



# STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2024



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### Our Vision

Through the excellence of the education we provide, we will enhance and transform lives.

We strive to be sector-leading in everything we do.

### Our Values

1. Teaching and learning is our priority and the needs and safety of our students always come first.
2. As members of the College, we are partners in the success of the organisation and we are all accountable for our outcomes.
3. High standards are at the heart of all that we do. In our pursuit of excellence, we recognise that individually and collectively we can always improve.
4. Within our college community we treat each other with respect, trust, openness, care and consideration. We celebrate student and staff success.
5. We are an inclusive college where we promote and protect equality and diversity.
6. We work in partnership with employers and other stakeholders so that we can make a positive contribution to local, regional and national economic development.



### Our Strategic Aims

1. To achieve high **quality** outcomes for our students by prioritising teaching, learning and progression.
2. To continue to improve levels of **efficiency** and remain in outstanding financial health.
3. To maximise opportunities for **growth**.

## Strategic Aims

- 1 To achieve high **quality** outcomes for our students by prioritising teaching, learning and progression.

### We will do this by:

- 1.1 Prioritising the delivery of outstanding **quality** in terms of teaching, learning and assessment and the student experience so that all our students progress and reach their potential.
  - 1.2 Striving to create a college community with core values at its heart.
  - 1.3 Nurturing our students and staff so that we have high levels of morale and wellbeing, together with creativity, innovation and excellence.
  - 1.4 Providing exceptional levels of student care with an emphasis on good citizenship, employability skills and positive progression outcomes.
  - 1.5 Investing in our staff to sustain high quality provision through outstanding staff development activities.  
Developing leadership and management skills at all levels within the organisation
  - 1.6 through the Leadership Development Programme.
  - 1.7 Implementing a recovery programme to identify gaps in knowledge and skills due to the pandemic and building on the digital skills learnt in lockdown.
- 2 To continue to improve levels of **efficiency** and remain in outstanding financial health.

### We will do this by:

- 2.1 Maintaining financial stability through effective cost control and creating funds to grow.
  - 2.2 Investing in and modernising our centres to meet local and regional priorities and addressing the needs of green technology and the low carbon economy.
- 3 To maximise opportunities for **growth**.

### We will do this by:

- 3.1 Promoting growth areas, particularly 16-18, Higher Education, apprenticeships, full cost recovery courses and the new opportunities for adults.
- 3.2 Prioritising the needs of the people of Halton and the Liverpool City Region (LCR).
- 3.3 Continuing to be the first choice for school leavers, adult learners and employers while maintaining a market-led, regionally responsive college with an exciting and engaging curriculum.
- 3.4 Working in partnership to engage those who traditionally do not participate in education and training.
- 3.5 Working with employers and Employer Representative Bodies (ERBs) to develop a responsive curriculum to close the skills gap and provide a highly skilled local workforce through the Local Skills Investment Plan (LSIP).



### 2.1 External and Internal Assessment

2.1.1 In March 2020, Ofsted judged the College to be outstanding.

The inspection report highlights many positive aspects for the College including:

- ‘Learners and apprentices are **exceptionally well motivated** and demonstrate **extremely positive attitudes to learning**
- ‘Relationships between learners, apprentices and their teachers and assessors are **excellent**
- ‘Learners and apprentices develop their confidence, resilience and strong independence skills
- ‘Senior leaders and governors are **very ambitious** for their learners and apprentices
- ‘Senior leaders and governors promote **especially high standards** in all aspects of the college
- ‘Governors have **high aspirations** for their learners, apprentices and staff
- ‘Learners and apprentices enjoy a wide range of courses that **meet local and regional needs exceptionally well**
- ‘Leaders have **exceptional links** with local employers and regional business groups
- ‘Assessors, in conjunction with employers, ensure that apprentices benefit from **excellent and well planned** on- and off-the job training
- ‘Learners on advanced level programmes **greatly benefit** from the ‘prestigious universities’ programme that facilitates successful applications to universities. Consequently, **most progress into higher education with a significant number going to the best universities**
- ‘Learners experience a **wide range** of work experience opportunities and, as a result, they develop higher-level interpersonal skills
- ‘Managers, teachers and staff provide learners and apprentices with **excellent** and impartial careers information, advice and guidance before and during their programmes’



Link to inspection report: <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/31/130622>.

2.1.2 The new Education Inspection Framework (EIF) was introduced in September 2019. Previously, under this framework, outstanding providers would not normally be inspected unless performance declines, however, in 2021 this changed. All colleges and schools will be inspected by September 2025 and the College is preparing for this.

2.1.3 Alongside Ofsted the College receives a number of external assessments throughout the year including Department for Education (DfE) performance tables; Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF); Quality Monitoring Reviews (QMRs); Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) audit; learner and employer surveys; MATRIX Award; the Higher Education Annual Provider Review and the Annual Strategic Conversation with ESFA and FEC, all of which acknowledge excellent performance and high levels of satisfaction.

2.1.4 In Autumn 2022 the College produced a Self-Assessment Report (SAR) for 2021/2022, with the following grades:

Overall judgements	Ofsted Grade 2020/2021	SAR Grade 2020/2021	SAR Grade 2021/2022
The Quality of Education	Grade 1: Outstanding	Grade 1: Outstanding	Grade 1: Outstanding
Behaviour and Attitudes	Grade 1: Outstanding	Grade 1: Outstanding	Grade 1: Outstanding
Personal Development	Grade 1: Outstanding	Grade 1: Outstanding	Grade 1: Outstanding
Leadership and Management	Grade 1: Outstanding	Grade 1: Outstanding	Grade 1: Outstanding
Education Programmes for Young People	Grade 1: Outstanding	Grade 1: Outstanding	Grade 1: Outstanding
Adult Learning Programmes	Grade 1: Outstanding	Grade 1: Outstanding	Grade 1: Outstanding
Apprenticeships	Grade 1: Outstanding	Grade 1: Outstanding	Grade 1: Outstanding
Provision for Learners with High Needs	Grade 2: Good	Grade 2: Good	Grade 2: Good



2.1.5 The following key strengths were identified:

1. Highly effective leadership and management, at all levels, has ensured the quality of provision and support for students has remained high during the challenges of a global pandemic.

2. Judgements from external agencies evidence that the College is outstanding. This includes Ofsted: Grade 1; Teaching Excellence Framework (most recent): Gold; and ESFA Financial Rating: Outstanding.
3. Health and well-being of staff and students are of the highest importance. A culture of self-improvement and continuous improvement permeates the College. (Ofsted 2020)
4. Students make excellent progress whilst at College. Achievement rates continue to be high for almost all learners.
5. Learners and apprentices enjoy an extremely well planned curriculum, which means they gain significant new knowledge and skills quickly. They gain the attitudes and behaviours they need to progress to higher levels of study or work. (Ofsted 2020)
6. Teachers and trainers are well qualified and benefit from high-quality professional development that develops their subject knowledge and expertise. (Ofsted 2020)
7. Outstanding financial management has led to economic stability and effective deployment of resources and significant investment in facilities
8. Leaders, managers and teachers have developed a high-quality curriculum that widens learners' and apprentices' experiences and life skills. (Ofsted 2020)
9. Arrangements for safeguarding are highly effective.
10. Leaders have exceptional links with local employers and regional business groups, including the local enterprise partnership and regional mayoral authorities. (Ofsted 2020)

2.1.6 The Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) 2022/2023 identified the key areas for improvement:

1. Further improve the quality of education for learners in the foundation studies department to ensure the more confident learners make rapid progress. (Ofsted 2020)
2. Further improve the quality of education for the small minority of courses and apprenticeships that are not yet outstanding.
3. Develop organisational focus and capacity to further meet the local skills needs.

2.1.7 The College aims to address these areas for improvement in addition to those parts of the College which are not yet rated as outstanding. These are detailed in the Quality, Efficiency, Growth (QEG) Plan which acts as the College's 'to do' list.

2.1.8 National Achievement Rate Tables will be published at the end of the academic year. The College is expected to be in the top 20% of colleges and the highest in the local area.

## 2.2 The Policy and Funding Environment

2.2.1 As the country moves on from the COVID-19 pandemic we are faced with the cost of living crisis, the tightest labour market on record and the continuing war in Ukraine, all creating challenges and uncertainties which look set to continue for some time.

2.2.2 For colleges, the rise in the 16-18 funding rate has been overtaken by the rising costs and the lack of funding rate increases in the adult education budget,

apprenticeships and higher education budgets makes for incredibly challenging times for the college sector, along with the rest of the public sector.

- 2.2.3 With the cost of living crisis continuing, the challenges for colleges on pay is extreme. Last year the College agreed a pay award for all staff. This year 2023/24, the unions claim is for a 15% rise, there is not a single college able to meet that claim. We will be creative in our pay award and endeavour to build upon the pay awards we have sustained for seven years. Much depends on recruitment to all programmes in 2023/24.
- 2.2.4 Recruitment and retention of teaching and support staff is becoming an issue for the College. The COVID pandemic left the legacy of different ways of working and the College is looking at ways to make terms and conditions more attractive including remuneration.
- 2.2.5 The mental health and wellbeing of our staff and students remains of utmost importance. We will continue to invest in practical support for students provided by our Programme Management teams in the areas of mental health and enrichment. For staff, we will continue to implement our Health and Wellbeing Plan, launched in August 2021.
- 2.2.6 We will continue to follow the Climate Action Roadmap for FE Colleges published as part of the Department for Education's Sustainability and Climate Action Strategy in 2022. We are currently progressing towards the 'established' stage. We have set a net zero target by 2030. A strategic group meets regularly to review progress supported by our governing body.
- 2.2.7 The plethora of Bills, Green and White Papers and consultations have been introduced in 2022 have all started to be implemented.
- i. *Skills and Post-16 Education Act – April 2022 (Skills Bill)*  
This Act puts employers at the heart of the skills system, by placing a legal requirement on colleges to work with employers to develop skills plans to meet the needs of the local area. The employer responsive body leading the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for Halton and the wider Liverpool City Region is the Chamber of Commerce led by St Helens Chamber. The LCR colleges have worked closely with the Chambers who will submit the Plan to the Department for Education in May 2023. Alongside the LSIP, the College has submitted an Accountability Agreement to DfE to demonstrate how we will meet the LSIP. The Strategic Development Fund, the pre-cursor to the LSIP has been successful and the College is leading on training and upskilling in the field of hydrogen.
  - ii. *Levelling-Up White Paper – February 2022 (Department for Levelling Up, Housing Communities (DLUHC))*  
Halton was named as one of 26 priority Education Investment Areas (EIAs), as was Knowsley. The areas identified for Halton are Early Years, Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 maths and English and attendance. The Principal sits on the Strategic Board for Halton Learning Alliance and the Knowsley Learning and Skills Partnership and as such the College continues to support improvement in pre-16 education.



- iii. *Schools Bill and Higher Education Bill*  
The Bills will have significant impact on colleges and how the wider education and skills system comes together coherently. The Schools Bill is also an opportunity to address some of the inequity that exists in schools and college policy, particularly in relation to funding and workforce recruitment. The HE Bill will give the DfE powers to introduce Lifelong Loan Entitlement (due 2025).
- iv. *Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision – Green Paper*  
The SEND Review: right support, right place, right time, will have implications for colleges over time, but its focus is on pre-16 and on schools. The main aim seems to be to improve mainstream SEND provision and reduce the demands of EHCPs (Education Health and Care Plans) and special school places. The College is currently undertaking a strategic review of its SEND provision to ensure we offer outstanding inclusive provision throughout the College. The SEND Review will inform this process.

- 2.2.8 At regional level we will continue to collaborate with the Association of Liverpool City Region Colleges (AoLCRC) who in turn work with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) and the Chambers of Commerce to deliver the skills plans for 'green' courses in the Strategic Development Fund (SDF) and longer-term design and implementation of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). This includes the opportunities provided in the Freeport status awarded to the LCR.
- 2.2.9 More locally the College is a main partner in Reconnecting Runcorn, the Town Deal awarded in 2020. Working with the NHS to open an education and wellbeing hub in Runcorn town centre, one of seven projects to regenerate the town.
- 2.2.10 The College will introduce four T-Levels in August 2023 and will monitor demand for this new provision, whilst ensuring that we meet the needs of our locality. We strongly support the case that level 3 qualifications are not defunded until T-Levels are tried and tested.
- 2.2.11 The overall message from the sector is that colleges are vital to the recovery and stand ready to deliver but need continued investment and flexibilities to support more young people, adults, communities and employers. The response from government is positive, however this needs to turn into long term additional and stable funding.
- 2.2.12 The pace of change, the uncertain environment and the coordination of the plethora of policies from government clearly poses risks to the College. However, the College remains in a very strong position in terms of quality and financial health (both rated outstanding by Ofsted and ESFA) and can respond quickly to the challenges ahead including a visit from Ofsted by 2025.

The College has

- invested over £20m in teaching and learning facilities since 2017 whilst maintaining outstanding financial health - the £18m in capital project spend, including the £8m health, wellbeing and sport facilities at Cronton (open for September 2023) and the £5.7m green technology hub at Riverside due to open in September 2024; and

- turnover has increased from £20m in 2016/17 to £33m in 2022/23 (65%). The College's main income streams (16-18 and Adult) are secure for 2023/24 and this accounts for 80% of income.

### 2.2.13 The General Election

The Association of Colleges (AoC) is working with the main political parties on influencing their manifestoes ahead of the next General Election, likely to be in 2024. They are currently working on five key strands (Jun 2023):

1. A right to lifelong learning
2. An apprenticeship system that works
3. A qualifications system that drives up access, quality of outcomes
4. A funding system that works
5. A thriving College workforce



## 2.3 16-18 Students

### 2.3.1 16-18 learner number allocations

2015/16	2017/18	2019/20	2021/22	2023/24
2,681	3,019	3,223	3,433	3,562

2.3.2 The College has increased its 16-18 provision by 33% since 2015/16 and continues to focus on high quality provision and the opening of the new technology facilities to persuade more students from Halton and outside the borough to choose our College. Application and offers for school leavers are good and include the increased funding for 16-18 learners.

## 2.4 Apprenticeships

- 2.4.1 We will continue to provide high quality apprenticeships to support employers, individuals and the local community to respond to skills shortages and current challenges with the labour market.
- 2.4.2 Existing markets will be consolidated and new relationships generated especially with employers across the region in key priorities including those identified in the Local Skills Improvement Plan
- 2.4.3 We will build on the success of offering apprenticeships as progression routes from our full time, work placement and T Level programmes.
- 2.4.4 There will be continued investment in new facilities and digital offers to increase flexibility and efficiency.

## 2.5 19+ Adult Education

- 2.5.1 The Adult Education Budget (AEB) comes from two sources, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and the Liverpool City Region (LCR), this budget is secure for 2022/2023 including the Multiply initiative.
- 2.5.2 The College, through the Association of Liverpool City Region Colleges (AoLCRC), is working with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) on recovery and retraining packages for adult learners after the success of short adult courses offered in 2022/2023 in Engineering, Digital and Health and Social Care.



## 2.6 Higher Education

In 2023/2024 the College aims to build upon its Higher Education offer by exploring further curriculum pathways at Level 4 and above, while enhancing its current offer in collaboration with HE students and monitoring of outcomes. Riverside College continues to be a much-valued member of the Staffordshire University Collaborative Partnership and is also a partner provider in Shaping Futures (the Merseyside Collaborative Outreach Programme) - a Higher Education Outreach Programme for the Liverpool City Region.

## 2.7 Community Confidence

The OUTSTANDING Ofsted grade has secured community confidence and established the College as a high-quality provider of education and training. This achievement is the result of over a decade of work with key stakeholders. The College Management Team are involved in the key task groups, governing bodies, trustees of MATs, IFATE, AoLCRC, Ofsted and a whole range of bodies offering advice and guidance to all phases of education.

## 2.8 Working in Partnership

- 2.8.1 The College wishes to continue to work closely with partners. In the context of more diverse post-16 provision, it is important to maintain support for a successful, strong and viable college in Halton.
- 2.8.2 The College has made the following commitments:
1. We will consistently perform as a high-quality college.

2. We will address the issue of those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in a collaborative and creative way.
3. We will increase the percentage of young people achieving Levels 2 and 3 by the age of 19.
4. We will work towards closing the gap in attainment between those who were in receipt of free school meals and those who were not.
5. We will increase the number of young people starting on apprenticeships and traineeships.
6. We will seek to address the needs of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who need clear progression routes within Halton.
7. We will respond positively to the requirement for young people to stay in education or training until they are 18 and beyond.
8. We will contribute fully to addressing local educational needs and priorities, by implementing the plans of the Halton Learning Alliance where the College sits on the Strategic Board.
9. We will engage with partners to work towards key targets for adults with the adult learning team at Halton Borough Council and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA).
10. We will work with partners to expand higher education opportunities in Halton. This year our Access to HE programme has expanded and we have introduced the HNC Construction and HND in Performing Arts (Technical Arts).
11. We will seek to deliver an inclusive curriculum for the residents of Halton notwithstanding the impact of changing funding sources and levels.
12. We will work with Halton employers and the Chamber of Commerce to produce training for workers. We will focus on dynamic local sectors such as construction, engineering, science and technology.
13. We will play a significant role in the development of an Education and Health Hub as part of the Runcorn Town Deal.
14. We will work with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the Growth Platform to contribute to the skills strategy for the Liverpool City Region:
  - CreaTech and Digital
  - Advanced Manufacturing
  - Health and Life Sciences
  - Energy
  - Built Environment
15. We will embrace the opportunities the Freeport will bring.

### 3.1 Monitoring of Performance

Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) will be produced for all curriculum and support areas. These will be monitored throughout the year by

- i. the quality improvement cycle as part of the self-assessment process;  
the Quality, Efficiency and Growth (QEG) report which summarises areas for improvement; where emerging concerns are identified, bespoke recovery plans will be implemented immediately; and
- ii. Senior Management Team (SMT) monitoring meetings – 3 times per year.

### 3.2 Reporting Outcomes

Outcomes and external assurances will be reported to Governors through Committee and Board meetings by

- i. the QEG report;
- ii. dashboards for finance and quality;
- iii. strategic update reports by the Senior Management Team; and
- iv. reports by auditors, Ofsted, Office for Students, performance tables and funding bodies.
- v. the outcomes from the Annual Strategic Conversation with the ESFA/DfE and LCRCA.