

Strategic Plan 2025 - 2028



Blackburn: The College *of* Choice

Introduction

As an anchor institution, Blackburn College is committed to fostering an environment of excellence, innovation and inclusivity. As we look towards the future, our strategic plan outlines a clear vision and roadmap for the next three years. This plan is designed to enhance our educational offerings, support student success, and strengthen our community ties. By leveraging our rich history and embracing new opportunities, we aim to provide an exceptional, transformative educational experience that prepares our students for the challenges and opportunities of the modern world. Our strategic priorities focus on academic excellence, staff development, community engagement, social mobility, sustainability and technological advancement, ensuring that Blackburn College remains at the forefront of exceptional Further and Higher Education.

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Since its founding in 1888, the College's purpose has been the provision of high-quality technical and employment-focused education for the people of Blackburn and the surrounding area, and our mission and intent remain the same today – "Transforming students' lives and our community through exceptional education, training and support". Our vision is to achieve this by continuously improving the College, providing exceptional learning and supporting the acquisition of the skills needed by employers, delivered on our world-class campus.

Students, on all levels and modes of study, remain at the heart of everything that the College does. The College is committed to providing the very best quality of education and student experience, enhancing skills and knowledge to support and inspire students to achieve and progress on to their next steps – changing people's lives.

Further Education students study technical and academic courses from entry level to level 3 in the majority of subject areas. The College also has an extensive Further Education provision for adults, most of whom study English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and skills for work on a part-time basis. In addition, Apprenticeships are offered from level two to level six. The College also delivers degrees validated by Lancaster University, University of Central Lancashire and the University of South Wales. The College has undergone many positive **changes in recent years, including being rated overall good, with outstanding for educating young people, adults, behaviours and attitudes, plus personal development, in the November 2024 Ofsted inspection.** In addition, the College prides itself on achievement rates rising every year for the past five years and now being in the top three nationally for achievement rates for learners aged 16-18, for the second year running.

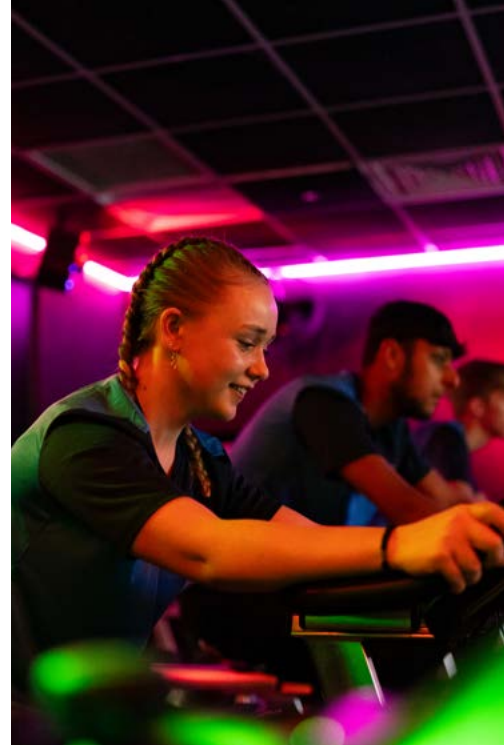
The focus of the College is to lead on the local, regional, and national education skills agenda and meet the employability needs of individuals and employers in line with Government priorities. This was recognised by Ofsted in their 2024 inspection, when they reported that the College makes a strong contribution to skills – the highest possible grade.

Through collaborative programmes funded via the Levelling Up Fund, the Strategic Development Fund and the Local Skills Improvement Fund, the College has proactively worked with neighbouring colleges, to strategically invest in a network of industry-standard education and training spaces, building on its specialisms and collaborating to develop new courses and curriculum that aligns with business needs. Additionally, the College collaborates with local businesses to offer work placements and Apprenticeships, providing students with valuable hands-on experience and strengthening ties between education and industry. By focusing on these initiatives, the College contributes to building a skilled workforce, driving local economic growth, and ultimately getting Britain working.

The College is committed to the implementation of the Further Education (FE) White Paper **'Skills for Jobs'** alongside responding to Higher Education (HE) reforms. This ensures our current and future workforce is best equipped to thrive in supporting local, regional and national priorities.

The College is playing a significant role in supporting the UK's employment goals **'Get Britain Working'** by aligning its programs with the needs of the local and national job markets. By offering a diverse range of courses, including A Levels, T Levels, Technical courses, Apprenticeships and Degrees, plus basic, language and employability skills for adults, the College ensures that students gain the skills and qualifications required by employers, plus is continually **working with industry to co-create curriculum** designed to lead into employment. The College will continue to operate across a range of sectors with a key focus on engineering, health and social care, electric/hybrid and hydrogen vehicle technologies, cyber and digitalisation, plus many other areas, across the whole curriculum.

This Strategic Plan links closely with the Colleges Annual Accountability Agreement and Local Needs Duty 2025-2026 which set out the key targets for the academic year reflecting the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and the National Skills Priorities. Developed in consultation with internal and external stakeholders, including staff, students and the College's Corporation Board, the Strategic Plan 2025-2028 sets out the College's priorities as it continues the journey to transform into one of the UK's leading Further Education colleges.





Our Mission

Transforming students' lives and our community through exceptional education, training and support.



Our Vision

Aspiring, innovating and achieving through excellence.

Our Values

Excellence

We strive for excellence to realise the potential of all students and staff.

Knowledge

We promote the value of learning in fostering curious minds, supporting the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Inclusion

We promote equity, diversity and inclusion in our teaching, training, support and customer services.

Empowerment

We empower and support our students and staff to develop their lives through education and training.

Commitment

We are committed to exceptional education, training and support of our students and staff.

Respect

We treat everyone as individuals and with respect.



Ten Key Facts about Blackburn College

1. Established in 1888:

College has a long history, originally starting as Blackburn Technical College and is situated close to Blackburn town centre, making it easily accessible by public transport and car

2. Student Population:

College serves over 5,500 students

3. Ofsted Rating:

College has been rated as 'Good' with outstanding features by Ofsted as of November 2024

4. Results:

Top three nationally for 16-18 year-olds achievement, two years running

5. Course Offerings:

College offers a wide range of courses, including A Levels, T Levels, Technical Courses, Apprenticeships, Degrees and professional courses

6. National Student Survey Results:

Final scores are at least 10% above the national rates, with high scores for student satisfaction over the last three years

7. Industry Standard Facilities:

The campus has undergone significant redevelopment and refurbishment with the addition of a Cyber Hub, Health Care Ward, Scholars Restaurant, Hybrid and Hydrogen Automotive and the Industry Collaboration Zone

8. Innovative Programs:

College is among the first institutions to pilot a hydrogen automotive qualification

9. Community Engagement:

College is actively involved in the local community, offering various adult education courses and professional development opportunities

10. Recognition:

Working closely with the community and partners to deliver social mobility



Context

The political environment within which the College operates is fluid and fast-changing, it is imperative that the College's Strategic Plan aligns and delivers on the national, regional and local priorities which focus on '**Get Britain Working**' and social mobility.

Lancashire has a thriving £33bn economy, with a population of 1.5m people, with over 55,000 businesses generating 700,000 jobs across a range of future-facing sectors from manufacturing, health, and tourism; to cyber, digital and low carbon. The Lancashire Local Authority leaders launched the **Lancashire 2050 framework** to create a long-term strategic plan for the future of Lancashire. It brings people together with a shared vision, shared ambition, shared goals and shared priorities. This framework will help the College focus on the issues that are most important, as well as respond to changing local and global trends, policy mandates and place needs. It will mean Lancashire can speak with one voice when championing our needs in government.

The College works closely with the **Lancashire Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)**, which is led by the North and Western Lancashire Chamber of Commerce, working in partnership with the East Lancashire Chamber of Commerce, to improve the local skills system, update the curriculum and invest in training facilities - ultimately boosting the region's economic growth and ensuring that local businesses have access to a skilled workforce. The LSIP focuses on engaging with local employers to identify and address skills gaps and is part of the UK government's Skills Accelerator initiative, aimed at reshaping the technical skills system to better align with the needs of the local labour market and economy.

The College is actively engaged in preparations for a **Lancashire Combined County Authority (CCA)** Devolution Deal which is expected to include the devolution of adult skills budgets. Under the banner of The Lancashire Colleges Group (TLC) the College is working closely with the emerging CCA team to demonstrate the impact that adult education and skills provision has on individuals, the local communities and the economy. The College is supporting the CCA team to consider their skills strategy and to identify the opportunities and additional flexibilities that devolution can bring, allowing the sector to better support local priorities and respond to emerging needs.

Devolution will lead to more efficient allocation of resources, as decisions about funding and policy are made closer to the communities they affect. This will result in more targeted investments in education and training, ultimately benefiting students and the local economy. By being key players in the CCA, the College can also influence policy-making and ensure that our expertise in education and skills training is recognised and utilised, ultimately empowering us to be even more responsive, innovative and effective in meeting the needs of our community.





The College plays a crucial role in the **UK's Modern Industrial Strategy 2025** by fostering skills development, innovation and local economic growth. We collaborate with businesses and industry bodies to align the curriculum with the needs of key sectors, ensuring that students are equipped with relevant skills for the workforce. The College also supports the **'Growth-driving sectors'**, by providing targeted training programmes. Through these efforts, the College helps to build a skilled, adaptable workforce and stimulate economic development and social mobility in the community.

The curriculum offered by the College is subject to constant review, the latest 'Curriculum and Assessment Review' (CAR) led by Professor Becky Francis, aims to ensure that the national curriculum and statutory assessment system are fit for purpose and meet the needs of all children and young people. By aligning the curriculum with the needs of the modern workforce, colleges can ensure that students are better prepared for employment and further study. The review emphasises the importance of core subjects while also promoting a broader range of disciplines, including academic and technical education. This approach helps colleges cater to diverse student interests and career aspirations, fostering a more inclusive and adaptable learning environment. Additionally, the review aims to refine assessment methods to better capture student progress and achievements across a wide spectrum of skills.

This can lead to more personalised learning experiences and improved support for students with varying needs. By implementing these changes, colleges can enhance their educational offerings, boost student engagement, and ultimately contribute to the overall development of social mobility within their communities.

The new Labour government have created Skills England, a new body to bring together central and local government, businesses, training providers and unions to meet skills needs across the UK. Skills England is set to play a pivotal role in transforming the skills landscape for colleges across the UK. By unifying efforts from various stakeholders, including businesses, central and local government, colleges, universities and training providers, Skills England aims to address existing skills gaps and prepare the workforce for future economic growth. Colleges will be vital partners in this initiative, helping to deliver targeted training programs that align with the needs of key sectors identified in the Industrial Strategy. This collaboration will ensure that students are equipped with the skills necessary to secure better jobs and contribute to the nation's productivity improvements. Overall, Skills England's efforts will support the College in providing high-quality education and training that meets the evolving demands of the labour market. It is critical that our Strategic Plan aligns with and delivers on this key government priority.

train

Lancashire 2050 framework

Lancashire Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)

Lancashire Combined County Authority (CCA)



Place

Blackburn College is located within the town centre boundaries of Blackburn providing good access by public transport, road, and rail. Blackburn sits within Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council which is a unitary authority within the Lancashire footprint.

Relationships with the Council are strong and we continue to work closely together to ensure that no one gets left behind and we see our diverse communities as a source of strength. The Council has funded a number of projects at the College to ensure that we have facilities that benefit the communities we serve, together we are determined to deliver a brighter future for Blackburn.

The College student community broadly mirrors the makeup of the Borough with 58% white and 42% from ethnic minority groups. Blackburn with Darwen is the ninth in the list of the most deprived local authority districts in England, with the highest proportion of neighbourhoods in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods nationally (2019 English Indices of Deprivation).

In Blackburn with Darwen, the population size has increased by 5.0%, from around 147,500 in the 2011 census to 154,800 in the 2021 census, this is lower than the overall increase for England (6.6%), but higher than the neighbouring borough of Hyndburn which only increased by 1.8%. In 2021, Blackburn with Darwen ranked 133rd for total population out of 309 local authority areas in England, which is a fall of three places in a decade. As of 2021, Blackburn with Darwen is the 19th most densely populated of the North West's 39 local authority areas. There has been an increase of 18% in people aged 65 years and over, compared to 20.1% nationally and an increase of 3.3% in people aged 15 to 64 years, plus an increase of 2.9% in children aged under 15 years.

Blackburn and its surrounding areas epitomise the journey that post-industrial Pennine Lancashire has been on in recent years, striving to address decades of under-employment, eroding social cohesion and financial instability. The latest ONS data from 2023, shows that Blackburn with Darwen has the highest level of economic inactivity of all the local authorities in Lancashire, with 29.5% of people aged 16-64, which is significantly higher than the national rate of 21%. At 4.8%, the unemployment rate in the borough is above the national level of 3.4%. Gross median weekly pay is £528 in Blackburn with Darwen versus the national average of £604.

People who work in Blackburn with Darwen have on average higher earnings than those who live in Blackburn with Darwen. This suggests that people commute into the borough for some of the better-paid jobs rather than these being taken by residents, who have on average fewer higher-level qualifications, or no qualifications compared to regional and national averages.

Blackburn is listed as the ninth most deprived local authority in the country, with the neighbouring boroughs of Burnley being eighth and Hyndburn being 21st, therefore the majority of students and apprentices are from the most economically deprived local areas (2019 English Indices of Deprivation). In Blackburn with Darwen 63% of students achieved a grade 4 or above in English and maths GCSE upon leaving school (2023 figures). Overall Blackburn with Darwen performs above the national average on the Progress 8 measure of attainment at Key Stage 4, although there are significant differences between progress in Blackburn with Darwen's schools. On overall attainment, Blackburn with Darwen scores 45.0, just above the all England average score of 44.7 (2023 figures).

As such, over half of students and apprentices enrol at the College without having achieved five GCSEs at grades 4-9, including English and mathematics. In Blackburn with Darwen, 9.1% of the local population have no qualifications compared to the national average of 6.6%. The proportion of working age (16-64) residents in the borough who have a level 4 qualification or above has seen a gradual increase in recent years, currently standing at 28.9% compared to 21.9% in 2011. This gradual increase mirrors the regional trend, however the borough figure remains below the regional level.

Based on the 2023 ONS data, Blackburn with Darwen has over 6,095 active businesses, an increase since the last data set and 10% above the national average, the vast majority of which are classed as micro-businesses. The Borough has an entrepreneurial culture with a business start-up rate higher than Lancashire as a whole.

There are 77,000 employees in jobs in Blackburn with Darwen, seven in ten jobs are in health and social work, manufacturing, retail and wholesale, education, administration and support services, and construction. Health and Social Work is the biggest area of employment in the area, with large employers including East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust and Blackburn with Darwen Council, both of which the College has strong partnerships with.

29.5%

Aged 16-64

are economically inactive

8.5%
higher than the
national average

9.1%

have no qualifications

higher than the national
average of 6.6%

58% White
42% Ethnic Minority

Reflective of the
local community

7/10 jobs in Blackburn with Darwen are in:

Health & Social Work

Manufacturing

Retail &
Wholesale

Education

Construction

Administration &
Support Services



Our Strategic Planning Process

The Strategic Plan for 2025-2028 has been developed following consultation with Governors, Staff, Students, local stakeholders and employers.

Blackburn College is outward facing ensuring key strategic relationships and active engagement in the Skills Strategy, through direct and regular collaboration with key anchor institutions such as the unitary authority, East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust, local schools and the business community.

A series of workshops were held with both the Governors and the College Leadership Team to discuss the strategy for the next three years and inform the objectives.

The plan for the next three years focuses on three strategic pillars of activity:

The College's strategic planning process is designed to ensure that clear, achievable goals are set and effective strategies are developed to reach them. Based on the College's strategic position, clear measurable pillars, that align with our mission and vision must be set. These pillars guide our efforts and provide a roadmap for achieving the long-term goals.

- **Be Exceptional**
- **Be Future Focused**
- **Be Work Ready**



Student Focused
Quality
Innovation
Digital Transformation
Finance and Resources
Sustainability



Be Exceptional Be Future Focused Be Work Ready

Cross-cutting themes are essential elements that intersect with multiple strategic priorities, ensuring a holistic and integrated approach to achieving the overall goals of the Strategic Plan. The cross-cutting themes run through everything that the College does:

Student Focused:

Ensuring that the student experience is the focus of every decision

Quality: Ensuring that the College delivers the best results for the students

Innovation: Encouraging continuous improvement and the adoption of new technologies and methodologies to stay ahead in a rapidly changing world

Digital Transformation:

Integrating digital tools and technologies to improve efficiency, accessibility, and the overall user experience

Finance and Resources:

Ensuring that Finances remain strong and resource utilisation is effective and efficient

Sustainability:

Ensuring that all initiatives and activities are environmentally sustainable and contribute to long-term carbon reduction

All of these themes are supported by our Mission, Vision and Values and deliver a sustainable college for the future.



Strategic Aim

To embed a culture of continuous improvement, innovation and excellence in all aspects of what we do.

Key Actions:

- 1. Professional Development:** Invest in ongoing professional development for staff to ensure they are equipped with the right skills, knowledge and industry experience to deliver the highest quality education
- 2. Student Development:** Focus on the development of students by offering a wide range of extracurricular activities, work experience, leadership opportunities and support services – ensuring our students are ready for work / further study – create the Blackburn College Student
- 3. Build on Market Leading Solid Partnerships:** Strengthen partnerships with stakeholders, employers and community organisations to provide students with real-world learning opportunities and career pathways – we will be the partner of choice
- 4. Strong links with Schools and Employers:** Ensure our curriculum meets the needs of employers and our brand and reputation make us the provider of choice for schools
- 5. Excellent Communication:** Strengthen our communications, developing an exceptional Blackburn College culture
- 6. Community Engagement:** Actively lead in initiatives that benefit our community, foster community cohesion, build aspirations and enable social mobility

Expected Outcomes:

- Consistently high student achievement and satisfaction
- Exceptional reputation and recognition as a leader in education and delivering against the government priorities
- Stronger community and industry connections
- Improved staff satisfaction and retention

Strategic Aim

To prepare students for the future by adopting cutting-edge technologies, innovative teaching methods, and forward-thinking practices into the educational experience.

Key Actions:

1. Being Employer informed and engaged by supporting **economic growth** through working with employers and other stakeholders to co-create programmes which meet current and future education and workforce demands
2. Delivering Employer Led Future Focused Curriculum
 - Ensure all our courses have **clear progression routes** and lead to jobs / further study; (strong destinations data)
 - **Increased number** of Higher Level and Degree Level Apprenticeships
 - Ensure the **best outcomes** for students at all levels
 - Target **growth** across all areas of the curriculum
 - Further respond to local needs by seeking to **re-engage** those who are not in employment, education or training (NEET).
 - Agilely respond to continuous **curriculum reform**
3. Embracing Digital and AI, enhancing quality and increasing productivity by **embedding AI** and process improvements throughout teaching and support activities
4. Being Distinctive and progressive
 - Continue to develop the campus by delivering **Industry-standard facilities** in all areas
 - Sustainability – working collaboratively towards an **environmentally sustainable agenda**
 - Continue to build the brand and reputation, by **increasing market share** and being the **partner of choice** for schools and businesses
 - Deliver outcomes in the **top five percent nationally**

Expected Outcomes:

- Graduates with advanced technological skills and innovative thinking
- Increased student engagement and improved learning outcomes
- Stronger partnerships with industry leaders and technology innovators
- A campus and culture that values sustainability and lifelong learning
- Students prepared to navigate and succeed in a rapidly changing global landscape

Strategic Aim

To equip students with the essential skills, knowledge and behaviours required to thrive in the world of work and to foster lifelong career development.

Key Actions:

- 1. Curriculum Integration:** Embed employability skills across all programs, ensuring that students develop knowledge, skills and behaviours, including critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, confidence, collaboration and resilience
- 2. Work-Based Learning:** Expand opportunities for Work Placements and industry projects to provide practical experience and enhance job readiness
- 3. Employer Engagement:** Lead and support strong partnerships with local and national employers to align educational offerings with industry needs, skills priorities and standards
- 4. Work Ready Skills Development:** Offer workshops and training sessions focused on developing skills such as leadership, teamwork, adaptability, and emotional intelligence
- 5. Alumni Network:** Leverage the alumni network to provide mentorship, networking opportunities and career guidance for current students
- 6. Continuous Feedback:** Implement a system for continuous feedback from employers and students to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant and responsive to the evolving job market

Expected Outcomes:

- Improvement to positive destinations data
- Exceptional student satisfaction with career support services
- Strong relationships with industry partners
- Students equipped with a comprehensive skill set that meets employer expectations

Targets for Strategic Plan 2025-28

Target	Measure
Student Experience: Focus on providing a supportive and engaging environment that promotes student success and well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overall satisfaction rate >92% on internal surveys - Achieving >85% on HE National Student Survey (NSS) for overall satisfaction (Q27)
Teaching and Learning: Continue to invest in professional development for staff and adopt innovative teaching methods to ensure exceptional quality of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Innovative range of CPD activities - Satisfaction rate from staff >95% - Quality of Education Reviews completed for every school
Curriculum Development: Employer informed and co-created curriculum to meet the evolving needs of current and future job opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase number of Industry Boards in place - Improved destination data
Student Success: Develop knowledge, skills and behaviours to support students to secure exceptional job roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deliver exceptional student achievement rates - Improved destinations in the 'growth-driving' sectors - Improved internal progression rates
Digital Innovation: Integrate technology into the learning experience and support services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrate AI into the curriculum, teaching practice and business processes
Community Engagement: Support and work collaboratively with stakeholders and employers to lead and develop community development and student opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Key stakeholder collaboration, initiatives and projects - Increase the number of Employers Engaged through work experience and Apprenticeships.
Learning Environment: Continue to upgrade our modern, inclusive campus to facilitate the development of exceptional knowledge, skills and behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deliver the annual capital plan - Industry standard facilities
Financial Sustainability: Ensure the College's financial health is sustainable through efficient resource management and diversified funding sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintain Outstanding Financial Health - Meet FE Commissioner metrics - Secure external grant funding
Environmental Responsibility: Increase sustainability and reduce carbon footprint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuous progress on FE Climate Change Road Map - Reduction in carbon footprint

Blackburn College
Feilden Street
Blackburn
BB2 1LH

01254 292929

blackburn.ac.uk



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