closely with the Employer Representative Bodies (ERBs) to support in preparing these, and have continued our involvement in this process. Updates to the LSIPs are anticipated in late Spring 2024. This Statement, therefore, takes into account the priorities published in 2023. It also takes into account the updated national priorities published by the Department for Education (DfE) in December 2023.

As well as influencing the portfolio of qualifications that we offer, employer input into curriculum design shapes the structure of our courses (including the units or modules offered within a qualification), the content we teach (such as topics and scenarios), and the way in which training is delivered (for example, the equipment used). Employers are involved in delivering training and assessment, as well as providing on-the-job training. Employers also help with upskilling teaching staff.

Each subject area within the College Group prepares a 'Skills and Employment Plan' which highlights sector-specific skills priorities for the curriculum area. Heads of School work together on these across colleges. These plans are live documents which record new information throughout the year. This process informs decisions about the courses we offer as well as the content of these courses plus additional skills delivery, and guides planning for the future.

Although a formal annual activity, our business planning is an iterative process. Employer input is routine, whether through our own strategic engagement, forums and consultations, and ongoing dialogue with the large number of employers with whom we have sustained relationships, or through informal conversations, such as with employers seeking assistance with recruitment or enquiring about commercial training. For example, we work with local leisure centres in both Watford and Luton to provide our sports learners with the National Pool Lifeguard Qualification to enable them to work in hard-to-fill vacancies for these businesses; we have an ongoing relationship with an innovative construction company who supports training our carpentry learners in Modern Methods of Construction.

We deliver a formal programme of work-related skills for our full-time learners, which provides skills that extend beyond the core content of technical and vocational qualifications. It also includes English and maths skills informed by what employers in different sectors have told us are important

in the workplace. Through this project, which we call 'Bravura', learners complete activities to gain a set of skills and knowledge related to their chosen occupational pathway. These are shaped by employer input and other priorities (such as digital skills needs and English and maths development), and they are designed to help learners close the gap between completion of their main learning aim and readiness for work.

Examples of Bravura activities include:

- Smoke alarm and Carbon Monoxide alarm installation certificates, for electrical installation learners
- Essential Digital Skills qualifications, for ESOL learners
- 18th Edition Wiring Regulations, for electrical installation level 3 learners
- Safeguarding, first aid, and coaching qualifications, for sports learners
- Air Cabin Crew course readiness, for travel learners
- Mental health first aid awareness
- Self-employment masterclasses
- Wella Salon Sustainability online course, for hairdressing learners
- Football Excellence Active IQ gym instructor and personal training courses, for sports learners
- Retrofit installation, for plumbing and electrical learners
- Mindset and resilience virtual reality courses

Learners also participate in World Skills and other national skills competitions.

Our provision covers all national priority sectors. While we do not offer courses badged as 'logistics', employers in this sector have reported through the LSIP consultation that they do not require training with a narrow logistics focus, but instead prefer to access business and digital courses, which give learners better prospects. We offer a broad portfolio of business and digital courses across a range of levels.

We have responded to specific employer demands, which have arisen from the LSIP consultation:

- Employers would like more accessible modular courses. As well as introducing Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) in our existing HE provision, we are working with our HE partners on the development of new HTQs which will give opportunity for shorter technical qualifications at a higher level.
- Green skills for sustainability, in particular retrofit, are a priority need in our regions. We have trained our staff in installation for solar PV, EV charging, and heat pumps, and invested in training equipment for these courses. We have successfully bid for a grant to deliver retrofit installation qualifications in Hertfordshire.
- Employers report that they struggle to understand the skills offer in our regions. We engage widely with employers to understand their needs and support the ERBs in their work with employers. We are also participating in the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) project on communication with employers.

- We deliver a range of maths provision including through the targeted Multiply programme, which is enabling local people to develop skills for work or further study such as Functional Skills. We also deliver maths and English at L2 for those who need it.

A key priority for employers in both regions was 'soft' skills. These include, for example, communication for the workplace, confidence, and digital skills. We have responded in several ways:

- Employers reported that they need employees to have better digital skills. We have introduced digital courses for our ESOL learners to prepare them for the workplace; these courses include topics like cyber security. Our full-time learners take our digital passport programme.
- Employers told us that soft skills, including communication and confidence, are often more important than technical skills. We have invested in the creation of virtual reality personal development modules on workplace communication, which our full-time learners complete as part of their personal development programme.
- Skills such as resilience, self-motivation, and adaptability have also been highlighted as particularly valued by employers. We worked with an expert in motivation and resilience for young people to commission a virtual reality module on resilience and mindset. This will be taken by our full-time learners.
- Other 'soft' skills include time management, teamwork, and planning. Our Bravura activities, including employer-led Live Briefs, give learners the opportunity to develop these skills by participating in projects over and above what their main programme of study requires.

Work with stakeholders

The College has very strong links with regional employer groups and these have been extended through our participation in preparing the Local Skills Employment Plans (LSIPs). We maintain situational awareness of the local and regional economy and labour market through our work with Chambers of Commerce (Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire, Hertfordshire), Local Enterprise Partnerships (Hertfordshire, South East Midlands), and local councils (Luton Borough, Watford Borough, Dacorum Borough). We also make use of labour market intelligence services such as Vector and Lightcast, and through commissioning research where appropriate. We are represented on a range of local skills panels and other groups.

We work with a wide range of other stakeholders including:

Local councils

In Watford, we have worked closely with the Borough Council on the development of the Watford Local Skills and Employment Plan. West Herts College led on convening local stakeholders and coordinating their responses. We are also part of the Watford Developer

Forum, a construction sector group which meets to oversee the response to skills needs for major construction projects in the town, and Watford Business Connect, which connects us to a wide range of employer stakeholders.

In Luton, we chair Luton Council's Employment and Skills Partnership Board, which brings stakeholders together to operationalise the town's 2040 Vision. We are an integral part of the Inclusive Economy Board which aims to build an inclusive economy that delivers inward investment to support the growth of businesses, jobs and incomes. The board oversees the development of the Economic Strategy and detailed delivery plans.

In Dacorum, we sit on the Borough Council Economic Board, and lead its employment and skills aspect; we are also represented on the Hemel Place Board. These focus on social welfare and wellbeing projects.

Other groups

Partnerships with Watford's key cultural employers and organisations is strong and sustained by the Watford Together Cultural Leaders Group (Watford Palace Theatre, The Pump House Theatre, Watford Museum, Colosseum Venue, Watford Football Club, Warner Bros, Vibe FM, and Visit Watford).

We work with employers to ensure that our studios and workshops are kept updated to reflect industry needs. For example, we have worked with a modern methods of construction (MMC) company to install a model MMC house in the construction workshop at our Hemel Hempstead campus.

We work closely with Luton Council on issues relating to skills and employment, for example to identify opportunities to provide training for retrofit installers to contribute to the upgrading of the town's housing stock. We also work closely with two charitable organisations, Love Luton and Community Interest Luton, which bring businesses together for community purposes. We work to support other groups in Luton: for example, we provide community provision for ESOL learners.

We are a member of the Hertfordshire Screen Skills Board and the Hertfordshire Sports Skills Board.

We work closely with the Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce and the Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire Chambers of Commerce. We also work with the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership.

Work with the other local providers

We work with a range of local providers, including:

Universities

We provide a range of courses for the University of Hertfordshire as part of our wider HE offer, and work with the university on initiatives including learner progression opportunities. We have also begun work with the University of Hertfordshire on the development of Higher Technical Qualifications and on their degree apprenticeship development project.

We work with the University of Bedfordshire as part of our widening participation strategy in Luton.

Local schools

We run careers events for pupils and career advisors; taster sessions promoting specific occupations and skills; and events in collaboration with employers to break gender stereotypes across specific occupations.

In the South-East Midlands, strategic engagement with schools centres on the Secondary Heads Networks, where the focus is on supporting school children to transition from school to college (Luton schools do not have sixth forms) and also establishing alternative provision for 14 to 16 year-olds.

We are part of the steering group for the Hertfordshire Cultural Education Partnership, which comprises schools, the County music service, the Royal Opera House bridge, and a range of creative providers, and works for develop cultural education across the region.

Further Education colleges

We have established a routine of collaborative working with the other FE colleges in our regions and have developed strong relationships between college leaders. We also work to avoid overlap in our provision. For example:

- North Herts College leads on work with life sciences employers in Hertfordshire due to the college's proximity to the Gene and Stem Cell Therapy Catapult in Stevenage. To share the expertise they have developed through this work, North Herts College is leading a project within the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) project on upskilling science staff in laboratory skills for life sciences and use of the virtual laboratory

resource.

- Oaklands College is leading on the development of the town planning curriculum in Hertfordshire and also delivers Hertfordshire's land-based provision.
- West Herts College is leading on establishing a collaboration between the Herts FE colleges and the County Council to improve partnership working across SEND provision, to deliver improvements and cost-savings. We are also leading the Hertfordshire LSIF and leading on the South-East Midlands LSIF health project.
- Hertfordshire Regional College is leading one of the projects within the LSIF on capacity building for the creative industries, including sustainable ways of working in this sector.
- Milton Keynes College is leading the South-East Midlands LSIF, including projects focused on best practice for communications with employers, and on digital technology for skills teaching.
- Bedfordshire College is leading a project within the South-East Midlands LSIF on sustainability technology.
- Northampton College is the regional specialist in international logistics. We do not deliver haulage (driver) training because this is provided by private training providers.

Collective actions to meet local needs include collaboration on staff training and the development of a virtual campus. We routinely support each other with referrals and guidance to employers, where another college is best placed to assist with their skills needs.

Private training providers

We are extending our relationships with private training providers. For example, we work with the Code Institute to offer specialist high-level digital skills, and with iSales on specialised apprenticeship provision in Hertfordshire. We have worked with Bodyswaps, a leading international provider of immersive skills development software, on several bespoke projects in response to employer demand. We have also recently joined the Sustainability School, through the South-East Midlands LSIF project. We are also developing links to the Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes (BLMK) NHS Integrated Care Board healthcare academy.

Contribution to national, regional, and local priorities

These short-term objectives reflect new provision or growth in the academic year 2024/5 compared to 2023/22, which have been planned to meet specific national and/or local skills priorities. This is not an exhaustive picture: the wider, ongoing work of the college also relates closely to skills priorities but is not detailed here. This includes, for example, Level 2 English and maths and engineering up to Level 3. In addition, further work targeted at specific priorities will be developed during the course of normal college business as the academic year progresses.

The college was successful in its bid to lead the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) project for Hertfordshire and to lead the health sub-project for the LSIF in the South-East Midlands. Delivery of these projects is progressing well.

The college will continue to recruit to a curriculum portfolio aligned to a wide range of national and local skills priorities and will deliver training to over 10,000 learners.

	Priority				Objective	Achieved to date	Target output 2024/25
	Skill	National	SEM	Herts			
1	Health and care <i>Also</i> Science and mathematics	✓	✓	✓	a. Train school leavers for careers in health and in childcare b. Deliver skills training to 16-18 year-olds on health and care programmes which gives them up-to-date industry knowledge to support their transition to this sector's workforce	a. Level 3 T Level in Education and Childcare - Early Years Educator was introduced in 2023 b. This skills training was delivered to those taking health and social care courses for 16-18 year-olds; this will be continued in	New courses planned for September 2024: 1. L2 Certificate in Skills for Further Study in Health and Human Science 2. L2 Diploma for the Early Years Practitioner 3. A Levels in Biology, Chemistry and maths, to enable a new medicine/science pathway Increase in groups for September 2024: Level 2 Extended Diploma in

	Priority				Objective	Achieved to date	Target output 2024/25
	Skill	National	SEM	Herts			
						2024/25	Health and Social Care – additional group at Hemel Campus
2	Construction, green skills, and decarbonisation	✓	✓	✓	<p>a. Train school leavers in the skills for the installation of green technologies in construction, to support their transition to this sector’s workforce</p> <p>b. Provide upskilling courses for those working in construction trades in electrical installation and plumbing to enable them to gain the qualifications they need to install green technologies</p>	<p>a. Skills training on green technologies in EV charging, solar PV and heat pumps was introduced in 2023 for 16-18 year-olds on construction trades programmes in electrical installation and plumbing; this will be extended in 2024/25</p> <p>b. Commercial programmes have been introduced in these technologies and we will continue to develop this offering</p>	<p>New courses planned for September 2024: Level 1 Award in Health and Safety in a Construction Environment</p> <p>Increase in groups for September 2024: Level 3 T Level Building Services Engineering for Construction - Electrotechnical Engineering for Construction – additional 2 groups at Hemel Campus</p> <p>We have secured funding for the delivery of retrofit qualifications to 45 apprentices and their employers in Hertfordshire (note that the LEP estimates there are currently only 157 qualified installers in the county)</p> <p>We will investigate funding bespoke courses such as External Wall Installation and other retrofit qualifications through new Adult Skills Fund Tailored Learning funding</p>
3	Digital	✓	✓	✓	Provide basic digital skills for employment for adult learners, as well as higher-level training in software development	Essential Digital Skills has been added to our English as a Second or Other Language courses.	<p>New courses planned for September 2024:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Level 3 National Foundation Diploma in Computing - Network Systems and Security

	Priority				Objective	Achieved to date	Target output 2024/25
	Skill	National	SEM	Herts			
						Level 5 software development course was introduced in 2023	2. Level 3 Foundation Diploma in Cyber Security
4	Professional skills for work readiness	✓	✓	✓	<p>Full-time learners will gain a set of skills and knowledge related to their chosen occupational pathway, informed by employer input, which will help them close the gap between completion of their main learning aim and readiness for work.</p> <p>We will provide courses to meet the fast-growing demand for a range of business roles, as well as entry-level employment</p>	<p>Full-time learners complete a portfolio of Bravura activities.</p> <p>We offer a range of business learning aims from L1 to L4 including specialisms in law, marketing, enterprise, accounting, management, and human resources</p>	<p>Increase in groups for September 2024:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Level 3 National Foundation Diploma in Business – additional 2 groups at Watford Campus Entry 2 Certificate in Personal and Social Development Skills – additional 2 groups at Luton Entry 2 Certificate Employability Skills – additional group at Watford Campus
5	Creative			✓	Support local people to gain the skills they need to work in this key sector in our region	Extended provision aligned to the fast growth in demand for creative skills in motion capture, animation, digital media, interior design/architecture, TV and film	<p>New courses planned for September 2024:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Level 3 Extended Diploma in Creative Practice: Art, Design and Communication (Digital Illustration and Animation) Interior Design – Beginners HND in Game Development Introduction to Music Production and Technology HND in Film and Television Level 2 Diploma in Creative Media (Game Design)

	Priority				Objective	Achieved to date	Target output 2024/25
	Skill	National	SEM	Herts			
							Increase in groups for September 2024: Level 2 Diploma in Art and Design – additional group at Luton

Local Needs

The Corporation has reviewed the curriculum offered by the College, and considers that it meets local needs.

West Herts College offers a broad range of academic, vocational, and professional training from foundation level to level 5, including apprenticeships and non-accredited provision. The college continues to develop courses identified by the DfE as priority high quality provision including apprenticeships and T Levels, and has continued to expand its A Level offering for those for whom occupational courses are not yet appropriate.

West Herts College provision covers the skills required for national priority sectors and local needs, working with other providers to avoid overlapping curriculum offers. The college has been responsive to employer feedback through the LSIP consultation, as detailed in this Statement, and works with a range of stakeholders on other local needs, some of which arise quickly and require a rapid response, such as provision for refugees.

The table on pages 14-16 of this Statement outline our longer-term strategic outcomes and actions.

Corporation statement

On behalf of the West Herts College Group corporation, it is hereby confirmed that the college plan as set out above reflects an agreed statement of purpose, aims and objectives as approved by the corporation at their meeting on 8th May 2024.

The plan will be published on the college's website within three months of the start of the new academic year and can be accessed from the following link: <https://www.westherts.ac.uk/about/policies-statements>

Chair of Governors



Phil Thompson

Chief Executive and Accounting Officer



Gill Worgan

Dated: 14 May 2024

Supporting documentation

Hertfordshire [Local Skills Improvement Plan](#)

South-East [Midlands Local Skills Improvement Plan](#)

The college was inspected by Ofsted in December 2021; the report is here:
<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/31/130720>

West Herts College Group [Strategic Plan](#)

Contact us

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