Derwentside College

Strategic Plan
2025-2031

Our Mission

Transforming lives through education, ambition, and impact

Our Vision

Creating positive futures for our learners, community, and region

Our Values

Trust | Respect | Excellence | Enjoyment | Enterprise

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Foreword

We are proud to introduce Derwentside College's Strategic Plan for 2025-2031 - a bold and forward-looking reflection of our unwavering commitment to our learners, our communities, and our region.

This plan is more than a document; it is a shared vision for the future. It sets out how we will continue to drive opportunity through education, ambition, and regional impact - empowering individuals, supporting employers, and contributing meaningfully to the economic and social regeneration of County Durham and the wider North-East region.

We are entering this next chapter with confidence. Our College is built on strong foundations: a dedicated and values-led workforce, a culture of excellence, and deep-rooted partnerships with employers, civic leaders, and community organisations. We are proud of our reputation as a responsive, inclusive, and high-performing institution - and we are determined to build on this.

The strategic priorities outlined in this plan are designed to ensure we remain resilient, innovative, and impactful. They reflect the voices of our staff, stakeholders, and learners, and are grounded in a clear understanding of the challenges and opportunities ahead.

We know the landscape is changing. Political reform, economic uncertainty, technological disruption, and social inequality all demand a bold and agile response. This strategy is our commitment to that response. It is a promise to our learners that we will continue to support them to achieve, belong, and thrive. It is a pledge to our region that we will remain a trusted partner in shaping a brighter, fairer, and more prosperous future.

Chris Todd
Principal and Chief Executive

David Allsop
Chair of the Board

Introduction

Derwentside College is proud to be a driving force for opportunity, ambition, and transformation across County Durham and the wider North-East region. As a dynamic and inclusive Further Education College, we are deeply rooted in our communities and committed to delivering education that changes lives, strengthens the economy, and builds a brighter future for all.

We are more than a place of learning - we are a catalyst for progress.

Every day, we empower learners to realise their potential; support employers to grow and innovate; and contribute to the social and economic regeneration of our region. Our work is grounded in a belief that education should be accessible, aspirational, and aligned with the real-world needs of learners, businesses, and communities.

This strategic plan sets out our vision and priorities for the period 2025–2031. It is shaped by a deep understanding of the national, regional and local skills agenda, regional economic challenges, and the aspirations of those we serve. It reflects our ambition to lead with purpose, respond with agility, and deliver with impact.

These priorities are underpinned by a clear implementation framework, rigorous quality assurance, and a culture of accountability and continuous improvement. They are not just strategic themes - they are commitments to excellence, inclusion, and transformation.

We recognise the challenges ahead: economic uncertainty, technological disruption, social inequality, and environmental responsibility. But we also see immense opportunity. Opportunity to lead with courage, to innovate with purpose, and to make a lasting difference in the lives of those we serve.

Through this strategy, we reaffirm our mission: transforming lives through education, ambition, and impact. We will continue to be a college that listens, adapts, and leads - a college creating positive futures for our learners, community, and region.

At the heart of this strategy are **five bold priorities** that will guide our direction and define our success

Strategic Context

Derwentside College enters its next strategic planning cycle at a time of significant change and opportunity - both within the further education sector and across the wider political, economic, and social landscape. This plan is shaped by a comprehensive review of our mission, vision, and values; a detailed analysis of external drivers; and extensive engagement with staff, governors, and stakeholders.

A Renewed Sense of Purpose

Our refreshed mission - **"Transforming lives through education, ambition, and impact"** - and vision - **"Creating positive futures for our learners, community, and region"** - reaffirm our enduring commitment to inclusive growth, learner empowerment, and regional impact. These statements build on the strong foundations already in place and reflect the evolving needs of our learners, partners, and communities.

While our values remain unchanged, they continue to serve as a powerful guide for our culture and decision-making. They reflect who we are and what we stand for - a college that champions excellence, respect, trust, enterprise, and enjoyment. These values are deeply embedded in our daily practice and will continue to shape how we work, support one another, and deliver for our learners.

Responding to a Changing Landscape

The external environment presents both challenges and opportunities. A new Labour government, evolving devolution arrangements, and a shifting local political context are reshaping the policy and funding landscape. The College must remain agile and proactive in responding to national strategies such as the Post-16 Skills Strategy, Local Growth Plan, the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, and regional frameworks like the North-East Local Skills Improvement Plan (NELSIP).

Economically, the North-East continues to face structural inequalities, skills shortages, and the ongoing impact of inflation and cost-of-living pressures. These realities reinforce the College's role as an anchor institution - supporting social mobility, workforce development, and economic resilience.

Socially, the College must respond to persistent barriers to participation, including low aspiration, digital exclusion, and mental health challenges. At the same time, technological transformation - particularly in AI, automation, and digital learning - presents opportunities to innovate and personalise education. Environmental sustainability, legal compliance, and safeguarding remain essential pillars of our operational and strategic approach.

Building on Strengths, Addressing Challenges

Derwentside College is well-positioned to respond to this context. We are recognised for our strong leadership, positive culture, and deep employer partnerships. Our curriculum is well aligned with national and regional priorities, and our staff are committed to delivering high-quality, inclusive education. However, to remain future-ready, we must also confront key internal challenges. These include enhancing operational efficiency, ensuring greater value for money, and accelerating our digital transformation. Addressing these priorities will be essential to sustaining our success and meeting the evolving needs of our learners and stakeholders.

A Platform for Progress

This strategic plan builds on our strengths while responding to the realities of our environment. It sets out a bold, values-led agenda for the next five years - one that is ambitious, inclusive, and grounded in the needs of our learners, staff, and communities. Through this plan, we aim to ensure that Derwentside College continues to transform lives through education, ambition, and impact - and remains a trusted, forward-thinking institution at the heart of our region's future.

Our Mission

> **“Transforming lives through education, ambition, and impact”**

Our mission captures the heart of Derwentside College’s purpose: to be a force for positive change through the transformative power of education. Every word reflects our unwavering commitment to empowering individuals and strengthening our region - through our method (education), our mindset (ambition), and our outcomes (impact).

Transforming lives speaks to the profound and lasting difference we aim to make for every learner. We believe education is more than the transfer of knowledge - it’s about building confidence, unlocking potential, and opening doors to new opportunities, regardless of background or circumstance.

Through education highlights our dedication to delivering high-quality, inclusive, and responsive learning experiences. We create engaging, supportive environments where learners develop the skills, mindset, and resilience needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Our mission also reflects our “ambition” - not only for our learners, but for our staff, partners, and communities. We foster a culture of high expectations, continuous improvement, and shared success.

As an anchor institution in County Durham and the wider North-East, we are committed to making a lasting impact. We work in close partnership with employers, civic leaders, and community organisations to address skills needs, drive economic growth, and promote social mobility.

This mission underpins every decision we make. It guides our strategy, shapes our partnerships, and ensures that everything we do is focused on creating meaningful, lasting change - for individuals, for communities, and for the region we proudly serve.

Our Values

Enterprise

Encouraging initiative, innovation and a proactive approach to opportunities.

We embrace change, think creatively, and empower staff and learners to take ownership of their ideas and ambitions.

Respect

Valuing every individual's contribution and treating each other with dignity.

We celebrate diversity, listen actively, and create a culture where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued.

Excellence

Striving for the highest standards in all that we do.

We pursue quality relentlessly - whether in teaching, support, leadership, or service - because our learners deserve nothing less.

Derwentside College

Trust

Building confidence through reliability and transparency.

We are committed to being open, honest, and dependable. Trust is the foundation of strong relationships - with learners, colleagues, employers, and the wider community.

Enjoyment

Creating a positive and enjoyable environment where everyone can thrive.

We believe that learning and working should be fulfilling and energising. A joyful, supportive atmosphere helps people grow, connect, and succeed.

Excellence • Respect • Trust • Enterprise • Enjoyment

Our Vision

> **“ Creating positive futures for our learners, community, and region ”**

At Derwentside College, our vision is the driving force behind everything we do. It reflects our deep belief in the power of education to transform lives, strengthen communities, and fuel the prosperity of our region.

We place learners at the heart of our mission. Every individual brings unique talents, ambitions, and challenges - and we are here to unlock that potential. Through high-quality teaching and personalised support, we equip learners not only with qualifications, but with the confidence, skills, and mindset to thrive in a fast-changing world.

We create pathways to opportunity for all. Whether someone is starting their first career, retraining for a new direction, or progressing in their current role, we ensure they have the support, challenge, and guidance to achieve their goals and shape their own future.

We are a catalyst for regional growth. By working in partnership with employers, civic organisations, and our wider community, we respond to the North East’s economic and social priorities - bridging skills gaps, supporting innovation, and contributing to inclusive, sustainable development.

Our vision is not just aspirational - it is deliverable. It shapes our culture, informs our strategy, and defines our purpose. Together, we are not only educating for today, but building a brighter, fairer, and more resilient tomorrow for everyone we serve.

Strategic Priorities

1 Leadership, Governance, and People

2 Curriculum

3 Learners

4 Partnerships

5 Resources and Investment

Priority 1

Leadership, Governance, and People

Leading with purpose and empowering others

In a dynamic organisational landscape, strong leadership, inclusive governance, and empowered people are key to sustainable success. This priority focuses on cultivating resilient leadership, values-driven governance, and a high-performing, collaborative culture. Through strategic succession planning, open communication, and investment in professional development, we aim to build a future-ready workforce rooted in integrity, wellbeing, and inclusion.

Strategic Objectives

SO 1.1 Strengthen governance and leadership through succession planning, development, and values-driven practice.

SO 1.2 Foster a high-performing, collaborative culture built on open communication, accountability, and staff empowerment.

SO 1.3 Invest in people through targeted recruitment and continuous professional development.

SO 1.4 Embed wellbeing, inclusion, and staff voice across all levels of the organisation.

SO 1.5 Maintain agile assurance and risk frameworks aligned with strategic priorities.

Linked Strategic Delivery Plans

Oversight provided by the Search and Governance Committee

- Governance Development Plan
- Board Assurance Framework

Oversight provided by the Finance and Resources Committee

- People Strategy
- Leadership Development and Succession Plan
- Internal Communication Plan

How we will Measure our Success:

SM 1 Governance and Leadership Strengthened - Succession plans in place and reviewed annually for all key roles; annual governance self-assessment and external reviews show year-on-year improvement.

SM 2 Collaborative, High-Performing Culture - Annual staff survey shows increased confidence in leadership and communication; performance reviews reflect stronger collaboration and accountability.

SM 3 Agile Assurance and Risk Management - Board Assurance Framework and Strategic Risk Register reviewed and updated regularly; assurance frameworks remain aligned with evolving strategic risks.

SM 4 Wellbeing and Staff Voice Embedded - Staff voice and wellbeing programme fully implemented by 2028; evidence of positive wellbeing outcomes and engagement (staff surveys - from 2024-25 baseline).

SM 5 Values-Led Culture - 95% of staff affirm alignment with College values in annual performance appraisals.

SM 6 Improved Talent Acquisition – Evidence of high calibre leaders and staff through performance appraisal, accountability and performance management.

SM 7 People Investment and Development – Evidence of leadership development activity, in particular, junior, middle, and senior leaders. All staff participate in relevant CPD activity each year and leadership pathways are established in key areas.

Priority 2

Curriculum

Delivering an ambitious, inclusive, and future-focused curriculum

To meet the demands of a rapidly changing world, our curriculum must be bold, inclusive, and aligned with the future. This strategic priority is centred on designing and delivering programmes that respond to regional and national skills needs, while expanding access through flexible, inclusive pathways. By working closely with employers, embedding digital fluency, and raising teaching standards, we aim to equip learners with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to thrive in employment, further study, and life.

Strategic Objectives

SO 2.1 Align curriculum with local, regional and national priorities to meet evolving skills needs.

SO 2.2 Co-create curriculum with employers to ensure relevance and work-readiness, embedding digital fluency across all study programmes.

SO 2.3 Collaborate in the development of Centres of Excellence in key growth / priority sectors such as Construction, Health, and Engineering.

SO 2.4 Expand our offer into new areas, rising to the opportunity presented by devolution and reviewing our role in the Higher Education space.

SO 2.5 Raise teaching and learning standards through innovation and CPD, with a focus on AI.

SO 2.6 Strengthen progression routes into employment, apprenticeships, and higher study.

Linked Strategic Delivery Plans

Oversight provided by the Curriculum, Quality, and Inclusion Committee

- Accountability Statement
- Skills Strategy
- Curriculum Plan
- Quality Plan
- Self-Assessment Report
- Quality Improvement Plan

How we will Measure our Success:

SM 8 Curriculum Alignment with Skills Needs – High level alignment with regional and national skills priorities.

SM 9 Increased Participation and Access - Year-on-year growth in enrolment from underrepresented and non-traditional learner groups.

SM 10 Centres of Excellence Established – Either in partnership with other providers or as a lead provider.

SM 11 Achievement – Evidence of high performance across all areas, significantly above national benchmarks.

SM 12 Expanded Adult Skills Offer – Evidence of growth and seizing of devolution opportunities.

SM 13 Teaching Quality – At least 95% of teaching meeting professional standards.

SM 14 Digital Fluency Embedded - All study programmes include digital skills.

SM 15 Enhanced Progression Outcomes - Increased learner progression into employment, apprenticeships, or higher study, tracked through destination data.

SM 16 Excellent Ofsted Inspection outcomes evident.

Priority 3

Learners

Supporting every learner to achieve, belong, and thrive

Our learners are at the centre of everything we do. This strategic priority is focused on creating an inclusive, supportive environment where every individual feels valued, heard, and empowered to succeed. By amplifying learner voice, tackling inequality, and expanding access to wellbeing and life skills support, we aim to foster a strong sense of belonging and civic responsibility, helping learners to thrive both within and beyond the College.

Strategic Objectives

SO 3.1 Amplify learner voice to shape and improve the learner experience.

SO 3.2 Empower learners to aim higher and persevere through challenge by fostering a culture of ambition, aspiration, and resilience.

SO 3.3 Tackle inequality and disadvantage through targeted support and inclusive practice.

SO 3.4 Foster a sense of belonging and civic responsibility across the learner community.

Linked Strategic Delivery Plans

Oversight provided by the Curriculum, Quality, and Inclusion Committee

- Learner Voice Plan
- Inclusion Strategy
- Learner Journey Roadmap

How we will Measure our Success:

SM 17 Reduced Inequality in Outcomes – Achievement gaps between key learner groups (e.g. SEND, disadvantaged, ethnic minorities) reduced by 25% by 2029 through targeted interventions.

SM 18 Increased Sense of Belonging – 85% of learners report a strong sense of belonging and inclusion in annual surveys by 2028, with participation in enrichment activities increased.

SM 19 Learner Satisfaction – Evidence of increasingly high levels of learner satisfaction.

SM 20 Community Engagement – Evidence of significant community activity and projects across all areas.

Priority 4

Partnerships

Shaping futures through purposeful partnership

Strategic partnerships are vital to driving innovation, widening opportunity, and delivering meaningful impact. This priority focuses on strengthening collaboration with regional education providers, employers, and local authorities to address shared challenges and close skills gaps. By positioning the College as a proactive regional leader and trusted partner, we aim to influence policy, attract investment, and co-create solutions that shape meaningful futures for our learners and communities.

Strategic Objectives

SO 4.1 Deepen collaboration with FE, HE, local authorities and employers to address skills gaps.

SO 4.2 Position the College as a key voice in the region and an outward facing organisation that is well connected within the wider community.

SO 4.3 Influence policy and funding decisions through proactive stakeholder engagement.

SO 4.4 Build strategic alliances that unlock innovation, investment, and impact.

Linked Strategic Delivery Plans

Oversight provided by the Corporation Board.

- Stakeholder Engagement Plan

How we will Measure our Success:

SM 21 Regional Influence and Visibility - College representation within key strategic partnerships and evidence of measurable contributions to policy and strategy.

SM 22 Increased Employer Engagement and Satisfaction – Evidence of consistent and regular employer involvement in curriculum development and design, and high levels of employer satisfaction.

SM 23 Joint Funding and Innovation Projects – Evidence of collaborative bids or joint initiatives secured with partners to drive innovation, investment, or social impact.

SM 24 Stakeholder Satisfaction and Trust - 90%+ satisfaction rate from key stakeholders (employers, partners, local authorities) in annual engagement surveys.

SM 25 Recognition as a Regional Leader - External validation (e.g. awards, case studies, media coverage) recognising the College's leadership in partnership working and regional development.

Priority 5

Resources and Investment

Securing and deploying resources to drive sustainable growth and innovation

To realise our strategic ambitions, we must ensure that resources are effectively secured, managed, and aligned with our vision for growth and innovation. This priority focuses on strengthening financial resilience, diversifying income, and investing in modern infrastructure and digital capabilities. By embedding sustainability, harnessing emerging technologies like AI, and becoming a data-driven organisation, we will create the foundations for long-term success, value for money, and enhanced learner outcomes.

Strategic Objectives

SO 5.1 Boost financial resilience and investment potential by increasing EBITDA surpluses through targeted growth and improved cost efficiency (VFM).

SO 5.2 Prioritise future growth towards apprenticeships, education programmes for young people, and the opportunities arising from devolution.

SO 5.3 Modernise the estate, facilities and equipment to support growth and learner success.

SO 5.4 Accelerate digital transformation, harnessing AI to enhance operational performance.

SO 5.5 Become a data-driven organisation with smart, integrated systems and first-class reporting.

SO 5.6 Embed sustainability into College operations.

Linked Strategic Delivery Plans

Oversight provided by the Finance and Resources Committee

- Financial Plan
- Estates Strategy and Masterplan
- Data and Information Strategy
- Environment and Sustainability Policy and Climate Action Plan

How we will Measure our Success:

SM 26 Improved Financial Resilience & Profitability - Achieve a sustained increase in EBITDA surpluses year-on-year, reaching a target of 6% by 2027-28 to enable strategic reinvestment.

SM 27 Growth in Priority Areas - 20% increase in learner numbers across apprenticeships and education programmes for young people.

SM 28 Modernised Estate and Facilities - Completion of key capital projects outlined in the Estates Masterplan, with 100% of teaching spaces rated as “fit for future learning” by 2029.

SM 29 Data-Driven Decision Making - Establishment of a centralised data and analytics platform by 2028, with all strategic decisions informed by real-time performance dashboards.

SM 30 Sustainability Embedded Across Operations – Evidence of significant reduction in carbon emissions by 2031 (from 2024 baseline), with annual reporting aligned to the College’s Climate Action Plan.

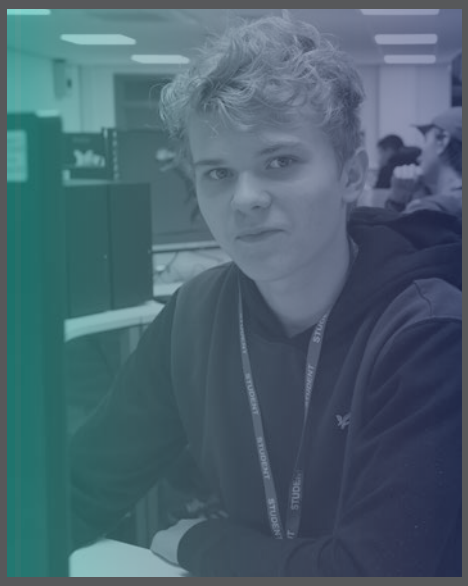
SM 31 Value for Money and Operational Efficiency – Targeted VFM reviews completed across key departments, with demonstrable cost savings or reinvestment opportunities identified and actioned.

Strategy into Action

MISSION **Purpose**	"Transforming lives through education, ambition, and impact"
VISION **Ambition**	"Creating positive futures for our learners, community, and region"
VALUES **Culture**	Trust, Respect, Excellence, Enterprise, Enjoyment

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES **Focus**	Leadership, Governance and People	Curriculum	Learners	Resources and Investment	Partnerships
DELIVERY PLANS **Action & Oversight**	**Search and Governance Committee:** • Governance Development Plan • Board Assurance Framework **Finance and Resources Committee:** • People Strategy • Leadership Development and Succession Plan • Internal Communication Plan	**Curriculum, Quality, and Inclusion Committee:** • Accountability Statement • Skills Strategy • Curriculum Plan • Quality Plan • Self Assessment Report • Quality Improvement Plan	**Curriculum, Quality, and Inclusion Committee:** • Learner Voice Plan • Inclusion Strategy • Learner Journey Roadmap	**Finance and Resources Committee:** • Financial Plan • Curriculum Plan • Estates Strategy and Masterplan • Data and Information Strategy • Environment and Sustainability Policy / Climate Action Plan	**Corporation Board:** • Stakeholder Engagement Plan

REVIEW **How we will review our Impact**	• Quarterly performance reports, including an Annual Review against the Strategic Plan will be reported to the Corporation Board. • KPIs and targets will be continuously developed and agreed each year to drive our performance against the Strategic Plan, demonstrating our impact and aligning with our 'Data and Information Strategy'. • Delivery Plan will be reviewed and monitored regularly by the Corporation Board, or relevant sub-committee.



NHS

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