

Learning to become a better world

Accountability Agreement | 2023



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College mission and purpose

Statement of Purpose

The college offers a unique residential model of adult education to adults from minoritised and marginalised communities in the West Midlands.

Residential adult education is an intensive and immersive learning experience. Combined with a practice of supporting every learner as a unique individual in a kind and caring environment, our students tell us that this experience transforms and changes lives. responded.

The college was established by George Cadbury Jnr in 1909, inspired by the Danish Folk High School model of adult residential education and rooted in social justice principles

These principles of social justice, developed recently within our mission to include climate and environmental justice, remain fundamental to the college.



Accountability

Objectives and Aims:

1. Support sustainable transitions, climate justice action and green skills development
2. Reduce digital exclusion amongst students through our curriculum offer
3. Support student's progression into good work
4. Support the physical and mental health recovery of adults in the WM to assist work/life progression
5. Increase our understanding of students' skills acquisition and progression to inform future curriculum delivery and development

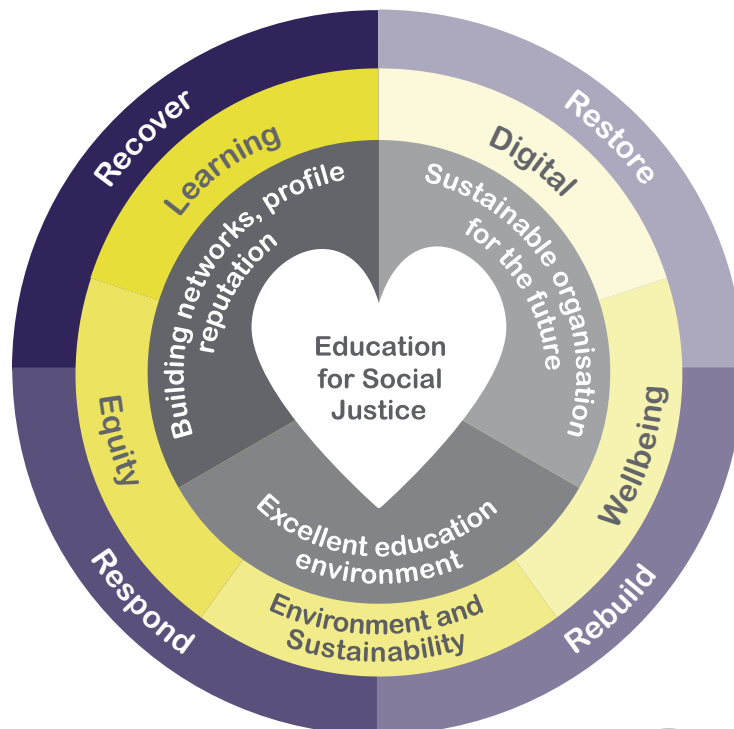
Fircroft has been a lifeline to me in a sense. Fircroft has given me the space and guidance to learn, re-evaluate where I am and where I want to be. Fircroft has provided the perfect environment to gain clarity. Fircroft gives me a feeling of hope and belief in people. Equality, social justice and giving opportunities to all. I am very grateful to George Cadbury Jnr. for the legacy he left behind and opportunities he continues to give people through Fircroft.

College Mission

'To promote social and climate/environmental justice by providing adults with an excellent learning environment for personal, professional and political development.'

Strategic Aims and Objectives

1. Provide an excellent education environment for adults
2. Be a sustainable organisation for the future
3. Develop our networks, profile and reputation



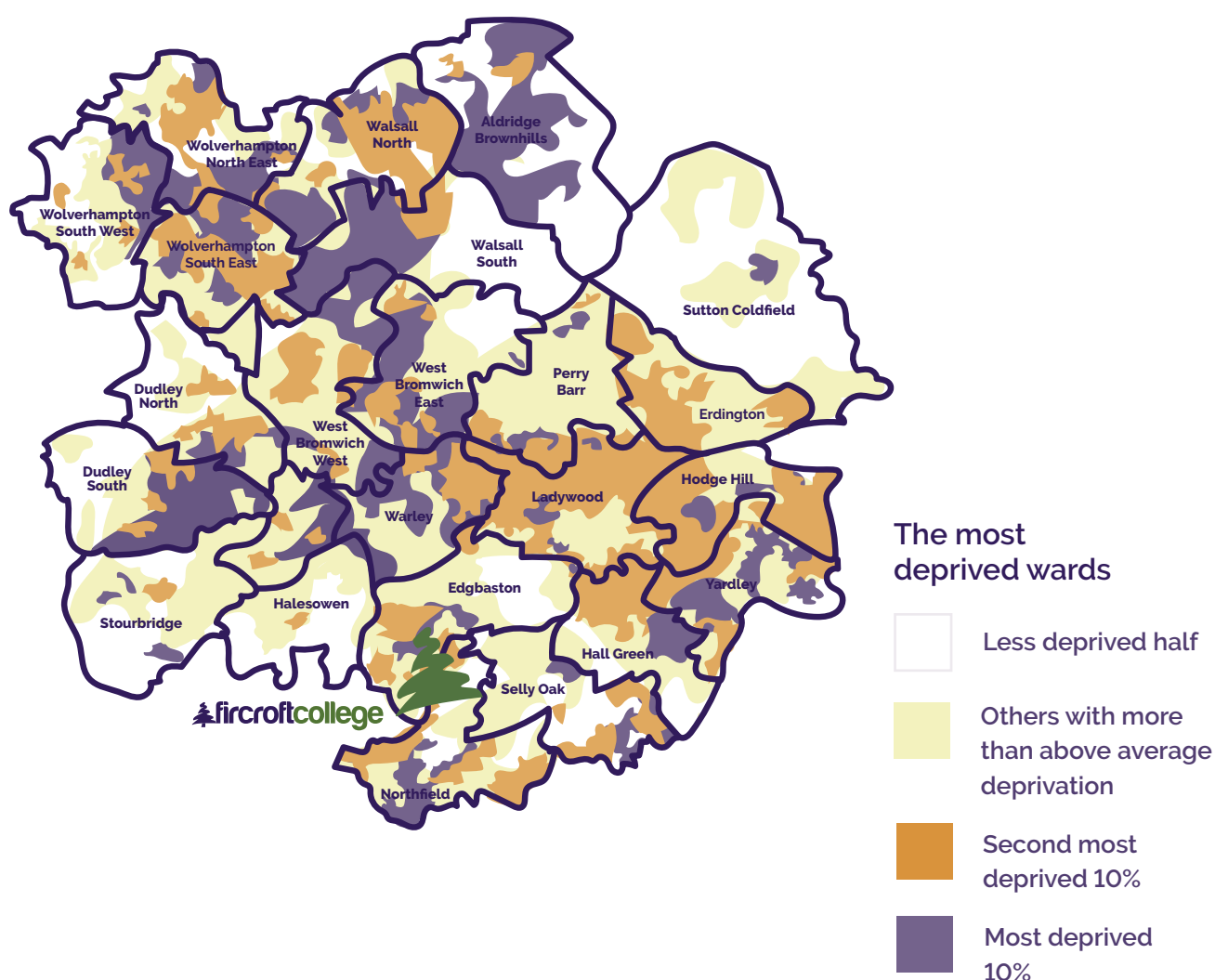


Our strategic themes are reviewed and renewed (where necessary) annually and run across the college. They are:

- Learning
- Digital
- Wellbeing
- Environment
- Sustainability
- Equity

Following the COVID- 19 pandemic, the college has framed its strategic planning around recovery, responding, restoring and rebuilding. The college is currently undertaking a strategic review and will have produced a new strategic plan 'Towards 2030' by August 2023

Our current strategy document can be found on our website [here](#) which was approved by the governing body in July 2019.



Context and place

Fircroft is an Institute for Adult Learning so all our learners are 19+. We are a registered charity. By August 2023, we will have changed our legal status from an Un-incorporated Trust to a Company Limited by Guarantee.

Following the devolution of our funding to West Midlands Combined Authority, 99% of our learners now live in the West Midlands Combined Authority region. We have a small ESFA contact for

half a dozen Access to Higher Education students nationally. We are located in the Weoley and Selly Oak ward of Birmingham which is in the 10% most deprived in the country,

Only 8% of our students come from that immediate area because we are a residential college. We are easily accessible by public transport being on the A38 Bristol Road. 93% of students live in the Birmingham local authority area. They come from 40

different wards, including the 6 wards which are a priority for WMCA because they are educationally disadvantaged (Aston, Bordesley Green, Erdington, Kingstanding, Ladywood, Shard End). 3% live in the Black Country (Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall, Wolverhampton). 65% of students come from the most deprived wards (with IMD score 2 or below).

Birmingham is a City of Sanctuary and Fircroft is a College of Sanctuary, one

of the first to be awarded this status in the region. 2021 Census results show it is a young city with 25.1% of the population aged 0-17 compared with 20.8% nationally. In the 2011 Census 4.6% of all residents self-reported that they could not speak English well or at all, compared with 1.9% nationally. 2021 Census estimates are that Birmingham is now a black majority city. The Local-Skills-Dashboard shows that FE participation in Greater Birmingham and Solihull is lower than the national average (20.4%), particularly at Level 2. The proportion qualified at Level 3 is also lower (56%). 62% of Fircroft's students have no qualifications at Level 2 and 42% of our spend is at Level 3.

The Office for National Statistics says that economic inactivity in the West Midlands region is above the national average at 21.9% of 16-64 year olds. 24.5% of that inactivity is because of long term sickness. 88% of Fircroft students are not in paid employment when they enrol and 66% say they have a disability or learning difficulty. Nomis also says that in Birmingham, median gross annual earnings are £30,744.0 which is below the All English single tier and county council's figure of £33,517.0 and below the England figure of £33,208. WMCA's latest Local Skills Report 2022 recognises the impact of the pandemic on the region and particularly on women, adults over 50, young people and BME residents who are well represented

at Fircroft College. The report concluded '*so skills development that builds on resilience requires prioritisation*'. The WMCA has recently set up a Mental Health Commission and is piloting the extended use of its AEB funding in 2023/4 to develop wrap around support for adults to enable successful outcomes. Fircroft College's model of residential adult education is an exemplar of this.

The cross-cutting themes of Green and Digital Skills are already strategic priorities for the college.

For our 2023/24 Accountability objectives these are expressed in terms of:

- Sustainable transition, climate justice action and green skills
- Reduce digital exclusion amongst students through our curriculum offer

Our Students 21/22

88% WERE
UNEMPLOYED

65% from
DISADVANTAGED
WARDS

9% under
25
YEARS OLD

49% were
ethnic
MINORITIES

62% have
no level 2
QUALIFICATIONS

25% over
50
YEARS



This is all addressed in two of our Accountability objectives:

- Support the physical and mental health recovery of adults in the West Midlands to assist work/life progression
- Support student (progression) into good employment.

As part of Colleges West Midlands, Fircroft College has been involved in the development of the West Midlands and Warwickshire Local Skills Improvement Plan WM&W LSIP. Their April 2023 draft focuses on the need for digital and green skills and associated leadership and management capabilities.

The WM&W LSIP uses the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) definition of green skills as the *'knowledge, abilities, values and attitudes needed to live in, develop and support a sustainable and resource-efficient society'*.

It quotes an Employer Skills survey saying that 49% of employers in the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP anticipated that digital skills need enhancing. Basic IT skills such as MS Office were a major constraint. In 2021 the West Midlands region was reported to have the country's fastest-growing tech sector with demand for Management Consulting, IT Consultant, Network Engineer and IT Service Manager. It also quotes an IPSOS MORI survey in 2022 showing that in the West Midlands 66% of people have the Essential Digital Skills for Work (compared with 78% nationally), 18% partial skills and 15% zero.

In relation to Green skills, the WM&W LSIP identifies that it is those companies in the region who have not yet taken measures to reduce their environmental impact

that identify knowledge information and skills as the barrier. Their interviews with local businesses already operating in this sector show there will be a great need for retrofit skills and for climate change risk management. The LSIP quotes a 2022 YouGov poll saying that 56% of public had not heard of green jobs, 62% didn't understand what the term 'green skills,' means and 65% reported they didn't have access to green skills training. The same report by IEMA and Deloitte identifies an increased need for green skills in non-specialist roles and a transition of workforces from unsustainable sectors.

The LSIP has identified 4 broad priorities:

- 1** **With regards to essential skills, the LSIP says:**
Curriculum funding focus groups conducted by the Chambers identified strategy development, performance management, project management and change management as the additional skills their organisation will require to respond to these challenges. As well as a lack of understanding as to what decarbonisation and the transition to net zero would mean for their business.
- 2** **'Essential Skills' and Practical Experience**
Employers responding to the Chambers also identified the need for more 'soft skills' or to emphasise their importance. *'essential skills,' 'curriculum funding and assessment must recognise the importance of essential skills, including communication, collaboration, problem solving, innovation and commercialisation.'*
- 3** **Recruiting into Education**
The LSIP recognises the difficulties providers face accessing staff in support and delivery functions, including the skills staff need to deliver against skills gaps.
- 4** **Identifying the Right Providers and Identifying the Right Means of Delivery**
As well as identifying what skills need addressing in the region, the LSIP identifies how they need addressing. They recommend a shorter modular approach, co-development, delivery in person and at different times, bespoke delivery customised to business needs and outcomes, clearer pathways, mentoring and wrap around support.



Birmingham City Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 because of the city's carbon emissions and the need to reduce them by 12.8% each year. Their Route to Net Zero Action Plan acknowledges that *'education has a vital role to play in raising climate awareness'* and also talks about the importance of maintaining Birmingham's green spaces. Fircroft College was the first college to declare a climate emergency and having 6 acres of grounds gives us a particular opportunity and responsibility. Fircroft College is leading a Colleges West Midlands plan to develop teacher education for sustainability.

We have been working to WMCA's Digital Roadmap 2021 and Birmingham City Council's 2021 Digital Inclusion Strategy. Digital and technology is a national priority under Skills for Jobs, alongside Health and Social Care. WMCA's West Midlands Plan for Growth has Digital and Skills as a priority growth cluster, alongside Logistics and Distribution, Health Tech and Medical Tech, Creative Content Production and Gaming, Professional and Financial Services and Manufacturing.

In April 2023 the region's largest labour shortages were in Nursing, Care and Education – Fircroft College has increasingly developed its curriculum offer in this area over the last three years.

Our final Accountability objective is:

- Increase our understanding of students (skills) progression to support future curriculum development

This recognises that we need to stay responsive as national and regional priorities are further developed and we need to balance generic and sector specific needs for current shortages and for long-term growth. It also reflects the acknowledgement within the DfE's 2023/24 national priorities of the role of the IAL's in delivering essential skills up to level 2 in English and Maths and level 1 in digital skills. This also highlights the importance of the IAL's curriculum offer of progression routes into national and regional priority areas.

Our approach

To developing the annual Accountability Statement

Fircroft College took part in the 2022 Accountability pilots. We have an established cycle for curriculum planning which already involves Governors in agreeing a set of objectives. Our 2023/24 Accountability Statement has been developed in parallel with a new Strategic Plan for the college. It covers all our DfE funding, including the funding devolved to West Midlands Combined Authority.

Senior leaders have been involved in meetings with Corin Crane as the Chamber lead on the LSIP. We have monthly meetings with Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP Growth Hub Skills Service. As most of our funding is devolved, Fircroft College staff at all levels meet regularly with West Midlands Combined Authority. Based on their 2022-25 AEB Strategy, WMCA's 2023/24 Strategy and Delivery Statement sets out their priorities for the region, an outcomes framework for community learning, and we have discussed how Fircroft College, as a residential college, can best contribute to these. We meet regularly with DWP Partnership Managers for the Black Country and Birmingham. Together we have piloted a response to the specific recruitment needs of Supported Housing employers and run a Jobs Fair at college involving local employers. We are represented on the Board of a Birmingham City Council ESF/Shared Prosperity Fund employment and skills project and we are written into their action plan. Fircroft College employs a Partnership Officer, holds regular roundtable meetings with partners in the region, particularly 3rd sector employers and service providers, and managers meet monthly to analyse and agree our response to emerging skills needs.

Fircroft College plays a full role in two provider networks which are important in the region:

- Colleges West Midlands. Together we have agreed priorities for collaboration, including Digital, Pre-employment Training, Sustainability, Anti-Racism, Safer Students. We share and publish data, and have developed a common approach to outcomes. Through the Sustainable Development Fund our colleges have researched and responded to skills needs in the areas of Digital and

Health. Our Principal chairs the CWM Sustainable Futures Partnership and has previously led the work on ESOL in the region.

- West Midlands Adult and Community Learning Alliance. ACLA gives us access not only to the Heads of Adult Education services in the region but also their local authorities. We have worked with ACLA on a regional set of Community Learning outcomes and that is acknowledged in WMCA's AEB Strategy.

We are members of the corresponding national bodies (Institutes of Adult Learning, AoC and HOLEX) as well as EAUC (The Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education), an ESOL Regional Leads meeting and the Black Leadership Group.

We have strong links through our governors

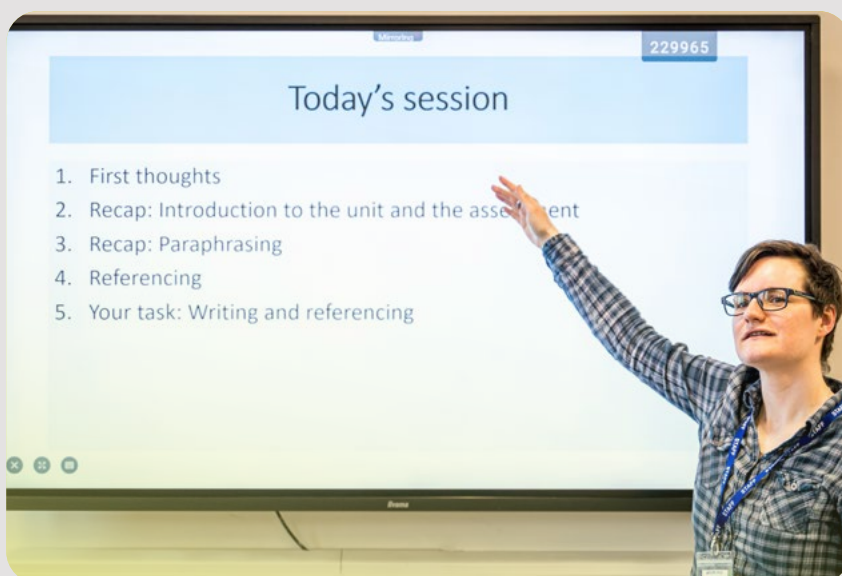
with the University of Birmingham, University of Wolverhampton and Coventry University.

A progression agreement is in place with Newman University and in negotiation with Aston University. Other HEIs in the region including Warwick, Coventry and Worcester run workshops

for students or attend our HE fair.

The college is also part of the Global Folk High School Movement. This builds on Fircroft's roots and still current pedagogical practice. The Global Folk High School Movement offers a global platform to link practitioners and researchers from across the world to build relationships and share ideas about

curriculum and pedagogy. As part of this movement more recently, the college has been working on a two-year project on global sustainability education, which has enabled and supported the development of both teacher training and curriculum in the College which supports the first of our objectives.



Accountability Agreement

aims and objectives

Strategic aims and objectives	Key actions and targets (outcome/impact)	References to national, regional and local priorities for learning and skills
Support sustainable transitions, climate justice action and green skills development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a college wide climate action plan • Develop a college wide green pledge • Develop partnerships to develop our green skills and wider curriculum • Green skills audit of current curriculum offer (using AlmHI 15 green skills) • Increase the professional development offer to education staff and green skills curriculum champion • Expand the mother garden bootcamp outcomes to four further community partners • Increase the bio-diversity of the college estate by 10% 	<p>WM&W LSIP 2023 WMCA AEB Strategy and Local Skills report DfE Climate Action plan BCC Route to Zero Action Plan DFE National Skills Priorities #WM2041 action plan</p>
Reduce digital exclusion amongst students through our curriculum offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot higher level three IT programme • Move to functional digital skills offer • Develop existing internal ILP for all students requiring digital skills development • Explore outreach opportunities to deliver digital skills courses in community venues • Develop taster days with DWP clients so they can access online services • Mapping to other providers and partners curriculum offer to develop digital skills pathways following SDF 	<p>WM&W LSIP 2023 WMCA AEB Strategy and Local Skills report DfE National Skills Priorities BCC Digital Inclusion strategy</p>

Strategic aims and objectives	Key actions and targets (outcome/impact)	References to national, regional and local priorities for learning and skills
Support student's progression into good work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operationalise our careers strategy • Work with DWP to increase pre-employment skills • Year 2 offer of multiply • Develop a learner journey which supports progression into and within work which includes 13 programmes leading to level 2 • Co-develop with employer's programmes which relate directly to vacancies • Increase weekend course offer for people in employment • Review our full level two programme to integrate a careers service offer and inform further curriculum development • Offer shorter and more flexible leadership and management courses • Increase (strategic) partnerships within the health and social care sector 	<p>WM&W LSIP 2023 WMCA AEB Strategy and Local Skills report WMCA Plan for Growth</p>
Support the physical and mental health recovery of adults in the WM to assist work/life progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver a non-residential community programme with specific communities to support progression into residential courses • Develop programme pathways within our Personal and Social Development curriculum offer • Increase numbers of younger students on programmes • Work with economically inactive students to develop strategies to support their recovery and engagement with employment opportunities 	<p>BCC Creating a Bolder, Healthier City WMCA AEB Strategy and Local Skills report WM&W LSIP 2023</p>
Increase our understanding of students' skills acquisition and progression to inform future curriculum delivery and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase numbers of students followed up post course to map progression and destinations (including volunteering) • Assess the extent of skills acquisition through observations, analysis of ILPS and impact survey • Develop clearer pathways to progression – into/within employment through IAG and course offer • 95% of RARPA skills targets met. Continue to respond to the development of the regional LSIP • Further develop our work with partners to inform future curriculum development • Explore how we can utilise regional and national funding flexibilities to ensure our full level 3 offer is sustainable 	<p>WM&W LSIP 2023 DfE National Skills Priorities WMCA AEB Strategy and Local Skills report</p>

Self assessment

Fircroft College makes a reasonable contribution to national and local skills needs and the above represents our priority actions to strengthen our contribution

Duty to review provision in relation to local needs

We are committed to complying with our duty under a new section 52B of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 to review provision in relation to local needs, as proposed in the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill 2022. We will look to hold a review in Autumn 2023 to identify how well we are meeting local skills needs. We will publish a report on our main website following this review. We will factor in any actions from this report into our future Accountability Agreement planning.

Corporation statement

On behalf of the Fircroft College corporation, it is hereby confirmed that the college plan as set out above reflects an agreed statement of purpose, aims and objectives as approved by the corporation at their meeting on 24th May 2023.

The plan will be published on the college's website within three months of the start of the new academic year.

Supporting documentation

- WM&W LSIP
- Colleges Financial Statements
- Ofsted inspection reports

Geoff Layer,
Chair of Governors



Melanie Lenehan,
Principal and CEO





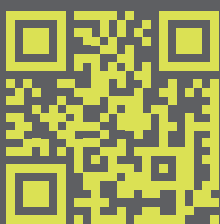


never a crofter

“ Fircroft brought me
back onto the path I
wanted to be on ”

Jack Matthews, student

Fircroft College Access to Higher Education
(Social Science and Humanities), 2019/20
Now studying **Youth Work and Community
Development Degree** at University of Derby





Published May 2023



Fircroft Adult Education College
1018 Bristol Road
Birmingham B29 6LH

Contact

0121 472 0116
hello@fircroft.ac.uk
www.fircroft.ac.uk

 @fircroftcollege
 /fircroftcollege
 @fircroft_college