

Strategic Plan

2022/3 – 2024/5

Skills, Innovation & Excellence



1 Northern Regional College in 2025

Northern Regional College (the College) delivers education and skills training to learners, businesses and communities across four of Northern Ireland's local Council areas. Our footprint stretches from Causeway Coast in the north, through Mid-Ulster to the outskirts of Belfast Metropolitan area, catering for a population of c590,000. We deliver against the Department for the Economy's (DfE's) dual mandate of:

- ▶ generating a strong and vibrant economy through the development of professional and technical skills and by helping employers to innovate; and
- ▶ supporting social inclusion by providing those with no or low qualifications, or who have other barriers to learning, with the skills and qualifications needed to find employment and become economically active.

Like all areas of Northern Ireland society, the College's learners and partners have been severely impacted by the global Covid-19 pandemic over the past two years. Now that we are starting to emerge into recovery, we are keen to learn from the lessons of the pandemic and to embrace our role in delivering the aspirations for Northern Ireland outlined in the previous Executive's draft Programme for Government and "Economic Recovery Action Plan" and DfE's economic vision "A 10X Economy".

Key to our success will be supporting our citizens to develop the skills they need to succeed in the world of work; helping local businesses to innovate, enabling them to compete in a global market; supporting the Northern Ireland economy to recover, rebuild and renew; and doing all of this in an agile, responsive, demand-led manner, working in partnership with DfE, other colleges, schools and universities, our citizens, businesses and communities in our local areas. Importantly, our ability to deliver will be impacted by the funding made available to us and we are cognisant of the uncertainties in the current funding environment. We are also aware that the outcome of the recently commissioned DfE Review of the FE Sector is likely to have an impact on the College's direction over the next three years.



We have ambitious aspirations for the College and by 2025:

- ▶ We expect our learner population to be sustainable with significant growth in learners studying qualifications at levels 3-5. This growth will be facilitated by the reshaping of our curriculum to align much more closely to 10X and the recently published Northern Ireland Skills Barometer.
- ▶ We will have extended our part-time provision, particularly in relation to upskilling/reskilling for adult learners, facilitating their journey of lifelong learning.
- ▶ We will have provided an enriching and supportive environment for our learners, leading to personal growth and enabling them to make a positive impact on the workforce and their community.
- ▶ We will have rationalised our provision from six campuses to a four-campus model and moved into our new state of the art campuses in Coleraine and Ballymena. We will also have put forward development plans and secured the necessary funding for redevelopment of Newtownabbey and Magherafelt in line with our refreshed curriculum plans.
- ▶ We will have built upon the lessons learned during the pandemic, including how to optimise the use of digital technology, where appropriate, while at the same time ensuring that we provide an excellent, supportive, hands-on experience for our learners.
- ▶ Excellence will underpin all that we do, resulting in a significant improvement in outcomes for our learners.
- ▶ We will be a highly effective partner in community planning across our four Council areas, working closely with each Council's Labour Market Partnership and with local businesses to drive innovation and change across our catchment area.
- ▶ We will have implemented our Talent Framework, ensuring that we provide our staff with the development opportunities required to thrive in the post-Covid world. We will promote equality, diversity, inclusivity, well-being and respect in all that we do.

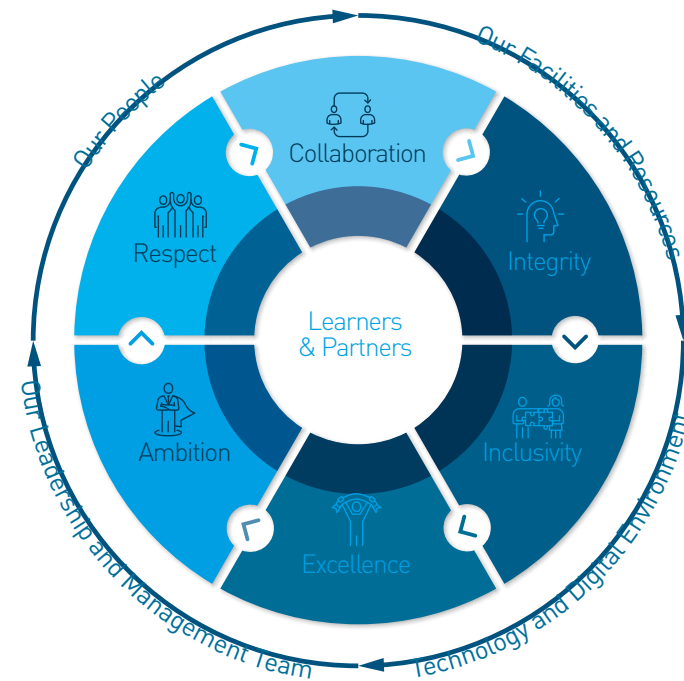
This plan outlines our vision for 2025 and defines our key priorities, targets and goals for the next three years, delivery of which will enable us to achieve this vision.

2 Our Vision

 Our vision is:



to be the FE College of choice, providing lifelong learning opportunities for all, through innovative, high-quality education and skills training, supporting the Northern Ireland economy to be globally competitive.

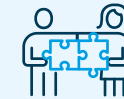


3 Our Values.

The core values that will underpin our relationships with our learners, staff and external partners and which will be fundamental to all that we do are:



Respect
We will treat everyone we engage with in a respectful manner, valuing contributions made.



Inclusivity
We will embrace and promote equality and provide an open and welcoming environment for all.



Collaboration
We will engage proactively with internal and external stakeholders, including our Sponsor Department, DfE and other NI Government Departments, building strong, respectful partnerships to achieve joint goals.



Excellence
High standards, excellence and continuous improvement will underpin everything we do.



Integrity
We will demonstrate integrity in all of our engagements, internal and external to the College.



Ambition
We will not be limited in the scale of our ambition for our learners, partners and local community. We will ensure that we deliver new, innovative, high-quality provision aligned to business and community needs.

4 Our Priorities for 2025

The College has been through a period of significant change over recent years, both as a College, and as a result of the impact of the pandemic. With a new Governing Body and leadership and management team now in place, and the green shoots of recovery from the pandemic now being felt, we want to take the opportunity to develop and grow the College sustainably over the next three years. In doing this, we will also be cognisant of the economic difficulties currently being experienced across our region, both as a result of the pandemic and the ongoing conflict in Europe.

To help us realise our vision for 2025 we have identified twelve key goals, structured around three core themes of Learners, Professional Services and Partners.

Learners



To provide an agile, responsive, sustainable curriculum aligned to the 10X Strategy and local business and community needs.



To equip learners with the skills to make a positive impact in the workforce and the wider community.



To improve academic standards and associated learner outcomes.



To provide learners with an enriching experience during their studies with the College.

Professional Services



To attract, recruit, develop and retain highly skilled, motivated and professional talent.



To embed an open, transparent, high performing culture demonstrated through independent evidence.



To provide facilities that support delivery of our refreshed curriculum and achieve environmental sustainability.



To provide value for money and effective governance in delivery of our services.

Partners



Through horizon scanning, to proactively identify emerging skills requirements and partnership opportunities.



To be an integral and first choice partner in local community planning & skills development.



To maximise opportunities to secure income from alternative funding streams.



To develop an instantly recognisable brand that enhances the College's reputation.

5(a) Theme 1 - Learners

Learners are the centre of everything we do. We will provide them with an excellent learning experience while at College which enables them to develop the skills they need to work locally, nationally and globally. In doing this, we will provide opportunities for learners at all stages in their career journey: school leavers; adults wishing to upskill/ reskill; those returning to employment after a career break; those who until now have been further away from the labour market; ensuring that we are facilitating a lifelong learning journey for all. We will take cognisance of the needs of businesses and align to the strategic framework provided by the Executive through the draft Programme for Government and the Covid-19 Recovery Action Plan, as well as the priority skills needs outlined by DfE in their 10X Strategy and associated Skills Strategy. We will seek recognition of our approach through achievement of external accreditation standards (e.g. Matrix, Beacon) and success in external competitions such as World Skills.

What will we do?



1. We will provide an agile, responsive, sustainable curriculum aligned to the 10X Strategy and local business and community needs.

We will update our curriculum provision and reshape this in line with DfE's 10X Skills Strategy. In doing this, we will take account of the needs identified for our four Council areas in the recently published Skills Barometer and identify emerging need through engagement with local business and community partners. We will ensure that our curriculum is aligned to the need to increase provision at levels 3 to 5, while at the same time ensuring that we continue to provide for those learners who are furthest from education and training, retaining key, core provision at levels 1 and 2. We are conscious of the opportunities provided for learners through apprenticeship programmes and we will continue to broaden our apprenticeship and Higher Level Apprenticeship (HLA) provision. We will embrace opportunities for delivering online education and training and consider how we can work collaboratively with other colleges and universities to drive sustainability in our curriculum. We will support opportunities for progression in the design of our curriculum offer.



2. We will equip our learners with the skills to make a positive impact in the workforce and the wider community.

We will ensure that each learner has access to modern technology, equipment, and resources in the College to facilitate their lifelong learning and training in their chosen vocational areas. We will encourage the lowest qualified to participate in lifelong learning opportunities. We will increase our focus on developing each learner's transversal and entrepreneurship skills and improve their employability through increased work placement opportunities and qualifications that promote a positive impact in any workplace including soft skills in communication, digital skills, leadership and problem solving/analytical skills. We will use our role as the sector lead for Entrepreneurship to ensure that we fully embed an entrepreneurial approach in our learners and use our contacts with local businesses to provide our learners with realistic, work-related, problems to solve that are underpinned by new, innovative approaches. We will work collaboratively with employers to develop the skills needed locally but also provide the skills required to open opportunities for our learners to enter the global workforce.



3. We will improve academic standards and associated learner outcomes.

We will enhance the quality of the provision we deliver and ensure that we improve and maintain achievement rates across all professional and technical areas. We will work proactively with the Education & Training Inspectorate and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education to provide quality education

and outcomes for our learners. We will embed standardised delivery of qualifications across campuses to ensure equity of access for learners. Regardless of qualifications on entry to the College, we will improve the literacy and numeracy skills of all learners. We will ensure that every learner has access to consistently high standards of digital resources to support their education and training. We will support staff through annual CPD that is relevant to their vocational area including providing a supportive approach for lecturing staff engaged on a part-time basis.



4. We will provide learners with an enriching experience during their studies with the College.

We recognise the need in the changing post pandemic world to provide ever increasing levels of wrap around services to our learners, we will continue to invest in our learner support staff ensuring that each learner has access to the right support at the right time. We will increase and improve the skill set of staff to support learners experiencing barriers to education, be this language, disability, medical conditions, previous educational experience, or socio-economic factors. We will listen to our learners through regular feedback activities and continue to raise the profile of the learner voice, ensuring our teams implement plans to address issues identified by learners. We will provide an annual calendar of enrichment activities for all learners to support their progress on their chosen vocational qualification and, where appropriate, provide opportunities to gain additional qualifications. We will celebrate our learners' successes, including through participation in national and international events and ensure that the impact made by them is recognised throughout our College community.

5(b) Theme 2 - Professional Services

As a Non-Departmental Public Body, the College is committed to delivery of high-quality services aligned to all statutory legislation and guidance. We will ensure that the public has confidence in us and in how we spend their money and provide transparency in the decisions we make. As an employer of over 800 staff, with an annual budget of over £40m, we are one of the largest employers within our catchment area. We recognise our most valuable resource is our staff and they form the bedrock for delivering the services commissioned by DfE.

What will we do?



1. We will attract, recruit, develop and retain highly skilled, motivated and professional talent.

We can only achieve our goals of delivery of a high-quality, sustainable curriculum if we have the right workforce to lead on and manage our curriculum delivery and corporate functions. We will develop supporting behaviours to bring our values to life and embed them in all College activity. We will develop and implement leadership and management training programmes to build capacity and provide our leaders and managers with the right skills and knowledge to lead, manage and develop their teams. In doing this, we will draw on the industrial experience provided through employer partnerships. For all newly employed and promoted staff we will ensure they are provided with coaching and mentoring support and a personalised development plan. This will be supported by robust onboarding and induction programmes. We are committed to ensuring we are an attractive employer through competitive reward and recognition policies that support staff and lead to staff feeling valued.



2. We will embed an open, transparent, high performing culture demonstrated through independent evidence.

Our vision is to embed openness, transparency and high performance across all College activities and we will take a proactive approach to developing and enhancing College culture, while at the same time embracing a framework that responds to feedback from key stakeholders through addressing issues raised. We will conduct a cultural assessment survey and proactively respond to any issues identified. We will ensure that we provide an open and transparent culture through publication of information for the public to view and scrutinise, that justifies the decisions made by providing confidence that all statutory obligations have been met through equality and rural needs impact assessments. We will endeavour to explore and seek external review accreditation of our services through independent scrutiny such as the Education and Training Inspectorate, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, Cyber Security, Investors in People, Customer Service Excellence, and appropriate ISO standards. We will embed high performance training into staff CPD.



3. We will provide facilities that support delivery of our refreshed curriculum and achieve environmental sustainability.

We will work collaboratively with DfE to secure capital funding to underpin our Ten-Year Estates Strategy, to provide facilities in all our campuses that offer learners the best environment in which to thrive and staff surroundings that promote their well-being and support them to achieve high performance in their roles. We recognise the opportunities presented through Green Growth and we will embed our commitment to meet United Nations Sustainability Goals, reducing our carbon footprint and exceeding our environmental and sustainability goals through the opening of new campuses in Coleraine and Ballymena and exploring opportunities in Newtownabbey and Magherafelt. We will also develop our curriculum to reflect the opportunities presented. Our Estates Strategy will align each campus to a key theme to facilitate the local community and their needs.



4. We will provide value for money and effective governance in delivery of our services.

We will ensure that we continue to deliver our services against the highest standards of governance and financial management. We will review our internal governance structures to provide effective mechanisms to give assurances to both DfE and the wider public that we can achieve success of this plan and embed robust reporting of all we are commissioned to deliver. Our Governing Body will continue to develop its strategic leadership, governance and risk management approach to ensure that the College benefits from the significant experience of Board members.

5(c) Theme 3 - Partners

It is through partnership that we will be able to fully support the recovery of Northern Ireland PLC as articulated in the Executive's Covid-19 Recovery Plan and DfE's 10X Strategy. We will be an agile and responsive partner in this recovery process, fully committed to responding to the skills needs of learners, businesses and communities across Northern Ireland. We will engage proactively with DfE, DfC, local Councils and business partners to fully understand these emerging skills needs. Through proactive development of new and innovative education, training and business development programmes we will enhance the skills and employability of citizens in our area, while at the same time helping to address skills gaps currently being experienced across a range of business sectors. We will continually engage with key partners to ensure that we are being responsive to ongoing skills needs as they arise.

What will we do?



1. Through horizon scanning, we will proactively identify emerging skills requirements and partnership opportunities.

The future of work is changing at a pace not experienced in recent decades and it is crucial that the College keeps abreast of future skills needs, modifying our provision as required. We will actively research and review labour market intelligence and other relevant reports/publications/articles to identify key trends and emerging skills needs. We will proactively engage with local employers, establishing a College led forum to receive input from staff, employers, learners and Councils on developing needs. We will actively contribute to local Council, Belfast Regional City Deal and other Growth Deal Boards and through this access a broad range of labour market intelligence. We will use the intelligence gleaned to feed opportunities through to our curriculum planning process. Curriculum planning will cover all aspects of our provision, including FE, HE, apprenticeship and business development opportunities. While curriculum planning tends to be a medium-term activity, in taking this forward, we will be agile and responsive to any short term, immediate needs that may be identified.



2. We will be an integral and first choice partner in local community planning & skills development.

The College is uniquely positioned as it is the only College to span four Council areas and it is imperative that we further develop our role as an integral partner in the community planning arrangements for each of these areas: working closely with the Councils, other education bodies, business partners, community and health organisations. We already play an active

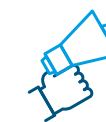
role on Community Planning Boards and on the recently created Labour Market Partnerships, but we will continue to develop and sustain our relationships across all key stakeholder groups including the Local Area Partnerships. We will use these fora to showcase our strengths and the expertise that we bring to the table and to provide value-added input to proposals being developed. In conjunction with Council colleagues, we will agree College representation at both a strategic and an operational level across all relevant groups. We will ensure that our recently recruited Business Engagement Officers are fully aligned to the governance structures that have been put in place. We will also consider how we can further enhance our involvement with Belfast Regional City Deal, and other City Deals currently being shaped in Mid-Ulster and Causeway Coast and Glens, ensuring that we provide maximum impact to the skills agendas being taken forward. We will evaluate our contribution and the impact made by us for citizens, businesses and communities in our Council areas.



3. We will maximise opportunities to secure income from alternative funding streams.

In a world of economic uncertainty with significant financial pressures and funding cuts currently being proposed, we must ensure that we remain financially sustainable. It is important that we access funds from a broad range of funding sources and do not rely solely on funding provided by our sponsor Department, DfE. We need to maximise the opportunity provided by new funding streams focused on innovation and skills development. As part of our horizon scanning, we will identify the full remit of funding streams available to us and consider how we can work collaboratively across the FE and HE sector (locally and in GB and ROI), with other public sector bodies and across business and enterprise networks. We will consider opportunities presented across local, national and international

boundaries, including, for example, funding from Central Government in GB and ROI, Levelling Up/ Shared Prosperity Funds, Shared Island initiatives, funding from other NI Government Departments, Growth Deals, Peace funds, international opportunities and through cost-recovery work delivered to local businesses. We will also respond to any new opportunities arising from DfE's review of Further Education and the new Partnership Agreement and develop consortiums and partnerships with organisations to avail of collaborative funding proposals. In conjunction with Finance colleagues, we will develop an income generation strategy that allows us to maximise opportunities provided. To enable us to capitalise on these opportunities, we will build expertise and capacity within our Business Engagement and Curriculum teams to allow us to respond in an agile, timely manner to tender opportunities with high-quality bid responses and also to commercially exploit any Intellectual Property we generate.



4. We will develop an instantly recognisable brand that enhances the College's reputation

We will enhance our reputation locally and nationally through the development of an instantly recognisable College brand, aligned to the FE NI brand. To facilitate this, we will complete benchmarking research to understand the awareness of and positivity towards the College and its brand attributes. We will identify those key features of branding that resonate best with our target audience. We will incorporate the College's vision and values into our new brand and use this to relaunch the College in our local community. We will recruit brand ambassadors and ensure that we use the opportunities provided by the opening of our new campuses in Coleraine and Ballymena to promote the College through positive media stories.

6 Enablers

We will be assisted in achieving our goals through four key enablers: our people; our facilities and resources; technology and the digital environment; and our leadership and management team.



1. Our People.

Our people are our most valuable asset and we will develop a culture which enables them to maximise their potential while at the same time ensuring that their well-being is our key priority. Our recently agreed Talent Management Framework is focused on: providing a welcoming and supportive environment for new recruits; an inclusive approach to talent development and management which drives high performance; regular talent conversations; and a robust approach to succession planning. We will fully embed this approach to talent management over the next three years. Our core values and associated behaviours will underpin the development of an open, transparent and high performance culture which will result in the promotion of equality, diversity and inclusivity throughout the College.



2. Our Facilities and Resources.

We are currently building two new campuses in Coleraine and Ballymena which will allow us to rationalise delivery across four key sites. These campuses will have state of the art facilities and equipment which will enable us to provide an innovative

learning environment that supports delivery of our refreshed curriculum. Both campuses will be opened by the end of the 2024/25 academic year and in planning the roll out, we will consider how we can encourage more community use of our facilities; how we can better collaborate with local enterprise centres through use of shared space (for example in relation to start-ups and innovation projects); and how to best use facilities provided by Invest NI, such as Global Point. In parallel with building our new campuses, we are also developing our ten-year estates strategy. This will address development of our campuses in Newtownabbey and Magherafelt over the medium to long term and will also reflect our commitment to working towards net zero targets. Environmental and sustainability goals will underpin our approach to future estates development. We will also work closely with partners in Northern Ireland's City Growth Deal projects, ensuring that we contribute to the skills agenda identified through these deals and maximise shared use of new facilities, where appropriate. One key area where we are already working collaboratively is in taking forward Green Technology and maximising the opportunities presented by our new campus in Ballymena and the i4C facility proposed by Mid & East Antrim Council which will be adjacent to our building, as well as the broader opportunities offered by the St Patrick's Barracks development.



3. Technology and the Digital Environment.

We will refresh our digital strategy to reflect the learnings from the pandemic regarding digital delivery; where funding allows, we will provide leading edge technology across our business

areas; this will enable us to provide an excellent experience for our staff and learners. We will consider how best to incorporate digital into curriculum delivery, and further explore how we can use technology to improve our business processes. In doing all of this, we will take cognisance of the risks posed by a cyber world and ensure that we build appropriate controls and safety measures into our technology strategy. We will ensure our IT systems are agile, meet the needs of our learners, partners and staff and are future proofed to meet any further periods of flexible/remote working. We will continue to explore the opportunities presented by the recently implemented sector-wide Learner Management System, consider how this can best be integrated with the newly developed Trainee Management System, and identify additional improvements that can be made to our College infrastructure. In doing this, we will continue to upskill our staff and learners on the opportunities provided by digital and on how best to proactively manage the risks presented by a cyber world.



4. Our Leadership and Management Team.

Following a number of years of change in the College's Governing Body and Senior Leadership Team, we now have a fully resourced Governing Body and leadership team in place. Our Chair took up post in July 2021, our new Chief Executive was appointed in November 2021 and all remaining gaps on our Board were filled in February 2022. The team that has been appointed is very experienced in governance and leadership within the FE sector and the College will now draw on this experience to achieve our vision and grow our successes over the next three years.

7 Success in 2025

Learners



Curriculum

75% of our curriculum will be aligned to 10X, and/or Northern Ireland Skills Barometer and/or Council Community Plans.



Impact on the Workforce

80% of our learners will progress to further or higher education/training or into employment.



Academic Standards

We will achieve and sustain success rates of at least 80% and a rating of very good in the SER process validated by ETI.



Learner Experience

95% of our learners will rate their experience at the College positively.

Professional Services



Talent

5% increase per annum in the number of staff indicating they are proud to work in the College and would recommend us an employer.



Culture

We will make substantial progress towards achieving IIP or an appropriate alternative external accreditation.



Facilities

75% of our stakeholders will rate our facilities positively.



Finance & Governance

We will achieve financial sustainability within 1% tolerance.

Partners



Horizon Scanning

We will continue to identify new vocational areas aligned to 10X, Northern Ireland Skills Barometer and local needs and build these into our updated curriculum strategy.



Community Planning

We will receive positive feedback from our Council partners on our impact in community planning and LMPs and will have successfully delivered on joint projects.



Income Generation

15% of our income will be generated from business activities.



Brand

We will have improved our brand awareness and attribute indicators by 3% (subject to benchmarking).

Baselining of Targets

During the first quarter of operation of our Strategic Plan, we will baseline our current performance for all key targets, then confirm the improvement to be achieved in each by the end of our 2025 academic year.



References

Building Forward: Consolidated Covid-19 Recovery Plan

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Economic Recovery Action Plan - Rebuilding a Stronger Economy

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The Northern Ireland College of the Future - The College of the Future

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A 10x Economy

[\[economy-ni.gov.uk\]](https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk)

Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland - Summary

[\[economy-ni.gov.uk\]](https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk)

Tourism Recovery Action Plan

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Trade and Investment for a 10x Economy

[\[economy-ni.gov.uk\]](https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk)

Northern Ireland Skills Barometer 2021

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