

Solihull College & University Centre  
and Stratford-upon-Avon College

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2025



Impact and Progress

**Update 2**

July 2023 to January 2024

 Solihull College  
& University Centre

Stratford-upon-Avon  
College







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# Foreword

I am pleased to present the second six-month strategic plan update for Solihull College & University Centre, covering the period from July 2023 to January 2024. In a landscape marked by national trends of decline, it is gratifying to note the positive strides made by our institution in various areas. Despite prevailing challenges, our commitment to student success has yielded some commendable outcomes. Notably, our T-Level achievement rates stand out as a beacon of excellence, defying the national trend of dropout rates. This achievement underscores our dedication to providing a supportive environment conducive to learning and growth.

Furthermore, I am delighted to report substantial progress towards our growth ambitions. The increase in enrollment of 16-18-year-olds this year, coupled with the expansion of apprenticeships and some areas of adult provision at 2022/23 year end, is a testament to the College's adaptability and meeting evolving skills and educational needs.

Our commitment to attracting and retaining high-quality people, and fostering a conducive work environment is reflected in our terms and conditions, which remain unparalleled in the region. Our recent pay increase, matching inflation, underscores our dedication to recognising and rewarding the hard work of our staff. Financial stability remains a cornerstone of our institution, with robust finances and a commitment to invest in our campuses, and in industry-leading equipment and resources. This solid foundation allows us to pursue our strategic objectives with confidence and foresight.

As a leader in sustainability initiatives within the Further Education sector, we are proud to continue setting the standard with our sustainability strategy. Our ongoing efforts in this area reflect our commitment to responsible stewardship of resources and environmental consciousness.

Lastly, I am pleased to acknowledge the high-profile visitors we have hosted, and the many events we have been invited to attend, including at Windsor Castle and the House of Lords. These interactions serve as validation of our commitment to fostering partnerships and driving positive change in the education landscape, and contribute to enhancing our reputation for innovation and excellence.

Looking ahead, we remain focused on our strategic priorities for the next six months, guided by a clear vision of our ambitions. These priorities will drive our continued progress and ensure that we remain at the forefront of educational excellence and innovation.

In conclusion, I extend my gratitude to all stakeholders for their unwavering support and dedication to the mission and values of Solihull College & University Centre. Together, we will continue to strive for excellence and make a meaningful impact in the lives of our students and the communities we serve.



**Dr Rebecca Gater**  
Principal & Chief Executive



**Barbara Hughes**  
Chair of Corporation

# 6-Month Review

**JUL 2023**



Principal and Chief Executive, Dr Rebecca Gater, invited by King Charles III to Windsor Castle to celebrate the contributions of William Shakespeare to literature and society.

**DEC 2023**



Memorial garden official opening in memory of John Callaghan, Principal 2014 – 2021.

**AUG 2023**



TEF - The Silver award signifies that Solihull College & University Centre's student experience and student outcomes are 'typically very high quality' as judged by a panel made up of independent academics and students. The panel judged staff professional development, academic practice, the educational gains of learners, and aspects of teaching, assessment and feedback to be of an outstanding quality.

**NOV 2023**



Stratford campus development completed and launch event held to showcase to local stakeholders.

**SEPT 2023**



Joinery apprentice Harry Scolding comes top 5 in Europe in the Worldskills competition in Gdansk, Poland. Harry won a medallion of excellence and will attend the 'Olympics of Skills' in Lyon 2024. Harry received a personal letter from the West Midlands Combined Authority Mayor, Andy Street commending his achievements.

**OCT 2023**



Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) approved Solihull College & University Centre was the lead applicant and will now work with businesses and providers to deliver the projects.



# Strategic Ambition 1

Deliver a high-quality curriculum that enhances the life opportunities of our learners, the inclusive growth of our communities, and the productivity of the employers with which we work.



## Over the past 6 months we have:

### Quality and Curriculum

- Finalised our academic year end data for 2022/2023:




**Overall achievement has stabilised**  
against a backdrop of decline - 81% (80.8% in 2021/2022)




**Improvement in apprenticeship achievement**  
(54.8%, which is 1.4% above the most recent national average).

**Overall retention is 91.2%**  
(0.8% above the most recent national average)



**Overall pass rate: 88.1%**  
(improvement of 1% compared to 2021/22)



**Outstanding T-Level results**  
93% achievement, 100% retention (Bucking the national trend as Ofqual report that "one third of T-Level students drop out" nationally)

**+2% Internal progression improved by 2%**  
on Entry, Level 1 and Level 2 programmes

**+11% Internal progression improved by 11%**  
on Level 3 year 1 to Level 3 Year 2 programmes



**Engagement with hard-to-reach adults from deprived wards in learning increased by 11%.**

- Secured funding from the Association of Colleges (AoC) Youth Social Action Ambassador Project. Eight students are working together on a multi-generational project in the college and local community around loneliness.
- Achieved 'Silver' status in Higher Education Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) - this status has only been achieved by 30 FE Colleges in the UK.
- Launched new technical qualifications, including T-Levels in Business, Construction, Health and Science, and Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQ).

- Launched the newly developed personal development assessment to all full-time learners to better understand their starting points.
- Gained recognition as a 'Gold College of Excellence' at the award-winning Ragdale Hall Spa.
- Taken students to the Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council's 'Question Time' event in Local Democracy week where they quizzed councillors from each major political party on issues such as youth democratic engagement, sustainability and HS2.

## Partnerships and Outreach

- Established employer boards to enable more effective stakeholder shaping of curriculum.
- Joined forces with West Midlands Police, to work with every 16-18-year-old on Blossomfield Campus to protect our young people from becoming victims of knife and weapons crime and exploitation.
  - 99% of students agreed that they now understood the psychological effects of knife crime.
  - 99% agreed that they now know how to report any concerns.
- Engaged in sharing best practice across a range of themes with other FE institutions including Dudley College, Birmingham Metropolitan College, Stoke on Trent College, Hull College and Halesowen College.

## Reputation

- Won the 'Excellence in Education, Training and Development of People' award at Solihull Chamber of Commerce Awards.

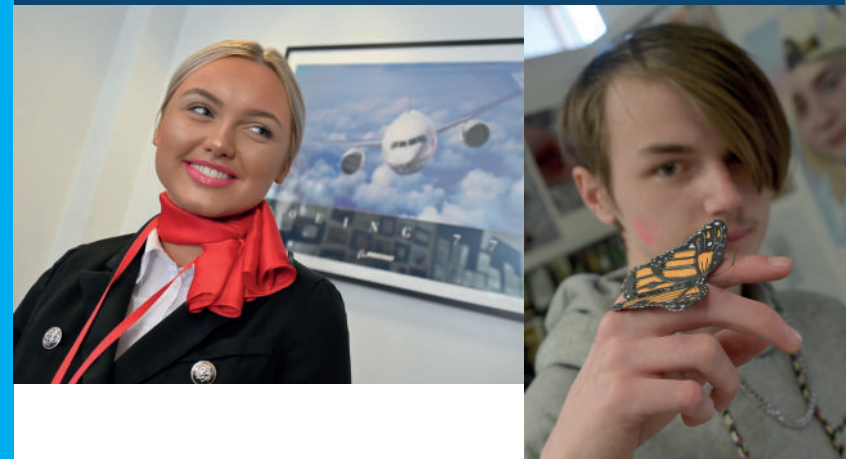
## Priorities for the next 6 months:

- Develop the next wave of T Levels to launch in September 2024, including Animal Welfare, Media and Beauty.
- Conduct a training needs analysis with employers to enable stronger curriculum intent and co-creation described above.
- Work with all staff to improve the digital capability of the organisation. A wide set of digital elevation workshops and training has been created and will be offered to all staff in 2024.
- Engage with the DfE-led consultation on the Advanced British Standard and contribute to breakout discussion activities in London to shape the new qualification.



# Strategic Ambition 2

Secure the future of our organisation in a fast-changing sector through careful and appropriate income diversification and growth.



# Strategic Ambition 3

Create a high-performing culture that attracts and retains the best people, is fully inclusive, and produces a happy and proud workforce.



## Over the past 6 months we have:

### Quality and Curriculum

- Developed a revised curriculum strategy which includes all provision types.
- Won a grant to develop a social care degree level apprenticeship in partnership with Oxford Brookes University.

### Partnerships and Outreach

- Successfully gained approval for the delivery of a £10.3m LSIF across the West Midlands and Warwickshire region. We are lead provider for the project and will benefit from each of the six workstreams within it.
- Success at winning bids – LSIF £10.3M, SIF2 Funding for Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQ) £800K via the Greater Birmingham & Solihull Institute of Technology (GBSloT) with over £500K for Solihull College & University Centre, Office for Students (OfS) Grant to develop degree apprenticeships £110K, Wave 5 Bootcamp Funding £670K.

### Reputation

- Appointed Nancy Buckley as the new Vice Principal of Business Growth, Skills and Partnerships. She was invited to speak at The Engineering Skills Digest Annual skills Conference at the Black Country & Marches IOT.



## Finance and Resources

### Achieved growth by end of academic year 2022/2023



in the following income:

- ESFA AEB (Adult Education Budget) **9% increase**
- Apprenticeships **4% increase**

### Achieved growth at start of academic year

- **6% increase** in 16-18 learners

### West Midlands Adult Education



Our R06 figures show that we are well on track to achieve our funding targets for adult education. Compared to this time last year we are ahead by **32%** on this time compared to last year.

## Priorities for the next 6 months:

- Further develop and widen our marketing strategy to align with business development and curriculum activity with particular emphasis on adult and apprenticeship growth.
- Work with curriculum heads to develop a three-year curriculum plan for each school, focussing on skills priorities and regional employment gaps.
- Achieve the growth we have targeted for adults, and apprenticeships and maximise new funding opportunities.

## Over the past 6 months we have:

### People and Culture

- Delivered an inflation-matching 6.7% pay award to staff.
- Launched a cross-college communication project.
- Completed the staff organisational culture inventory™ 'remeasure' exercise, together with an organisational effectiveness survey™.
- Delivered anti-racism awareness training to over 600 staff.
- Supported over 50 staff to commence higher level long course qualifications in 2023/24 academic year, including PhDs, Masters degrees and teaching qualifications.
- Launched our wellbeing strategy.
- Taken the senior leadership team through the 'Happy' leadership training programme, which aims to create a work-based culture of trust and, through it, improved performance.

### Reputation

- Worked with the FE Commissioner on a pilot project to develop a benchmarking model for business support areas.
- Deputy Principal & CFO, Heather Hunt, has taken up role of West Midlands Finance Directors Group Chair.
- Vice Principal, Pete Haynes, has led on the employee focus element of the Colleges West Midlands (CWM) Racial Equality project, producing a collaborative talking heads video, involving staff from 10 midlands colleges, launched on website and social media channels in January 2024.

- Principal and CEO, Rebecca Gater, has led on the CWM 'Future Leaders' programme for ethnically diverse staff members aspiring to leadership roles. The pilot group is near completion and the programme is being rolled out formally for the next cohort. This has attracted much attention nationally, with the opportunity to present at the Equity in Education conference at the University of York.
- Successfully appointed to three senior management posts and a curriculum middle management post, all from external applicants. Three internal staff have been promoted to management positions.

## Priorities for the next 6 months:

- Implement recommendations and actions from the communication project.
- In response to the results of the culture and organisational effectiveness inventories, implement strategies and projects to increase the achievement, self-actualisation and affiliative cultural traits.
- Produce and publish our annual Equality, Diversity and Inclusion report.
- Introduce the use of regular 'pulse' surveys to understand staff mood and views on specific topics that directly affect them.
- Refine our management development programme.
- Introduce a 'green' staff relaxation space in the heart of the Blossomfield Campus.
- Roll out the 'Happy' leadership training programme to our middle managers.



# Strategic Ambition 4

Deliver a considered but ambitious programme of investment underpinned by financial stability



Over the past 6 months we have:

## Finance and Resources

- Achieved the majority of our financial objectives and maintained overall 'Good' financial health.
- Renewed and monitored our performance against financial targets ensuring our overall KPIs are achieved.



## TARGET

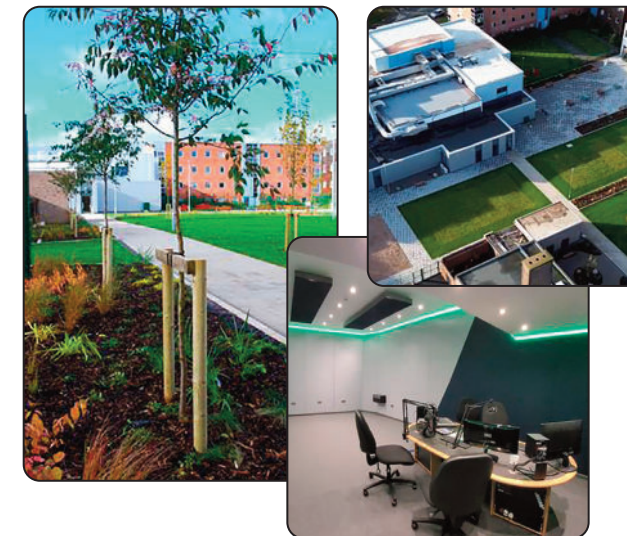
## ACTUAL



An adjusted current ratio of at least 3.3, (net working capital positive).	Actual adjusted current ratio at 31st July 2023 was 1.8 which was below target, due to the repayment of the bank loan.
EBITDA as a percentage of income (education specific) at least 4%	EBITDA as a percentage of income (education specific) was 4%. This is in line with target.
A debt servicing cover ratio of at least 1.6.	Debt servicing cover ratio was 19.81 at 31st July 2023. As the College has no debt outstanding at 31st July 2023, the debt service ratio for 2023/24 will be zero.
Aiming to ensure that staffing costs are no more than 65% of total income excluding capital grants.	Staffing costs (excluding restructuring) at 31st July 2023 were 67% of total income excluding capital grants. Due to cost-of-living concerns for our staff, Corporation approved an increase to this target for a period of 2 years.
Month end cash balances above £6m (over 50 days cash in hand).	Actual cash balances at 31st July 2023 were significantly above target at £22,063K (179 days cash in hand).
Contribution from faculties of at least 40%	Actual contribution was 41% (46% excluding gift payments to staff), this is higher than target.
Meeting the banking covenants agreed with NatWest (net cashflow inflow of a minimum of 1.25).	The loan with NatWest was fully repaid in November 2022 and at this point the banking covenant requirements were removed.

## Finance and Resources continued...

- Secured capital funding from Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) and Office for Students (OfS).
- Commenced our ambitious investment plan to improve College facilities:
  - Completed and launched the Stratford-upon-Avon Campus Redevelopment.



- Refurbished refectories on all three campuses.
- Agreed investments in CCTV systems, facilities helpdesk and fire safety systems.
- Refurbished spaces in Health & Care areas at Blossomfield for T-Level learners.
- Completed works to the Sports areas at both Blossomfield and Stratford campuses to improve facilities for learners.
- Created lesson capture rooms using OfS grants at both Blossomfield and Woodlands campuses.
- Agreed a plan for works in Spring 2024.

## Priorities for the next 6 months:

- Renew and update our Property Strategy.
- Renew and update our Digital Strategy.
- Complete and communicate our investment plan.
- Develop the Animal Care T-Level area.
- Deliver on the LSIF capital projects we have been awarded i.e. heat pump installation training centre.
- Undertake a College-wide building condition survey.
- Progress fire safety works.
- Roll out our new digital learning platform 'DigiLearn' to provide personalised skills development to improve digital skills.





# Strategic Ambition 5

Be net zero by 2030.



## Over the past 6 months we have:

### Quality and Curriculum

- Been an active contributor to the Colleges West Midlands Leadership, Curriculum and Professional Development workstream.
- Undertaken an evaluation of sustainability content and quality across the curriculum (deep dives, lesson planning etc).
- Developed unused ground, through an Animal Management Level 3 sustainability project, to create an allotment to grow food for animals within the animal care centre.
- Appointed a Teaching and Learning Coach for Sustainability.

### Partnerships and Outreach

- Co-delivered a 'Power of Partnership' session at the national annual Environmental Association of Universities & Colleges (EAUC) Conference.
- Achieved AoC Beacon Award 'Commended' status for Sustainable Development



### People and Culture

- Held Green Champions Launch events at all campuses.
- Held a Sustainable Christmas Fair in The Link, Blossomfield.
- Completed College staff and student travel surveys (circa 1,000 responses).
- Completed Governor's sustainability survey, presented at EAUC toolkit launch event and are developing a training and awareness programme for Corporation.
- Undertaken litter picks and anti-litter campaigns at all campuses.
- Included sustainability as a responsibility within all job descriptions and in the recruitment process.

### Finance and Resources

- Continued to actively support the progression of the District Heat Network, providing timely information as required.
- Sponsored a member of staff to undertake a project to consider a four-day working week as part of their higher-level qualification.
- Completed feasibility study for LED lighting replacement at Blossomfield and have to date, replaced over 200 lights.
- Completed Stage 1 of the BMS overhaul.

## Priorities for the next 6 months:

- Complete building energy efficiency audit (including boiler replacement, LED lighting, insulation and on-site solar PV renewable energy production) and develop decarbonisation plan for the next 7 years.
- Deliver on the LSIF Green Skills programme, specifically:
  - o Two lecturers completing the Train the Trainer programme.
  - o Commencing the roll-out of the green skills training programme to curriculum staff.
- Update College sustainable travel plan with the findings from the recent survey.
- Complete the implementation of EV charging infrastructure solution.
- Continue enhancement and communication of the waste and recycling collection service to increase recycling rates and reduce overall waste arisings.
- Complete printing, digitising paper-based processes, digital archiving project.
- Publishing the latest carbon footprint data on our website and the SECR by March 2024.
- Undertake a Biodiversity Action Plan.
- Further consider maximising space utilisation and minimising building energy use inefficiencies (specifically to evening opening).

# Building Our Reputation Regionally and Nationally

## Celebrating staff, student and college success at regional and national level

- Rachel Arnold, English teacher and Teaching & Learning Coach, spoke at Festival of Practice in Wales about her trauma informed research.
- Heather Hunt, CFO and Deputy Principal elected as West Midlands representative on the National College Finance Director's Group.
- Nancy Buckley, Vice Principal Business Growth, Skills and Partnerships presented a keynote 'mentoring and developing apprentice talent' at the West Midlands Engineering Skills conference.
- Ollie Scholefield, Head of Sustainability, presented as part of an expert panel, at the annual EAUC conference in June 2023, on the Power of Partnership, sharing achievements to date through the Colleges West Midlands Towards net Zero workstream.
- Rebecca Gater, Principal and CEO, invited to House of Lords roundtable discussion on FE.
- Mary Younan, Dean of HE and Research, invited to collaborate on a QAA toolkit supporting providers to deliver higher education apprenticeships.
- Holly Bayliss, maths teacher and Teaching & Learning Coach, certified as National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics (NCETM) Professional Development Accredited Lead.
- Rebecca Gater, Principal and CEO, presented at the Association of University Directors of Estates (AUDE), as FE expert, at the University of Oxford.
- Invited and agreed to pilot the ETF climate toolkit for governors.
- Gained recognition as a 'Gold College of Excellence' at the award winning Ragdale Hall Spa.
- Lee Jamieson, Vice Principal, joined a panel of local councillors for SMBC's Question Time event for Local Democracy Week.



**INSPIRING**  
**Motivating others to excel**  
 We recognise and celebrate achievement, and empower staff and learners to exceed their perceived potential.



**INNOVATIVE**  
**Transforming our ideas**  
 We seek continuous improvement, and use innovation to adapt to change.



**COLLABORATIVE**  
**Working together to achieve shared goals**  
 We operate as one team, valuing the contribution each of us makes.



**CARING**  
**Making a difference**  
 We care about the wellbeing of our staff, learners and communities by trusting, listening to, engaging with and supporting each other.



**RESPONSIBLE**  
**Making things happen**  
 We are open, honest, and take full responsibility, individually and collectively, for our decisions, actions, performance and results.



**RESPECTFUL**  
**Welcoming others into our college community**  
 We celebrate difference and diversity. We value others and recognise that their thoughts and feelings are as important as our own.





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