

# Annual Accountability Statement 2023/24

Milton Keynes College Group is deeply connected to the communities it serves. The courses we deliver, skills we impart and the experiences we offer our students are all shaped by our communities and a commitment to meet local skills need. This accountability statement outlines how we connect with employers, other providers and our community at both a strategic and operational level.

## College Mission & Purpose

### Delivering Fairer Futures in the communities we serve

Milton Keynes College Group vision is to ‘use the power of education to create opportunities, champion talent and build fairer futures.’ We do this by inspiring positive social change in the people and communities we serve through delivering exceptional learning experiences to transform lives, achieving our vision of a fairer future for all.

The Group comprises a general further education college with campuses in Milton Keynes and Bletchley, a prison education business overseeing learning in 30 prisons throughout England, and the South-Central Institute of Technology, delivering higher education digital programmes regionally.

In 2021, aligned to our new purpose, we launched our Fairer Futures strategy to run through to 2026. This strategy is based around 6 aims:

- 1) Drive aspirational, innovative and student focussed educational experiences.
- 2) Develop meaningful partnerships to grow our influence and create opportunities.
- 3) Achieve and maintain financial and operational sustainability.
- 4) Deliver the skills needed by employers to aid productivity.
- 5) Promote and live fairness, equality, diversity, and inclusion.
- 6) Create organisational unity around our shared vision and purpose.

Our strategic plan was informed by the Skills for Jobs white paper and approved by our Governing Board in Spring 2021 and is available at <https://mkcollege.ac.uk/mkcollegroup/>

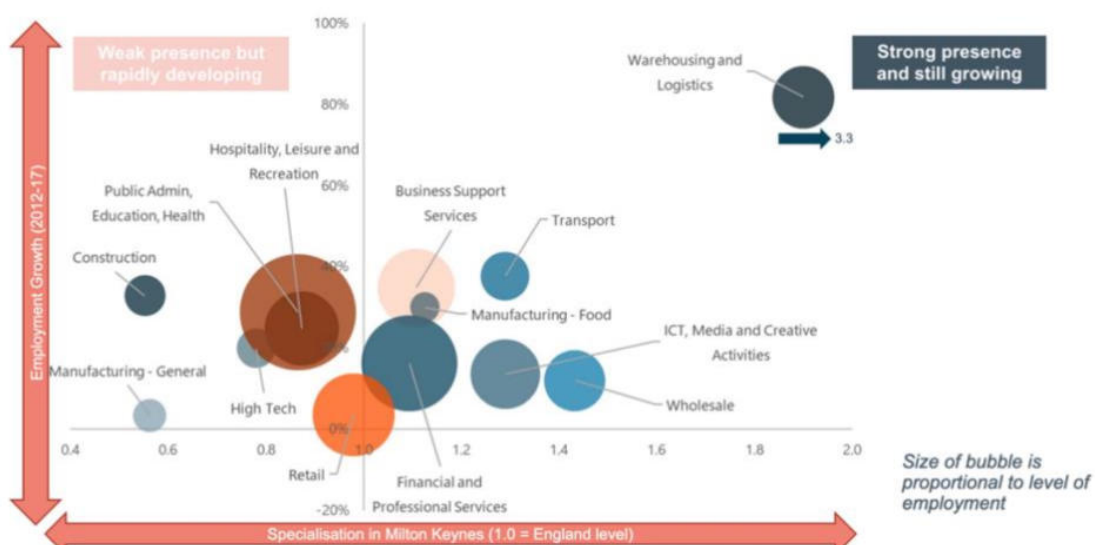
## Our community

### Milton Keynes – a highly productive, growing city with pockets of deprivation

Milton Keynes (MK) is a brand-new city situated in the South-East Midlands (SEM) LEP region. With a population of approx. 270,000 people and home to 12,765 businesses the MK economy is worth £14.03 billion with a GDP per worker of £73,439 – one of the highest in the country.

In terms of the profile of businesses in MK, the city is distinct from other areas within the SEM region due to the prevalence of micro business (with 0-9 staff); these make up 90% of the businesses in MK. SMEs form a much smaller group making up 9.4% of businesses. The city is also notable for the large number of global and national head offices; 75 businesses have more than 250 employees and include national brands such as Red Bull Racing, Network Rail and Santander.

The graph below shows the MK sector mix with logistics, ICT, business support and financial and professional services as strong specialist areas within the city.



MK has a younger population than England as a whole with 27.4% of the population aged 19 and under, compared with 23.7% nationally. The city has a racially diverse population with 26.1% BME increasing to 44% BME in the current student population. 25% of the population has English as a second language and 14% of pupils have special educational needs (SEN).

Although as a city MK is ranked 181<sup>st</sup> out of 326 regions in the deprivation index, this hides the 9 'Lower Super Output Areas' (LSOAs) which are within the 10% most deprived in England.

MK is also a city on the move. The number of 16–19 year olds is predicted to increase by 30% within the next six years. Whilst school capacity is increasing to respond to this greater demand, the combination of demographic growth and increased market share should see the College plan for up to a 35% increase in 16-19 students by 2029.

### Milton Keynes Skills Snapshot – a widening gap in GCSE performance

Data from Milton Keynes Council shows that the city slightly outperforms the rest of South-East Midlands in terms of highest level of qualification achieved, with fewer students without any qualifications and a greater number qualified to Level 4 (amongst the 16-64 population). However, these figures are in line with averages within England.



The performance of MK schools is mixed with a number of schools in more affluent areas seeing 75% of students achieving a grade 5 and above in English and maths with others, largely in more deprived areas, seeing less than 35% of students achieving the same grades. As with the deprivation index, the two-

tier nature of GCSE performance gives MK an average of 47% 'good' English and maths results vs an England average of 50% but this belies the significant distance between the best and worst performing schools.

The gap in GCSE performance in Milton Keynes is also widening. Between 2013 and 2019 there was a decline of 1.3% in the percentage of children in MK gaining 5 GCSEs at grade 4 and above; nationally there was a 5.2% improvement.

### **Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) – An emerging skills picture**

As of July 2023, the LSIP covering Milton Keynes is still in development with no final document published. However, as we have played a key role in the development of the LSIP we know that digital skills will feature heavily and that specific skills shortages highlighted by businesses include:

- Engineering – electrical / aviation / design / manufacturing / technical management & project management
- Software developers/programmers including media creation
- Marketing and digital communications
- Management and project management
- Maintenance/mechanical/electrical/manufacturing/aerospace engineering
- Skilled trades/utilities – electricians/carpenters/HVAC/plumbers/gas engineers
- Business and data analysts
- Education – teaching assistants, FE tutors and primary school teachers
- Cleaning
- Customer service and business administration focused financial planning

Alongside these industry specific skills, draft aims are being created. Again, no final version is available yet but a summary of the aims in the draft document is below:

- 1) Help business to understand future trends and take advantage of education available through new technologies.
- 2) Readiness for work including communication, attitude, resilience, and problem solving to be instilled in all students.

- 3) Continued need to raise awareness of available provision and clearly show how it connects with job demand and employer skills challenge, filling gaps with new provision where they exist.
- 4) Improving accessibility and flexibility of training opportunities.
- 5) Engaging employers who do not currently work with chambers, LEPs or colleges to highlight how skills can improve their business.
- 6) Develop a blended business and learning language to support better line of communication between businesses and colleges.
- 7) Develop more full-cost delivery where the value of training and benefits of learning are understood.
- 8) Prioritise green agenda to help prepare employers for future needs in this area and prioritise EDI initiatives to open up a wider market for jobs.

MK College Group was actively encouraged to become the lead College within the SEMLEP region for the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) and will take this role, facilitating skills spend across the region. Details are emerging but it is expected that funds will be available to respond to skills priorities. As the LSIP priorities are confirmed and published, we will update this section of the accountability statement accordingly.

Whilst more than 90% of our students come from the South-East Midlands (SEM) LEP area, Buckinghamshire LEP is our next nearest area and will provide opportunities for growth, particularly for South Central IoT. Many priority sectors overlap; Bucks also have a need to support Engineering, Construction, Digital and Green technologies. In addition Buckinghamshire LEP identifies Health & Social Care and Film and TV as priority sectors (the latter are likely due to the planned expansion of Pinewood Studios).

## **How does MK College Group contribute to local and regional skills needs?**

### **We are the largest provider of education to Milton Keynes residents**

Milton Keynes College attracted a total of 5,550 learners in the 2021/22 academic year. Of these, 49% were 16-19 funded, 12% were apprentices and 38% were adults.

### Profile of Learners



In terms of scale, 33% of 16-19 year olds from Milton Keynes study at the College, 35% of adults accessing AEB or loans funding study at the College and 10% of all apprenticeships in MK are with the College. We are the largest provider of education to Milton Keynes residents.

### Fairer Futures at the heart of what we do

The MK College Group Fairer Futures strategy was developed in consultation with our key stakeholders. We ensured the aims built into the strategy could be broad enough to respond to the changing demands as the country emerged from the pandemic, whilst an annual plan anchors these aims into specifics. Alongside ensuring that the skills we deliver help employers be more productive our strategy sets out our intent to act as a civic leader and ensure that we help reverse inequalities experienced by our students in their education journey before they reach the College.

### South Central Institute of Technology – driving regional digital skills

2023 saw our brand-new South Central Institute of Technology (SCIoT) fully open. SCIoT will address both the regional and national skills shortage (as evidenced in both SEMLEP skills priorities and national skills priorities) in digital whilst acting as Milton Keynes’ largest, in-person, Higher Education Institution.

### Adapting our offer as a direct result of student feedback

By acting as a lead for the Skills Development Fund, the College has delivered short sharp skills training to over 1,000 students and crucially, held employer forums to identify ‘on the ground’ skills requirements to augment local skills data. These forums identified that alongside specific sector skills requirements,

more general skills such as communication, timekeeping and resilience were required.

MK College is taking this forward and overhauling our Level 1 provision to focus less on specific technical skills and more on these overarching employability themes.

### **We develop partnerships to create opportunity**

Partnerships form a key part of our strategy and our work with Silverstone, Careys, Anglian Water, Red Bull Racing and others provides ongoing opportunities and experiences for our students.

#### **Silverstone**

Our relationship with Silverstone has achieved national recognition. Hospitality students spend up to half of their programme at Silverstone and their end-of-year project is to cater the British Grand Prix. The outcome of this partnership is that over 50% of Silverstone chefs are former MK College Group students. Motor vehicle students are now into their first year of working at Silverstone to develop their employment experience, and from September 2023 our Business students will also be engaging in this partnership.

#### **Anglian Water**

Our relationship with the Anglian Water Alliance is in its 4<sup>th</sup> year. It offers a pathway from Level 1 study programme to a Level 2 apprenticeship with one of the Alliance partners. 22 apprentices have been recruited throughout the partnership fulfilling a national skills gap in groundworkers and water technicians.

#### **Careys**

We currently deliver study programme trades, brick and groundworker apprenticeships from a Careys operational site in Bleak Hall, Milton Keynes. This relationship enables us to work in partnership to support the behaviours and skills of students, developing a critical pipeline of talent to the local and regional area. This year Careys are recruiting groundworker apprentices for their own business for the first time; they are also keen supporters of sector forums at the college, guiding curriculum development and providing equipment for teaching when required.

#### **Red Bull Racing**

Red Bull Racing have been a key partner to the college for over 5 years. Our relationship centres on apprentice development, with the recruitment of up to

18 apprentices each year in a variety of disciplines including engineering, digital and digital marketing. More recently our partnership has developed to encompass negotiations on developing talent pipelines, increasing participation and raising career aspirations.

### **Skills development that is systematic and planned**

Whilst it is easy for any college to share a 'highlight' reel of best practice, we have developed a 'skills matrix' to ensure that our work within curriculum areas is systematic and planned. The matrix analyses an array of data, including LMI data, LSIP priority status and our own assessments to identify curriculum areas that need to focus more attention on meeting local skills needs. This matrix drives the **strategic skills priorities** you can see at the end of this document.

### **College Performance**

College performance data shows that in the 2021/22 academic year:

- 16-18 overall achievement, including English and maths, finished at 81.7%, which is an 8.4 percentage point improvement on 2020-21.
- All ages overall achievement, including English and maths, finished at 82.4%, which is a 2.6 percentage point improvement on 2020-21.
- GCSE English high grades finished at 30.9%, which is 2.5 percentage points above the national average.
- GCSE maths high grades finished at 22.5%, which is 2.4 percentage points above the national average.
- Overall Apprenticeships finished at 68.8%, which is a 6-percentage point improvement on 2020-21 and significantly above the national average.

Overall, 91% of learners have either progressed into further education and training (including Higher Education and Apprenticeships) or into employment, which demonstrates that learners are being prepared well for future successes in education, training and employment.

Of these:

- 77% of learners progressed into further education and training.
- 14% of learners progressed into employment, with a further 2% actively looking for employment.
- 56% of learners progressed with their studies at Milton Keynes College.
- 10% of learners progressed into an apprenticeship.
- 12% of learners progressed into higher education.



## Stakeholder engagement

Partnerships form a key part of everything MK College Group sets out to achieve, and they are fully embedded as one of our six strategic aims.

Stakeholders key to our local delivery include:

- Milton Keynes Council
- Milton Keynes & Northamptonshire Chamber of Commerce
- Central Bedfordshire Council
- South-East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership
- Employers
- Business representative groups and networks
- Local MPs
- Community groups

The College maintains a Friends & Allies Network (FAN) which allows us to bring together representatives from across these diverse groups to discuss key local issues. Recent examples of topics have been our response to the pandemic, inspiring more students to pursue digital skills and tackling knife crime.

### **Engagement with other providers in the area**

MK College Group enjoys strong working relationships with other providers within our area.

We have a constructive relationship with other **FE Colleges** in the region, primarily through CoSEM (Colleges of SEM) where leaders from each college in the region meet regularly. This group of colleges are also working collaboratively on the new LSIF funding opportunity that the College will be leading. The College has established a good initial working relationship with Bucks College Group and will work in partnership with them on the Buckinghamshire LSIP.

We work very closely with the **schools in MK**. Several members of our leadership contribute to MKSH (Milton Keynes Secondary Heads) meetings where we have led collaborative work to respond to local capacity issues as well as tackling poor performance, particularly in English and maths. In addition, the College plays a significant role in supporting access to

Information, Advice and Guidance, organising a Careers Advisors Network and providing engagement opportunities to local schools.

Milton Keynes does not currently have a university. Cranfield University have led 'MK:U' a project designed to launch a new £100m university in the city. Whilst a university is still some way off, MK College has been a key partner (Cranfield is also a partner of the South Central Institute of Technology).

## **Prison education**

Whilst the bulk of this accountability statement refers to our campus and IoT business areas it is also important to reflect the impact we have via our national prison contact. MK College Group has recently expanded to deliver education in 30 prisons across the length and breadth of England.

Whilst a number of reports, including a select committee review, have identified the challenges in prison education – particularly with the ability for prisons to provide regular access to education providers to students, MK College Group enjoys a very strong reputation for delivering what it says it will deliver.

In previous contracts, we have secured over 800 ex-offenders into employment on release and have more recently been responsible for the Group securing a contract to deliver education services to 10 additional prisons and leading the charge to deliver apprenticeships with serving prisoners.

## MK College Group strategic priorities 2023/2024

In response to the key issues, we have developed the following areas of focus for 2023/2024:

Board Strategic Priorities for 2023/24	Contribution towards national, regional, and local priorities for learning and skills
1. Continue to improve achievement rates, deliver Board Student Performance KPIs and deliver an Ofsted 'Good' outcome (if Ofsted arrive in the academic year).	Continuously improving achievement rates will increase the number of students with the higher-level skills needed by MK employers. A 'Good' Ofsted will help the College to continue to attract project funding to support growth.
2. Reform our Level 3 curriculum.	Level 3 curriculum reform will see the College prioritise pathways that are linked to LSIP priorities. As an example, we are developing new pathways in the digital, green energy, social science and creative sectors.
3. Develop and deliver IoT action plan, aligned to the approved DfE change request and grow student numbers to meet the DfE Licence Agreement.	South Central IoT reaching targets set by DfE will see an immediate injection of digital skills training within the region. If we achieve our targets, then over 400 students will gain higher level digital skills this year.
4. Deliver Good ESFA Financial Health and maintain financial sustainability.	Ensuring our continued strong financial health will be important in securing project funding and in continuing to innovate our curriculum to meet local skills needs.
5. Develop a plan to source talent from outside the education sector and grow our own talent from within MKCG.	A real risk to our ability to meet skills needs is the people required to deliver technical training. Growing our own talent pipeline will ensure we can continue to expand our provision.
6. Agree a bidding strategy and bid for Prison Education Services (PES), with an aim to retain our current market share, as a minimum.	Our prison education work not only provides a vital service, it also gives us access to a national network of educators. Growing our offer would see us expand to meet these vital skills needs and help reduce reoffending.
7. Lead LSIF across SEMLEP area and deliver two regional LSIF projects in ' <i>digital skills gaps</i> ' and ' <i>communication with employers</i> '.	As LSIF lead we are taking ownership of the regional response to LSIP priorities. We are also leading on two key projects connecting to digital skills and communicating with employers.
8. Deliver the Capital Transformation Fund (CTF) project.	Successfully completing the CTF project will increase the capacity of usable learning spaces across the college and support reduction in energy costs and ongoing maintenance, allowing more investment in new courses to meet skills needs.
9. Undertake a strategic estates review, planning how we increase our post 16 capacity to meet the needs of employers and LSIP priorities.	This strategic review will allow us to ensure that when we grow our estate to meet demand, we do so in a way that meets the LSIP priorities and provides value to taxpayers

These strategic areas of focus will be reviewed each year, linking to our strategic aims and project areas.

For more information on these, see 2023 to 2026 Operational Plan Summary: Delivering Fairer Futures appendix.

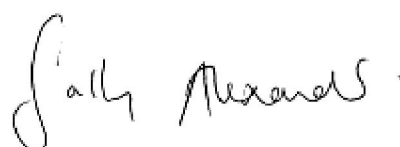
## Corporation statement

On behalf of the MK College Group Board, it is hereby confirmed that the plan as set out above reflects an agreed statement of purpose, aims and objectives as approved by the Board at their meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> of July 2023.

The plan will be published on the college's website and can be accessed from the following link: <https://mkcollege.ac.uk/governance/>



David Meadowcroft  
Chair of Governors  
Dated: 31<sup>st</sup> July 2023



Sally Alexander  
CEO and Group Principal  
Dated: 31<sup>st</sup> July 2023

## Supporting documentation

[MK College Group Fairer Futures strategy](#)

[SEMLEP Skills Strategy](#)

[MK Council 2050 plan](#)

[MK College Group Financial Documents](#)

[Ofsted Inspection Reports](#)

[2023 to 2026 Operational Plan Summary: Delivering Fairer Futures](#)

MKCG Skills Matrix available on request