

Fircroft College Accountability Agreement 2026-27

(includes Statutory Duty to review how well the education we provide meets local needs)

Statement of Purpose

As the only residential institute of adult learning in the UK, Fircroft offers a uniquely intensive and supportive educational experience. Ofsted's 2023 inspection report recognises that we are "skilled in reaching learners who are furthest from the labour market" and that "leaders use their knowledge of skills gaps and shortages to shape their curriculum". That curriculum is holistic in blending academic and vocational skills with functional skills and also the personal and social skills required to thrive in life and at work. Skills provision has doubled since devolution in collaboration with a wide range of partners. The college now leads on the development of Green Skills regionally and nationally. Judging Fircroft "Good" overall, Ofsted grade the change in the behaviour and attitudes of learners who have been failed elsewhere as "Outstanding". Despite starting further back, our learners progress to employment and education at rates comparable with the rest of the sector. In addition, they describe the impact on their confidence, health and aspirations as "transformational":

"It's really helped me to get better skills, and they really look after you"; and "wow, it has been almost life changing, especially work wise. It has helped me in my professional life and working with other people" (Matrix re-accreditation report 2025).

Our Matrix continuous improvement check in 2026 noted, our careers and progression strategy *and framework* show, "...a real commitment to strategic development of IAG... linking this with developments in the local area and the values of Fircroft."

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. We have re-established those transnational links and extended those principles to include climate and environmental justice. We were the first college in the country to declare a climate emergency.

The College mission is: "To promote social and climate/environmental justice by providing adults with an excellent learning environment for personal, professional and political development."

Our values were refreshed and embedded in 2023 as illustrated:

The college has one strategic goal which was launched in September 2023 as part of our new Strategic Plan [Towards 2030 and Just Transitions](#): "To support the development of global sustainable citizens through residential adult education" .





Our sector leading strategy shows that global sustainable citizens exist at the intersection of good work, health and well-being and civic and community engagement. Our strategic goal will be delivered through our strategic foundations of people, place, partnerships and planet.

In 2024 an internationally respected researcher helped us develop a bespoke impact framework for the college aligned to this strategic plan. This identifies 9 outcomes in relation to Health and Wellbeing, Good Work and Community and Civic Engagement. We are measuring these by adapting existing quality processes and through an annual impact survey. Our impact framework demonstrates that residential learning delivers significant personal, social and economic benefits for

adults facing barriers to progression. Our 2024/25 impact report showed the following: 84.7% of learners reported that their course helped them pursue their goals and ambitions, 82.2% improved their ability to maintain their physical and mental wellbeing, 82.6% became more involved in society, and 74.6% developed stronger communication, teamwork and social skills. The college's impact extends beyond qualifications and destinations, with 60.6% of learners feeling less anxious and more confident, 74% reporting a greater willingness to progress into work or further learning, and 58.8% indicating an increased likelihood of participating in community activities and supporting others. Through our residential model, learners can work to overcome systemic and personal barriers, build resilience, develop independence, and progress into further education, employment, volunteering and active citizenship, directly supporting the college's accountability objectives and the skills, health and inclusion priorities of the West Midlands.

During 2025-26, the college commissioned research regarding economically inactive learners, the barriers they face and the benefits of residential learning. This research enabled us to further understand our learners' barriers to participation and progression, as well as aligning with WMCA's priority to support economically inactive residents furthest from the labour market. Fircroft College supports a significant proportion of adults who are economically inactive, accounting for 46% of all enrolments and 54% of our Tailored Learning enrolments. Of these learners, 75% have a learning disability or long-term health condition, compared with 51.3% across the wider learner cohort, highlighting the complex and intersecting barriers faced by many residents furthest from the labour market. By engaging with current learners, previous learners and referral partners, the research report investigates how Fircroft College addresses economic inactivity (EI) in the West Midlands. Our research further asserted that EI is a complex, long-term challenge driven by multiple disadvantage, where individuals often navigate intersecting barriers such as chronic illness, mental health challenges, trauma, housing instability, and LD/neurodivergence simultaneously, yet they achieve similar completion rates due to the college's approach.

The findings highlight that our residential adult education (RAE) acts as a core mechanism for progression rather than an optional extra, creating a safe re-entry point for those facing the most barriers to entering the labour market and providing the intensity and immersion necessary for 'identity repair', by removing barriers like travel costs, and providing a reset from chaotic home environments. The report concludes that this model delivers a substantial Return on Investment (ROI) by acting as "preventative infrastructure" that reduces long-term demand on other public sector services. Stakeholders and former students alike emphasise that for many, our residential

adult education offer was, and continues to be, the "only way back" to sustainable education and employment. The report will be disseminated September 26.

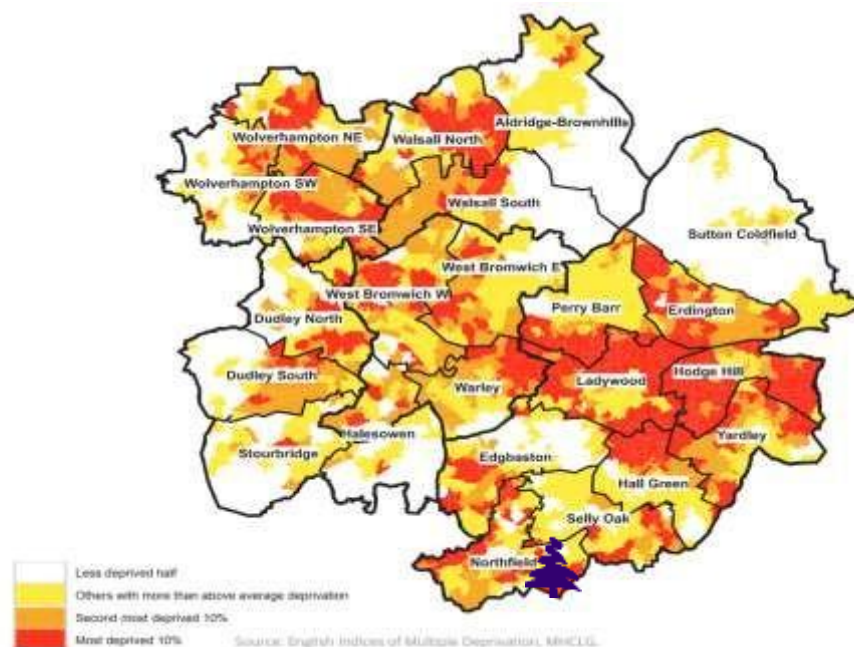
Context and Place

Fircroft is an Institute for Adult Learning so all our learners are 19+. We are a registered charity. In August 2023, we 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 (WMCA), 99% of our learners now live in the West Midlands Combined Authority region. We have a small ESFA contract for learners who live outside the West Midlands region

We are located in the Weoley and Selly Oak ward of Birmingham, UK, which is in the 10% most deprived in the country. Only 9% of our learners come from that immediate area because we are a residential college.

We are easily accessible by public transport being on the A38 Bristol Road. 81% of students live in the Birmingham local authority area. 59% of students come from the most deprived wards (with IMD score 2 or below). We worked with WMCA to develop new provision in 2024/25 in South



West Birmingham Output Areas they see as “cold spots”. In 2026, the focus of our community focused collaboration moved to working with partners to co-develop progression pathway, such as DATUS Enabling Recovery; a grassroots peer-led charity, born out of supporting individuals who suffer from addiction. We collaborated on the development of courses as part of their service user progression model into volunteering. We also have a volunteering offer within our garden and grounds that DATUS service users participate in. Our work together led us to nominating DATUS, for the WMCA Adult Learning Awards, Community Learning Champion award in July 2026 and for the Get the Nation Learning Awards in November 2026.

Birmingham is a City of Sanctuary and Fircroft was in the first wave of colleges nationally to help develop and then achieve College of Sanctuary status. The 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. Fircroft College has used our Tailored learning provision to work with Red Cross and their service users in order to co-develop a multi-disciplinary programme for new communities, and

survivors of modern trafficking and modern slavery. This programme aims to develop skills, behaviours and knowledge such as language acquisition, communication, employment rights/law, wellbeing, collaboration and digital skills. This course is a transitional bridging offer to those learners then entering formal education.

The West Midlands Combined Authority has the lowest employment rate (69.2%) and highest unemployment rate (5.3%) of the current combined authorities, with 40% of those long term unemployed. The economic inactivity rate in the WMCA area is 25.1%, mostly due to disability and ill health; “7.4% of working age residents are inactive due to long-term sickness, vs a lower figure of 6.1% nationally” (West Midlands Works, 2026). Overall outcomes are poorer for women, disabled people, ethnic minorities and young people. These key figures for the region are slightly up from 2025 but they are still lower in comparison to other regions. Through our partners, Fircroft has been particularly successful at engaging economically inactive learners, who as mentioned, make up 46% of our enrolments. Many residents are in low paid or insecure work. Many businesses report skills shortages, with 51% of all vacancies classed as ‘hard to fill’ and 35% vacant because of a lack of skills, qualifications or experience among applicants. (WMCA figures March 2025)

Regional unemployment is 1.5–2pp above the UK average, with around 1 in 5 working-age residents in low-paid or insecure jobs. There is a significant minority of residents with no formal qualifications, while just three-fifths are qualified to at least level 3, compared with two-thirds nationally. 1 in 4 working age adults have poor literacy and numeracy skills. Over half of adults (56%) across the West Midlands lack the fundamental digital skills required for work and the region has the highest proportion of employers finding it difficult to hire applicants with the necessary digital skills (38%) We work with adults who face the most barriers to entering the labour market, facing multiple intersecting barriers to participation and progression, such as poor mental health & emotional wellbeing, low confidence, motivation & self-efficacy, financial & economic barriers, challenges around access & transport, housing instability, complex life circumstances, skills gaps & educational disengagement.

Our strategy sets out our definition of good work which follow’s the TUC definition that “people not only want to work, they want good jobs that they feel are rewarding”. This is not just about decent pay and a basic standard of employment. It’s about a “fulfilling working life, job satisfaction and achieving individual potential”. We also view good work as contributing the sustainability of the planet. Whilst 98.4% of our adult students are of working age (19-65), 85% of our students are unemployed. Of those 79.7% unemployed, 46% are economically inactive. Despite these challenges, we have high success rates with our achievement rate averaging between 90-94%. The college works very successfully with those adult learners who find it most difficult to engage in education. 40.3% of our learners are BME, 28.3% have no qualification at Level 2 or above; and level 2 progression for adults is a key WMCA priority, and 51.3% have a disability or learning difficulty.

For many of our learners, there are multiple barriers to returning to the labour market. Alongside our vocational offer, half of our enrolments are on Personal and Social Development courses. Learners can also add these to their longer academic or employment programme. Tutor feedback includes the progress that learners make in terms of the resilience and independence required in life and for progression. Ofsted judged that “Staff support learners to develop their trust and resilience” and “learners improve their communication skills and resolve differences with others”. Developing these skills, alongside specific employment courses can support the transition required.

We know that skills and qualifications are one part of the jigsaw in engaging adults back into education. For those students from the most marginalised and minoritized communities, behaviours and attitudes can also be a key determinant. Our latest Ofsted inspection judged that Behaviour and Attitudes were Outstanding because “learners’ behaviour improves significantly over time” and they learn how to “work purposefully”. Inspectors considered that many learners have been out of education for a long time or have not succeeded with other providers or have been referred specifically to address unhelpful behaviours. Our recent Matrix assessment said that we “recognise potential barriers and help students to confront and overcome them by positive reinforcement and a blend of challenge and support that allows students to recognise their issues while knowing that there is a safety net there for them.”

We have high levels of students who declare a physical or mental challenge, at over 51.3% of all our students and we know that these challenges can be a huge barrier in terms of employment also. As part of our admissions process every student receives at least one, one to one discussion, resulting in a high level of disclosure.

The Department of Work and Pensions WMCA Area Based Plan (January 2025 version) shows that teaching (primary and secondary), sales and IT are amongst the vacancies most frequently posted. The common skills most frequently posted include communications, management, customer service, teaching, leadership and problem solving which residential education is particularly good at addressing. In terms of the skills offer it identifies sector specific qualifications in Management and Professional, Health and Digital as gaps in provision.

The West Midlands Futures Green Paper was published for consultation in April 2025. Its purpose is to support a conversation across the West Midlands to affirm and crystallise the long-term strategic economic priorities as a region, with a growth plan being published in the Summer 2025. The green paper highlights that “The large majority of our people and businesses in the West Midlands operate in what might be called the ‘everyday economy’: those labour-intensive, non-tradable activities mostly serving very local markets. These include health, education, social care, public administration, retail, hospitality, leisure, arts, tourism, construction, utilities, transport, and food production”. In the West Midlands, the green paper shows that everyday economy jobs make up 63% of all jobs in the region. These jobs are often found in areas of high deprivation and are characterised by younger, more diverse, and often female, disabled, or foreign-born workers. They tend to have poor job quality, including low pay, insecure work and while AI may replace some of these jobs, it is expected they are more likely to be augmented by AI rather than replaced. Another vital part of the everyday economy is the social economy: a collective term for social enterprises, cooperatives, mutuals, community-owned businesses, and other not-for- personal-profit organisations that use a trading model to generate funds and tackle inequality”.

In their 2024-2027 Employment and Skills Strategy, WMCA set out a vision for an integrated employment and skills system for the region. This focuses on 4 pillars and the college has mapped its curriculum offer against these:

- building strong and inclusive communities
- providing a good education up to level 2.
- supporting residents into-employment and supporting career progression.
- meeting future skills needs at level 3 and above through upskilling and reskilling.

Fircroft's delivers a significant Tailored Learning provision, and it plays a critical role in supporting the WMCA's ambition to build strong and inclusive communities by engaging adults who face the most

barriers to learning, employment and civic participation. The college specialises in residential learning, working with residents facing multiple and intersecting barriers, including poor mental health, trauma, disability, long-term health conditions, housing instability and social isolation. Research undertaken by the college found that residential adult education acts as a "core mechanism" for progression, providing the stability, immersion and supportive peer networks needed for individuals to rebuild confidence, resilience and self-belief. Through a trauma-informed, residential approach and strong partnerships with over 250 referral organisations, including mental health, recovery and community services, the college provides an effective re-engagement pathway for adults who are often unable to access mainstream provision. Evidence shows that residential learning reduces anxiety, improves wellbeing, strengthens social connections and supports progression into further learning, employment and community participation, directly contributing to the WMCA's priorities around health, inclusion, economic participation and good work.

In response the college has set out these first two Accountability objectives:

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

As part of Colleges West Midlands, Fircroft College was involved in the development of the West Midlands and Warwickshire Local Skills Improvement Plan (WM&W LSIP). The final version of the WM&W LSIP focuses on the cross-cutting themes of digital and green skills and associated leadership and management capabilities. These priorities have been maintained in the update to the WMW LSIP.

The WMCA strategy says that they "will continue to improve digital inclusion by providing access to devices, data and learning opportunities in community settings to help residents develop the skills they need to successfully access online support for health, welfare, training or employment". The LSIP 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. Fircroft has been a partner in Colleges West Midlands projects to address this through the Strategic Development Fund and the Local Skills Improvement Fund. We have been working to WMCA's 2021 Digital Roadmap 2021, and Birmingham City Council's 2021 Digital Inclusion Strategy. WMCA's West Midlands Plan for Growth has Digital and Skills as a priority growth cluster. We were an active delivery partner of the LSIF digital skills project for 2023-2025. More recently, the Mayor's Growth Plan has identified Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a core employability skill and set out an ambition to make the West Midlands the UK's leading region for AI skills, including a commitment that every adult should have access to free AI training. Fircroft's digital curriculum and wider digital inclusion work strongly align with these priorities, supporting adult learners to develop practical digital skills, digital confidence, critical thinking and an understanding of AI, AI ethics and its applications in work, learning and everyday

The WMCA employment and skills strategy 2024-2027 highlights that as "reflected in our Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), leadership and management skills have never been in greater demand as our regional economy and businesses grapple with the challenges and opportunities brought about by Brexit, the transition to net zero and rapid technological change". It quotes a Chartered Management Institute report on West Midlands Prosperity saying that a large proportion of the 600,000 managers in the region do not receive the support and guidance they need from their

employer to develop the skills required. WMCA want to focus public funds on groups which Fircroft is well placed to access: “Accidental leaders” who have been promoted internally without support and aspiring leaders in low pay or insecure employment, from racialised communities, women or with disabilities. Fircroft has some excellent practice to share coming in the top 20 employers nationally when last awarded Investors in People Gold. In addition, the college continues to strengthen system navigability for both learners and employers through improved Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG), clearer progression pathways and stronger links between community learning, Tailored Learning, Adult Skills, higher-level study and employment. This supports the LSIP ambition to create more accessible and intelligible skills pathways that enable learners and employers to navigate provision more effectively.

To support this, the college has developed a bespoke progression framework that guides learners through six interconnected stages: Mental and Physical Health and Wellbeing First; Digital Inclusion and Access; Core Skills Development and Critical Thinking; Sustainability and Green Skills; Subject and Vocational Development; and Supporting Progression into Good Work and In-Work Progression. Together, these stages create a coherent pathway that addresses barriers to participation while supporting progression into further learning, employment and active citizenship.

In terms of National Skills Priorities, identified by the DfE, Digital and Technology and Health remain two of the sectors identified, with green jobs as a growth area. These cross-cutting themes of green and digital skills are already strategic priorities for the college. For our 2025/6 Accountability objectives these are expressed in terms of our third and fourth objectives:

3. Support a sustainable transition, climate justice action and green skills

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”.

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 meant and 65% reported they didn’t have access to green skills training. The same report by the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, and Deloitte, identifies an increased need for green skills in non-specialist roles and a transition of workforces from unsustainable sectors. Alongside technical and vocational skills, the LSIP highlights the importance of foundational skills and work readiness. Fircroft's Personal and Social Development curriculum makes a significant contribution in this area, supporting learners to develop the communication, confidence, resilience, self-management and social-emotional skills required for successful participation in employment, further learning and community life. This is complemented by provision in digital skills, literacy and numeracy, ensuring learners develop both the personal and practical capabilities needed to progress towards good work and lifelong learning.

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 in the country to declare a climate emergency and having 6 acres of grounds gives us a particular opportunity and responsibility.

The West Midlands Futures green paper highlights that green skills are important "because they increase the ability of firms in our region to adapt and take advantage of new growth and employment opportunities. Increasingly, green skills are understood to be crucial for resilience of firms across a wide range of sectors, in addition to traditional energy intensive industries. Developing the green skills of our current and future workforce is therefore important for both our achieving net zero ambitions as well as maximising growth and employment opportunities".

The College continues to support a sustainable transition through the integration of sustainability, climate justice and green skills across curriculum and enrichment activity. Alongside embedding these themes throughout the learner journey, the College delivers specialist programmes including Mother Garden, Cross Pollinators, Organic and Regenerative Gardening, Sustainable Communities and Building the Future. These courses support learners to develop practical green skills, environmental awareness, community leadership and active citizenship, while aligning with WMCA priorities around sustainability, inclusive growth, health and wellbeing, and community resilience.

Learner feedback demonstrates a strong impact. 93% of respondents reported that green courses helped them pursue their goals and ambitions, 87% improved their ability to learn or work independently, 80% reported improved wellbeing, and 73% felt better able to socialise and communicate with others. In addition, 93% reported progressing their knowledge of green skills and sustainability, 67% were developing the sustainability knowledge of others, 40% became or progressed as volunteers, and 27% had started or planned community-based initiatives as a result of their learning.

The provision is creating tangible progression opportunities. Learners reported moving into community gardening, volunteering roles, allotment leadership, community growing projects, CIC development and employment-related opportunities linked to sustainability and horticulture. One learner described the experience as "Life changing", while another stated, "The course helped me to realise the scale of opportunity in sustainable construction." Others highlighted increased confidence, stronger community connections and the ability to share green skills within their communities. Through this work, Fircroft is contributing to regional skills needs while empowering learners to take practical climate action and contribute to a more sustainable and inclusive future.

From November 2023 to March 2025, the college has led a £837K wider greens skills project, one of six regional projects funded through the Learning and Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF). To date the project has included a wider green summit for employers and colleges, research to understand the current post-16 offer of green skills courses across the West Midlands and Warwickshire and the development of a green skills road map. The implementation of the recommendations in the roadmap are now being led through a number of groups organised through Colleges West Midlands. Our regional approach to working together to address sustainability and green skills is recognised as sector leading. During 2025, the college developed and delivered a green skills teacher training programme called Green Changemakers, this programme continued throughout 2026 and was delivered as a national offer to a number of colleges across the UK. This demonstrates the college's national reputation and impact through leadership in sustainability, research and transformational adult education practice. Through its Green Changemakers work, the College has contributed to national conferences, research events and sector partnerships, sharing innovative approaches to leadership, sustainability and organisational change across Further Education. Key activities included

the LSRN Green Changemakers Research Event (November 2025) and the Green Research Event (June 2026) and publications such as *Awakening the Golden Unicorns: How the Changemaking Power of Potentia is Transforming Leadership in UK Further Education*. The College has also extended its influence through published research, award recognition and partnerships with colleges across England, supporting workforce development, professional learning and the adoption of sustainable practices. This work has enabled Fircroft College to contribute to sector-wide improvement, including a national Green Changemakers working group, influencing and guiding the role of adult education in creating positive social and environmental change

The college is also building an exemplar eco-classroom during the second year of LSIF funding. The college has developed a sector wide Green Skills Digital Hub which won a Green Gown Award in 2026, which aims to support teachers across the AFE sector to develop their praxis on education/learning for sustainability. The college participated in the Birmingham Innovate UK partnership, working with SME's to develop their green skills. In 2024-5 we partnered with Civic Square to deliver the first year of the Re:Builders programme, aimed at construction SME's interested in moving towards more regenerative building practices. During 2025-26 we continued this work. Through the Birmingham Innovation Hub, Fircroft College worked with partners such as Civic Square and established the Rebuilders Hub, positioning the college as a specialist knowledge base for regenerative construction and sustainable built environment practices, supporting SMEs across the construction sector to adopt innovative and environmentally sustainable approaches. The hub combined classroom learning, practical build sessions, open-house demonstrations and study visits, enabling businesses to apply innovation directly within their organisations. A distinctive strength of the Fircroft model was its hands-on approach, with SMEs participating in real-world build days, demonstrations and learning visits. Stakeholder feedback highlighted that physical visits, demonstrations and access to specialist facilities were more impactful than traditional training methods and helped businesses understand how innovation could be applied in practice. The Hub made a direct contribution to the region's sustainability and retrofit agenda by engaging businesses in regenerative construction, retrofit and environmentally sustainable practices. Stakeholders specifically identified Fircroft's work as helping to strengthen links between innovation, green skills, sustainability and business growth within the construction sector.

Fircroft won a coveted Green Gown Award for our sustainable approach to catering and was the first college in the country to become a Cycling UK Cycle Friendly Employer (Gold).

4. Reduce digital exclusion amongst students through our curriculum

The College is continually reviewing and developing its curriculum offer in order to stay responsive to national and regional priorities as they evolve. We have been engaging with employers and wider stakeholders over the previous year to develop our courses and, as one of our post-Inspection actions, we have been extending this engagement across the full curriculum offer. This reflects the acknowledgement within the DfE's national priorities of the important role Institutes of Adult Learning (IALs), such as Fircroft College, play in delivering essential skills up to Level 2 in English and maths and Level 1 in digital skills, while providing progression routes into national and regional priority sectors. To support the College objective of reducing digital exclusion amongst students, we are embedding digital, data and AI capability across the curriculum, enabling learners to develop digital confidence, essential digital skills, data literacy, AI awareness and an understanding of the ethical use of emerging technologies. Our commitment is to move beyond digital inclusion towards

digital application, literacy and AI awareness, ensuring learners can confidently use technology in learning, employment and everyday life. This aligns with our progression framework, which recognises the importance of wellbeing, digital inclusion, core skills development, sustainability and vocational learning in supporting learners furthest from opportunity to progress into further learning, employment, community leadership and good work

Our final Accountability objective for 2025/6 is:

5. Increase employer/wider stakeholder engagement in our residential offer; curriculum, course design, support and enrichment

The College has strengthened employer and wider stakeholder engagement to ensure curriculum planning, delivery, enrichment and progression opportunities are increasingly aligned to local and regional skills needs and WMCA priorities. During 2025/26, significant progress has been made through the creation of a stakeholder engagement framework and tracker aligned to Ofsted and Matrix requirements, enabling the College to systematically record and evaluate stakeholder contributions across curriculum intent, implementation and impact. Engagement has expanded across stakeholders, with relationships established or strengthened with organisations including National Careers Service, Newman University, Embark Learning, Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC), Wolverhampton University and employers within the care sector. This engagement has informed curriculum review and development, progression opportunities, enrichment activities and ongoing skills mapping to ensure provision remains responsive to learner, employer and regional skills needs. Partners have positively recognised the impact of this work, with Embark Learning commenting that they “really enjoyed the visit and meeting yourself and the learners”, while Newman University described partnership activity as “a pleasure and a joy ... I came away really buzzing.”

Through this work, the College is strengthening work-readiness and foundational skills development by aligning Personal and Social Development (PSD), ESOL, digital skills and vocational provision more closely to employer expectations and progression opportunities. Stakeholder engagement has directly informed curriculum content, including the review of provision, development of Skills for Support Work and Volunteering courses, employability workshops and curriculum planning. Emerging themes from consultation and engagement activity include employability skills, communication, resilience, wellbeing, digital confidence, data literacy, AI awareness, progression into employment and volunteering, and preparation for priority sectors such as health and care, education, community development, sustainability and digital industries. In response, the College is committed to further strengthening employer co-design and co-delivery of curriculum and enrichment activity, to enable meaningful participation.

The College has also made progress in strengthening progression support through the development of a Careers and Progression resource pack and hub, enhanced progression partnerships, attendance at local careers and employment events, and the establishment of stakeholder-informed progression pathways. Ongoing learner needs analysis and barriers surveys are informing curriculum planning and partnership development, ensuring stakeholder engagement is driven by identified learner aspirations and labour market demand. This work contributes directly to WMCA priorities by supporting inclusive growth, workforce development, digital inclusion, health and wellbeing and sustainability, while enabling the College to respond effectively to adult skills needs. The quality of these relationships is reflected in stakeholder feedback, with Wolverhampton University thanking the College for its engagement and recognising the value of the experience provided to learners

through the "useful insights and information" shared during partnership activities. Through sustained engagement with employers and wider stakeholders, the College is ensuring learners develop the knowledge, skills, behaviours and confidence needed to progress into further learning, volunteering and good work, while supporting the development of a skilled, inclusive and adaptable regional workforce.

Contribution to national, regional, local priorities

Here is the progress we have made against our previous Accountability Agreement and the plans we have put in place as a result of the local skills duty to review.

Objectives	What we did 2024/5	What else we will do in 2025/26	Progress in 2025/26	What else we will do in 2026/27
1. Support the physical and mental health recovery to assist work/life progression	Extend number of non-residential Community Learning courses delivered off-site at community venues (including South Birmingham cold spots) – partially implemented (due to staff illness) 75% of learners declare a mental or physical health challenge -Staff developmental sessions around managing behaviour supporting learners to achieve and MH needs -Collaboration with partners/service users re recruitment/deli	Research on inactive students to support priorities in 'get Britain working' Further work with partners to work with 'our learners' in the community – developing their workforces to support phys/M health e.g. bespoke red cross staff development around homelessness and immigrants	Research on economically inactive students and residential learning completed. Research included both learners and referral stakeholders Key themes identified: Economic growth, skills and workforce needs Social mobility and inclusion Health, wellbeing and community resilience Policy, funding and the future of lifelong learning Stakeholder work started with DATUS	Full implementation of the CEIAG strategy framework and stakeholder engagement processes Next steps for work regarding barriers to participation and progression Use of residential research regarding barriers to learning and benefits of residential learning to further enhance key elements of the college's offer linked to the research outcomes Review of Personal, Social Development tailored learning offer to ensure currency and relevance of offer in assisting mental and physical health recovery of learners during the relevant stages of their

	very models/course content and relevance eg Red Cross for course content review-pathfinder for single parent CO -1 CO course delivered – digital skills, 1 due for delivery in July 25 – health and skills with focused digital skills use throughout - both in identified cold spots areas.		recovery group to create progression pathways into voluntary and paid employment. Co-development of offer to support service users to become volunteers, support staff and managers of volunteers. First course piloted – Introduction to Volunteering Level 1. 13 learners enrolled, completed the course and continued their development with DATUS. Next steps Volunteering L2 for active volunteers. General course development: New courses designed and offered in Physical Health and Nutrition for Happiness Men and Women. Learners noted “Very good and informative	learner journey at the college Development of consistent tutorial scheme across medium and long course provisions, including stakeholder engagement and careers and progression development for learners
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			course on nutrition and well-being” and learners noting they felt, “more confident seeking help to manage my health and wellbeing, Healthier lifestyle.” and they felt attending the courses led to them having “Greater willingness to progress (in work or education)” These courses will be repeated in term 3 and are included in the 2627 delivery plan as part of the Personal Social Development programme area. <i>Destinations reporting for the previous year shows the following:</i> 93.2% of respondents agree that attending the college allowed them to pursue their goals and ambitions	
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			88.9% of respondents felt better able to socialise, work and communicate with others 94.3% felt attending the college helped them to keep physically and mentally fit 93.9% of respondents felt they could become more involved in society 92.2% felt more able to learn, work or study independently and make independent decisions	
2. Support student progression into good employment	Admissions pick up in Individual Learning Plans Extend National Careers Service 1:1s to all longer courses Careers space and enrichment sessions in Digital Hub 25% of learners progressing to good employment J2 Research's report enables	New careers and progression post in restructure (in post for 25/26) -Further partnership developments for direct progression/vocational experience opportunities -Admissions development re IAG in practice -Implement new IAG platform and accounts use for	Careers and Progression Coordinator appointed. Curriculum Manager appointed with remit for skills in the curriculum and stakeholder engagement. Internal marketing in place across screens, posters, library spaces and	Full roll out of TEAMS Careers Hub and embedding of access across all curriculum areas Economically inactive learners work – barriers and strategies for participation and progression Core careers and progression engagement to be mapped annually on the curriculum plan and released

	us to benchmark impact against previous years at Fircroft and against other colleges. The % agreeing in August 2024 that college had helped them: • Pursue their goals and ambition 95% (was 94% when Colleges West Midlands average was 90%) • Socialise , work and communicate with others 94% (was 98% when CWM 89%) • Keep themselves physically and mentally well 96% (was 98 when CWM 93%) • Actively participate in their community and in society 93% (was 89% when CWM 74%) • Learn, work or study independently 93% (was 93% when CWM 91%) • Prepare for working life 92% (was 87% when WM 84%)	learners (Wolves uni) -Possible use of online platform – supported by wolves uni Directorate of Recruitment, Marketing and Admissions - New online resource - Lifepilot resource	enrichment areas, plus course induction to increase visibility. Barriers to careers and progression participation survey completed (in report). Careers and Progression sessions within courses, and drop-ins running since 26 Jan with regular attendance. Access to HE drop-ins for UCAS: 12 learners attended (Nov–Dec). Progressing to HE lessons delivered as part of Access to HE programme. 1-to-1 careers guidance: 24 booked appointments in the last 3 months. Careers Hub created on TEAMS and currently piloted with Pre Access and	alongside annual planning and termly review of course planning Complete mapping of curriculum offer for 2627 to CEIAG framework Completing skills mapping for all courses in Term 3 to ensure curriculum alignment with current local and national skills needs. Action plan in development for tutors on careers language, context and promotion. Early learner pathway information captured and being developed in line with CEIAG framework Complete review of delivery plan and submit to WMCA for agreement Currently reviewing level 3 digital course offer as above. Review of maths provision currently ongoing due to low retention/achievement and learners experiencing barriers to maths such as ‘maths anxiety’. This is also
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			Access to HE courses. Resource pack in place External progression routes are now clearly signposted through the resource pack and dedicated content on the Careers & Progression Hub. Participation Life Pilot in full use and offered to learners. Uptake Delivery of Careers and Progression session to all teaching staff during Easter COD week – Tutor began referring learners directly from term 3 Employability enrichment for Term 1 delivered, including Digital Skills for Employment (7 learners), CV Writing & Interviews (7 learners), and Newman University	paired with the fact that learners on the Access to HE programmes start attending maths due to entry requirements when applying for university but then receive offers that very often then don't require the learners to hold a maths qualification. We are currently working hard to understand this and what we can do as a provider to encourage maths attendance and achievement from a broader progression perspective such as employment progression.
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			collaboration (14 learners). Term 2 enrichment in place, working with Donna on activities including CV Writing & Interviews with NCS, Digital Skills, Employability Skills and Good Job Skills. Collaboration with tutors to plan and deliver Careers & Progression sessions. External stakeholders booked for enrichment, including Newman University and NCS. Please see further details in accountability objective 5. below regarding curriculum stakeholder engagement Destination progress this year	
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			Destinations tracking process extended to bi-monthly internal activities with the aim of increasing respondents and data collection Successful Matrix annual continuous improvement check successfully completed, “It was good to hear how over the past year the restructure has supported these continuous improvements with the development of the Careers Strategy and how this has been built on a foundation of inclusive education, social & climate justice, and meaningful progression into good work.” <i>Destinations reporting for the previous</i>	
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			<i>year showed the following:</i> 91.9% of respondents felt they discovered their goals and ambitions 95% of respondents understood the different paths and goals they could take to achieve their goals 73% of respondents felt they were able to perform their current job better 21.6% noted that they were able to get a pay rise 16.2% were able to get a promotion 88.8% felt the course they studied was relevant to their future career paths 84.2% felt the course they studied was relevant to what they were currently doing at work	
3. Supporting a sustainable	Further develop teacher training offer	-Members of CWM green skills courses and green skills	Embedding of global citizenship in	Review of green skills outcomes in Spring/summer

transition, climate justice action and green skills	Green skills curriculum audit and embedded across curriculum areas Eco classroom build linked to this- Green Skills audit in curriculum completed. Sustainability reflection section included in ILPs and Green Skills CPD for all teaching team with the implementation inclusion of using the ground/outdoors for learning in all provisions alongside. Observations noted effective embedding of GS as a positive 3 phase eco classroom programme delivered. - Growth in green skills offer – build the future programme and cross pollinator pilot in term 3 -Review of green skills offer and growth opportunities via alumni event leading to cross	careers groups to work across the region on GS courses and careers progression -Development of enrichment team and new careers role to align with curriculum offer and ensure embedding of GS in enrichment and careers offer -Work on global citizenship model implementation in curriculum and enrichment and assess impact	enrichment. student enrichment has regularly covered topics highlighted in the global and national EDI calendar to better promote the ethos of having a fairer, more peaceful and better connected world. Specific enrichments covering these themes include ‘International Men’s Day’ November 18, ‘International Day for the elimination of Violence Against Women’ Nov 25, ‘Holocaust Memorial Day’ Jan 29, ‘World Day for Social Justice’ Feb 20, ‘International Women’s Day Mar 4, ‘Stephen Lawrence Day’ April 24 and a ‘Fircroft Politics Café’ on April 29 <i>enrichment session have covered green skills or a linked topic,</i>	term 25 report as part of green impact report Future partnerships still to be developed Signposting to green volunteering roles to learners through 1-1 support. Sourcing employers/organisations to come and talk about green/sustainable jobs (in early stages). Green jobs piece to be created for Careers Hub. Green careers page created for C&P resource pack – already distributed to Access and Pre Access Embed sustainability into SAR and QIP and OFSTED preparation The focus for 2026/27 is to develop further green partners and stronger progression pathways for learners. We are also looking into the potential of delivering an adult skills sustainable leadership offer
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	pollinator provision design		<i>including: 'Green Skills' 27th Sep, 'Gardening' 2nd Oct, 'Sustainability' 18th Oct, 'Climate Action' 4th November, 'Green Winter Skills' 29th Nov, 'Eco/Sustainability' 22nd Jan, 'Green Skills' 23rd Feb. With more planned for the rest of the year, such as Gardening sustainability on the 15th May. Other that the evening sessions, as part of National green week, enrichment included an information QR code to start a conversation around green skills and sustainability. This QR code contained a short video on Sustainability and its importance and also invited learners to share how they are</i>	We are currently working on a green skills bid with Wolverhampton University and Black Country Colleges. If successful, we have pitched to offer an entry level offer, teacher development and sustainable leadership so this is a potential opportunity for our curriculum development direction although it does rely on the bid being successful.
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			<i>sustainable. Some comments included' I use LED lights and turn off switches. I recycle as well' and 'Cook pre prep meals less cooking and use local transport or walking and cycling'.</i> learning walks planned for June/July with a focus embedding Global citizenship Undertake audit of current curriculum offer using AimHI and SDG framework - Audit work completed Section added on short course ILP relating to AIMHI 15 Green skills Phases 2 and 3 of Cross Pollinator courses completed Developmental plans for new green/sustainable courses	
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			including bid for future project with partners – Wolverhampton University and Black Country Colleges. BID sent to National Lottery- awaiting outcome. Best practise folder set up and populated, for curriculum team on SharePoint to share ideas/ resources relating to green skills Feb 26 CPD session planned to support tutor development on how further to support embedding across all curriculum areas. SU Sustainability offices role, green team member	
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4. Reduce digital exclusion amongst our students	LSIF Yr 2 capital for devices to extend accessibility to our essential digital skills training. Increase to 30% the % of all students saying they have developed their Digital skills - Entry L3 to L3 digital provision creating progression pathway -Use of digital resources and hardware in every course -Community outreach provisions re digital inclusion	Enrichment/careers offer to include digital development/use -Learner journey mapping/recruitment to include digital skills assessment/recruitment to align with maths/literacy model	We are currently using Teams for our medium and long courses. We are looking at opportunities for a low level accessible virtual learning environment. We have successfully piloted the use of SharePoint on our entry level and level 1 digital courses as a possible lower-level accessible virtual learning environment. There have been some challenges with widening participation here due to our current digital hardware specifications	To decide on and fully launch a new lower-level accessible virtual learning environment for all short courses To complete the above survey activity with learners to identify barriers and strengths from the learner perspective To refresh embedding digital skills in curriculum for the teaching team and learning support assistants To deliver development sessions to tutors to ensure the entire team is confident using virtual learning environments/platforms To further develop our digital skills offer within enrichment and tutorial
5. Increase employer/ wider stakeholder engagement in our residential offer; curriculum, course design,	Extend to Leadership and Management Some engagement with an employer on every long course Knowledge transfer through Innovate UK	-Extend HE progression partnerships – Wolves uni -Develop pipelines partnerships with other providers – community/ITPs/FE colleges/etc Develop stakeholder	Gap and needs analyses completed Stakeholder strategy work started with a focus on curriculum, Alumni and recruitment Recruited Careers and	Ensure appropriate and relevant stakeholder engagement within all programme areas contributing to planning, delivery and progression elements of each area as relevant

support and enrichment	from April 24 to 10 SMEs- Extended our partnership work across more programmes -Consulted on programme development with partners/service users and alumni with a focus on recruitment, delivery models, course content/offer, work progression (eg Mother Garden/Free Thinking/ Working with.../IT L2&3) -Community outreach -Wolves uni - extended HE info and advice in Access eg adult focused finance support, visits	engagement process Develop incentive offer to partners Create external progression pathways for Admissions/IAG education routes Create SHE Strategy/policy and action plan Data sharing agreement template creation MoU Consultancy agreement SHE Needs analysis and SH mapping exercise – impact/need SHE Needs analysis and SH mapping exercise. Curriculum/Skills Recruitment Scoping exercise for integration of AI Review/amend/dev elop current stakeholder system - is it fit for purpose to record, monitor current SHE details, purpose and interactions	Progression Coordinator and Curriculum Manager with stakeholder remit New CEIAG strategy and framework As noted above, following the recruitment of both a Curriculum Manager with stakeholder remit and a new Careers and Progression Coordinator, work is well underway to develop stakeholder engagement. The key progress in 2025/26 is regarding full introduction of a stakeholder engagement process alongside both stakeholder gap and needs analyses. This also aligns with Ofsted's skills judgment area (new specification released in October 2026) where work	Ensure all areas and teaching teams have a clear understanding of skills needs for their specific areas of delivery Ensure there is effective and appropriate stakeholder engagement within both enrichment and tutorial Ensure we are 'Ofsted ready' for the relevant judgement areas such as 'meeting skills needs' 'curriculum and teaching' and 'personal development and wellbeing'.
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			has been completed to ensure a solid foundation for building on both stakeholder engagement in curriculum, how this work supports the college's contribution to meeting skills needs and developing effective progression pathways. Whilst the processes were being formalised, there has been ongoing stakeholder engagement within curriculum	
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Approach to developing the annual accountability Statement

We have an established cycle for curriculum planning which already involves Governors in agreeing a set of objectives. Our 2025 Accountability Statement has been developed in parallel with our Strategic Plan for the college and the annual strategic objectives. It covers all our DfE funding, including the funding devolved to West Midlands Combined Authority.

We have maintained our membership with the Greater Birmingham Chamber and made good use of our membership. Benefits of membership include: strategic introductions, employers looking at our offer and talking to our students, joining their Good Business Forum. As most of our funding is devolved, Fircroft College staff at all levels meet regularly with West Midlands Combined Authority. Based on their 2024-2027 Employment and Skills Strategy, WMCA's 2024/5 Strategy and Delivery Statement sets out their priorities for the region, an outcomes framework for tailored 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. Fircroft College employs a Partnership Officer in

constant dialogue, particularly with their sector employers and service providers. In terms of enhancing the delivery of our careers and progression strategy, we will be employing a careers and progression co-ordinator in 2025.

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 working with 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, Association of Colleges and HOLEX (the lead body for adult education) as well as EAUC (The Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education), an ESOL Regional Leads network and the Black Leadership Group. We have also joined, in 2025, Sustainability West Midlands to support our work.

We have strong links through our governors with the University of Birmingham, the University of Wolverhampton and Coventry University. A progression agreement is in place with Newman 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 International Folk High School Movement. This builds on Fircroft's roots and still current, pedagogical practice. The International 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. Our involvement in the International Folk High school movement has enabled and supported the development of both teacher training and curriculum in the College which supports the first of our objectives.

Board duty to review

The Governing Body of Fircroft college undertook a review of its contribution to local skills in February 2024. The Board also undertook an external review of governance between November 2023 and March 2024. A further review of governance is planned for January 2027. The board believes that the future of work of the college is linked to the ability of individuals and communities to respond to the most pressing challenges of climate and other environmental/social changes of our time. This commitment has been evidenced in the college leading the LSIF Green skills project in 2023-2025. The board recognises the college's contribution to the key objectives in the WMCA's Employment and Skills Strategy 2024-2027. In particular the strategic priorities of "building strong and inclusive communities" and providing "good education" up to Level 2.

The review demonstrated that the college offers a good range of skills development at several levels and which are relevant to our particular student base. There is the opportunity to progress through the diversity of our programme, and we help and support students to navigate their way to meet

their needs. We reach students that other entities do not, and we motivate students to achieve at levels many did not know they could reach. We give good guidance on their next steps after their courses. The Board review highlighted that the key objectives outlined above in the accountability agreement, reflect both the college's strategic planning and the WMCA's key priorities. It also highlighted that extending the college's offer in certain curriculum areas, particularly digital and in terms of additional support in terms of careers guidance will require additional funding. The Board agreed an action plan following the board review and has been implementing the required actions through 2024-2025.

The governing body recognises that in order to better meet local skills needs, the college needs to extend its work and engagement with employers (and trade unions) which is reflected in the objective in the Accountability Agreement, 'Increase employer/wider stakeholder engagement in curriculum offer and course design'. The College has extensive links with regional partners (primarily public sector/charities) and the introduction of the Partnership Officer position has been a very positive development in the last few years. This development is also reflected in the college's post inspection Quality Improvement Plan increasing engagement with the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and the Innovate UK project funding.

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 15th July 2026. It fulfils the statutory skills duty.

The plan will be published on the college's website within three months of the start of the new academic year and can be accessed from [this hyperlink](#).



Geoff Layer

Chair of Governors



Melanie Lenehan

Principal and CEO

Links to supporting documentation:

- [WM&W LSIP](#)
- [west-midlands-and-warwickshire-local-skills-improvement-plan-progress-report-2025-final.pdf](#)
- College Strategic Plan [Towards 2030 and Just Transitions](#)
- [Colleges Financial Statements](#)
- [Ofsted inspection report](#)
- [Employment and Skills Strategy 2024 - 2027](#)

- [West Midlands Growth Plan](#)