

Accountability Agreement 2025-26

1. Introduction

Our mission is *to empower our communities to develop their economic and social prosperity in a rapidly changing world.*

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 new Strategic Plan 2025-29 sets out five clear goals:

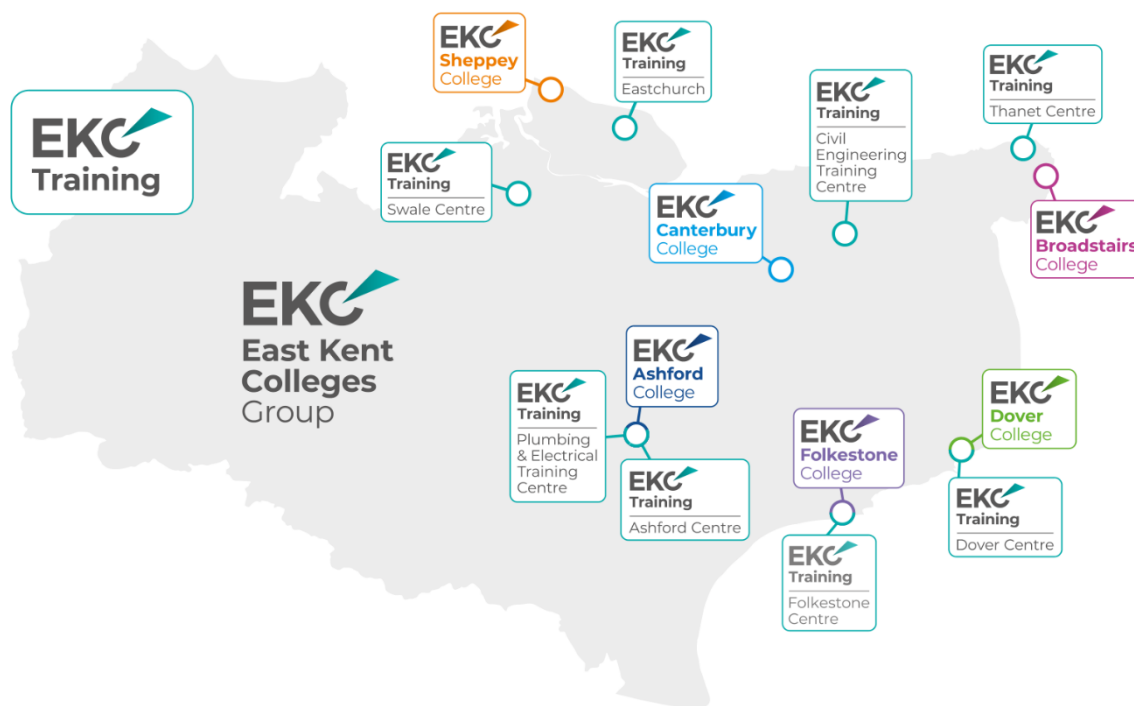
1. Building on our existing strengths, deliver a wider range of inspirational, inclusive and accessible education provision that meets the needs of our communities;
2. Ensure our learners are equipped for their next stage of life and work in a rapidly changing world;
3. Develop and deliver a range of exceptional business support and training solutions, establishing long-term partnerships with our local employers to enable them to grow and innovate;
4. Develop and invest in our people to enable them to prosper in their roles and careers, delivering transformational education and services for our communities;
5. Build on our investment in a sustainable physical and digital infrastructure, ensuring that our facilities, services and learning environments meet the needs of students and industry.

Our Strategic Plan was approved by our Governing Body on 25th March 2025 and can be found at <https://www.ekcgroup.ac.uk/group/about-us/our-strategy>.

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 College and EKC Training meet 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 Business Unit has a Local Board which includes representation from local employers and the relevant local authority. As the Group serves a distinct geographic area, it delivers 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://kentemployersskillsplan.org/resources/>

Other useful reference documents include:

The Kent and Medway Workforce Skills Evidence Base
<https://kentemployersskillsplan.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 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. We have also worked in collaboration to address the cross-cutting themes of decarbonisation and digitalisation identified in the LSIP. Investment in 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 are enabling students to learn about how this technology can be used to support Care service users in a range of settings. Employers are engaging with these demonstration spaces, seeing how the technology can be used in the context of their own settings. We are also upskilling employees and sector entrants through two new digital skills and assistive technology pathways.

We are continuing to work directly with employers to identify and respond to specific occupational priorities, for example through our rail maintenance programme and Apprenticeships programme. We have also implemented a specialisation plan for our Colleges for Level 3 and above qualifications that aligns the curriculum offer with the needs of our districts and boroughs, whilst ensuring that there are accessible progression pathways for students.

This annual accountability agreement takes account of our response to wider policy, including devolution. We are working closely with other local authorities to ensure that the planned local government reorganisation meets the needs of our communities. In addition, we are supporting the National Health Service and the Department for Work and Pensions, to provide support for public sector restructuring.

EKC Group continues to implement an ambitious capital investment programme, drawing on funds such as the FE Capital Transformation Fund and Levelling Up Fund (working closely

with our District and Borough Council partners). This £55m investment over the last five years has supported an improved infrastructure across the Group's Colleges to deliver a specialised curriculum linked to local needs, including:

- £9m 16-19 Capacity Fund and Group match funded extension of Ashford College, providing engineering and built environment workshops and general classrooms
- £7m Levelling Up Fund extension to Sheppey College providing additional engineering, logistics and creative training spaces
- £6.5m Levelling Up Fund Margate Digital campus on Margate high street as part of a wider regeneration programme
- £4.6m investment of FE Transformation and Energy Efficiency grants to upgrade poorer condition buildings across the Group to reduce energy costs

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. In 2023/24, this new programme led to a 53% increase in the number of young people achieving a Level 2 qualification.

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 Agreement, 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. 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 work in partnership with the Kent and Medway universities on key initiatives, including the Local Skills Improvement Plan and inward investment and large infrastructure projects such as the Lower Thames Crossing.

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 continue to work with independent training providers through the LSIP, including membership of a 'Solutions Panel' to identify areas of joint working and gaps in provision. We have also worked with a range of community-based providers on key projects to meet local needs.

4. Contribution to national, regional and local priorities

Aims and objectives	KPIs / Outcomes	EKC Group Strategic Goal Ref
1. Deliver 16-19 study programmes and T Levels to meet local needs, equipping our students with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase 16-19 students from 7,249 in 2024/25 to 7,367 in 2025/26 • Increase positive student destinations from 90% to 92% 	Goal 2

Aims and objectives	KPIs / Outcomes	EKC Group Strategic Goal Ref
skills for life and work, enabling them to progress to further learning or careers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number of T Level students by 146 in 2025/26 • Equip our students with core skills through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Social action ○ Work experience ○ Critical digital skills (including AI) ○ Participation in skills competitions ○ Sustainability programmes ○ Innovation and entrepreneurship programmes 	
2. Develop an improved offer for adults that enables them to access the learning and skills they need to enhance their lives, and that meets the needs of our local communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver an increase of 40 new courses to 360 adults in 2025/26 in national and LSIP priority sectors, including Computing, Construction and the Built Environment and Health and Social Care. • 72% of provision will be focused on priority sectors and identified cross-cutting themes (from a baseline of 67%) • Pilot a new programme supporting adults with long-term health conditions explore career and work options in Swale and Thanet working with 60 learners. 	Goal 1
3. Develop and deliver a range of exceptional business support and training solutions, establishing long-term partnerships with our local employers to enable them to grow and innovate	<p>Continue to ensure that more than 50% of Apprenticeship starts are 16-18 year-olds</p> <p>Maintain the number of Apprenticeship starts above 450 (target of 461)</p> <p>Increase Higher Apprenticeships starts from 25 to 37, including one new programme in the priority sector of Education (Specialist Teaching Assistant Level 5)</p> <p>Develop and deliver 3 new courses that support digital skills needs that cut across all sectors, including Artificial Intelligence, Cybersecurity, and other digital skills.</p> <p>Utilisation of our Innovation Kitchen by local food businesses for new product development and</p>	Goal 3

Aims and objectives	KPIs / Outcomes	EKC Group Strategic Goal Ref
	<p>production leads to 60% occupancy by July 2026</p> <p>Support local businesses in the Building Services sector to develop their Green Credentials with the expansion of new programmes to include Retrofit programmes, Air and Ground Source Heat Pumps and Low Temperature Water Systems with a total target of 94 learners.</p>	
<p>4. Further develop our place-based strategic work, in partnership with key stakeholders, including supporting LSIP 2.0 priorities, the restructuring of local public services and preparing for devolution</p>	<p>Support the restructuring of local public services (NHS and local government reorganisation)</p> <p>Work with Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce and other KFE Colleges to support LSIP 2.0 priorities, including successful securing any LSIF funding opportunities.</p> <p>Through our existing Memoranda of Understanding, co-design, develop and deliver bespoke training programmes for each of our six district and borough councils and East Kent Healthcare Partnership to meet their workforce and skills needs, supporting their staff through structural reorganisations</p>	<p>Goals 1 and 3</p>

5. Local needs duty

EKC Group operates a Committee and Local Board structure that received a Beacon Award for Excellence in Governance in 2024. Through its Local Board and Education Committee structure, the governing body regularly reviews how well local needs are being met. EKC Group also received a 'Strong' judgement from Ofsted for meeting skills needs.

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. 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 Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, MidKent College, North Kent College and other providers to meet the needs identified in the LSIP
- Working in partnership with DWP, NHS, Local Authorities, Colleges, Providers, and other key stakeholders on joint policy implementation, place-making, and other initiatives, including Connect to Work (and wider Get Britain Working implementation) and the Kent and Medway Work and Health Strategy
- Working closely with other providers and stakeholders to support any major inward investment and infrastructure projects, for example the Lower Thames Crossing
- 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 24th June 2025.

Charles Buchanan



Lucy McLeod



Chair of Governors

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](#)