# STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2027



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General

## Chapter 1 Vision, Values and Strategic Aims

### Our Vision

At the heart of Halton, transforming lives

### 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**, aligned to meet sector skills needs.



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**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 Aspiring 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.
1.6 Developing leadership and management skills at all levels within the organisation through the College Leadership Development Programme.
1.7 Carefully and cautiously embracing Artificial Intelligence to enhance our daily working routines – Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2024.
1.8 Implementing and maintaining a wide curriculum offer that meets sector skills needs of the local, regional and national stakeholders.

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,** aligned to meet sector skills needs

**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 alignment with the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) , the Liverpool City Region Growth Plan and the Get Liverpool City Region Working Plan (The Local Triple Lock).



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## Chapter 2 Environment



### 2.1 External and Internal Assessment

2.1.1 In April 2024, Ofsted judged the College to be Outstanding.

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

- *Teachers and assessors use **especially effective** teaching and assessment strategies.*
- *Staff at all levels have **high aspirations** for their learners and apprentices. Consequently, learners and apprentices who study here do **exceptionally well***
- *Teachers and assessors help learners to **achieve high grades** and produce work consistently to a **very high standard***
- *Teachers and trainers are well qualified and benefit from **high-quality professional development** that develops their subject knowledge and expertise*
- *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*



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Link to Inspection Report: 50249456 (ofsted.gov.uk)

2.1.2 Alongside Ofsted the College receives a number of external assessments throughout the year including Department for Education (DfE) performance tables; Quality Monitoring Reviews (QMRs); The DfE Funding Audit; learner and employer surveys; MATRIX Award; the Higher Education Annual Partner Review, the Annual Strategic Conversation with DfE and FEC (Further Education Commissioner), and the External Review of Governance June 2024, all of which acknowledge excellent performance and high levels of satisfaction.

The College was one of 13 providers in England to be selected for the Expert Provider of Apprenticeships pilot and works closely with the Department for Education in simplifying systems to make apprenticeships more accessible.

2.1.3 In Autumn 2025 the College produced a Self-Assessment Report (SAR) for 2024/2025, with the following grades:

| Overall judgements | Ofsted Grade 2024 | SAR Grade 2023/2024 | Ofsted Grade 2024 | SAR Grade 2024/2025 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The Quality of Education | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding |
| Behaviour and Attitudes | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding |
| Personal Development | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding |
| Leadership and Management | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding |
| Education Programmes for Young People | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding |
| Adult Learning Programmes | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding |
| Apprenticeships | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding | Grade 1: Outstanding |
| Provision for Learners with High Needs | Grade 2: Good | Grade 2: Good | Grade 2: Good | Grade 2: Good |

2.1.4 The following key strengths were identified:

1. Judgements from external agencies evidence that the College is outstanding. This includes Ofsted: Grade 1 and DfE Financial Rating: Outstanding. ‘Leaders create a culture of continuous improvement’. ‘Senior leaders and managers have a very clear rationale for their aspirational curriculums. Leaders carefully consider the courses they provide for students, apprentices and those who have high needs’ (Ofsted, 2024)
2. Health and well-being of staff and students are of the highest importance. Staff have manageable workloads. Leaders listen to feedback from staff to reduce workloads



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and stress. Staff feel appreciated for the contribution they make to the college. They value the well-being days, where they participate in activities, such as yoga, football and silent discos. Staff feel well-supported by their managers. (Ofsted, 2024)

3. Students make excellent progress whilst at college. Achievement rates continue to be outstanding for almost all learners. 'Students on education programmes for young people develop a wide range of highly relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours that prepare them exceptionally well for progression and their next steps' (Ofsted, 2024)
4. Learners and apprentices enjoy an extremely well-planned curriculum, which means they gain significant new knowledge and skills quickly. 'Students and apprentices enjoy their learning at Riverside. They display extremely positive attitudes and would recommend the college to friends, family and peers. Students and apprentices are articulate, enthusiastic and polite' (Ofsted, 2024)
5. 'Leaders ensure that teachers are highly qualified and have expert subject knowledge. Teachers benefit from a range of staff development to improve their teaching skills and to maintain their vocational currency' (Ofsted, 2024)
6. Outstanding financial management has led to economic stability and effective deployment of resources and investment in facilities
7. 'The College makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs. Leaders and managers have a deep understanding of skills needs for the region. They have established highly effective partnerships with a range of stakeholders, including local chambers of commerce, the local borough council and the Liverpool City Region (LCR) combined authority' (Ofsted, 2024)

2.1.5 The Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) 2025/26 identified the key areas for improvement:

1. Strengthen leadership at all levels to secure improvements in the quality of education for learners in the foundation studies department.
2. Further improve the quality of education for the small minority of programmes that are not yet outstanding.
3. Revise the adult curriculum plan to ensure improved student outcomes and that funding allocations are met.

2.1.6 The College aims to swiftly and robustly address these areas for improvement. Further details are in the Quality, Efficiency, Growth (QEG) Plan which acts as the College's 'to do' list.

2.1.7 Achievement and attainment rate tables for 2024/25 were published at the end of the academic year. The College was in the top 50% nationally for 16 of the 19 measures. 11 of those measures were in the highest quartile.

2.1.8 The financial health of the College remains OUTSTANDING by the DfE assessment for the eleventh year.

## 2.2 The Policy and Funding Environment

2.2.1 The Labour Government has been in office for two years and as expected, a plethora of new policies, plans, reforms, funding announcements, inquiries and consultations have been introduced and are now being implemented.
This Government has described itself as being mission-led and has aligned itself to 5 missions:

- Kickstart economic growth
- Make Britain a clean energy superpower
- Safer streets
- Breakdown barriers to opportunity
- Build an NHS for the future



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2.2.2 The Association of Colleges has responded with a mission accepted report detailing how colleges can contribute to the five missions and emphasising the vital role they play.

2.2.2 With the cost-of-living crisis continuing, fuelled by international events and turmoil in national politics the challenges for colleges on pay is extreme. However, the current Government has recognised that there needs to be an alignment between school and college pay through additional funding that there needs to be an alignment of school and college pay , although the funding increase for 26/27 did not fully reflect this. This year 2026/27, we will be fair in our pay award and endeavour to build upon the pay awards we have sustained for ten years. Much depends on recruitment to all programmes in 2026/27.

2.2.3 Recruitment and retention of teaching and support staff remains an issue for the College and the wider sector. The Covid pandemic left the legacy of different ways of working and the ability to match pay in schools is thwarted by funding levels. However, the College's pay scale now matches those of schools and sixth form colleges and the introduction of flexible working options, including the 2pm finish on Fridays has had a positive impact,

2.2.4 The mental health and wellbeing of our staff and students remains of utmost importance. We will continue to invest in practical and emotional support for students provided by our Support for Students teams and by encouraging participation in inspiring enrichment opportunities. For our staff, we continue to implement our Health and Wellbeing Plan introduced in 2021.

2.2.5 Qualification reform and defunding: from August 2026, the College will deliver three T Levels, introducing Digital Software Development alongside existing provision in Health and Social Care and Early Years. The College is also finalising its Strategic Planning Transitions Statement, which will set out a comprehensive timeline for the phased introduction of T Levels, V Levels and Level 2 Pathways.

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 and updated November 2024. We are currently progressing towards the 'established' stage. A strategic group will continue to meet regularly to monitor progress against our net zero target by 2040.

2.2.7 At regional level we will continue to collaborate with the Association of Liverpool City Region Colleges (AoLCRC), the Liverpool City Region Strategic Authority (LCRSA) and the newly designated Technical Excellence Colleges (TECS) for construction, defence and clean energy to deliver the Local Growth Plan.

2.2.8 More locally the College is a main partner in Reconnecting Runcorn, the Town Deal awarded in 2020. Working with NHS partners to open an education and health hub, WELL Runcorn in Runcorn town centre, one of seven projects to regenerate the town and due to open in 2026.

2.2.9 In 2024 The Local Authority launched the Children and Young People Plan under the banner headline 'Aiming High for Halton's Children and Young People, 2024-2027'. The College plays a pivotal role in the implementation of the plan.

2.2.10 The pace of change, the uncertain political environment nationally and locally, and the coordination of the Government policies clearly carries risks to the College.



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However, the College remains in a very strong position in terms of quality and financial health (both rated OUTSTANDING by Ofsted and DfE) and can respond swiftly to the challenges presented in the year ahead.

The College has

- Invested over £50m in teaching and learning facilities since 2017, whilst maintaining outstanding financial health. This includes the Green Skills Centre at Kingsway (an £8m project), the Health and Wellbeing Centre at Cronton (£10m project) and various upgrades to student study and social spaces both inside and outside.
- In 2026/27 the College plans to open the new music hub and teaching block at Cronton (£7m project), invest in improving the Kingsway fascia and upgrade hair salons and improve social spaces.
- Turnover has increased from £20m in 2016/17 to £44m in 2025/26 (120% increase). The College's main income streams (16-18 and Adult) are secure for 2026/27, and this accounts for 84% of income.



## 2.3 16-18 Students

### 2.3.1 16-18 learner number allocations

| 2015/16 | 2021/22 | 2025/26 | 2026/27 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2,681 | 3,433 | 4000 | 4,310 |

### 2.3.2

The College has increased its 16-18 provision by 61% 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. Applications and offers for school leavers are significantly ahead of last year and recruitment is expected to increase again in September 2026.

## 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 priority sectors including those identified in the LCR Local Growth Plan, LSIP and Industrial Strategy. Employers will be encouraged to participate in forums, ISPs and curriculum development activities to ensure apprenticeships are tailored to meet local needs



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2.4.3 We will continue to achieve excellent employer and apprenticeship feedback as part of the Apprenticeship Accountability Framework

2.4.4 We will build on the success of offering apprenticeships as progression routes from our full time, work placement and T Level programmes.

2.4.5 There will be continued investment in new facilities and digital offers to increase flexibility and efficiency for apprentices and employers.

## 2.5 19+ Adult Education

2.5.1 The Adult Skills Fund (ASF) comes from two sources, the Department for Education and the Liverpool City Region (LCR), this budget is secure for 2025/2026, and robust curriculum planning and monitoring is in place to achieve the funding target which proved challenging last year.

2.5.2 The College, through the Association of Liverpool City Region Colleges (AoLCRC), is working with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) and the Chambers of Commerce on delivering the Local Skills Investment Plan



## 2.6 Higher Education

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In 2025/2026 the College aims to build upon its Higher Education offer by exploring further curriculum pathways, including HTQs (Higher Technical Qualifications) and preparation for Lifelong Learning Entitlement, while enhancing its current offer in collaboration with higher education students and monitoring of outcomes. Riverside College continues to be a much-valued member of the University of Staffordshire Collaborative Partnership and is also a partner provider in Shaping Futures - the Liverpool City Region Uni Connect programme with the aim of reducing the gap in underrepresented groups accessing higher education.

## 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, Skills England, AoLCRC, Ofsted, Expert Provider Apprenticeships 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.



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2.8.2 The College has made the following commitments:

1. We will consistently perform as a high-quality college.
2. We will take a proactive approach with our local authority and secondary schools to promote community cohesion by aligning our plans to the Liverpool City Region Anti Racism Strategy
3. We will address the issue of those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in a collaborative and creative way, taking a lead on the Halton Post 16 EET Board
4. We will partner with high quality subcontractors to supply the best teaching and learning experience for students and to extend the reach of provision to people and communities that would not normally engage with traditional college programmes. We will retain the Subcontracting Standard to do this.
5. We will increase the percentage of young people achieving Levels 2 and 3 by the age of 19.
6. We will work towards closing the gap in attainment between those who were in receipt of free school meals and those who were not.
7. We will increase the number of young people starting on apprenticeships and continue to support SMEs and Level 2 and 3 Apprenticeship Standards. Priority will be given to full time students to progress onto apprenticeships via work experience opportunities.
8. We will seek to address the needs of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who need clear progression routes within Halton and continue to work closely with the local authority to ensure there is provision within the borough.
9. We will contribute fully to addressing local educational needs and priorities, by implementing the recommendations of the Children and Young People Plan – Aiming High for Halton's Children & Young People 2024-2027.
10. We will work to promote the value and transferability of maths and English skills in order to close skills gaps and support our learners in gaining a qualification in these subjects, while also ensuring maths and English skills for industry are positively promoted and embedded in all subject curriculums to improve learner employment and social mobility opportunities.
11. We will work collaboratively with our partner high schools as a legacy of the PEIA project, to close skills gaps in maths and English in 16-18 learners to best support them in achieving a Level 2 qualification in these subjects whilst studying at the College.
12. 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 Strategic Authority (LCRSA).
13. We will work with partners to expand higher education opportunities in Halton.
14. We will seek to deliver an inclusive curriculum for the residents of Halton
15. We will work with Halton employers and Chambers of Commerce to produce workforce training programmes. We will focus on dynamic local sectors such as Construction, Engineering, Science and Technology, including Green Energy.



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16. We will utilise our partnership in the education and health Hub in Runcorn WELL Runcorn, to develop a responsive and agile curriculum ready for the Hub opening in 2026. This will include supporting employability and skills needs of the Health Sector.
17. We will work with the Liverpool City Region Strategic Authority (LCRSA) and Growth Platform to contribute to the skills strategy for the Liverpool City Region, focussing on sector specific demand including:
    - CreaTech and Digital
    - Advanced Manufacturing
    - Health and Life Sciences
    - Energy
    - Built Environment
18. We will embrace the opportunities provided by the Freeport and Life Sciences Investment Zone.

## Chapter 3 Monitoring Performance 2026/2027

### 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;
ii. the Quality, Efficiency and Growth (QEG) report which summarises areas for improvement; where emerging concerns are identified at the weekly Operations Meeting, bespoke recovery plans will be implemented immediately; and
iii. 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 DfE/FEC and LCRSA.



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