



PEOPLE STRATEGY

2025 – 2031

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Milton Keynes is growing rapidly, with the MK City Plan 2050 planning 63,000 new homes being built by 2050. Milton Keynes is positioned at the centre of the new growth corridor linking Oxford, Milton Keynes, and Cambridge to create a new 'Silicon Valley'. Milton Keynes is the largest settlement in the Southeast of England outside London and is a city of national economic importance, with an economy worth £16.2bn in 2022 (larger than the city of Cardiff). With the Oxford to Milton Keynes section of East-West Rail opening later this year, Milton Keynes' economy will continue to grow, with the city developing as a centre for AI innovation and growth.

As a result, Milton Keynes College Group, one of the largest employers in Milton Keynes with over 1,200 staff, is also growing rapidly. 16-18 student numbers alone have increased from 2,770 in 2021/22 to 3,635 in 2024/25. Application numbers for 2025/26 are the strongest ever, and 16-18 student numbers are expected to exceed 4,000 within the next 12 to 24 months and remain at least at this level until 2032. The College is seeing a similar growth in apprenticeships, which have grown from c.300 in 2018/19 to over 800 in 2024/25. The current Government focus on apprenticeships means these numbers will continue to grow at the same trajectory as 16-18 growth.

The recent announcement that the Government has approved the first Universal Studios theme park in Europe, to be built near Bedford, will have significant impact on the local labour market, with work due to start later in 2025. This will deliver a £50 billion boost for the UK economy by 2055 and create 28,000 jobs across the creative, hospitality, and construction industries, before opening in 2031.

Evolving National Skills Priorities and Government Policies on Post-16 Education and Skills require agile post-16 providers with flexible workforces. This along with Government funding cuts and national shortages in specialist vocational roles in skills priority areas including Electrical and Engineering puts pressure on post-16 providers to work much more innovatively.

Along with the local context, there are changes to the College's Prison Contract. Following a successful bidding process, the College will shortly start to mobilise the move from the Prison Education Framework (PEF) Contracts to the new Prison Education Services (PES) Contracts. This will see a change in the regions where the College delivers prison education and a large-scale TUPE process, to enable the new contracts to commence from October 2025, and run initially until September 2029.



Our Vision for 2031

By 2031, our compelling reward offer along with our effective learning and development culture, our excellent employee relations, and our inclusive values led approach has enabled Milton Keynes College Group to attract, retain and develop a diverse workforce of the right size, shape, cost, and agility to deliver the required growth to meet the skills needs of the communities it serves.

Placing staff wellbeing at the heart of our people's experience, along with supportive and inspiring leadership, we have excellent staff retention and low levels of staff sickness in comparison to the sector benchmarks.

An effective and embedded appraisal process creates capability and opportunity by motivating and engaging our people with their career development. We have an agile workforce with the required skills and an effective succession planning process which is responsive to changing skills priorities.

As a result, our people belong, they are inspired, and they deliver extraordinary outcomes.

Our Values



Respect

We treat everyone within MK College Group with respect and kindness as we work together to build fairer futures for our students, employees and community.

Building Fairer Futures.

Excellence

We have a hunger for excellence in all that we do – pushing boundaries of what is possible to achieve extraordinary things.

Building Fairer Futures.

Integrity

We are honest and act according to our principles – even when it's hard.

Building Fairer Futures.

Innovate

We believe in the power of original thinking and disrupting the status quo.

Building Fairer Futures.

Inspire

We inspire our students, employees and community to see the power of education to transform lives.

Building Fairer Futures.

Belong

MK College Group is a place where everyone belongs and can be their authentic selves.

Building Fairer Futures.

Strategic Aims Summary

1. Our Workforce

Attracting, retaining and developing our people with the required skills for a workforce of the right size, shape, cost, and agility to support growth.

2. Our Staff Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Welcoming to all, supporting, encouraging, and developing our people so everyone belongs - respecting and enabling diversity and promoting inclusion.

3. Our Health and Wellbeing

Providing a safe and healthy environment for our people, placing wellbeing at the heart of staff experience, encouraging our people to maintain and promote their health and the health of others to reduce sickness levels.

4. Our Learning and Development Culture Creating capability and opportunity by motivating and engaging our people with their learning and development. Delivering the required skills and succession planning for adaptability, agility, change, and the delivery of extraordinary outcomes.

5. Our Reward and Recognition
Attracting and motivating our people with a competitive reward offer including pay and non-financial elements, whilst recognising and celebrating success.

6. Our Staff Experience and Engagement
Nurturing a working environment in which our people are inspired to strive for extraordinary, actively engaging with the College values - with opportunities to contribute to our communities, our decision-making, and our future direction.

7. Our Employee Relations
Working in partnership with our recognised trade unions, ensuring that our people are well informed, involved in decisions which affect them, and are treated fairly and consistently.



Our Workforce

Where are we now in 2025?

The College has an excellent reputation and strong identity with opportunities for career progression, job security, and a flexible approach to work-life balance.

The volume and quality of applicants for posts is strong and our vacancy rate has reduced from 7.4% to 2.9% over the last 12 months. However, there remains a national shortage of specialist skills in key growth areas (Engineering and Trades).

The College's inclusive selection process ensures the validity of selection decisions to recruit optimum candidates. Overall levels of turnover are improved but remain too high at 20% (15% for Campus areas and 27% for Prisons), compared to the sector average of 16%.

Approximately 50% of our people are based in our Prison Education sites and we will be undertaking a large-scale TUPE exercise in October 2025.

All leavers are invited to complete an exit interview to identify reasons for leaving and offered the valuable opportunity to provide feedback.

A flexible contingent workforce is in place to meet urgent, short-term staffing requirements.

Where do we want to be by 2031?

Attracting, retaining and developing our people with the required skills for a workforce of the right size, shape, cost, and agility to support growth.

How will we get there?

A Group Workforce Plan will be produced annually, aligned to the curriculum planning and budget process, skills priorities, predicted growth, and taking account of new projects and initiatives (Universal, PES etc.)

We will undertake the prison TUPE process in October 2025, implement College processes, and induct new prison teams to support them into the College.

We will closely monitor industry trends and remain agile in the jobs market whilst continuing to incubate talent and review our talent attraction mechanisms.

We will establish an integral link between workforce planning and Learning and Development activities at individual and team level to develop and improve the required skills.

We will identify the roles of the future and develop the skills required for these.

How will we recognise success?

The first indicator is achieving an unfilled vacancy rate below 1% by 2028. A further indicator is reduced campus staff turnover of 10% by 2031 and Prison staff turnover of 20% by 2031, with favourable feedback from leavers across the Group.

The final indicator is a workforce with the required mix of roles and skills, with improved utilisation and reduced costs (in line with our financial staff/income KPIs)

A photograph of three people working in a workshop. On the left, a person with short brown hair is seen from the back, wearing a black hoodie with a graphic of a skull and flames. In the center, a person with dark curly hair is wearing a black hoodie and looking down at a workbench. On the right, a man with a shaved head and glasses is wearing a grey hoodie and looking at the workbench. They are in a well-lit workshop with wooden workbenches, tools, and a clock on the wall.

Our Staff Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Where are we now in 2025?

The College is committed to its core values and is welcoming to all. We have an established EDI Strategy Review Group (ESRG) chaired by our CEO, along with 5 Employee Networks (Cultural Diversity, LGBTQ, Disability, Women's, and Men's) embedded into our Group activities. We have appointed a dedicated Head of EDI and Learning and Development to lead our approach to EDI and continually challenge our teams to be more inclusive. Annual EDI mandatory training is in place to support our people's understanding.

We are in the process of renewing our Leaders in Diversity accreditation. We have an ACE Recruiter programme and NSPCC training in place for hiring managers. We have completed Equality Accessibility Impact Assessments (EAIA) for all our organisational strategic risks.

Despite this, only 16.7% of our workforce is from minoritised ethnicities (ME) against our current target of 20%.

Where do we want to be by 2031?

Welcoming to all, supporting, encouraging and developing our people so everyone belongs - respecting and enabling diversity and promoting inclusion.

How will we get there?

We will work with employee forums and networks to deliver the annual Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gap Report actions, to reduce these gaps.

We will work with managers to reduce unconscious bias in recruiting across all protected characteristics.

We will undertake focussed work with our communities to remove perceived barriers to recruitment for applicants at all levels, including neurodivergent candidates, and enable a full contribution to their roles when in post.

How will we recognise success?

The first indicator is we continue to close our Gender and Ethnicity pay gaps by 2031, with annual targets approved by the Board.

A further indicator is we increase the percentage of our workforce from minoritised ethnicities incrementally over the duration of this strategy to reflect the communities we serve and ensure at least 20% of our workforce is from minoritised ethnicities by 2031.



Our Health and Wellbeing

Where are we now in 2025?

The College provides a safe and healthy working environment through effective induction, and supportive line management with additional support from the Health and Safety Team and People Services Business Partners. Effective support processes include sickness absence management, wellbeing initiatives, counselling, flu vaccinations, and an accessible Employee Assistance Programme available 24/7.

Working with our recognised trade unions, we have formed collaborative Workload and Wellbeing Sub-committees covering both our Campus and Prison provision to improve staff wellbeing and reduce workload concerns.

Despite our approach, staff feedback on the Peakon Health and Wellbeing driver is too low at 7.4 and the average number of sickness days per employee per year is too high at 7.1 days against a target of less than 5 days.

Where do we want to be by 2031?

Providing a safe and healthy environment for our people, placing wellbeing at the heart of staff experience, encouraging our people to maintain and promote their health and the health of others to reduce sickness levels.

How will we get there?

We will continue to support and promote a healthy and inclusive workplace (including our people's health, safety and wellbeing) in line with the Getting Britain Working White Paper.

We will review our benefits package to enable improved access to GP services and other support interventions, to support early intervention in sickness absence and increase returns to work.

We will continue to work with our recognised trade unions and staff teams to address workload and wellbeing concerns.

We will undertake further work to support managers in managing and promoting health and wellbeing within their teams, to manage workplace stress, ensure effective support, communication, manageable workload and a work/life balance through agile working and other measures. This will include the use of predictive analytics to identify patterns and ensure effective support is in place.

How will we recognise success?

The first indicator is reducing the average number of sick days per employee per year to below 5 days by 2031.

The second indicator is improving staff feedback on the Peakon Health and Wellbeing driver to above 8.0 by 2031.

A photograph of three people in a meeting. A man with glasses and a white shirt is smiling and holding a tablet. A woman with long brown hair is looking at the tablet. A man with grey hair and a dark sweater is also looking at the tablet. They are all wearing lanyards.

Our Learning and Development Culture

Where are we now in 2025?

All staff have the opportunity to further their own learning and development, and the College invests significantly in ongoing individual and team professional development activities.

A new staff appraisal process (My P2E) is being piloted currently and is due to roll out in September 2025. This includes a review of performance against objectives, identification of learning and development activities, and a discussion about career aspirations.

All new staff undertake the Group New Staff Induction to cover all aspects of the Group's activities, an opportunity to meet key members of the team, and provide access to all information required to support them in their new role. All Prison based staff also have a local prison specific induction, covering local requirements and prison security.

All staff complete mandatory training on an annual basis and there is a minimum requirement of 30 hours CPD each year.

Where do we want to be by 2031?

Creating capability and opportunity by motivating and engaging our people with their learning and development. Delivering the required skills and succession planning for adaptability, agility, change, and the delivery of extraordinary outcomes.

How will we get there?

We will deliver MyP2E appraisals to all staff from September 2025 and review the outcomes and skills gaps following the first year of MyP2E. Appraisal will drive the delivery of an annual Group Staff Development Plan and a Group Succession Plan.

We will identify key roles, high-performance, and use individual talent profiles to ensure effective upskilling relevant to roles and individual's career aspirations.

We will equip managers and leaders with the required skills and confidence to successfully respond to, adapt to, and manage change alongside the capabilities to lead extraordinary performance within their teams.

How will we recognise success?

The first indicator is a 95% completion of MyP2E at each of the 3 milestones throughout each year, which demonstrates positive staff engagement in their career development.

A further indicator is improved staff internal progression with percentage increases each year until 2031.

The work undertaken will result in our final indicator of an agile workforce better placed to respond to changing skills needs across the region and support our predicted growth.



Our Reward and Recognition

Where are we now in 2025?

We have successfully negotiated responsible staff pay awards with our recognised trade unions for the past 3 years, resulting in an average 14% increase for Campus staff and an 18% increase for Prison staff, between 2022/23 and 2024/25.

We have developed a clear remuneration framework and salary review mechanism, which is currently under review with our recognised trade unions.

In addition to pay, we have a generous reward package including occupational pension schemes (TPS and LGPS), enhanced annual leave entitlements, enhanced sick pay, enhanced family leave, Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), employee discount schemes, personal and professional development programmes, qualification sponsorship, Refer-a Friend Recruitment Scheme, eye tests, and flu jabs.

We also have a staff recognition platform (Encore), long service awards and annual staff awards.

Despite this, our Peakon Reward driver remains too low at 6.5.

Where do we want to be by 2031?

Attracting and motivating our people with a competitive reward offer including pay and non-financial elements, whilst recognising and celebrating success.

How will we get there?

We will develop a transparent pay policy, aligned to our remuneration framework and salary review mechanism, and communicate this with our people.

We will undertake a benefits review to align our benefits with the needs of our people and illustrate this through a total reward statement.

We commit to continuing to negotiate pay awards with our recognised trade unions, to maximise pay for staff within budget affordability.

We will review our approach to staff recognition aligned to the roll out of our MyP2E appraisal process.

How will we recognise success?

The first indicator is improved staff feedback on the Peakon Reward Driver, improving to a score of 7.0 by the end of 2026/27, with continued year on year increases until 2031.

A further indicator will be a transparent pay policy is communicated to our people and embedded within the Group by 2026.

The final indicator will be continued successful annual pay award negotiations, with pay costs maintained in line with Board approved Group pay/income KPIs



Our Staff Experience and Engagement

Where are we now in 2025?

Overall Employee Satisfaction via Peakon is 7.5 with a target to achieve 8.0 by July 2026. Staff satisfaction is an improving trend, but it remains too low. Our highest scoring drivers are Management Support (8.4), Peer Relationships (8.2), Goal Setting (8.4) and Meaningful Work (8.3). Our lowest scoring drivers, which require more work, are Reward (6.5) and Environment (6.8).

Meet the Senior Team sessions enable us to connect with our people, along with communication channels including weekly Unity newsletters, half termly Transmit broadcasts, and a Managers' Teams chat to share important news, requests for action, and insights to ensure our people are connected to our purpose, values, and strategy.

How's it Going interviews for new staff were introduced in 2023/24 to support engagement and enable us to be proactive with new staff concerns.

We have annual Industry Connect days as upskilling and networking opportunities, and College in the Community days, working with teams and students across the Group, to engage with their communities and increase our corporate social responsibility activity.

Where do we want to be by 2031?

Nurturing a working environment in which our people are inspired to strive for extraordinary, actively engaging with the College values - with opportunities to contribute to our communities, our decision-making, and our future direction.

How will we get there?

We will establish a series of employee forums to undertake a qualitative analysis to address lowest scoring drivers (Reward and Environment) and continue to improve all other drivers.

We will embed the new MyP2E staff appraisal process to support meaningful engagement with our people, and the identification of learning and development needs and career aspirations.

We will identify Group priorities from our employee forums and the MyP2E outcomes and use these, along with our new Strategic Plan 2026 to 2031, to inspire our people to strive for extraordinary.

How will we recognise success?

The first indicator is an improved overall Peakon Employee Satisfaction score of 8.0 by July 2026, with an improving trend up to 2031.

A further indicator is year on year improvements in staff retention to 90% on campus and 80% in prisons by 2031, and reduction of staff absence 5 days per employee per year by 2031.

A final indicator is the achievement of a 1.5 self-assessed score on Campus and 2.0 score for Prisons by July 2026, with a trajectory to a self-assessed score of 1.0 by 2027/28.



Our Employee Relations

Where are we now in 2025?

We have productive working relationships with our recognised trade unions (UCU and Unison). Mature meeting structures are embedded and include the Joint Consultation Committee (JCC), Workload and Wellbeing Subcommittees, the Health and Safety Subcommittee, and a Remuneration Subcommittee. These enable collaborative working to continually improve employee relations, address workload and wellbeing concerns, and facilitate the successful negotiation of annual pay awards.

Effective and compliant people policies are used well to support our people and manage issues. However, Employee Relations cases remain too high across both Campus and Prisons.

Where do we want to be by 2031?

Working in partnership with our recognised trade unions, ensuring that our people are well informed, involved in decisions which affect them, and are treated fairly and consistently.

How will we get there?

We will continue to work with our recognised trade unions transparently, collaboratively, and constructively. This will include negotiating and agreeing our Remuneration and Salary Review mechanisms.

We will continue to keep up to date and compliant with legislative changes which impact our people.

We will deliver a programme of Manager and Business Partner Employee Relations training to develop our teams. This will enable us to mitigate Employee Relations cases earlier and reduce the number of cases moving to formal escalation.

How will we recognise success?

The first indicator is a continued collaborative working relationship with our recognised trade unions, with no industrial action and positive feedback through the formal meeting structures.

A further indicator is a year on-year reduction in the number of formal Employee Relations cases between now and 2031.

The final indicator, aligned to our Staff Experience and Engagement aim, is an improved overall Peakon Employee Satisfaction score of 8.0 by July 2026, with an improving trend up to 2031.



Implementation, monitoring, and review of our People Strategy

Our People Strategy will be taken forward by the Chief Operating Officer and Group Director: People Services, with key performance indicators and actions undertaken reported to our Board of Governors, through an Annual Report (and the Board Dashboard).

We will produce an annual operational plan; to operationalise this strategy and ensure we remain on target with the delivery of each of our seven aims and our People KPIs. As the College operates across a range of different settings including our prisons, our apprenticeship delivery, and on campus we will ensure that actions in the operational plan are nuanced to recognise these differences and support the overall delivery of our People Strategy across the whole Group.

Delivery of our People Strategy, and its operational plan, will be monitored by the Strategy and Performance Monitoring Meeting (SPMM).

We will undertake a review of our People Strategy in July 2026 to ensure full alignment with the new Milton Keynes College Group Strategic Plan 2026 to 2031.





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