

# Accountability Agreement 2024-25

## 1. Purpose

Our mission is *to play a leading role for East Kent in developing the economic and social prosperity of the diverse communities we serve.*

As an Ofsted 'Outstanding' provider, East Kent Colleges (EKC) Group provides inspirational education for young people and adults across the six districts and boroughs of East Kent. Our purpose is to provide inclusive and accessible education that raises the ambitions of our students and enables them to succeed in their chosen pathway, whilst ensuring the curriculum we deliver is clearly linked to skills priorities at national, regional and local level. We are passionate about providing more technical education opportunities for children and young people, which includes working closely with our sister Multi Academy Trust, the EKC Schools Trust. We are a partnership driven education group with a strong sense of civic leadership responsibility and our Strategic Plan sets out five clear goals:

1. Create a revolutionary model of education, delivering a new range of nationally recognised education solutions for the benefit of East Kent and beyond;
2. Deliver inspirational, inclusive and purposeful education that enables young people and adults to achieve their ambitions and meet the needs of East Kent;
3. Successfully integrate Ashford College and Spring Lane into the EKC Group family, developing the provision to enable the Group to truly meet the needs of the whole of East Kent;
4. Continue to invest in industry-standard facilities and first-class Group services that support our business units to deliver aspirational, relevant and high quality learning experiences;
5. Ensure that EKC Group is an employer of choice and responds appropriately to the social, ethical and moral issues of its communities, supporting the development of well-rounded and responsible young people.

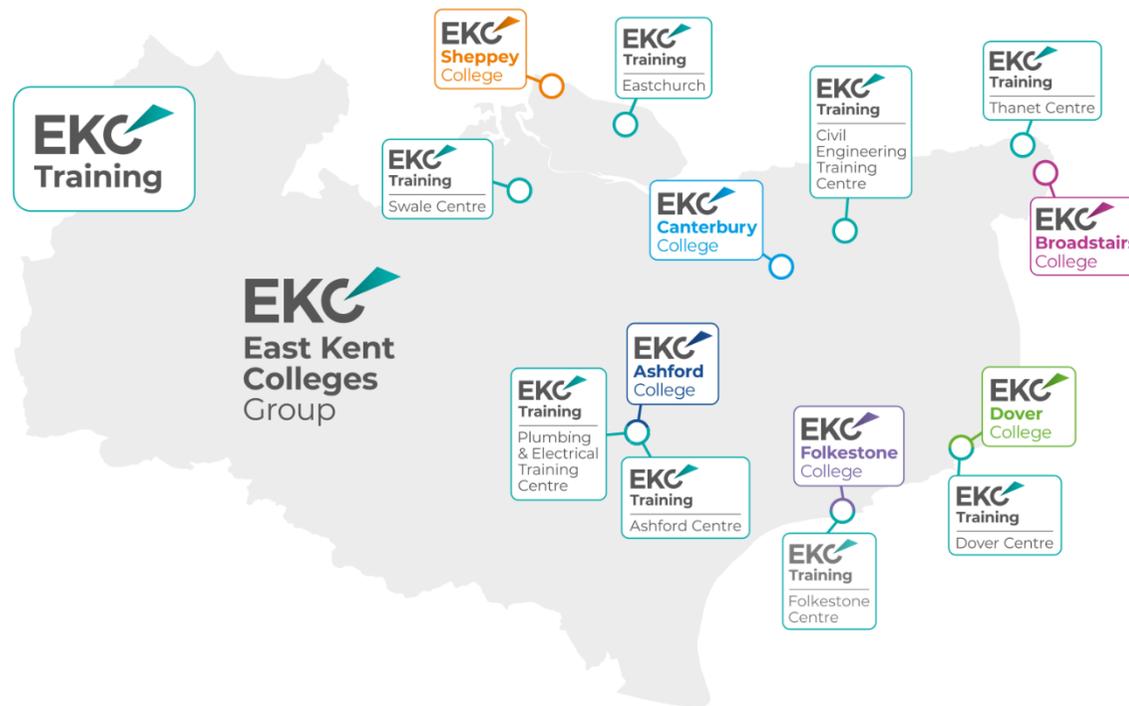
Our Strategic Plan was approved by our Governing Body on 30 June 2020 and can be found at <https://www.ekcgroup.ac.uk/group/about-us/our-strategy>. We will be developing a new Strategic Plan for 2025-29 during the next year, working closely with our key stakeholders to ensure that we continue to fulfil our mission.

With reference to the Local Needs Duty that all Colleges in England are required to meet, since the publication of our Strategic Plan national skills policy has developed further, therefore this annual accountability agreement takes account of our response to these longer-term developments, including Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs). We have worked very successfully with Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce and the other two FE Colleges in Kent and Medway (MidKent College and North Kent College), to drive forward the LSIP agenda and to meet the needs that have been identified in priority sectors.

EKC Group is also continuing to implement a significant capital investment programme, drawing on funds such as the FE Capital Transformation Fund, T Level Capital Funding, and Levelling Up (working closely with our District and Borough Council partners). This investment will support an improved infrastructure across the Group's Colleges to deliver a specialised curriculum linked to local needs.

## 2. Context and place

Since 2014, EKC Group has grown rapidly from a single-site College in Broadstairs to a family of six Colleges and an EKC Training business unit serving the whole of East Kent and each of its local communities. The Group has worked closely in partnership with key stakeholders to ensure that each of its local Colleges meets the economic, skills and social needs of its communities, covering the districts and boroughs of Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone and Hythe, Swale, and Thanet. Each College has a Local Board which includes representation from local employers and the relevant local authority. As the Group serves a distinct geographic area, its Colleges and EKC Training business unit deliver a co-ordinated curriculum provision, providing clear progression pathways, whilst specialising where appropriate to meet local needs and maintaining a College presence in each of our six districts and boroughs. The Group also works to strategically meet the requirements of 'communities of need' such as those learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), English as an Additional Language (EAL) and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This approach ensures the Group can carry out its mission and appropriately serve each of its communities.



**Business and economic profile:** in common with the rest of Kent, 90% of East Kent businesses employ nine or fewer people, but these micro-businesses account for just 31% of employment, whilst businesses with 50 or more employees account for nearly half (46%). Current employment is focused on health, retail, education, hospitality, and manufacturing, however district, borough and county stakeholders have identified the following priority sectors that are important to the economy:

- Manufacturing
- Visitor / experience economy
- Creative and cultural / digital tech
- Development and construction (including supporting anticipated high levels of house building and infrastructure projects)

- Health and social care

**Social needs:** there are major social challenges to be addressed:

- 96,000 East Kent working age residents are on benefits, including 25,000 people on Universal Credit in work. The picture varies by local authority area, but Thanet has the highest level of people on benefits.
- There are 25,000 children living in low-income families in East Kent, and the proportion of children in low-income families is higher than the average for the South East region in all six East Kent Districts.
- There are also significant pockets of deprivation: four of the six East Kent Districts (Dover, Folkestone and Hythe, Swale, and Thanet) are in the bottom quartile nationally in terms of the employment deprivation measure.

The resident qualifications profile is lower when compared nationally:

- Fewer residents have qualifications at level 3 or above (54% compared with 57%)
- Significantly fewer have qualifications at level 4 or above (32% compared with 40%).
- 40,000 East Kent residents have no qualifications at all.

The proportion of working age residents with no qualifications is slightly higher in Swale and Thanet.

**Young People:** Following a period of contraction, the number of 16-19 year olds is expected to significantly increase over the next 5 years. By 2029 there will be around 15% more 16-19 year olds across Kent & Medway than now, an increase of nearly 8,000 potential students across East Kent, with the highest growth in Ashford. EKC Group has already secured an increase of 700 16-19 students in 2023/24, with growth at all six Colleges.

The Local Skills Improvement Plan provides more information and can be found at <https://kentemployerskillsplan.org/resources/>

Other useful reference documents include:

The Kent and Medway Workforce Skills Evidence Base <https://kentemployerskillsplan.org/resources/>

Key data and information about the whole of Kent can be found at <https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/facts-and-figures-about-Kent/summary-of-kent-facts-and-figures#tab-1,2,3>

### 3. Approach to developing the accountability agreement

EKC Group already has a clear Strategic Plan, developed in consultation with our key stakeholders. We have ensured that the aims and objectives in this Accountability Agreement align with our Strategic Plan. As a key anchor institution in East Kent, it is important to note that our strategy sets out a wider range of longer-term goals and objectives. These include goals and objectives related to our civic leadership responsibilities (for example sustainability), capital investment, and to establish the Group as an employer of choice. In developing the aims and objectives in this Accountability Agreement, EKC Group has carefully considered national, regional and local priorities, particularly where these directly align.

Whilst EKC Group currently delivers a wide range of programmes in priority sectors, we know we need to do even more to meet rapidly changing and increasing needs. As a member of Kent Further Education (KFE), we have worked closely with Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce and the other two FE Colleges in Kent and Medway (MidKent College and North Kent College), to drive forward the LSIP agenda. This includes securing £9m of government investment in Strategic Development Fund and Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) programmes across KFE to develop facilities and curriculum to meet the needs in the priority sectors of Construction, Education, Engineering, Fresh Food and Produce, and Health and Social Care. This also includes the cross-cutting themes of decarbonisation and digitalisation identified in the LSIP. New EKC Group facilities include:

- Two new Learning Centres to support engineering and manufacturing employers to decarbonise and for students to be trained in robotics and other technologies.
- Six immersive classrooms that can be connected to six others that have been installed at MidKent College and North Kent College. These can be used for a range of innovative ways to meet skills needs, including addressing tutor shortages by sharing resources and teaching expertise, employer masterclasses, and VR/AR content.
- Three Assistive Technology demonstration spaces at three of our Colleges, which will enable students to learn about how this technology can be used to support Care service users in a range of settings. Employers will also be able to experience these spaces and how the technology can be used in their own settings and to train staff through two new digital skills and assistive technology pathways.

In addition, we are continuing to work directly with employers to identify and respond to specific occupational priorities, for example through our rail maintenance programme and our Apprenticeships programme.

Alongside skills and economic needs EKC Group ensures it is directly meeting the needs of learners. For example, the Group delivers a two-year Level 2 programme to give greater life chances to learners upon completion and raise their aspirations.

EKC Group has also developed a specialisation plan for its Colleges for Level 3 and above that aligns its curriculum offer with the needs of its districts and boroughs, whilst ensuring that there are accessible progression pathways for students.

## *Engagement with key stakeholders*

From its formation, EKC Group has worked in a highly collaborative manner with its network of partners for the benefit of our communities. This has remained a core strength of the Group, with the development and consolidation of strategic partnerships with many organisations from a wide range of sectors and areas. In developing this Accountability Statement, we have consulted with key stakeholders, including Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, local authorities, and the other two further education colleges in Kent.

The Group will continue to work closely with a range of key stakeholders to achieve its strategic objectives. These include:

- Kent County Council;
- District and Borough Councils;
- Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce;
- Other business representative groups and networks;
- Local employers;
- Third sector organisations;
- Government departments;
- Local MPs.

## *Engagement with other providers in the area*

EKC Group collaborates closely with the other two General Further Education Colleges in Kent and Medway, North Kent College and MidKent College. All three institutions are members of KFE, which is a pro-active partnership of FE Colleges that acts as a voice for the county's Further Education sector and to ensure it delivers the skills and training required. In addition to the LSIF, there are a range of collaborative projects and events, including staff conferences and skills competitions. EKC Group also has a strong national reputation; the Chair and CEO are National Leaders, and the Group has been granted chartered status as a member of the Chartered Institute for Further Education, working alongside industry to shape and influence the national skills system.

EKC Group also works with other providers in the area, including:

**Schools** – a selective education system operates in East Kent and every school has a sixth form, which has created a highly competitive environment. This system reduces schools' willingness to collaborate, however where possible we do work with schools, supporting them with the implementation of provider access legislation (the Baker Clause). This has included providing technical and vocational taster sessions and learning opportunities for pre-16s, as well as working with them to successfully transition learners into College.

**Universities** – we have an agreement with the University of Kent to deliver a small number of Higher Education programmes. We also work with the other East Kent-based institution, Canterbury Christ Church University. This has included joint work on a skills and workforce development plan that helped to secure significant inward investment in Kent from a large employer.

**Independent Training Providers** – Whilst the Group does not currently subcontract, we do consider working with private providers where we are unable to meet a specific local need. We have also worked with a range of community-based providers on key projects to meet local needs, such as the UK Community Renewal Fund and to deliver Community Learning.

## 4. Contribution to national, regional and local priorities

Aims and objectives	Contribution
1. Ensure that over 90% of students achieve a positive destination in 2024/25	Enable our students to succeed in their chosen technical and vocational programme and contribute to meeting the skills needs of East Kent
2. Ensure that all our 16-19 study programme students, over 7,000 in 2024/25, gain core transferable skills through a combination of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social action</li> <li>- Industry placements</li> <li>- Core transferrable skills</li> <li>- Embedded digital skills</li> <li>- Participation in skills competitions</li> <li>- A sustainability education programme</li> </ul>	Dedicated hours in our curriculum blueprint will develop core transferrable skills for all 16-19 students, which is a national priority. The LSIP also identified a need to invest in soft transferrable skills.
3. Deliver Free Courses for Jobs Level 3 programmes to 70 learners in 2024/25	Adults will gain the skills they need to improve their job prospects and succeed in priority sectors, whilst supporting the economy.
4. Deliver 14 new programmes to 30 employers in 2024/25 to meet the needs of LSIP priority sectors	<p>These programmes have been developed with MidKent and North Kent College as part of the LSIF project and will meet the needs identified in the LSIP in priority sectors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction (green energy and retrofit)</li> <li>• Engineering (Industry 4.0)</li> </ul>

Aims and objectives	Contribution
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health and Social Care (digital skills and assistive technology)</li> </ul>
<p>5. Deliver 470 Apprenticeships in 28 standards in 2024/25 to support the current and future workforce of East Kent</p>	<p>Contribute to meeting local and specific sector and occupational needs that have been identified by employers</p>
<p>6. Continue to implement our specialisation plan, including 6 new T Level Occupational Specialisms as they become available in the government rollout, with a target of delivering to an additional 180 students in 2024/25</p>	<p>Continue to implement curriculum specialisation that meets national, regional and local needs</p> <p>Builds on the 16 Occupational Specialisms already introduced, with 570 students on existing Year 1 and 2 Programmes</p>
<p>7. In partnership with Kent County Council, establish a pilot centre to meet identified unmet needs for alternative provision, particularly SEMH</p>	<p>Contribute to social and economic inclusivity by supporting learners into fulfilling careers, whilst meeting skills needs</p>
<p>8. Utilise the new flexibilities in the Tailored Learning fund, invest £350,000 to engage learners furthest away from the labour market and work with employers to deliver new non-regulated programmes to meet their needs</p>	<p>Contribute to the social and economic development of our local communities</p>

## 5. Local needs duty

EKC Group operates a Committee and Local Board structure that has recently received a Beacon Award for Excellence in Governance. Through its Local Board and Education Committee structure, the governing body regularly reviews how well local needs are being met. As mentioned in section 3 above, the Group works closely with other key stakeholders to review local needs and how these can be met collaboratively. EKC Group also received a 'Strong' judgement from Ofsted for meeting skills needs. Through this comprehensive system of review, a range of new or continuing strategic actions will be implemented, including:

- A new Strategic Plan for 2025-29
- A new Property Strategy to ensure that the Group builds on the significant investment already made in delivering a modern, sustainable estate, with curriculum facilities that support local specialisms
- Continuing to ensure that local stakeholders are represented on our Local Boards to support and challenge our Colleges and EKC Training to meet local needs
- Continuing to work closely with MidKent College and North Kent College on meeting the needs identified in the LSIP and any major inward investment projects
- Continuing to work with our key employers to deliver against shared objectives, reflected in memoranda of understanding
- Seeking to work collaboratively with Kent County Council to meet the needs of SEND learners, including investment in new provision

## 6. Corporation Statement

On behalf of the EKC Group corporation, it is hereby confirmed that this document reflects an agreed statement of purpose, aims and objectives, and fulfils the statutory Local Needs Duty, as approved by the corporation on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

**Charles Buchanan**



**Chair of Governors**

**Graham Razey**



**Chief Executive Officer**

## 7. Relevant Supporting Documentation

[Kent and Medway Workforce Skills Evidence Base](#)

[LSIP](#)

[EKC Group Strategic Plan](#)

[EKC Group Curriculum 2030 Research](#)

[EKC Group Financial Statements](#)

[EKC Group Ofsted Inspection Reports](#)

[Pathways for All – Kent 16 to 19 Review](#)

[Levelling Up Fund projects - Margate Digital, Sheerness Revival, Dover Beacon, Ashford Film Studios](#)