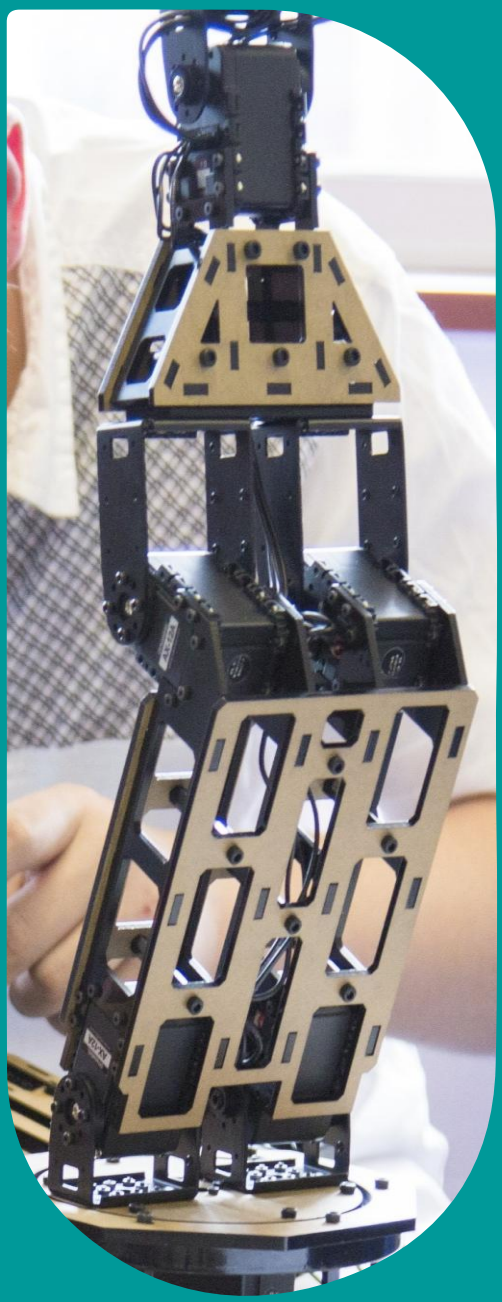






EAST SUSSEX COLLEGE

Annual Accountability Statement 2026-27

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Introduction

East Sussex College Group (ESCG) is a values-driven general further education college serving Eastbourne, Hastings, Lewes and Newhaven. We work with around 14,000 learners and more than 1,000 employers, civic partners and education providers each year, with the ambition to be a key driver of East Sussex regeneration through academic, technical and vocational excellence. Since our formation in 2018 we have built a curriculum that responds directly to the needs of learners, employers and communities, achieving a Good Ofsted judgement in January 2025.

This Statement is aligned to the college's Strategic Plan 2025–2028 and informed by the Curriculum and Skills Master Plan and SEND Master Plan 2025–2028, together setting out a framework for ambitious, inclusive and employer-responsive education structured around ambition, partnership and impact.

Our Vision & Mission

Our vision
To empower and sustain our communities through exceptional education and skills development.

Our mission
To provide an exceptional student experience through expert teaching, inspiring facilities and our ambitious partnerships.

Our Strategic Objectives

The Strategic Plan 2025–2028 is built around five strategic objectives:

Curriculum & Skills	People & Culture	Reputation & Partnership	Estates & Digital Transformation	Resources & Investment

The longer-term strategic outcomes arising from our most recent Local Needs Duty review are to increase participation and progression in priority technical and higher-level skills; strengthen employer-led curriculum design; improve outcomes for learners with SEND and those experiencing disadvantage; expand provision in sectors aligned to LSIP and national skills priorities. These outcomes inform the actions and targets set out in this Statement.

Inclusion and equity remain central to our mission. Guided by our values of Positivity, Respect, Opportunity, Unity and Diversity, we are committed to a college community in which every learner is supported to develop the knowledge, skills, behaviours and confidence to progress successfully.



Executive Summary

East Sussex College Group provides an inclusive curriculum from Pre-Entry to Level 6. In 2025–26 the college has supported over 14,000 learners, including approximately 5,500 aged 16–18, over 1,250 apprentices, and more than 6,000 adult learners across Adult Skills Fund, ESOL, community learning, Skills Bootcamps and tailored learning provision. Over 900 higher education students study through our partnerships with the University of East Anglia, the University of Brighton and a developing relationship with the University of Sussex. The college also delivers 14–16 alternative provision on behalf of East Sussex County Council (ESCC), alongside SEND and High Needs provision across all campuses.

The college serves communities with significant socio-economic challenges. Hastings is the 14th most deprived local authority in England (Indices of Deprivation 2025) and the most deprived authority in the South East. East Sussex has the oldest age profile of any English shire county, with 26.6% of residents aged 65 or over against a national average of 18.7%. Approximately 35% of working-age residents hold qualifications at Level 4 or above, against a South East regional figure closer to 47%. These conditions shape both the urgency and the design of our curriculum response.

Our approach for 2026–27 is framed by the four cross-cutting priorities of the Sussex and Brighton LSIP 2026–2029 (currently in draft, awaiting Skills England approval). The LSIP signals a deliberate shift in how the FE system is expected to operate: from courses to pathways, from qualifications to capability, and from individual provider relationships to a coordinated system response. Our strategic objectives for 2026–27 are framed against this direction of travel.

Six strategic objectives are set out in this Statement, mapped to the four LSIP cross-cutting priorities and to FE Sussex collective actions. Headline commitments include: scaling the AI and digital apprenticeship offer with the first cohorts of Level 5/6 digital apprenticeships; embedding sector-contextualised AI capability as an entitlement for all Level 2 and Level 3 learners; redesigning Pre-Entry and Level 1 provision as coherent progression pathways; operationalising the college's internal Priority First Inclusion Framework as a regional reference model; building a stackable micro-credentials offer for in-work upskilling; embedding sustainability as a curriculum entitlement; convening a coordinated FE Sussex response to NEET reduction in Hastings, Eastbourne and Newhaven.

Delivery of the seven priority objectives set out in our 2025–26 Statement was strong. All seven were delivered, with three exceeded: five validated UEA degree programmes against a target of four; over 75 starts on AI apprenticeship programmes against an original target of eight Digital Learning Designer apprentices; and ESOL provision extended into Brighton in addition to the planned Lewes cohort.

This Statement also fulfils our statutory Local Needs Duty. The most recent full review was completed in May 2025; this Statement provides a summative update within the three-year cycle. The conclusions and actions arising from that review continue to direct curriculum planning and are reflected in this Statement's strategic objectives.

Context & Place

The College & its Campuses

East Sussex College Group is a large general further education college operating from five main campuses, all serving distinct communities and labour markets within East Sussex.



Eastbourne is our largest campus, with specialist facilities for construction and engineering, art and photography, motor vehicle, catering and hospitality, and hair, beauty and complementary therapies.
Hastings Station Plaza is a five-storey campus with hair and beauty salons, gym facilities, an aviation training fuselage, the University Centre Hastings and training kitchens serving Coast Restaurant.
Hastings Ore Valley is a modern technical campus with realistic working environments for construction, engineering and automotive training, including IMI-accredited automotive facilities.
Lewes provides science labs, creative and performing arts spaces, sports facilities, and a Creative Skills Studio partnership with Charleston.
Newhaven Marine Workshops supports marine, creative media and technical provision linked to regeneration activity in Newhaven.

Travel-to-learn patterns are predominantly local, with some movement towards Brighton and the wider Sussex area. Travel-to-work patterns reflect strong employment links across health and social care, retail, construction, tourism, public services, digital, creative and small business sectors. The college sits within the East Sussex County Council and Future Skills Sussex LSIP geographies and is not currently within a Mayoral Strategic Authority footprint, though devolution arrangements are developing.

About East Sussex

East Sussex had a population of 560,882 at mid-2024, growing more slowly than England or the South East. The county has the oldest age profile of any English shire: 26.6% of residents are aged 65 or over, against 18.7% nationally, with Rother holding the second-highest 65+ and 85+ proportions of any local authority in England. Over the past decade the 18–29 population has fallen 7.1% while the 65+ group has grown 12.9%; by 2038 the 85+ group is projected to grow a further 82%. The implications for skills supply and replacement demand are direct.

The economy is structurally SME-dominated: of around 23,000 registered businesses, 91% are micro-employers and only 0.2% are large employers. Health and human social work is the single largest employment sector. Major opportunities linked to Gatwick, offshore wind, coastal regeneration and local growth plans point to growing demand in construction, engineering, clean energy, logistics, digital and professional skills.

Labour Market Overview

The South East has the UK's highest employment rate (78.6%, December 2025 to February 2026) and lowest economic inactivity rate (18.1%). East Sussex sits below the regional average on both, with inactivity concentrated among older workers, those with long-term health conditions and people furthest from the labour market. Hastings consistently runs a Claimant Count above the regional average. Employers report recruitment difficulties in health and care, construction and hospitality, often a labour shortage as much as a skills gap.

Cost of training, staff release and limited capacity are persistent barriers to workforce development among the SMEs that dominate the local economy. These barriers are the design rationale for the college's modular, flexible upskilling offer set out in this Statement's strategic objectives.

Workforce Qualifications & Skills

Approximately 35% of working-age residents hold qualifications at Level 4 or above, against a South East figure closer to 47%; around 7% hold no formal qualifications. The Level 4+ gap drives lower earnings, weaker productivity and out-migration of younger residents and therefore provides the case for the college's expansion of HE ,degree apprenticeships and Access to HE through our University Centre, supported by partnerships with the University of East Anglia, the University of Brighton and a developing relationship with the University of Sussex. Cross-cutting skills priorities are addressed through core curriculum entitlements (see Strategic Objectives).

Deprivation

The Indices of Deprivation 2025 confirm the depth of deprivation across coastal East Sussex. Hastings is the 14th most deprived local authority in England and the most deprived in the South East by a clear margin, with one neighbourhood among the ten most deprived nationally. A third of Hastings residents live in the most deprived 10% of areas in England, and 73% live in the most deprived 30%. 27% of Hastings children are affected by income deprivation, against 16% across East Sussex and 10% in Wealden; one in five older people in Hastings are similarly income deprived.

Eastbourne and Newhaven contain pockets of deep deprivation within otherwise less-deprived districts. Rural deprivation in Wealden and Rother manifests as transport barriers and reduced access to opportunity rather than income poverty. The college's coastal and town-centre campuses are intentionally located to be accessible to these communities, and the college's internal Priority First Inclusion Framework gives curriculum and pastoral teams a weighted classification of learner need to ensure highest-need learners receive proportionate support.

Devolution Context

East Sussex sits within the Devolution Priority Programme alongside West Sussex and Brighton & Hove. The Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority was established in 2026, with the mayoral election anticipated from 2028. The college is engaging with the CCA, constituent local authorities, the Employer Representative Body (ERB) and FE Sussex on the skills implications, Adult Skills Fund settlement, LSIP and local growth plan alignment, and coordinated post-16 response at Sussex scale. The system leadership commitments set out in this Statement's strategic objectives including NEET reduction, 14–19 transition and inclusive entry pathways through FE Sussex are the practical evidence of that engagement.

Meeting National, Regional & Local Needs

National Skills Priorities

DfE's January 2026 guidance identifies ten national priority sectors derived from the Skills Needs Analysis, the Industrial Strategy and the Plan for Change. The college's contribution to each is summarised below. Where ESCG does not deliver direct specialist provision, our role is to develop foundational and progression-route capability, recognising the LSIP's framing that the system's job is to build pathways and applied capability, not stand-up discrete sector courses.

National priority sector	ESCG contribution
Advanced manufacturing	Direct provision: Engineering bootcamps, T Level Engineering, engineering apprenticeships at Level 3, engineering pathway through UEA partnership.
Construction	Direct provision across all campuses: Levels 1–3 construction crafts, T Level Construction, plumbing, brickwork, carpentry, retrofit and green skills modules; 20+ construction employer partners for adult upskilling.
Creative industries	Direct provision in creative media, digital media, games, film production, performing arts, music technology, photography; new degree validations 2025–26 in film, games and digital media; Newhaven Marine Workshops creative cluster.
Defence	Indirect provision through engineering, electrical, mechanical, marine, digital and cyber pathways. Sussex sits within reach of the marine engineering cluster, aerospace and precision engineering supply chain.

National priority sector	ESCG contribution
Digital & technologies	Direct provision: T Level Digital, computer and systems development degree, digital apprenticeships at Levels 3–6, AI capability embedded across study programmes (see Strategic Objectives).
Financial services	Direct provision through A Level economics, business, mathematics; progression routes into HE finance and accounting through UEA and University of Brighton partnerships; AAT pathway in development.
Life sciences	Indirect provision through A Level sciences, applied science Level 3, T Level Health and Healthcare Science; progression to HE life sciences through partner universities.
Professional & business services	Direct provision: business, accounting, law A Level routes; business administration apprenticeships; progression pathways to HE business through UEA partnership; entrepreneurial acumen as a curriculum entitlement.
Clean energy industries	Direct provision: green skills embedded across construction, engineering and plumbing; retrofit Skills Bootcamps; progression routes into offshore wind supply chain occupations; Eastbourne Green Training Hub.
Health	Direct provision: T Level Health, T Level Healthcare Science, health and care apprenticeships, adult care provision; SWAPs in care; Digital Learning Designer apprenticeship partnership with NHS Sussex; clear progression routes into nursing and allied health through HE partners.

Across all ten priority sectors, the college prioritises delivery through the high-quality programme types named in the DfE guidance: T Levels, apprenticeships, Free Courses for Jobs, Skills Bootcamps and HE programmes. We will continue to expand essential English, mathematics and digital skills participation through statutory entitlements.

Two-Thirds Higher-Level Education by Age 25

The government has set a national ambition for two-thirds of young people to engage in higher-level education (Level 4 or above) by age 25. For East Sussex this is particularly material: approximately 35% of working-age residents currently hold Level 4+ qualifications, against a South East figure closer to 47%. The gap reflects both out-migration of younger residents to Brighton and London and limited local Level 4+ supply. Closing it is central to retaining young talent, raising productivity and meeting employer demand for technician and mid-to-high-level capability.

Our higher-level offer is designed as a layered progression system rather than a discrete HE department. The University Centre delivers degree programmes validated through our partnership with the University of East Anglia, including five new degrees validated in 2025–26 in engineering, computer and systems development, film production, games and digital media. Access to HE provision continues to support adult learners returning to higher-level study.

For 2026–27 we will develop level-up routes from Level 3 into Level 5/6 digital apprenticeships in line with LSIP Priority 1; build credit-bearing micro-credentials with stacking routes into apprenticeships and HE so working learners can accumulate Level 4+ capability incrementally; and grow HE student numbers against a 2025–26 baseline. The micro-credentials work is particularly significant for the two-thirds ambition, providing Level 4+ progression routes for adult learners who would not otherwise re-enter higher education.

Get Britain Working

The government's Get Britain Working plan sets a national ambition to raise the employment rate to 80% and halve the gap in healthy life expectancy between the most and least deprived areas. Both are directly relevant to East Sussex: although the South East has the UK's lowest economic inactivity rate (18.1%), East Sussex sits below this regional average, with inactivity concentrated among older workers, those with long-term health conditions and people furthest from the labour market in Hastings, Eastbourne and Newhaven.

ESCG's local response builds on existing infrastructure. We deliver wrap-around provision for Connect to Work, the DWP-led supported employment programme; referrals receive pre-employment skills, employability support, basic skills and sector tasters, with progression into SWAPs, Skills Bootcamps or substantive provision. ESCG sits on the local Connect to Work oversight board alongside DWP, the local authority and partner providers. Sector-based Work Academy Programmes will continue in retail and care, and Skills Bootcamps in green skills and catering, aligned to LSIP priority sectors. Adult employability provision and tailored learning target economically inactive and unemployed residents through explicit DWP and Jobcentre Plus referral routes. ESOL provision in Brighton and Lewes addresses workforce readiness for residents whose first language is not English.

Two new strands respond directly to the East Sussex demographic and health profile. An older-worker re-entry offer, developed with DWP and East Sussex County Council (ESCC), will target the over-50s returning to work or sustaining employment, a priority given the county's age profile. A health-related inactivity strand, developed with NHS Sussex, will provide WorkWell-aligned pathways back into work for residents with long-term health conditions, linking to our health and care apprenticeship and SWAP provision.

Pre-Entry to Level 1 pathway redesign (LSIP Priority 3) is the foundational work, with SWAPs, Skills Bootcamps and Connect to Work providing accelerated routes for those closer to the labour market. The Get Sussex Working Plan is the local instantiation of the Get Britain Working ambition; we will continue to align adult employability, ESOL and tailored learning provision to GSWP priorities through Connect to Work, FE Sussex and direct partnership with ESCC and DWP.

English, Mathematics & Digital Essentials

The DfE guidance is clear that priority sector pathways depend on improved participation in essential English, mathematics and digital skills. The college delivers statutory entitlement provision for adults to Level 2 in English and maths, and to Level 1 in digital, alongside GCSE and Functional Skills English and maths for 16–18 learners. We will continue to invest in this

provision in 2026–27, recognising it as both a statutory obligation and the necessary foundation for progression into priority sectors and higher-level study.
Our tailored learning allocation supports adult and community learning provision across the county, with particular focus on progression routes for adults with no Level 2 qualifications, ESOL learners, and those re-engaging with education after extended absence from learning.

The Sussex and Brighton LSIP 2026–2029

The Future Skills Sussex Local Skills Improvement Plan, led by the Sussex Chamber of Commerce as designated Employer Representative Body, provides the central framework for understanding employer skills needs across Sussex. The 2026–2029 second-cycle LSIP is currently in draft and awaiting Skills England approval (anticipated June 2026); references in this Statement are based on the draft and will be updated on approval.

Sussex and Brighton employers signal that the central issue is not recruitment volume but whether the skills system is producing and progressing people with the applied technical, digital and workplace capability that a changing labour market needs. Pressure is greatest in technician, supervisory and mid-to-high-level roles. Digital and AI capability is now a cross-sector baseline, and sustainability expectations are increasingly absorbed into mainstream jobs. The LSIP signals a deliberate shift in how the FE system operates: pathways rather than courses; capability rather than qualifications alone; flexible, modular, work-based delivery; system alignment across FE, HE, ITPs and employment support; and coordinated employer engagement.

The LSIP identifies four cross-cutting priorities:

Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	Priority 4
Secure and grow technical capability across the Sussex and Brighton workforce and future pipeline. Sectors of particular focus: advanced manufacturing and engineering; construction; land-based; digital technologies; creative industries.	Make digital and technological capability a baseline expectation across the workforce and future pipeline.	Strengthen access, entry and progression routes into employment, reflecting demographic and technological change.	Embed skills for environmental sustainability and climate resilience across the workforce and future pipeline.

Approach to Developing this Statement

This Accountability Statement has been developed through sustained engagement with the partners and structures required by DfE's Meeting Skills Needs guidance and the statutory Local Needs Duty. Engagement was initiated at the outset of the planning cycle and has continued throughout 2025–26.

Engagement with the Employer Representative Body

ESCG has engaged actively with the Sussex Chamber of Commerce throughout development of the second-cycle LSIP, including hosting consultation events at the college and contributing employer voice from across our sector specialisms - engineering, construction, digital, health and care, creative industries, hospitality and land-based - to the four cross-cutting priorities now framing the 2026–2029 LSIP. Our strategic objectives are mapped directly to those priorities, and where the LSIP names FE Sussex collective actions, ESCG has positioned itself as contributing or convening partner.

Engagement with Local & Strategic Authorities

The college is in regular contact with East Sussex County Council on skills, employment and economic development. Engagement during 2025–26 included alignment of adult employability and SEND provision with council priorities, joint work on the Get Sussex Working Plan, and 14–19 transition planning. ESCG sits on the local Connect to Work oversight board alongside DWP, the local authority and partner providers. We engage with Brighton & Hove City Council on cross-border learner flows and ESOL extension, and with district and borough councils on regeneration and skills priorities. With no Mayoral Strategic Authority yet in place, we are engaging the Devolution Priority Programme structures and the Sussex and Brighton CCA as they develop.

Wider Stakeholder Engagement

Employer engagement runs through our Employer Exchange and sector advisory groups, with over 1,000 employers active across the year. We work with DWP and Jobcentre Plus on referral and adult employability pathways, with NHS Sussex on apprenticeship and workforce development, and with Newhaven Enterprise Zone, Sussex Police and other public sector partners on shared workforce priorities. HE engagement runs through partnerships with the University of East Anglia and the University of Brighton, with a developing strategic relationship with the University of Sussex.

Engagement with Schools

We deliver 14–16 alternative provision on behalf of East Sussex County Council (ESCC) and engage with 11–16 comprehensives, schools with sixth forms and sixth-form colleges through mentoring, careers support, taster sessions, transition events and IAG aligned to the Gatsby Benchmarks, with particular focus on highest-need cohorts and SEND learners. In 2026–27 we will deepen engagement with feeder schools as part of our coordinated FE Sussex response to NEET reduction in Hastings, Eastbourne and Newhaven, including shared data and referral routes between providers, ESCC, schools and Jobcentre Plus.

Engagement with Other Providers

Through FE Sussex we work with general further education colleges, sixth-form colleges and other partners to align provision, share innovation and reduce duplication. The Sussex Council of Training Providers represents around 90 Independent Training Providers (ITPs) across the LSIP geography; we engage directly with ITPs where collaboration strengthens progression or fills gaps. Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) collaboration has supported cross-campus teaching facilities, digital innovation, employability resources and VR soft skills programmes delivered to over 3,000 students. This collaborative approach supports the Local Needs Duty by aligning curriculum planning to provision across the area, addressing barriers to participation, reducing duplication, and creating clearer progression pathways.

Reflection on 2025–26 Stated Objectives

The college set out seven priority objectives for 2025–26 in last year's Annual Accountability Statement, designed to enhance student success, address skills priorities identified in the Sussex LSIP, and strengthen the East Sussex workforce. All seven were delivered, with three exceeding their original targets.

Degree Programmes — We successfully developed and validated five degree programmes in engineering, computer & systems development, film production, games and digital media, exceeding our target of starting at least four. Validated through our partnership with UEA, these programmes provide accessible local pathways to higher technical education, addressing higher-level skills gaps in key Sussex growth sectors and helping to retain talent within the region.

AI Training for Staff and Students — We developed and rolled out a comprehensive AI training programme. CPD has been delivered to teaching staff to support both administrative tasks and pedagogy, and the student-facing AI module has been embedded into Level 2 and 3 tutorial provision. This positions our learners and workforce to engage confidently with AI tools, supporting the cross-cutting digital skills priority within the LSIP.

Immersive Technology — We designed and delivered English & Maths escape rooms within our immersive classrooms, creating engaging, experiential learning that supports foundational skills development. The escape rooms provide a distinctive offer for both college learners and partner feeder schools, reinforcing transition pathways and demonstrating innovative use of immersive technology in core curriculum delivery.

ESOL Provision — We extended ESOL provision into the Brighton area, broadening access for residents in surrounding communities, and built a viable cohort for Lewes ESOL provision in line with the original objective. This addresses an identified gap in accessible local language and employability support, contributing to workforce readiness and inclusive economic participation.

Skills Bootcamps — We delivered successful Skills Bootcamp cohorts across our committed strands in green skills and catering, providing fast-track upskilling and reskilling routes

aligned to LSIP priority sectors. These bootcamps directly support local employer demand and offer learners rapid pathways into employment.

Digital Apprenticeships — We have built out a full suite of digital apprenticeships, with more than 75 apprentices starting on AI apprenticeship programmes and delivered the Digital Learning Designer cohort. This represents a significant scaling of our digital apprenticeship offer and a meaningful contribution to closing the AI and digital skills gap identified by employers across Sussex.

Sector-based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs) — We developed and delivered SWAP cohorts in retail and care, providing structured pre-employment training, work placements and guaranteed interviews. These directly address workforce shortages in two priority local sectors and create accessible routes into employment for unemployed and underemployed residents.

Delivery against the 2025–26 objectives demonstrates the college's continued alignment with the Future Skills Sussex LSIP priorities and our responsiveness to local employer and community need.

Strategic Objectives 2026–27

Objective	Targets for 2026–27	Actions	National and local alignment
LSIP Priority 1 — Secure and grow technical capability across the Sussex and Brighton workforce and future pipeline			
Scale the AI and digital apprenticeship offer as a regional asset	• 50 AI/digital apprenticeship starts across SME and public sector employers • At least three new digital occupational standards added to the apprenticeship portfolio • First cohort of L5/L6 digital apprenticeships launched	• Convert demonstrated employer demand into a coordinated cross-Sussex offer through FE Sussex • Develop level-up routes from L3 to L5/L6 digital apprenticeships • Partner with NHS Sussex, local authorities and SME networks for in-work upskilling cohorts • Build dedicated AI apprenticeship coaching capacity to sustain growth	**National sectors:** Digital and technologies; health; professional and business services **Priority programmes:** Apprenticeships (incl. L5/L6); HTQs; supports two-thirds higher-level target **Get Sussex Working:** Ambition 6 (upskill workforce for growth); Ambition 3 (joined-up approach with employers) **LSIP:** Priority 1 (technical capability at scale); Priority 2 (digital and AI baseline)
LSIP Priority 2 — Make digital and technological capability a baseline expectation			
Embed AI and digital capability as a graduate entitlement across all study programmes	• All Level 2 and Level 3 learners complete a sector-contextualised AI capability unit • 80% of curriculum teaching staff complete applied AI CPD assessed at impact level • Five sector-specific AI capability modules co-designed with employers	• Move from generic AI literacy module to sector-contextualised capability built into vocational curriculum • Convert AI CPD from awareness to applied practice — observation-evidenced impact rather than completion • Co-design sector AI modules through Employer Exchange • Publish responsible-use framework for AI in learner work	**National sectors:** Digital and technologies (cross-sector application across construction, health, creative, professional services) **Priority programmes:** Cross-cutting curriculum entitlement; statutory digital entitlement at L1 **Get Sussex Working:** Ambition 6 (upskill workforce); Ambition 3 (employer-led skills) **LSIP:** Priority 2 (digital and AI baseline); capability-not-qualifications principle
LSIP Priority 3 — Strengthen access, entry and progression routes into employment			
Develop coherent pre-entry to Level 1 pathways into every college programme	• Foundation provision (pre-entry and Level 1) redesigned as a coherent curriculum with explicit progression destinations	• Audit current pre-entry and Level 1 provision and map progression destinations into every Level 2/3 vocational area	**National sectors:** Cross-sector entry routes; statutory English, Maths and Digital entitlements (L1–L2) **Priority programmes:** Free Courses for Jobs progression routes; foundation provision feeding T Levels and apprenticeships

Objective	Targets for 2026–27	Actions	National and local alignment
	• Every vocational area at Level 2 and above has a published, named pre-entry/Level 1 entry route • Measurable improvement in pre-entry/L1 to Level 2 progression rates against 2025–26 baseline • Foundation pathway visibility embedded in IAG, school engagement and SEND transition planning	• Redesign foundation curriculum around shared core (literacy, numeracy, digital, employability) with sector-tasted entry units • Co-design with SEND, ESOL and 14–16 alternative provision teams • Track pre-entry/L1 to L2 progression as a published curriculum KPI • Use Priority First weighting to monitor whether progression gaps narrow for highest-need learners	**Get Sussex Working:** Ambition 2 (diverse resident groups); Ambition 4 (place-based needs in coastal deprivation); Ambition 5 (systems-wide approach) **LSIP:** Priority 3 (entry and progression); aligns with Priority First and FE Sussex Action 5
Build a stackable, modular short-course offer for in-work upskilling	• Twelve credit-bearing micro-credentials live, with stacking routes into apprenticeships or HE • 100 working learners enrolled across employer-commissioned modules • At least 40% of micro-credential learners drawn from SMEs (under 50 staff)	• Convert the 2025–26 micro-credentials commitment into a coherent stackable framework • Map credit-bearing routes from micro-credentials into apprenticeships and degree provision • Use Employer Exchange to identify SME demand and co-commission modules • Deliver flexibly: evenings, weekends, on-site at employer premises	**National sectors:** Cross-sector with strong representation in digital and technologies, construction, clean energy industries, health **Priority programmes:** Skills Bootcamps stacking pathway; apprenticeship stepping-stone; supports two-thirds higher-level target for adults **Get Sussex Working:** Ambition 6 (upskill workforce); Ambition 3 (employer co-commissioning) **LSIP:** Priority 3 (modular, work-based, flexible); Action 4 (in-work upskilling)
LSIP Priority 4 — Embed skills for environmental sustainability and climate resilience			
Move sustainability from a green skills offer to an embedded curriculum entitlement	• Sustainability learning outcomes mapped and assessed in 65% of vocational study programmes in 2026–27, rising to 80% in 2027–28 • Cross-sector sustainability modules in place outside construction and land-based provision • Curriculum manager CPD strand on sustainability integration delivered	• Audit current curriculum sustainability content and identify embedding opportunities sector-by-sector • Develop cross-sector modules so sustainability is not isolated to construction or land-based provision • Build leadership capability through a CPD strand for curriculum managers • Track learner sustainability outcomes as part of programme self-assessment	**National sectors:** Clean energy industries (primary); construction; advanced manufacturing; cross-sector behavioural integration **Priority programmes:** Cross-cutting curriculum integration; Skills Bootcamps in green/retrofit **Get Sussex Working:** Ambition 6 (workforce upskilling for growth, including green economy) **LSIP:** Priority 4 (sustainability embedded across mainstream provision)

Objective	Targets for 2026–27	Actions	National and local alignment
Collective Commitment — System leadership through FE Sussex			
Lead a coordinated FE Sussex response to NEET reduction and school engagement across East Sussex	• Single coordinated 14–19 transition and NEET-prevention model agreed across FE Sussex partners • Measurable reduction in 16–18 NEET numbers in Hastings, Eastbourne and Newhaven against 2025–26 baseline	• Convene FE Sussex partners to design a joined-up 14–19 transition and NEET-prevention offer • Establish shared data and referral routes between providers, ESCC, schools and Jobcentre Plus • Build on ESCG's 14–16 alternative provision and Priority First as system contributions • Position ESCG as convening partner	**National sectors:** Cross-sector pipeline into all priority sectors; supports two-thirds higher-level target via earlier engagement **Priority programmes:** T Levels, apprenticeships, foundation provision as receiving destinations **Get Sussex Working:** Ambition 1 (skills and employment infrastructure); Ambition 2 (diverse resident groups, NEET); Ambition 4 (place-based, coastal); Ambition 5 (systems-wide) **LSIP:** FE Sussex collective Action 5 (coordinated youth participation and inclusion response)

Inclusive Mainstream Fund

East Sussex College Group will use its inclusive mainstream fund allocation as additional resource to meet a greater proportion of special educational needs and disabilities within mainstream provision across our five campuses. Our plan supports the transition to the reformed SEND system by improving the quality of our universal offer, so that more learners' needs are met within everyday teaching rather than through separate or specialist routes. The funding is deployed alongside our core funding and adds capacity rather than substituting for existing provision.

Our first priority is staff capability in adaptive teaching. We are funding additional advanced practitioner capacity dedicated to inclusive and adaptive practice, coaching teaching teams in scaffolding, accessible resource design and responding to a wider range of needs in the classroom. This raises the quality and consistency of adaptive teaching across the group and gives our wider investment a lasting foundation in pedagogy.

We are also strengthening adaptive delivery in English and maths, funding smaller group sizes where learners with low prior attainment and identified needs are most concentrated. Smaller groups give teachers the capacity to adapt delivery, check understanding more frequently and intervene earlier, improving progress in the subjects most closely tied to learner outcomes and progression.

Finally, we are improving accessible support and targeted intervention. We are deploying study skills teachers within our Learning Resource Centres to provide structured, accessible support for literacy, organisation and independent study in an environment open to every learner. Alongside this, we are investing in SEND and assistive technology that helps staff identify individual needs and embed inclusive practice into day-to-day delivery.

Together these choices reflect evidence-informed, whole-college approaches that meet predictable needs more flexibly and earlier. We will monitor their impact through our quality and SEND reporting, and account for the fund's use through our annual strategic conversation, so the investment is clearly attributable to improved outcomes for learners with SEND.

Local Needs Duty Statement

This Statement provides a summative update within the college's Local Needs Duty cycle. The most recent full review was completed in May 2025 and approved by the Curriculum, Quality & Standards Committee on behalf of the Governing Board. Circumstances have not changed substantially.

The college provides a broad range of provision from Pre-Entry to Level 6. In 2025–26 the college has supported over 14,000 learners. This includes approximately 5,500 learners aged 16–18 across study programmes and T Levels; over 1,250 apprentices in employer-led training across all sector specialisms; and more than 6,000 adult learners through Adult Skills Fund provision, ESOL, community learning, Skills Bootcamps and tailored learning. Over 900

higher education students study through partnerships with the University of East Anglia, the University of Brighton and a developing relationship with the University of Sussex. The college also delivers 14–16 alternative provision on behalf of East Sussex County Council, alongside SEND and High Needs provision across all campuses. We work with over 1,000 employers across all priority sectors. Learners include those from the most deprived communities in the South East, learners with SEND & High Needs, ESOL learners, care-experienced learners and adult returners.

The college's offer is well aligned with the Sussex LSIP priorities and with national skills priorities, particularly in construction, health & care, digital, engineering, creative industries, the visitor economy and adult employability. Employer engagement is well established and continues to shape curriculum design, industry placements, apprenticeships and adult provision. Embedded curriculum entitlements, careers education, digital & AI capability, entrepreneurial acumen, literacy and numeracy, green skills and inclusion all support holistic learner development.

The review identified four areas for further development that are now addressed in the 2026–27 objectives:

- Strengthening higher-level progression to support the two-thirds national ambition and to retain young talent within East Sussex;
- Embedding AI and digital capability more consistently and at sector-applied level rather than as generic literacy;
- Ensuring sustainability and green skills are embedded across mainstream curriculum rather than concentrated in stand-alone provision;
- Improving progression for the highest-need learners, including SEND, Pre-Entry and Level 1 cohorts, through coherent pathway design.

Through FE Sussex, the college has identified collective actions to better meet local needs, including a coordinated 14–19 transition and NEET-prevention model, shared progression mapping with HE and ITP partners, and joint employer engagement to reduce duplication and strengthen progression pathways. Engagement with schools, universities and Independent Training Providers continues outside the statutory FE sector to ensure pathway coherence.
Outcomes arising from the review are reflected in this Statement's strategic objectives and progress will be reported through the strategic conversation cycle and annual updates to this Statement. The next full Local Needs Duty review will be conducted in 2027–28 unless circumstances change substantially before then, at which point an earlier review will be undertaken.

Governing Board Statement

On behalf of the East Sussex College Governing Board, it is hereby confirmed that this document reflects an agreed statement of purpose, aims and objectives, and explicitly fulfils the statutory Local Needs Duty under section 52B of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (as amended by the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022).

The Governing Board further affirms that freedom of speech and academic freedom remain foundational to post-16 education. The college upholds both within its own provision and through its higher education partnerships, supporting open enquiry, rigorous debate and respectful engagement with challenging ideas.

The strategic objectives set out in this Statement have been developed with regard to the priorities of the Sussex and Brighton Local Skills Improvement Plan 2026–2029 (currently in draft, awaiting Skills England approval), national skills priorities, local growth priorities and the Get Sussex Working Plan. Engagement with the designated Employer Representative Body, local authorities and wider partners has informed the priorities and targets set out above.

This Accountability Statement was approved by the Curriculum, Skills & Quality Committee on behalf of the Governing Board at its meeting on 18 May 2026.

Chair of Governing Board: 
Date: 18/5/26

Principal & CEO: 
Date: 18/5/26

This Accountability Statement is published on the college's website here.

Relevant Supporting Documentation

This Accountability Statement is informed by, and should be read alongside, the following documents:

- East Sussex College Strategic Plan 2025–2028
- Curriculum and Skills Master Plan 2025–2028
- SEND Master Plan 2025–2028
- Sussex and Brighton LSIP 2026–2029 (draft, awaiting Skills England approval)
- Future Skills Sussex LSIP Progress Report (most recent published edition)
- ESCG Annual Financial Statements (most recent published edition)
- Ofsted inspection report, January 2025
- East Sussex State of the County 2025
- Indices of Deprivation 2025
- Get Sussex Working Plan 2025
- Priority First inclusion framework (ESCG)