

Annual Accountability Statement

2026-27



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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1 Purpose

Derwentside College transforms lives through education by raising aspirations, developing skills, and driving economic growth and social mobility across County Durham and the North East.

As a key regional provider, the College delivers an inclusive, high-quality curriculum aligned to employer and labour market need in priority sectors including health, construction, engineering and digital, supporting learners to progress into sustained employment, further study, and higher-level skills.

This Annual Accountability Statement sets out how the College will deliver its strategic priorities during 2026–27. It provides a clear line of sight between the long-term ambitions set out in the College's Strategic Plan 2025–2031 and the specific actions being taken to ensure provision remains responsive to national policy, regional economic priorities, and local skills needs. In doing so, it reflects the Department for Education's Meeting Skills Needs guidance and fulfils the College's statutory Local Needs Duty.

In 2026-27, the College will focus on three core priorities:

- delivering an ambitious, inclusive curriculum that meets current and future skills needs
- strengthening partnerships with employers and stakeholders to co-design and co-deliver provision
- supporting economic regeneration and social mobility across County Durham and the wider North East

Since the publication of its new Strategic Plan, the College has further strengthened its focus on employer engagement, higher-level technical skills, and emerging priorities including digital and artificial intelligence. This is reflected in the development of a refreshed Skills Strategy, ensuring that the curriculum remains relevant, future-focused, and responsive to a rapidly evolving economic and policy landscape.

This statement is informed by a comprehensive assessment of how effectively the College meets local needs, drawing on labour market intelligence, stakeholder engagement, and internal performance data. It sets out the actions the College will take to further enhance responsiveness, strengthen collaboration, and maximise impact.

Strategic Priorities



Delivering Local Needs: Durham Learning Alliance

The College works collaboratively as part of the Durham Learning Alliance, with colleges across County Durham, to ensure a coherent, complementary, and high-quality skills offer for the region. This partnership is a key mechanism through which the College fulfils its Local Needs Duty.

Through a joint curriculum review and shared analysis of labour market intelligence, the Alliance has strengthened alignment to priority sectors, particularly in health, construction, and engineering. This approach reduces duplication, strengthens progression pathways, and ensures that provision is strategically planned to meet both current demand and future workforce needs.

The collaboration has identified key priorities for further development, including:

- expansion of higher-level technical and professional pathways
- integration of digital and AI skills across the curriculum
- strengthening progression routes from entry level through to Level 4+ provision

In response, the College is working with its partners to coordinate curriculum development, share expertise and resources, and deliver targeted growth in priority sectors. This ensures that learners and employers benefit from a modern, responsive, and future-ready education and training offer.



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Context and Place

Derwentside College is a small further education provider operating from a single campus in Consett, County Durham; delivering a predominantly employer-led curriculum. Over 50% of the College's provision is in the area of apprenticeships which reflects a strong employer-responsive model that extends across workplace settings throughout the region.



The College serves a dispersed catchment area centred on County Durham, within the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority (North East MSA) and Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) area, with additional reach into Tees Valley. Travel-to-learn patterns vary; with 16–18-year-olds learners mainly drawn from Consett and Stanley and the surrounding rural areas, whilst adult learners and apprentices travel more widely, reflecting established regional travel-to-work patterns.

Youth participation presents a challenge with around 15% of 16–24-year-olds in the North East not in education, employment or training (NEET). This is compounded by socio-economic disadvantage, transport limitations, and low confidence which limits engagement and progression. Former industrial communities, including the towns of Consett and Stanley, face lower attainment, reduced progression to higher-level qualifications, and persistent economic inactivity which intensifies the need to maximise participation, particularly amongst younger residents. Consequently, addressing these barriers remains a key priority for Derwentside College.

Regionally, the labour market faces persistent skills shortages across LSIP priority sectors, including advanced manufacturing, construction, health and social care, and digital. Employers report gaps particularly at Level 3+, alongside shortages in technical and transferable skills, contributing to unfilled vacancies and constrained productivity. Additionally, barriers to participation remain significant, including rurality, limited transport infrastructure, and digital exclusion; with these challenges aligning directly with North East MSA priorities around inclusive growth, reducing economic inactivity, and improving social mobility.

Within this context, Derwentside College plays a critical role in supporting regional priorities. Through strong employer partnerships, a substantial apprenticeship offer, and targeted support for disadvantaged learners, the College contributes to workforce development, addresses skills gaps, and supports inclusive economic growth.



Demographics

The College operates in a challenging socio-economic context. County Durham ranks 40th out of 153 upper-tier authorities on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, with over half of residents living in the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods nationally. Demographic pressures are also significant. County Durham has a population of approximately 538,000 which is ageing, with significant growth in those aged 65+, increasing demand for health and social care services; whilst the working-age population has remained relatively static.

Learner Numbers by Region

	Apprentice	Adult	Aged 16 to 18	All Learners
North East	1609	1044	466	3119
Tees Valley	279	178	1	458
Yorkshire and the Humber	226	1		227
Other Regions	93			93
All Regions	2207	1223	467	3897



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Approach to Developing the Accountability Statement

The College's Annual Accountability Statement has been developed through a collaborative and evidence-informed approach, ensuring that key priorities and target outcomes are clearly aligned to local, regional, and national skills priorities.

From the outset, the College has engaged proactively with the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) and the designated Employer Representative Body (ERB) - the North East Automotive Alliance, through structured forums, LSIP engagement activity, and focused discussion. This has ensured the College's priorities are fully aligned to the emerging North East Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and reflect current and future workforce demands.

At a strategic level, the College has drawn on a wide range of intelligence sources and planning frameworks. These include the College's Strategic Plan and Skills Strategy, alongside regional economic priorities. Analysis of real-time vacancy data, and LSIP intelligence has directly informed the prioritisation of curriculum areas, including digital and green technologies. This has been complemented by internal performance data, national benchmarking and FE Provider Dashboard insights, which have informed targeted curriculum development and quality enhancement. Employer feedback gathered through the College's Industry Forums and partnership working has further strengthened the relevance and responsiveness of our provision.



Strategic Stakeholders and Consultation

The College has undertaken extensive engagement with a broad range of external stakeholders. This has ensured curriculum intent, design, and delivery models are responsive, inclusive, and aligned to both learner and employer need.

Key stakeholders engaged include:

- Employers across priority sectors, including SMEs and large regional organisations, contributing to curriculum design and validation
- North East Mayoral Strategic Authority, informing strategic alignment to regional skills priorities
- The ERB and wider LSIP network, ensuring provision reflects employer-led demand
- Public sector partners, including NHS Trusts and Jobcentre Plus, supporting progression and workforce development
- Education and Training providers, including schools and universities, to ensure coherent pathways
- Community and voluntary organisations, supporting access, inclusion, and participation

Curriculum Collaboration and Planning

In line with the Local Needs Duty, the College has worked collaboratively with other local providers to review provision and identify collective actions to better meet skills needs. Through active participation in the Durham Learning Alliance, the College has contributed to a county-wide curriculum mapping exercise to identify gaps in provision and agree complementary areas of focus. As a result, the College and its partners are implementing a more coordinated approach to curriculum delivery, including clearer progression pathways, improved alignment of specialist provision, and a shared commitment to addressing barriers to participation.

The College's approach to curriculum planning is both responsive and insight-based, ensuring provision remains aligned to LSIP priorities and informed by ongoing employer engagement. As outlined, through the use of labour market intelligence, performance data, and partnership feedback, curriculum development is continuously reviewed and refined. This has enabled the College to embed key priorities such as digital, green, and employability skills, while supporting clear progression routes into employment, apprenticeships, and further study. As a result, the College is well positioned to deliver an impactful response to local skills needs, contributing to economic growth, workforce development, and improved learner outcomes across the North East.



College Stakeholders

The College groups its main stakeholders under the five categories of Learners/Employees, Employers, Communities, Key Stakeholders, and Strategic Stakeholders.



Learners/ Employees

- Current Learners
- Prospective Learners
- Alumni
- Employees



Employers

- SMEs
- Large Levy Paying Employers
- Public Bodies
- Sector Skills Bodies



Communities

- Various Community Groups
- Police Constabularies
- Councillors



Key Stakeholders

- Parents, Carers, and Social Workers
- Schools and Academies
- Tees Valley Combined Authority
- North-East Chamber of Commerce
- Job Centre Plus
- North East Automotive Alliance
- North East Institute of Technology
- Universities
- External Awarding Bodies
- Durham County Council
- Alternative Provision Providers
- National Careers Service



Strategic Stakeholders

- North East Mayoral Strategic Authority
- Department for Education
- Association of Colleges
- Durham Learning Alliance
- Colleges for North East England Group
- Corporation Board
- Further Education Commissioner's Office
- Local Politicians - Liz Twist MP/Luke Akehurst MP
- Construction Technical Excellence College
- Advanced Manufacturing Technical Excellence College

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Contribution to National, Regional, and Local Priorities



Derwentside College is a key strategic skills partner for the North East, delivering provision that directly responds to National Skills Priorities, the North East Local Skills Improvement Plan (2026-2029), and the economic missions of the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority (North East MSA). In fulfilling its responsibilities under the Local Needs Duty, the College has used employer insight, labour market evidence, and local growth plans to identify clear areas of demand and shape its priorities for 2026-27.

The College will focus on expanding technical pathways in construction and green skills, engineering and advanced manufacturing, health and social care, and digital technologies, reflecting both regional shortages and national priority sectors. These priorities are underpinned by the College's Strategic Plan 2025-2031 and Skills Strategy 2025-2031, which together set the framework for employer designed curriculum, workforce alignment, and progression into higher level learning.

Delivery in 2026-27 will centre on high quality, employer validated provision including:

- **Apprenticeships (Levels 2-5)** which are central to national and regional priorities.
- **T Levels and Level 2 and 3 Vocational Pathways** which supports the new two thirds target for young people engaging in higher level education.
- **Sector-Based Work Academies in Priority Sectors** which align with DWP priorities and local employability needs.
- **Targeted Programmes for Residents Facing Barriers** which aligns with North East MSA's inclusive growth mission.
- **Essential Skills Programmes (English, maths, and digital)** which supports national priorities.

SMART Objectives for 2026-27

The SMART objectives that follow set out the planned scale of priority provision for 2026-27, including baseline comparisons with 2025-26 and clear targets for growth in priority sectors.

Objective 1	Grow Apprenticeships in High Demand Sectors Increase apprenticeship delivery in Construction, Engineering, and Health & Social Care to meet regional and national skills shortages.	Targets & Measures ● Total starts: 331 (from a baseline of 256 in 2025-26) +29.5% ● > 40% at Level 3+ ● Sector Growth: Construction +35%, Engineering +80%, Health & Social Care +30% ● Deadline: July 2027	Contribution & Impact ● Directly supports NELSIP priorities and national technical skills missions. ● Strengthens the skilled workforce pipeline in priority shortage occupations. ● Enhances regional resilience by increasing employer access to work-ready, industry-relevant talent.
Objective 2	Strengthen Technical Education Pathways for Progression to Higher-Level Skills Grow T Levels and Level 2 and 3 Technical Pathways, increasing progression into Level 4 and higher technical education.	Targets & Measures ● Enrolments: 302 (from a baseline of 282 in 2025-26) +7% ● 80% of learners enrolled in priority sectors ● Deadline: July 2027	Contribution & Impact ● Supports the national two-thirds participation target for higher-level education by age 25. ● Strengthens the regional higher-technical pipeline in line with NELSIP and North East MSA's missions. ● Enhances school partnerships and transition pathways.
Objective 3	Expand Adult Skills, Employability, and Progression Pathways Broaden adult learning provision and enhance progression outcomes through SBWAs, and targeted programmes for residents facing barriers.	Targets & Measures ● SWAP participants: 461 (from a baseline of 439 in 2025-26) +5% ● Enrolments at Level 2: 1041 (from a baseline of 992 in 2025-26) +5% ● >30% of learners progressing to positive destinations ● Deadline: July 2027	Contribution & Impact ● Supports North East MSA's inclusive growth mission. ● Reduces economic inactivity and strengthens employability for priority groups. ● Aligns with DWP priorities and employer recruitment pipelines.

Objective 4	Strengthen Support for Vulnerable Young People and NEET Prevention Increase capacity and tailored provision for vulnerable young people at risk of becoming NEET, ensuring accessible, supportive pathways delivered in partnership with schools, local authorities, and specialist agencies.	Targets & Measures ● King's Trust 16-18 enrolments: 72 (from a baseline of 58 in 2025-26) +24% ● > 90% of at risk learners progressing to positive destinations ● > 95% of disadvantaged learners with transition support plans within 14 days of enrolment ● Deadline: July 2027	Contribution & Impact ● Strengthens early intervention and supports North East MSA's inclusive growth and youth participation missions. ● Reduces local NEET levels through targeted, flexible, and personalised provision. ● Enhances coordinated multi-agency support and partnership working.
Objective 5	Embed Digital, AI, and Data Skills across Education Programmes for Young People Ensure all EPYP learners develop strong digital, AI, and data competencies that reflect the evolving needs of the future workforce and enhance their readiness for technology-enabled careers.	Targets & Measures ● 100% programme integration - all EPYP programmes embed at least one core digital, AI, or data skills component ● >90% of EPYP learners securing the Derwentside Digital Passport ● Deadline: July 2027	Contribution & Impact ● Builds essential digital and AI fluency ensuring every learner gains the core technology skills needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving labour market. ● Aligns programmes with employer-driven digital and data skill requirements to support future workforce demand. ● Enhances learners' confidence in emerging technologies to enable them to apply AI and data tools to real life challenges.
Objective 6	Enhance Employer Engagement and Curriculum Co-Design Continue to increase employer involvement in curriculum design, validation, and work based learning.	Targets & Measures ● Engaged employers: 60 (from a baseline of 50 in 2025-26) +20% ● 100% of priority provision employer validated ● Work placements: +20% ● Deadline: July 2027	Contribution & Impact ● Strengthens Local Needs Duty compliance and employer led reform. ● Ensures continued curriculum relevance and alignment with labour market demand. ● Expands Industry Employer Forums and partnership activity.
Objective 7	Maintain Quality, Achievement, and Learner Outcomes Maintain and continuously improve achievement outcomes across all provision types, ensuring equitable performance for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LLDD) and those without.	Targets & Measures ● Apprenticeship achievement: 70% or above ● 16-18 achievement: 90% or above ● 19+ achievement: 88% or above ● Achievement equity: No achievement gap between LLDD learners and non LLDD learners ● Deadline: October 2027	Contribution & Impact ● Drives quality improvement and inspection readiness. ● Enhances learner success, retention, and progression across all provision. ● Supports equitable outcomes across all learner groups, with targeted support where needed.

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Local Needs Duty

Statutory Duty

Section 52B of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, as amended by the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, places a duty on governing bodies to review how well their education and training provision meets local needs. For 2026-27, this duty is fully integrated within the College's Annual Accountability Statement, ensuring a clear and evidence-based alignment between identified skills priorities, curriculum delivery, and planned impact.

Review of How Provision Meets Local Needs

The Governing Body has undertaken a comprehensive review of how effectively the College meets local, regional, and national skills needs. This draws upon a robust evidence base, including labour market intelligence, insights from NELSIP priorities, and the economic priorities set by the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA). The review is also further informed by employer feedback gathered through Industry Forums and strategic partnerships, alongside internal performance data and learner outcomes. This has ensured a well-rounded assessment of the College's provision and its responsiveness to current and emerging skills demands.

Summary of Provision in 2026-27

Derwentside College delivers a predominantly employer-led curriculum, with approximately half of all provision focused on apprenticeships across priority sectors including construction, engineering, and health and social care. In 2026-27, the College will continue to grow and refine its provision to align with national priorities, the North East Local Skills Improvement Plan (NELSIP), and regional economic strategies. Key features include:

- **Apprenticeships (Levels 2-5):** Continued expansion in high-demand sectors, particularly engineering, construction, and health, with a strong emphasis on Level 3+ technical skills.
- **Education Programmes for Young People (EPYP):** Growth in T Levels and Level 2/3 vocational pathways, strengthening progression routes into employment, apprenticeships, and higher-level study.
- **Adult Skills and Employability:** A broad adult offer including Sector-Based Work Academies, employer upskilling, community learning, and flexible online provision aligned to employment and progression outcomes.
- **Targeted Provision:** Programmes designed to support disadvantaged learners and those at risk of becoming NEET, aiding progression to sustained education, training, or employment.
- **Emerging Skills:** Integration of digital, AI, and green skills across the curriculum to ensure learners are prepared for future workforce demands.



Through this review, the College has concluded that:

- Provision is strongly aligned to priority sectors, particularly in areas of identified skills shortages such as construction, engineering, health, and digital.
- Apprenticeship delivery is a key strength providing a direct response to employer demand and supporting workforce development across the region.
- Curriculum planning is highly responsive with established processes ensuring continuous alignment to labour market need.
- Progression pathways are highly effective, enabling learners to move seamlessly into sustained employment, apprenticeships, and higher-level study.
- Targeted support for disadvantaged learners is impactful, contributing to NEET reduction and improved social mobility.

Consequently, the College continues to make a significant and positive contribution to meeting local skills needs, and supporting economic growth across County Durham and the wider North East.



Collaboration and Partnerships

Collaboration remains central to fulfilling the Local Needs Duty. The College plays a key role within the Durham Learning Alliance and the Colleges for North East England Group, ensuring partnership activity operates at both local and regional levels. Through these networks, the College collaborates with other further education providers to map curriculum provision against NELSIP and wider regional priorities, to reduce duplication, and to develop coherent progression pathways.

The College continues to work closely with employers across priority sectors to co-design and validate the curriculum ensuring provision remains responsive to workforce needs. Additionally, strong links are also maintained with the North East MSA to support strategic alignment, alongside partnerships with schools and universities to strengthen progression routes. This collaboration also extends to public sector partners, including NHS Trusts and Jobcentre Plus, as well as community organisations who play a key role in supporting the College's priorities of inclusion and widening participation.

Key Actions Arising from the Review (2026-27)

As a result of this review, the Governing Body has identified the following priority actions to further strengthen alignment to local needs:

1. Increase apprenticeship volumes in priority shortage sectors with a focus on Level 3+ and progression into higher technical roles.
2. Strengthen progression pathways particularly from Level 1 and Level 2 into higher-level study and skilled employment.
3. Enhance targeted provision for vulnerable and NEET learners improving access, participation, and positive destinations.
4. Further strengthen employer engagement ensuring all priority provision remains employer-informed and aligned to workforce demand.
5. Continue collaborative curriculum planning through the Durham Learning Alliance ensuring a coordinated regional response to skills priorities.

Conclusion

Derwentside College has a well-established approach to meeting local needs, underpinned by strong employer partnerships, effective collaboration, and responsive curriculum planning. Through continued growth in priority sectors and targeted support for disadvantaged learners, the College is well positioned to deliver against its Local Needs Duty, playing a leading role in supporting economic growth, workforce development, and social mobility across the North East.

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Inclusive Mainstream Fund Statement (2026-2027)

The College will utilise Inclusive Mainstream Funding (IMF) in 2026-27 to strengthen inclusive mainstream provision and accelerate delivery of the government's SEND reform agenda, as set out in SEND Reform: putting children and young people first.



IMF will be targeted at learners with identified or emerging SEND who do not meet the threshold for High Needs funding or an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP), with a clear emphasis on early intervention and reducing escalation of need. This targeted approach will build capacity within mainstream provision and improve outcomes for learners with SEND.



The College will prioritise:

- **High-quality inclusive teaching**
Embedding consistent adaptive teaching practices across all curriculum areas so that learners with SEND are able to succeed within mainstream education.
- **Early identification and targeted intervention**
Strengthening screening, assessment, and transition processes, alongside timely delivery of evidence-informed interventions in literacy, numeracy, communication, and study skills.
- **Responsive in-class and pastoral support**
Increasing the capacity and flexibility of Additional Learning Support to remove barriers to participation, improve attendance, and sustain engagement.
- **Positive outcomes and progression**
Improving retention, achievement, and progression into further study, apprenticeships and employment, with a strong focus on independence and preparation for adulthood.
- **Effective partnership working**
Collaborating closely with schools, local authorities, and external agencies to support smooth transition and contribute to a more joined-up SEND system.

Impact will be evaluated through:

- attendance, retention, and achievement data
- learner progress against planned support outcomes
- learner and parent/carers feedback
- sustained positive destinations

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Corporation Statement

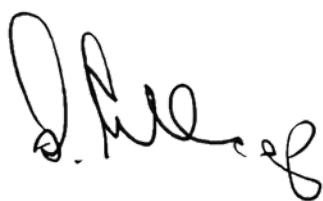
On behalf of Derwentside College Corporation, it is hereby confirmed that the Corporation conducts reviews in line with the Local Needs Duty, as such resulting in this Statement.

The Annual Accountability Statement sets out an agreed statement of purpose, aims and objectives as approved by the Corporation at their meeting on 23 July 2026.

The Statement will be published on the College's website within three months of the start of the new academic year.

Access to the Annual Accountability Statement -

www.derwentside.ac.uk/about-us/key-college-documents

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Allsop'.

David Allsop
Corporation Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Errington'.

Susan Errington
Acting Principal and Chief Executive

Dated: 23 July 2026

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Supporting Documentation

[Derwentside College Strategic Plan](#)

[Ofsted Inspection Report](#)

[NELSIP](#)





