

**Northern
College**



Strategic Plan 2023-2026

Inspiring positive change through adult education



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Our Ambition for the Future

This 2023-26 strategy builds on a long and celebrated history of changing lives through education. It clearly states our ambition to ensure Northern College meets the needs of its students, communities and the economy in the coming years.

Our future is one of collaboration with our partners, where we reach out to others to maximise the impact of our work, ensuring our vision and values guide us.

A successful future is one where Northern College is thriving, and our students benefit from excellent learning experiences proving it is never too late to discover a joy for learning. It is one where we develop the whole person, giving equal value to the development of subject specific skills alongside the development of confidence and wellbeing. It is a future where residential education remains core to changing people's lives through learning. It is through this approach that Northern College will continue to enable people to fulfill their potential.

We are excited for this next phase in our journey and look forward to working with you to achieve our ambition.

Mark Sanders (Chair of Governors)
Emma Beal (Principal & CEO)



Our College

Northern College for Residential Adult Education is a Specialist Designated Institution based at Wentworth Castle, Barnsley, South Yorkshire. Founded in 1978, the College offers a range of provision for adults on a residential and non-residential basis. Northern College is the only adult residential college in the North of England. Through our residential environment we offer a transformative learning experience, we accelerate personal growth, facilitate networking, and provide opportunities for specialised and immersive learning.

Northern College is a relatively small college, with circa 3,000 enrolments per year and this creates a strong community feel. The College is fortunate to be set in acres of National Trust gardens and parkland that students access as part of their studies at Northern College.

The College provides a platform for reengagement with education and prides itself on designing bespoke pathways in partnership with its stakeholders. These partnerships allow the College to reach out to adults who may not have had the opportunity to fulfil their potential and unlock their ambitions. The curriculum is driven by local / regional economic and underpinning skills priorities which include health and social care, business and management, English, maths, digital skills and inclusive growth. The College offers a range of courses from entry to higher level programmes enabling adults to succeed regardless of starting point.

The College has a specialism in supporting the success of adults from disadvantaged backgrounds and those facing multiple barriers to education and skills development. Students regularly tell us the College has changed their life.

Our Values

Always be ambitious - we have high aspirations and expectations; we balance support and challenge, and we seek to improve in everything we do.

Have people at our heart - we share, innovate and collaborate, we value every individual, we are inclusive, and we celebrate diversity.

Make things happen - we are clear and straightforward; we take personal responsibility, and we listen so we can understand and take action.

Our strategy's key themes:

Be sustainable - we will future proof the College by flexing our offer, ensuring maximum impact is gained from our unique assets.

Elevate our profile - we will be recognised nationally and regionally as a leader in adult education.

High quality - we will realise a clear and ambitious vision for high-quality, inclusive education and training building on our successful Ofsted inspection in 2023.



Regional Context

Serving the skills agenda in South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire is key to the College strategy. Key employment sectors in the region which the College contributes towards include healthcare, education, digital and professional services. Examples of current relevant priorities include:

- Persistent skills gaps within health and social care including for example support for those with mental health conditions, the need for digital skills and leadership and management skills.
- Shortages linked to digital transformation and project management within financial and professional services sector.
- Demand for further education tutors.
- Demand for both specialist and basic skills within digital and technology sector. There is a near-universal requirement for digital skills in employment at all skill levels including low skilled occupations.

Alongside this productivity, pay, social mobility and a lack of qualifications are key challenges faced by the region.

Cross cutting themes include net zero / sustainability, transferable skills, equality and diversity, leadership and management, digitisation and automation.



'I started with a couple of short courses to build my confidence and I have finished my pre-access in social studies. I didn't have a great time at school and I can't believe where I am now thanks to my classmate, tutors and the College.'

Samantha

Be Sustainable

Future proof the College by flexing our offer, ensuring maximum impact is gained from our unique assets.

Diversification & Adaptation - Thriving Estate - Net Zero

1.1 Grow our curriculum range, developing new and expanding existing income streams to meet local and regional priorities.

We will future proof the College by further developing and diversifying our curriculum offer in line with regional and national skills priorities. This includes refocusing aspects of the College curriculum, continuing to flex modes of delivery and targeted growth in key curriculum areas.

We will diversify our income aligned to our mission and expertise. We have a strong and successful history of supporting people with learning difficulties, disabilities and health conditions and we will look to further develop these opportunities. We have a strong and successful history of higher skills development working with our university partners and we will look to further develop these opportunities.

Our Community Learning approach will be place based. We will grow our range of partners in the region to ensure we can meet local need.

1.2 Secure new investment and development opportunities to maximise the use of the Wentworth Castle Estate.

We will ensure the Wentworth Castle estate thrives and develops by working with our estate partners, The National Trust and Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council.

We will develop new and sustainable opportunities on the campus aligned to our estates strategy.

1.3 Drive energy efficiency and energy saving activities on the campus as part of our Net Zero plan for 2045.

We will seek opportunities to accelerate our progress towards Net Zero by 2045. Our estate includes historically significant buildings and as such we will work with specialist partners to deliver this commitment.

We will be champions for awareness raising across a range of environmental issues through our curriculum and our partnership activity.



Where are we now?

'Leaders provide an exceptional and unique environment for learning.' 'Students value highly the relaxed and friendly ambience that pervades the college and the opportunity to enjoy the building and its surroundings.' (Ofsted, March 2023)

The Wentworth Castle Estate Partnership is well established (created in 2019). We have a shared vision for the future of the Estate including a newly developed estates strategy (July 2023).

In 2022/23, the College delivered new curriculum in Counselling and in Education, developed new employer-based provision in Digital Skills and added blended online and residential provision to its portfolio.

The College has aligned to the Climate Action Road Map for FE Colleges and is driving this agenda forward through its policy and planning.

By 2026 we will:

- Have continued to build our financial sustainability and secured new investment and development opportunities.
- Have developed new and grown existing income streams year on year to meet local and regional priorities. This will include a responsive higher level skills programme.
- Have developed a new, coproduced offer for people with learning difficulties and disabilities / health conditions.
- Have made key improvements within the physical College estate through the Further Education Capital Transformation Programme fund.

Elevate our Profile

Be recognised nationally and regionally as a leader in Adult Education.

Unique Proposition - Outward Focused - Specialist Knowledge

2.1 Shout loudly about the impact of our work ensuring the value of residential education is understood.

We will ensure there is clarity on the impact residential education brings to the skills landscape and shout proudly about our students' achievements.

We will engage with and influence the regional skills agenda locally and nationally to ensure the value of residential education is advanced.

2.2 Extend our range of partnerships ensuring the College offer is accessible to a wide range of people.

We will be outward focused, fostering new partnerships with employers, other education partners and aligned services such as health and wellbeing that enable us to grow our impact.

We will continue our commitment to ensuring that the barriers facing adults wishing to re-enter and progress in education and employment are understood and prioritised.

We will ensure there is an accessible ladder of opportunity through to higher level skills.

2.3 Continue to attract, develop and retain highly skilled and motivated staff that share and deliver our vision for the College.

We will be a values led employer who listens to and acts on feedback.

We will enable our staff to deliver a high-quality offer by ensuring they have access to a clear performance and development framework and relevant high-quality training.

We will continue to prioritise our wellbeing services for staff and students.



Where are we now?

A strong history of excellent outcomes for students.

Working with a broad range of stakeholders to 'develop and plan a curriculum that prepares students to progress to the next steps in education or employment and to meet skills needs.' (Ofsted, March 2023)

Working with our university partners (University of Huddersfield and Sheffield Hallam University) to provide high quality higher skills pathways for adults.

The College has developed new community based initiatives with local partners in ESOL and horticulture as a direct response to local need in 2022/23.

The College has utilised local funding flexibility to share its adult education expertise, upskilling over 100 adults in education and training in 2022/23.

By 2026 we will:

- Be working to a clearly defined policy for adult residential education that allows the College to support the region to meet its skills priorities.
- Be an employer and a partner of choice for Adult Education and Skills.
- Have a place-based approach to Community Learning including delivering Northern College in the Community.
- Be leading adult skills development opportunities within further education and skills collaborations regionally and nationally.

High Quality

To realise a clear and ambitious vision for high-quality, inclusive education and training building on our successful Ofsted inspection in 2023.

Curriculum - Innovation - Wellbeing

3.1 Drive teaching learning and assessment best practice through a quality improvement approach that promotes and enables growth and development.

We will use our recent Ofsted inspection as a platform to guide the College towards Outstanding. We will maintain a focus on the plans we have in place and be swift to implement these.

We will be future jobs focused, ensuring we are preparing our students with the skills they need for the current and future labour market.

3.2 We will prioritise developing our technology based solutions and infrastructure to enhance the quality of our offer, ensuring we remain competitive in the 21st century.

We will ensure our staff have the training and support to be digitally enabled and be confident to succeed in a modern education and skills institution.

We will remain cognisant of the wide reaching impact of digital exclusion on key sections of our student community and we will ensure this is reflected in our operations.

3.3 Prioritise the incorporation of our natural environment into our work providing evidence for its benefits to productivity and wellbeing.

We will increase the incorporation of our natural environment into our curriculum across all programmes.

We will seek opportunities to develop the evidence base for the use of the outdoors within education and skills.

We will work with our partners to increase the knowledge base in this area by offering specific training and development opportunities.



Where are we now?

Leaders ensure that staff have manageable workloads and are considerate of the well-being of their staff. Staff benefit from access to a range of courses and resources to support their well-being (Ofsted, March 2023).

The College is a disability confident and mindful employer aiming to attract and retain a well-qualified and diverse workforce.

The College is aligned to current best practice for student and staff mental health and wellbeing within the sector.

Utilisation of our natural environment is harnessed through whole College activities and through teaching and learning.

By 2026 we will:

- Be self-assessing as Outstanding against the Education Inspection Framework
- Have developed and implemented a digital strategy including a refresh to our approach to digital upskilling for staff.
- Be at the forefront of educational practice related to use of the outdoor environment to improve wellbeing and productivity.

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