

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

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2025



Impact and Progress

**Update 4**

July 2024 to January 2025

 Solihull College  
& University Centre

Stratford-upon-Avon  
College





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# Foreword

As we reflect on the past six months, from July to December 2024, at Solihull College and University Centre, it is with immense pride that we share the progress and achievements that continue to shape our journey toward delivering the ambitions of our 2022–2025 Strategic Plan. This period has been defined by meaningful investment, exceptional student successes, and sustained focus on improving outcomes for learners, all while maintaining a strong financial foundation.

It has also been a significant milestone for the governance of the College. Barbara Hughes, who has served as Chair of Governors for six years, following two years as Vice Chair and Governor, retired on 31st December. Barbara has been an asset to the College on all fronts, particularly in shaping and influencing our strategic direction, fostering a positive culture, and strengthening our reputation locally and nationally. Reflecting on her time at the College, Barbara commented:

"It has been an honour and privilege to be part of the College for eight years and to support and challenge the operational team, always striving to enhance the experience of both students and staff. I am delighted that Paul Assinder takes over as Chair from 1st January, 2025. The College is in good hands."

Our commitment to innovation and sustainability has driven significant developments in our facilities. This includes the establishment of an e-sports lab to meet the growing demand for digital skills, the creation of a heat pump installation training centre and the launch of an electric vehicle workshop at our Stratford campus, ensuring our curriculum aligns with future-facing industries. We have also made significant strides in the creation of a 10-year estates framework strategy, which will guide the long-term development of our campuses to support learner success for years to come.

Student success has been a particular highlight during this period. Learners from across the College have excelled in skills competitions, showcasing their talent and hard work in areas as diverse as maths, e-sports, and creative writing. Notably, one of our apprentices achieved global recognition by winning the silver medal in carpentry and joinery at WorldSkills — an extraordinary accomplishment that reflects both their dedication and the exceptional support of our staff.

These achievements exemplify the outstanding opportunities available at the College, empowering learners to achieve their full potential. Our GCSE English resit results were significantly above the national average - a testament to the determination of our learners and the expertise of our teaching staff. Satisfaction rates have also risen among classroom-based learners and apprentices, reflecting our continuous efforts to enhance the student experience.

Our commitment to excellence has been recognised through national accolades. We are proud to have been shortlisted for several prestigious awards, including from Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce Awards and the AoC Beacon Awards, further cementing our position as a leading institution in the education sector.

Staff development remains central to our success. During this period, we delivered an inflation-beating pay award, alongside initiatives such as cultural intelligence development days, unconscious bias training, and a comprehensive leadership development programme for all first-line managers. These efforts, combined with our competitive terms and conditions, ensure that we continue to attract and retain the very best staff, who are fundamental to the College's achievements.

Strong financial health underpins everything we do, and we are pleased to report that our key performance indicators remain positive, enabling us to continue investing in our learners, staff, and facilities.

As we look ahead to the next phase of our Strategic Plan, we remain steadfast in our commitment to being a reflective and progressive organisation that supports and inspires everyone to succeed. By continuing to invest in cutting-edge facilities, celebrating and supporting our staff, and building on the successes of the past six months, we are confident in our ability to meet the challenges of the future. Together, we will ensure that Solihull College and University Centre remains a place where aspirations are realised, and success is within reach for all.



**Dr Rebecca Gater**  
Principal & Chief Executive



**Barbara Hughes**  
Chair of Corporation

# 6-Month Review

JUL  
2024



Chair of Governors, Barbara Hughes, awarded Chartered Institute for Further Education fellowship.

DEC  
2024



Long Service Awards – celebrated by 15 staff with 20 years of service in 2024.

AUG  
2024

**100% Pass rate**  
**74% merit and distinction grades**

College students achieved outstanding T-Level results.

NOV  
2024



Finalist for AoC Beacon 'Engagement with employers' award (results announced March 25).

SEPT  
2024



Harry Scolding, won silver medal at World Skills international competition in Lyon, France.

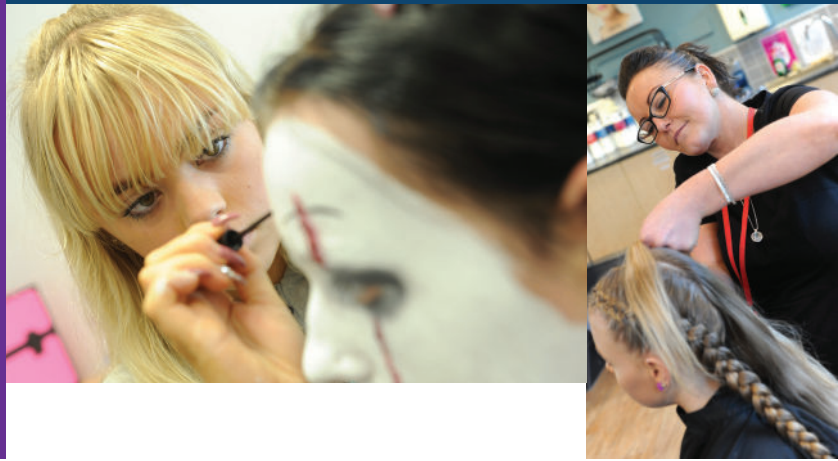
OCT  
2024



Official opening of E sports lab at Blossomfield Campus.

# 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

- Celebrated numerous successes across the College in competitions, including:
  - o October – December 2024: All GCSE Maths resit students (almost 3,000) participated in the MEI Maths Challenge during session 3 of their timetabled lessons, integrating competition-based learning into the curriculum.
  - o November 2024: Ray Jones, a hairdressing and GCSE English student, won a National Creative Writing Competition organised by the GCSE Resit Hub.
  - o A group of Ukrainian students placed 2nd in a national Esports competition, competing against 11 other colleges in a team-based elimination game.
- Increased GCSE English November resit results by a further 1.4% on last year with 53% of students achieving a high-grade pass (this is 18% above the national average of 34.9%).
- Improved overall student satisfaction levels last year, for both classroom based and apprenticeship learners in the Autumn Surveys:
  - o Teaching and Learning Survey - notable increases of up to 6% were recorded in several Schools for “I would recommend the College to a friend” and a 4% increase in satisfaction overall for “I feel safe”.
  - o Apprenticeship Survey – 94% of learners confirmed that they were satisfied with their apprenticeship programme (+5% compared to last year).

### Partnerships and Outreach

- Widened our collaborations with other colleges to share best practice across a range of areas, including Riverside College and East Kent College.

### Reputation

- Been shortlisted for the Creative and Cultural Activator Awards at the Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber Awards (Winner announced March 25).
- Achieved Commended status and advanced to the finalist stage of the AoC Beacon Awards for employer engagement (Winner announced March 25).





## Priorities for the next 6 months:

### 1. Digital Development & Training

- Re-run the digital elevation tool during the summer development fortnight to assess progress.
- Roll out additional digital development training for staff.
- Further embed digital skills into the curriculum with SLT members championing digital engagement in their areas.

### 2. AI Integration for Teaching & Learning

- Analyse data from the Teachermatic trial and plan for broader rollout if successful.
- Trial Co-Pilot in business support and curriculum areas once data protection concerns are resolved.

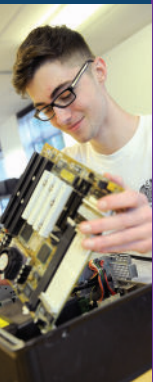
### 3. Refresh At-Risk Process

- Review and update the at-risk process to ensure it has a meaningful impact on learner outcomes.

### 4. Learner Support & Wraparound Care

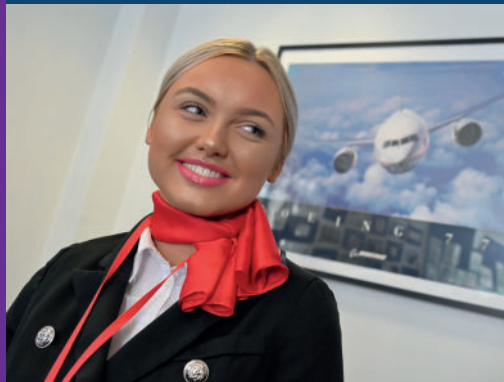
- Develop a comprehensive wraparound care framework for learners.
- Clearly define roles and responsibilities for staff involved in learner support.





# Strategic Ambition 2

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



## Over the past 6 months we have:

### Quality and Curriculum

- Launched an Adult Skills team to align with development and delivery of curriculum in high priority skills shortage areas (Leadership, Engineering, Construction, Health & Life Sciences, Digital).

### Partnerships and Outreach

- Secured funding through the Turing Scheme for 65 learners to undertake international work experience in Spain, Italy and Albania. This project aims to provide invaluable international experience and skills development for participating students, contribute to the broader goals of reducing youth unemployment and NEETs, and addressing the UK's skills mismatch.

### Finance and Resources

**Increased 16–18 year old learner numbers by 8% at 2023/24 year end and by a further 4% in 2024/25.**



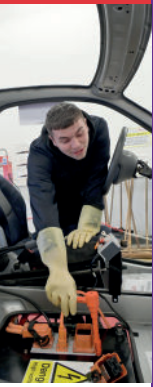
## Priorities for the next 6 months:

- Expand our engagement with larger local business to open more apprenticeship vacancies and grow training opportunities for staff.
- Build upon and grow the numbers of people benefitting from short, focussed courses from our Adult Skills department.
- Launch upskill and retrain programs from our newly completed LSIF funded provisions including Heat Pump Installation Training, PEMD and AI.
- Undertake a HE strategic review to ensure our range of courses at L4 and above are attractive to audiences in the area and helping to fill skills shortages.
- Continue to work with sub-contractor RMF to develop plans for the Education Village, a training centre feeding into the horse-riding and horseracing industry labour market.



# 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:

### People and Culture

- Taken a further 35 managers through the Happy Training Programme. Over 90 staff, almost all of our staff with any line management responsibilities, have now been on the programme.
- Launched our internal Aspiring Leaders programme for the next cohort of 15 staff.
- Held our Whole College Staff Development Day in October, focusing on 'Cultural Intelligence - Building an Inclusive College'. The programme included:
  - o Islamophobia
  - o Pride In Practice
  - o Navigating challenging conversations around EDI and Allyship.
- Trained 3 staff to deliver unconscious bias training, through a Train the Trainer model.
- Delivered student behaviour training to over 700 staff, through the Crisis Prevention Institute.
- Made a pay award of 2.5% or £750 (whichever is greatest) from August to ensure our teaching staff continue to have some of the best terms and conditions in the region and nationally.
- Re-affirmed our commitment to the AoC Mental Health Charter.

## Priorities for the next 6 months:

- Deliver unconscious bias training to all staff.
- Deliver a SEN-Focused Whole College Development Day in March, to continue our drive to be a fully inclusive workforce.
- Fully launch our Ready Respect Safe campaign.
- Deliver on new elements of our communication strategy, such as the newly developed Team Briefing process.
- Ensure we pay our staff above the national living wage rate by making changes to our business support pay scales.
- Introduce new wellbeing initiatives, including wellbeing days.
- Joe Wicks Movement Hour.

# Strategic Ambition 4

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



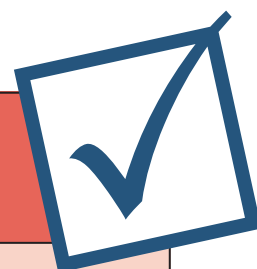
Over the past 6 months we have:

## Finance and Resources



### TARGET

### ACTUAL



<p>An adjusted current ratio of at least 1.8, (net working capital positive).</p>	<p>Actual adjusted current ratio at 31st July 2024 was 1.9 which was above target.</p>
<p>EBITDA as a percentage of income (education specific) at least 2%.</p>	<p>EBITDA as a percentage of income (education specific) was 1%. This was below target. However, this is not a concern for the College as it remains in good financial health.</p>
<p>Underlying operating surplus of a minimum of 1% of income (adjusted for one off costs).</p>	<p>Underlying operating surplus was 2.2% of income.</p>
<p>Aiming to ensure that staffing costs are no more than 67% of total income excluding capital grants.</p>	<p>Staffing costs (excluding restructuring) at 31st July 2024 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. In 2024/25 the College's target staff ratio is expected to be at 66% and 65% in 2025/26.</p>
<p>Positive cashflow from operations.</p>	<p>A positive cashflow of £1.3m was achieved.</p>
<p>Month end cash balances above £6m (over 50 days cash in hand).</p>	<p>Actual cash balances at 31st July 2024 were above target at £22,469k (172 days cash in hand).</p>
<p>Contribution from faculties of at least 40%.</p>	<p>Actual contribution was 47%.</p>



## Finance and Resources continued...

- Approved our Estate Strategy Framework outlining our estates priorities for the next 10 years.
- Completed the new Animal Care Dog Grooming Centre on the Blossomfield Campus.
- Obtained planning and appointed a contract to deliver Heat Pump and EV Centres on the Stratford Campus.
- Made improvements to our estates infrastructure funded by DfE grants for LED lighting, roof repairs, fire safety systems, building management systems and CCTV.
- Updated our VR headsets and subscriptions.
- Implemented Zero Trust Networking to improve cross campus and remote working opportunities.
- Surveyed learners, over 90% of which said that the College provides excellent classrooms/workshops, equipment and IT facilities to support their learning.
- Undertaken financial sensitivity modelling for the pay award decision and the Education Village project.
- Reviewed and introduced new processes for enrolment.
- Implemented bite sized cyber training to enhance cyber security.

## Priorities for the next 6 months:

### Finance and Resources

- Complete the Heat Pump and EV buildings on Stratford Campus.
- Complete DfE spend LED lighting, fire panels, BMS upgrades and fire doors.
- Remodel and extend our Woodlands and Stratford Campuses to accommodate growth in STEM learners anticipated in September.
- Replace the end of life boilers for Stratford Campus.
- Introduce Barriers and new Access Control systems at the Woodlands Campus.
- Create an Immersive classroom at the Woodlands Campus funded by LSIF.
- Upgrade our IT network at Stratford Campus.
- Launch a project to increase room utilisation and ensure all classrooms and IT rooms are fit for purpose.
- Prepare a 10 year financial plan to model funds availability for investment and agree with Governors the priority projects to be delivered



# Strategic Ambition 5

Be net zero by 2030.



## Over the past 6 months we have:

### Quality and Curriculum

- In partnership with Vital Energi, provided opportunities for students to use the installation of the District Heat Network as a live, on-campus case study as part of Construction and Built Environment.
- Engaged with Heads of School and curriculum teams to explore course-relevant opportunities to increase sustainability content and establish tutor competence and confidence in discussing the topic.

### Partnerships and Outreach

- Collaborated in developing the Colleges West Midlands Green Skills Road Map.
- Attended the Stratford Climate Assembly workshop (Sept 2024) leading to partnership working with community groups and other agencies.

### People and Culture

- Appointed Tony Lucas as Link Governor for Sustainability. Tony attended a Green Champions student / staff forum event in Dec 2024.
- Enhanced sustainability and knowledge of Corporation, in line with the AoC / EAUC FE Governance toolkit on climate action, including new Governor sustainability training.
- Established a Sustainability Steering Group to coordinate and drive forward delivery of the College's sustainability agenda and actions.

- In partnership with TfWM, delivered a free bus travel scheme to 47 staff.
- Engaged with learners through the Sustainability stand at freshers' events across all campuses (Sept 2024).
- Carried out a Whole College Development Day 'back to nature' health and wellbeing session clearing the wooded area around the pond at Blossomfield.
- Installed wall artwork in Animal Care section at Blossomfield raising awareness of nature and sustainability.

### Finance and Resources

- Progressed the District Heat Network project at Blossomfield Campus which will replace existing gas boilers with a low carbon off-site solution.
- Carried out a review of space use and patterns of working to identify opportunities for optimising space use and thereby improving energy efficiency on campus.
- Progressed the Building Management System project to provide a remote access desktop system to set and monitor heating and lighting on campus.
- Completed phase 1 of the standing lighting replacement with motion-censored LED lighting.



## Priorities for the next 6 months:

### Quality and Curriculum

- Complete baseline evaluation of curriculum areas to establish current quality and quantity of sustainability content across all courses and identify areas requiring further support
- Roll-out the Green Pioneer Awards, an in-house sustainability accreditation for curriculum areas.

### Partnerships and Outreach

- Progress Colleges West Midlands Green Skills Road Map strands with other Colleges in the West Midlands.

### People and Culture

- Hold a Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Fair, during Sustainable March 2025, as part of the SDG Teach In campaign.
- Pilot the delivery of Carbon Literacy Training to staff and students.
- Consider and install SDG artwork across campuses to promote sustainability goals.

### Finance and Resources

- Review waste and recycling arrangements in line with Government 'Simpler Recycling Legislations' as part of the tending exercise for the College's waste collection service.
- Explore Low Carbon boiler replacement options at Woodlands including feasibility studies and costings analysis and the potential of a WMCA grant funding bid.
- Progress phase 2 of the standard lighting replacement project
- Complete scope 3 supply chain pilot with major suppliers to establish carbon emissions of procured goods and services before rolling out to all suppliers.





# Building Our Reputation Regionally and Nationally

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

### July 2024

- Saqib Bhatti, MP for Meriden and Solihull East hosted his Business Forum at the College Business Centre discussing how business can get involved with young people to attract local talent.
- Heather Hunt, CFO and Dan Starkey, Director of MIS and Funding participated in ESFA Funding round table discussions on Audit Requirements.

### August 2024

- Nadia Davies, Director of Employer Engagement appeared on the panel of the Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber Economy and Skills Breakfast August 2024.

### September 2024

- Sarah Breslin, B2B Marketing Officer won the Solihull Chamber of Commerce Rising Star & Future Leader award.

### October 2024

- Katie Miller, Competitions Lead, selected as WorldSkills endorsed trainer. Following a three-day intensive training programme at Warwick University, Katie is able to deliver and embed the WorldSkills UK pedagogical methodologies across the College.
- Principal & CEO, Rebecca Gater, selected as one of four UK college Principals to join a study visit to Vienna, Austria to review vocational and technical education.
- Heather Hunt, CFO and Sam Bromwich, Director of Governance, Risk and Compliance presented to Governance Professionals Development Programme.
- MP Manuela Perteghella for Stratford-Upon-Avon district visited our Stratford campus.
- Our Higher Education students celebrated their graduation in October 2024 at the Motorcycle Museum along with staff members and VIP guests.
- Hosted sharing best practice visits with East Kent College and Cheshire College South and West.

### November 2024

- Solihull College were invited to join civic leaders in laying a wreath at the town's memorial service for Remembrance Day.
- Rachel Arnold, Quality Coach, presented at 'Research Further' webinar on FE practitioner research.
- Saqib Bhatti, MP for Meriden and Solihull East, visited Woodlands Campus to view facilities and the College's contribution to skills.
- Ray Jones, a hairdressing and GCSE English student, won a National Creative Writing Competition organised by the GCSE Resit Hub.
- Hosted successful first face to face regional College Finance Director's network since COVID-19.
- A group of Ukrainian students placed 2nd in a national Esports competition, competing against 11 other colleges in a team-based elimination game.
- Participated in T Level round table discussions on Audit Requirements (MI & Funding Director, Dan Starkey, Interim Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality, Linda McLaughlin, and CFO, Heather Hunt).

### December 2024

- Principal and CEO, Rebecca Gater, awarded Fellowship to Chartered Institute of Further Education, honoured at Apothecaries House in London.
- Two graphic design students won 2nd and 3rd place in a competition to design the logo for the new West Midlands Colleges Inter-College Competitions, established by six local colleges in the West Midlands and judged by a local employer Laura Anne Designs who specialises in branding, logo design and visual identity.
- Principal and CEO, Rebecca Gater attended the AoC winter parliamentary reception at the House of Lords.
- All GCSE Maths resit students (almost 3,000) participated in the MEI Maths Challenge during session 3 of their timetabled lessons, integrating competition-based learning into the curriculum.



**OUR  
CORE  
VALUES**



**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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