

Accountability Statement

2026-27



Education
Partnership
North East

S
Sunderland
College

N
Northumberland
College

H6
Hartlepool
Sixth Form
College

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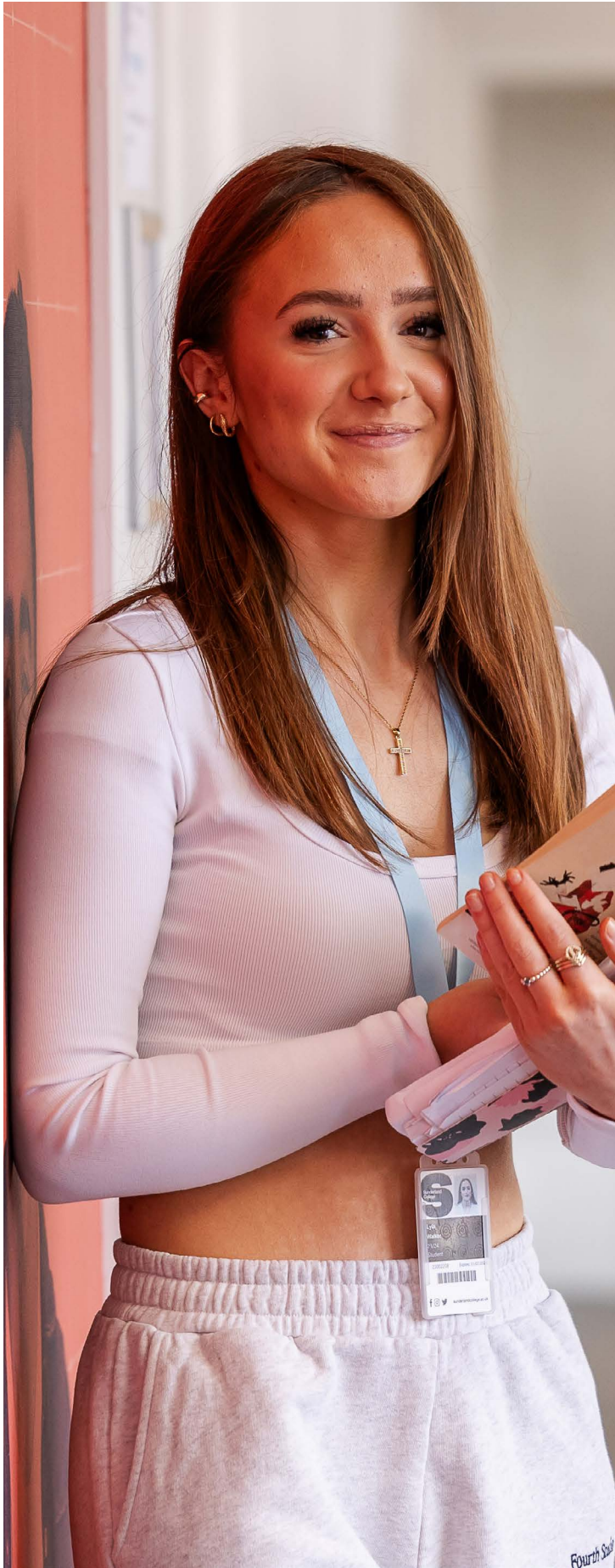
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Purpose

Education Partnership North East formed in 2019 after City of Sunderland College merged with Hartlepool Sixth Form College (2017) and Northumberland College (2019). A regional college group, Education Partnership North East (EPNE) is a trading name and comprises:

- › Northumberland College
- › Hartlepool Sixth Form College
- › Sunderland College
- › City of Sunderland College (legal entity)

EPNE is a North East England place focused provider and materially contributes to regional socio-economic progress. It delivers across all types of provision (within key sectoral areas) including technical education, apprenticeships, sixth form, degree and other higher education. All campuses deliver 16-19 and provision for adults.

The group has developed specialist delivery centres including SEND, Animal and Land, Construction Skills, Technical, and Academic.



Developed within the spirit of accountability agreements, our strategic plan sets out our vision and purpose to:

- › Ensure curriculum pathways meet the current and future demands of the regional labour market.
- › Maintain an unwavering and relentless focus on developing students through outstanding teaching, learning, support and assessment.
- › Build culture and develop high performing people, empowered to lead, innovate and take ownership.
- › Build financial resilience and resources to ensure all stakeholders benefit from outstanding learning environments.
- › Ensure we are an engaged sector leader with a strong reputation and growing partnerships.



Context and Place



EPNE’s geographical footprint stretches from the Tees Valley to the Scottish Border; an area comprising Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) and the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA).

- Economic characteristics**
Pan regional sectors of strategic economic importance (covering North East MSA and TVCA) include:
- Advanced manufacturing including electric vehicle and battery manufacture.
 - Clean energy and energy transition including offshore wind.
 - Creative industries and content including high end TV and film.
 - Defence, security and space.
 - Life sciences, pharmaceuticals and process industries.
 - Professional business services.
 - Tech, digital and Artificial Intelligence.

- Additionally, the foundational economy in the region supports a significant number of jobs in the following sectors:
- Construction and housing.
 - Education.
 - Health and social care.
 - Transport and logistics.
 - Visitor economy including hospitality and retail.

LSIP priorities

The current LSIP priorities identified in 2023 (phase 1) and refreshed in 2025 remain. In phase 2 of the LSIPs, the North East and North of Tyne areas will be combined to cover the whole of the North East MSA area. High-growth sectors, aligned to the UK’s Industrial Strategy, will be included in phase 2. The North East LSIP report is due for publication in July.

Tees Valley (Phase 1)	North East (Phase 1)	North of Tyne (Phase 1)	North East (Phase 2)
• Green Energy and Net Zero – Construction • Green Energy and Net Zero – Operational • Health and Social Care • Business and Professional Services	• Automotive/advanced manufacturing • Construction industries • Digital • Health and health sciences • Transport and logistics	• Construction • Green Energy and Net Zero • Health and Social Care • Business and Professional Services • Culture, Creative, Hospitality and Tourism	• Advanced Manufacturing, including Electric Vehicles • Construction • Creative industries and Content • Defence, Security & Space • Life Science, Process and Pharma • Offshore Wind and Energy Transition • Social Care • Tech, digital and AI
Cross-Cutting Skills • Digital • Professional Development and Business Skills	Cross-Cutting Skills • Essential and Advanced Digital Skills • Social Inclusion	Cross-Cutting Themes • Digital • Professional Development and Business Skills • Employability	



Social and demographic characteristics

The **North East MSA region** presents a significant demographic and economic profile, with a population of more than **2 million** people in 2024. Approximately **1.27 million** residents are of working age, with around **905,000** economically active and **365,000** economically inactive. This highlights a substantial labour market, but also points to ongoing challenges around workforce participation, skills development and supporting people into employment.

North East MSA’s population has grown by **4.4%** since 2019, adding approximately **85,770** residents. Projections indicate continued, though more modest, growth of around **1.0%** between 2024 and 2029. The job market has also expanded, with a **4.7%** increase in employment between 2019 and 2024. However, this remains slightly below the national average, suggesting that while the regional economy is progressing, it continues to lag behind the wider UK in terms of labour market expansion.

Educational attainment in North East MSA presents a mixed picture. Approximately **39.6%** of residents hold a Higher Education-level qualification, which is below the national average. However, the region performs more strongly at Level 3, with **21.5%** of residents holding an NVQ 3 or equivalent qualification, above the national average. This indicates a strong vocational foundation but also highlights the need to strengthen progression routes into higher-level technical, professional and academic study. In addition, **8.6%** of residents, representing more than **109,000** individuals, have no formal qualifications, reinforcing the importance of accessible adult learning, basic skills provision and employability-focused programmes.

The TVCA area shows a similar, although smaller-scale, demographic and economic pattern. In 2024, TVCA had a population of approximately **713,000**, with around **435,500** people of working age. The area is projected to experience modest population growth of **0.9%** between 2024 and 2029. Job growth increased by **3.4%** between

2019 and 2024, which, as with North East MSA, was below the national growth rate and indicates ongoing labour market challenges.

Educational attainment in TVCA largely mirrors North East MSA’s profile. The proportion of residents with Higher Education-level qualifications is below the national average, while Level 3 attainment is above the national average. This reinforces the importance of vocational and technical education as a regional strength, while also highlighting the need to improve higher-level progression and address the proportion of adults with low or no formal qualifications.

Across the combined North East MSA and TVCA regions, the wider socio-economic context highlights several important themes:

- > High youth unemployment and adult worklessness.
- > Racial diversity below the UK national average, although the region is becoming increasingly diverse.
- > Slower labour market recovery compared with the national average.
- > Underperformance in Gross Value Added (GVA) per head.
- > Acute skills gaps in key growth sectors.
- > Household income approximately £6.9k below the UK average.

Overall, the data suggests that the region has clear economic potential but also faces significant structural challenges. For the college group, this reinforces the importance of accessible education pathways, strong vocational and technical provision, adult skills development, employer engagement, and clear progression routes into higher-level study and employment.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Data, 2025/26

Further insight into regional need is provided by the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) data for the 2025/26 academic year, which identifies several indicators above national and regional averages.

25/26					
LDD		EHCP		High Needs	
3910	35	533	4.9%	190	1.7%

The allocated inclusive mainstream fund will support further and wider inclusion for students with SEND, to address the rising volumes of young people and adults with SEND and the phased implementation of the SEND reforms, namely:

- Introduction of Participation Coaches to work with our disadvantaged students, those furthest from education and those who require extensive support to engage in full-time education, including those with SEND needs, those from ELE and AP settings
- Introduction of Engagement Mentors at each of our college campuses to support students with SEND. The students who have a declared need

but do not have an EHCP or have High Needs status. This role triages and provides wider SEND support than is currently provided

- Development and implementation of a holistic organisational SEND CPD package, which is a multi-role approach to ensure and deliver SEND inclusion across the college
- Expanding the delivery of employer training which will support the outcomes and sustained destinations into work for young people and adults with SEND
- Review and improvement to the adult and HE core SEND offer



Local authorities and campuses

The main campuses of Education Partnership North East are located in the 3 local authority areas which are characteristic of aforementioned demographic and social characteristics:

- The borough of Hartlepool: Hartlepool Sixth Form College
- The city of Sunderland: Sunderland College
- The county of Northumberland: Northumberland College

• Hartlepool Sixth Form College

- Provides mainly level 3 academic and technical provision.
- Travel to learn is mainly from the borough of Hartlepool and immediate surrounding area.
- Provision links to 9 out of 12 strategic economic areas.
- Pathways to higher education or apprenticeships cater for 3 out of 4 Tees Valley LSIP priority areas.

• Sunderland College

City Campus

- Provides entry to level 5 in technical further and higher education.
- Travel to learn is mainly from the city of Sunderland and immediate surrounding areas.
- Provision links to 7 out of 12 strategic economic areas.
- Pathways to higher education or apprenticeships cater for 3 out of 5 NELSIP priority areas.

Bede Campus

- Provides entry to level 6 in academic and technical further/higher education.
- Travel to learn is from Sunderland City and immediate surrounding areas.
- Provision links to 5 out of 12 strategic economic areas.
- Pathways to higher education or apprenticeships cater for 2 out of 5 NELSIP priority areas.

HICSA - the North East Construction Technical Excellence Centre

- Provides entry to level 6 in Construction and Housing.
- Travel to learn is from Sunderland City and immediate surrounding areas.
- Provision links directly to 1 out 12 strategic economic areas and 2 of 5 NELSIP priorities and is connected to the city and region-wide infrastructure and housing developments.

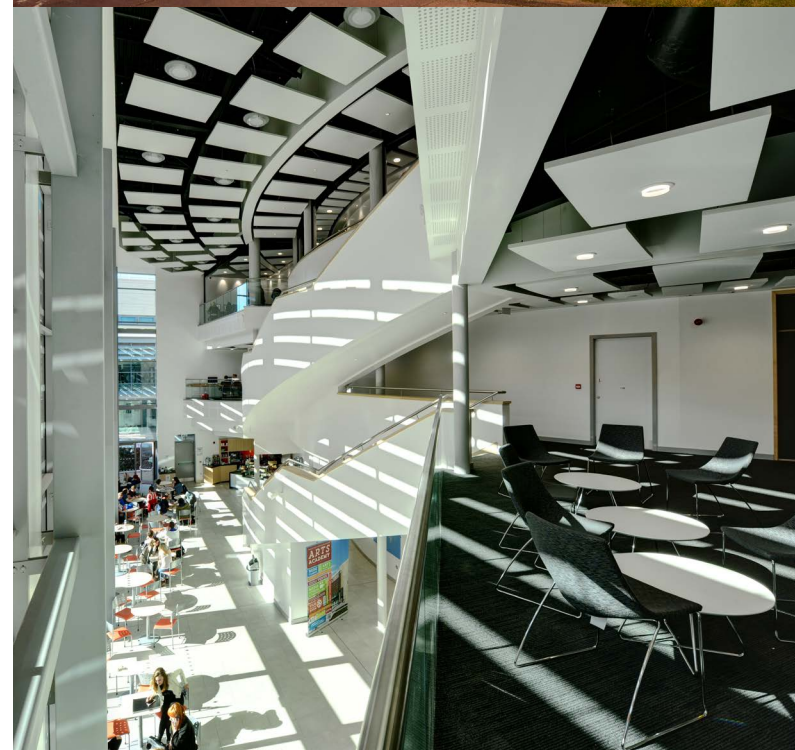
• Northumberland College

Ashington Campus

- Provides entry to level 6 in technical further/higher education provision.
- Travel to learn is mainly from the town of Ashington and the surrounding areas in Southern and central Northumberland such as Blyth, Morpeth, Bedlington and Cramlington.
- Provision links to 10 out of 12 strategic economic areas.
- Pathways to higher education or apprenticeships cater for 5 out of 5 North of Tyne priority areas.

Kirkley Hall Campus

- Provides pre-entry to level 6 technical further and higher education provision.
- Travel to learn is mainly from the south-east and north of Northumberland and immediate surrounding areas, although as a national land-based campus with residential provision, travel to learn patterns do extend beyond the local authority area.
- Provision links to 4 out of 12 regional strategic economic areas.
- Pathways to higher education or apprenticeships cater for 2 out of 5 North of Tyne LSIP priority areas. However, provision specifically links to 8 out of 12 national land-based disciplines.



Approach to developing an annual accountability statement

Key priorities within this accountability agreement are already included within the strategic plan for Education Partnership North East (EPNE). This was developed following extensive consultation with internal and external local, regional and national stakeholders. It was shaped following formalised stakeholder research led by a third party in Sunderland, Northumberland and Hartlepool, obtaining formative contributions from the North East Chamber of Commerce, community partners, industry/employers, staff, students, governors and others.

Other contributors from the education sector were the Bishop Chadwick Trust and Northumbria University, and our active engagement within the three LSIP partnerships has involved the wider Colleges across the North East.

EPNE's curriculum portfolio and delivery underpin the new strategic plan. All curriculum is robustly planned and delivery is informed and specifically mapped to Standard Occupational Classification Codes and labour market data trends before approval. Employer advisory boards linked to specific industry/sectoral areas actively feed into the shaping of curriculum for the skills needs of today and tomorrow.

Curriculum linked to specific industry priority areas such as in Health and Social Care, have also been developed through internationalisation supported by the Education and Training Foundation. Providers support EPNE to develop a community connected approach to curriculum intent and implementation.

Additionally, EPNE's specific priority areas have been developed through industry partnerships and provider collaborations via the Construction Technical Excellence College, Strategic Development Fund and Local Skills Improvement Fund programmes, Skills Bootcamps, and extensive engagement with local and combined authorities, employers and employer bodies, private training providers, further education colleges, charities and schools. This work is specifically prevalent in the high demand and technical priority areas of Advanced Manufacturing, Engineering, Automotive and Logistics, Clean Energy and Construction and Housing, including digital and modern construction.

More recently and adding a new layer to our

approach and accountabilities, Education Partnership North East, together with other equally important providers have co-created purposeful strategic alliances with the breadth, expertise and capacity to shape, develop and deliver real, valuable and impacting systemic change within existing and emerging LSIP priority industry/skills areas and those of the combined authorities.

For example, following the successful partnership with Northumbria University, the coming year will see increased strategic collaboration and sharing of practice and innovation with the University. This will ensure a

regional approach develops much needed, specialist training in Modern Construction and breaks down barriers to progression.

The aforementioned is one example of how EPNE, as a regionally focussed group, is investing in meaningful pan-regional strategy with preferred visionary partners to develop much-needed, collaborative and cohesive specialist localised training pathways. Similar approaches have been developed in other key economic areas such as within advanced manufacturing, engineering, automotive/logistics and green skills. For example, with the design and now implementation of MADE NE.



This accountability statement has also been developed following discussion with our lead governors for economy and place (representing Sunderland, Northumberland, and Hartlepool). It has been approved in its final form by the Board of Corporation for Education Partnership North East whose working aged members, represent the wider North East and Tees valley region.

Contribution to national, regional and local priorities

Already the annual economic contribution of Education Partnership North East to the local business community in the region is £400.6 million and the average annual return on investment to students is 14.4% in higher wages and to society is 13.7%. Contribution is delivered through our Strategic Plan 2025-2030 which prioritises changemaking curriculum strategy. This is and will continue to be underpinned by our 4 clear values and 6 statements that define the College's high level, broad and balanced curriculum intent.

Our values



1. Establish educational **Centres of Excellence** that transform delivery models of the past, look to the future, and pioneer visionary further and higher education systems.
2. Foster deeper collaboration with industry to influence, co-design and deliver a **Future Focused Curriculum**, meeting priority skills, and occupations in demand.
3. Enable all, regardless of background, age and ability to holistically develop and excel, reducing inequalities through the relentless pursuit of Outstanding Educational Quality.
4. Shape and provide **Inspirational Real-world Opportunities** to take education beyond competencies, to excellence, supporting students to progress in employment or higher study.
5. Embrace emerging technologies, innovate through **Outstanding Pedagogical Approaches**, creating exceptional learning experiences for all students.
6. Inspire and equip **Students with Changemaker Mindsets**, and the critical skills to thrive in a rapidly changing global economy.



Reflecting regional and local priorities including specific areas of relevant LSIPs (included in the Strategic Plan for Education Partnership North East), the following are examples of some of our objectives and intended impacts:

1. Sector skills needs linked to economic growth		
	Objective	Intended impact
1.1	Further improve the technical education offer in Northumberland, aligned to the county’s core sectors of growth.	Wansbeck campus with significantly improved industry standard facilities opened in October 2026.
1.2	Growth in construction skills training sector aligned to the North East CTEC ambitions.	Open the Vaillant Training Academy at HICSA by Dec-26. Increase 16-19 enrolments on construction programmes, all levels, by 40. Achieve 360 19+ enrolments on Level 2 construction courses through a delivery consortium led by EPNE.
1.3	Launch 14-16 Construction and Housing Skills Academy at Northumberland College in partnership with Bernicia, with a guaranteed progression to a L3 Apprenticeship, T Level or academic provision.	15 Academy Trust learners enrolled in Sep-26 on the 14-16 Skills Academy.
1.4	Strengthen the contribution to the automotive manufacturing sector through the partnership work with MADE NE and NEAA.	Extend the T Level placement pilot with MADE NE and Nissan to SMEs in the automotive manufacturing supply chain – a minimum of 44 learners from New College Durham (20) and Sunderland College (24) engaged. Develop an accelerated technician level apprenticeship model, underpinned by a learner progressing from a T Level, for delivery from Sep-27.
1.5	Work with Energy Central Institute partners in Blyth and the offshore renewables industry to explore the feasibility of introducing an HNC/D Electrical Engineering.	Develop a part-time HN Electrical and Electronics Engineering offer for delivery in Sep-27 with a minimum cohort of 12 learners.
1.6	Further strengthen the college group’s partnerships and market presence in the health and care sector.	Launch the Health Academy in Nov-26 with a simulated hospital ward and science labs at the Wansbeck campus in partnership with Northumbria NHS Trust. Deliver the Care Certificate as part of Level 3 Healthcare Support Worker apprenticeship standard for Northumbria NHS Trust – a minimum of 25 learners engaged. Develop and implement a collaborative approach with the University of Sunderland to better support learner progression into and through the healthcare sector.

2. Foundational skills linked to economic inactivity		
	Objective	Intended impact
2.1	Implement a data informed approach to the delivery of foundational skills interventions in the community, engaging those furthest from the workplace.	Develop and launch a Stronger Communities dashboard to inform strategic and curriculum planning by Nov-26. Co-design through participatory engagement smaller non-regulated courses to support the development of foundation skills and build confidence – 1,800 19+ enrolments.
2.2	Introduce 16-19 NEET approach in partnership with Gateshead and Newcastle colleges to support those furthest from engaging in education.	Pilot model with 45 NEET learners, all with SEMH acting as a barrier to engagement, supported by a dedicated key worker.

3. Inclusion		
	Objective	Intended impact
3.1	Ensure the college group fully implements the national SEND reforms by embedding a consistent, high-quality, person-centred approach across all provision, strengthening early identification and support, and improving outcomes for learners with SEND.	Deliver sustained high levels of positive destinations for students with SEND and High Needs, achieving 98%. Develop and implement an impactful SEND CPD package for staff through targeted level and role-appropriate professional practice, 100% of teaching staff and 75% of business/curriculum support staff engaged. Implement the ‘seamless start’ approach for 100% of students with SEND (ISP, SPP and EHCP). Launch the Connect 2 provision at the new Wansbeck campus in Ashington with 20 learners in Sep-26. Work towards the deliverables in the Inclusive Mainstream Fund.
3.2	Develop and launch a cross-college group, evidence informed Inclusion Plan	Develop and implement a cross-college group inclusion dashboard to inform strategic and curriculum planning by Nov-26. Prepare an evidence-informed, action-oriented plan for inclusion, identifying cross-college group priorities for implementation by Dec-26.

4. Community, placed-based delivery		
	Objective	Planned impact
4.1	Develop the Electively Home Educated offer for Northumberland, building on the established good practice in Sunderland.	Launch EHE provision in Northumberland in Sep-26, supporting 12-15 learners to engage in education.
4.2	Establish an Electively Home Educated hub at Hartlepool Sixth Form.	Engage 30 EHE learners in education in 26/27 with clear pathways to sixth form provision.
4.3	Collaborate with Newcastle College on the Adult Skills Fund Family Learning contract, delivering place-based interventions to engage learners.	Engage 500 learners in family learning delivered in the community by Apr-27.



5. Higher education

	Objective	Planned impact
5.1	Create and implement a strategic growth plan for HE with clear targets over a 5-year period.	Develop and launch new Level 4-5 qualifications for 26/27 in SEND and Inclusive Practice. Submit for LLE modular provision – construction and engineering. Increase HE learner numbers by 200 by 2030.
5.2	Further widen access to those least likely to access and progress into higher education.	Submit Access and Participation Plan 2027/28 by July 2026 to OfS.

6. FE sector leadership and collaboration

	Objective	Planned impact
6.1	Lead and deliver the year two plan for the North East CTEC in line with the national CTEC objectives, extending the partnership to ITPs and local authority providers.	Achieve 200 teacher industry education days across the NE CTEC provider network. Achieve 1,204 industry placements for Level 2 and above construction learners across the NE CTEC provider network.
6.2	Lead and deliver the SEND Centre of Excellence year two plan, driving inclusive teaching and improve outcomes for learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).	Group Executive Principal – National Skills (FE) and strategic lead for SEND acting as a National Leader for SEND. Engage 600 unique participants in the SEND Centre of Excellence activities through 6 peer reviews, 10 webinars and 3 knowledge exchange networks.
6.3	Chairing the regional Technical Education Group network of FECs, ITPs and universities, convened by the North East MSA to drive innovation in practice.	Pilot new approaches in strategically important areas including T Level placements and Accelerated Apprenticeships. Work with the DfE as a Qualification Pioneer, sharing good practice and supporting providers regionally.

Local Needs Duty

The governing body regularly reviews how the college group is meeting local, regional and national skills needs through a range of quality assurance mechanisms that enable both long-term strategic planning and operational oversight. Key processes include the annual curriculum planning cycle, which ensures alignment to priority sectors and labour market demand; the strategic plan, which takes an outward-looking approach to position the college at the forefront of changing skills needs.

This year’s accountability statement focuses on addressing key LSIP priority areas, Construction, Advanced Manufacturing and significant New Builds in both Sunderland and Northumberland which will provide new state of the art innovative facilities. Key external partnerships establish the College as a key institute across the region linking education, industry and the community.

While meeting economic needs, progression and support of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people once again remain a priority in the annual Accountability Agreement and is further supported by the work to include Academic and Technical reforms to support the advancement of the curriculum now and in the future. The Corporation continues looking outward, responding to changing local, regional and national landscapes. This approach enables the Corporation to ensure that the College leads on academic and technical education, supporting industry and regional priorities ensuring a strong contribution to meeting the local skills need.



Corporation/Governing Body statement

On behalf of Education Partnership North East Board of Corporation, it is hereby confirmed that the Corporation conducts reviews in line with the local needs duty, as such resulting in this plan. The annual accountability statement sets out an agreed statement of purpose, aims and objectives as approved by the corporation at their meeting on 30th June 2026.

The plan will be published on the Education Partnership North East website within three months of the start of the new academic year and can be accessed from the following link:

educationpartnershipne.ac.uk/legaldocuments

Supporting Documentation:

[UK's Modern Industrial Strategy](#)

[North East MSA Local Growth Plan](#)

[North East MSA New Deal for North East Workers](#)

[Tees Valley Strategic Economic Plan](#)



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