

A close-up portrait of a young Black woman with long, thick, blonde braids. She is smiling broadly, looking upwards and to the right. She is wearing a green jacket over a pink shirt. The background is blurred, showing an indoor setting with lights.

**Education  
Partnership**  
North East

**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion  
& Belonging Report  
2023-24**



# Foreword

We are committed to promoting equality and strive to ensure that all communications and learning materials are available in various languages and formats, including large font.

If you would like this document in an alternative format please contact:

**Marketing & Engagement**

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If you have any questions or queries regarding any aspect of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging, please contact:

**Vikkie Morton**

Vice Principal

Student Life & Stronger Communities

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Our last report noted that our work on DEIB would evolve to respond to the needs of the communities we serve. We were given an opportunity to demonstrate this during the riots across our region in August 2024 and whilst the riots themselves are deeply unsettling, we are enormously heartened by the pace, scale and sensitivity of the response by EPNE and our partners across the region.

Our work around creating a culture of belonging builds on the efforts needed to create safe and just communities.

This report highlights our work over the last academic year and our commitment to exceeding our public sector duties as described in the Equality Act (2010). This work will continue to be a priority and we will work to make sure that is realised in every part of our provision.

We are immensely proud of EPNE's ongoing focus on delivering exceptional provision for students with SEND. We see the positive impact of the teams' work on our governor visits to the campuses, including attending the wonderful graduation ceremonies for students with high needs, sharing their joy as their achievements are recognised.

The SEND Champion initiative continues to go from strength to strength, empowering staff and students to celebrate diversity and build a culture of belonging. We were therefore delighted that the college group has won multiple awards for SEND provision in recent months, reflecting our commitment to fostering an inclusive environment where every student and staff member thrives.



**James Stuart**

Chair of Governors



**Louise Doyle**

SEND Lead Governor

# The Group's key successes

- Armed Forces Covenant – Employer Recognition Scheme, Silver Award
  - **Better Health at Work Award – Maintaining Excellence Standard and hold coveted Ambassador Status**
  - Disability Confident Employer
  - **College of Sanctuary Status: Sunderland College, Northumberland College and Hartlepool Sixth Form College**
- National Beacon Award The Edge Award for Excellence in Real World Learning
  - **Educate North Awards – Student Experience FE/HE sector**
  - National SEND Award for Inclusion in FE
  - **NASEN FE Provider of the Year for SEND and High Needs**
  - Quality Professionals Award – Social Mobility Quality Improvement Initiative

## Progress against key priorities for 2023-2026 and onwards:

KEY: Complete/achieved; In-progress to be completed in 2024/25

Priorities and their links to United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals	Year 1 2023-24
<div>Diversifying workforce</div> <div><div><div>5 GENDER EQUALITY</div><div>10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES</div><div>16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS</div><div>17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS</div></div></div> <div>Reconfirm commitment to Armed Forces Covenant</div> <div>Achievement of Silver Status – Armed Forces Covenant</div> <div>Analyse recruitment data to understand recruitment and applicant gender patterns and inform action planning</div> <div>Analyse our non-declaration of equality data to identify patterns and inform action planning</div>	
<div>Principles of Pedagogy: meeting diverse learner need</div> <div><div><div>4 QUALITY EDUCATION</div><div>10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES</div><div>16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS</div><div>17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS</div></div></div> <div>Continue to implement existing strategies to ensure achievement gaps remain zero</div> <div>Refresh and publish SEND Framework for 2024-2027</div> <div>Work with employers to encourage and support supported apprenticeships</div> <div>Participation in DfE English &amp; maths apprenticeship flexibilities pilot</div> <div>Appointment of a SEND Lead Governor and a Quality Lead Governor to support and scrutinise provision offered to our students with SEND</div> <div>Professional Practice Day focussed on fair and equitable pedagogical practice that meets the diverse needs of all students</div> <div>ESOL Community of practice with External Partners</div> <div>Curriculum EDI professional development</div>	

Priorities and their links to United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals	Year 1 2023-24
<div>Addressing social-economic deprivation</div> <div><div><div>1 NO POVERTY</div><div>2 ZERO HUNGER</div><div>3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING</div><div>10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES</div></div></div> <div>Undertake Poverty Proofing Audits at all campuses</div> <div>Deliver Skills for Jobs – Levelling Up</div> <div>Provide opportunity for students and staff to receive free food on Fridays that would otherwise be thrown out</div> <div>Breakfast clubs initiated at most campuses</div> <div>Support student fundraising for local charities such as food banks</div>	
<div>Culture of belonging</div> <div><div><div>3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING</div><div>10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES</div><div>16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS</div><div>17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS</div></div></div> <div>Sign Organisational Pledge for College of Sanctuary</div> <div>Submit application for College of Sanctuary</div> <div>Northumberland Campuses to become a Safer Reporting Centres for Hate Crime</div> <div>Sign AoC Mental Health Charter</div>	
<div>Report/support: bullying &amp; harassment</div> <div><div><div>5 GENDER EQUALITY</div><div>10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES</div><div>16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS</div><div>17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS</div></div></div> <div>Developed project plan to understand experiences of our staff and students with aims to modify policies and procedures around reporting and providing support to those involved</div> <div>Launch of survey to staff to understand experiences of bullying and harassment</div> <div>Development of digital tool for anonymous reporting and support for bullying &amp; harassment across College</div>	



# The Group's commitment

## Our Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging Principles

### Our community

We will value our differences and benefit from our diversity of thought, background and experience. We will reflect the diversity of those that we work with and for.

We recognise we are part of a global community and have pledged to play our part in the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goal** agenda.

### Our behaviours

Our leaders will act as role models and champions. Individually and collectively, we will uphold our shared vision, and stand up to challenge behaviours that don't reflect it.

### Our progress

Data will be central to our decision making in helping us measure and drive change. We won't stop listening and learning and will be honest and transparent about our progress.



# The Group

Education Partnership North East is a multi-award-winning regional College group recruiting students from the Tees Valley to the Scottish Borders in diverse urban and rural communities. The Group comprises; Sunderland College (3 campuses), Hartlepool Sixth Form College (1 campus) and Northumberland College (2 campuses).

Provision extends across all subject areas with specialisms in vocational, technical, and academic education and training for 16-19-year-olds and adults. The Group is the biggest provider of Apprenticeships in the North East. Provision includes specialist SEND education, Land-Based and Sixth Form. Further Education courses span from pre-entry level to level 3, and Higher Education spans from Levels 4-6.

## The North East is an area of high social and economic deprivation

Education Partnership North East recruits and delivers education to some of the most deprived areas in the UK. 54.6% of households in the North East are classed as deprived in at least one dimension, the highest rate in England and Wales. Sunderland has the highest % of deprived households at 58.5%, Northumberland has 51.5% and in Hartlepool 57.8% of households are deprived.

## Employment and the Labour Market

- Unemployment in the North East is currently 4.2% (0.7% above the UK average) with a 24.2% inactivity rate (3.2% above the UK average)
- The latest North East unemployment rate is 0.1% lower than 2022/23
- The latest North East female unemployment rate is 3.5% reduced by 0.2% compared to 2022/23 and the male unemployment rates are unchanged.
- Male North East rates were highest among 16-24-year-olds

## Poverty (Trussell Trust & NE Child Poverty Commission)

- Two thirds of Parliamentary constituencies now have a child poverty rate of 25% or more
- Rates of child poverty at or above 25% are particularly prevalent in the North East
- In the North East, 89% of all constituencies have at least one in four children growing up in poverty
- The rates are much higher in the ten North East constituencies now estimated to have the highest child poverty levels in the region which includes:

- South Shields
- Newcastle Central and West
- Redcar
- Gateshead Central and Whickham
- Hartlepool
- Easington
- Bishop Auckland

## Qualifications (2021 Census)

- 20.3% of people in the North East have no qualifications (2.1% above the national rate) with only 47.2% having qualifications at Level 3 and above (3.5% below the national rate)
- Only 25.3% of people in the North East possess a degree or equivalent (8.3% below the national average)
- In Sunderland those with Level 3 and above is 41.7%, Northumberland 48.4% and Hartlepool 43.2%

## Health (2021 Census)

- 7% of people in the North East rate their health as bad or very bad (1.7% above the national average) with the North East having the highest proportion of people reporting very bad health in England
- Children in the deprived areas are twice as likely to be obese by year 6 compared to the least deprived areas





- The North East ranks lowest for life expectancy compared to other regions at 76.9 years for males and 80.9 years for females.
- 9.8% of people report that their day-to-day activities are limited a lot by a disability – compared to the English average of 7.5%.
- 5.7% economic inactivity due to ill health or disability – compared to the English average of 4.1%
- 10.1% of people state that they provide unpaid care – compared to the English average of 8.9%
- The highest rate of smoking at 14.8%.
- Mental health concerns for young people have increased with the North East having the second highest in the country at 542.9 per 100,000 and 3.2% of school pupils were identified with social, economic and

mental health needs, significantly higher than England

#### NEET

- 12.3% of young people (16-24) in the UK are NEET with a rise in young males becoming NEET, however, this is 17.2% in the North East which has the highest levels of NEET
- The proportion of NEET (16/17 year olds) in 2023 in Hartlepool was 3.9%, 4.8% in Sunderland and 5.1% in Northumberland

The Group has developed strong relationships with local partner schools to ensure that young people have the opportunity to fulfil their potential and are supported by seamless transition processes that are underpinned by timely provision of information, advice and guidance.

#### Values

The Group aspires to be the best in all that they do and to enable employees and students to reach their full potential. A culture of strong values means strong results for all of our stakeholders. This is why a set of professional values are fundamental to the pursuit for excellence and must underpin all activities.

The professional values and behaviours provide a valuable framework for use by people at every level of the organisation. They help to evaluate decisions and instil confidence in the choices that are made.

Set against our commitment to DEIB our values include:

**Authentic:** Our commitment to diversity and inclusion is a critical component to successfully achieve our Strategy. We approach EDI as a shared responsibility with individual accountability. We are open about and take ownership for those areas needing to be improved.

**Respectful:** We know respect is at the heart of a truly inclusive environment. We do this by being curious and openly discussing the experience of, and issues facing those with protected characteristics. We show respect in the way we celebrate and support our differences through our communications, policies and systems. We create an environment that calls in rather than calls out.

**Innovative:** We understand that innovation is best achieved in a diverse and inclusive environment. We want to be forward thinking in our approach to diversity and inclusion, thinking outside the traditional norms. We do this by welcoming those with diverse thinking and experiences to confidently discuss issues and help influence design solutions.

**Ambitious:** Our organisational goal of 'excellence at the heart of everything we do' extends to our commitment to diversity and inclusion. We want to be sector leaders in creating a culture that ensures all our students and staff are learning and working in environments that support them to be their authentic self and to succeed. We do this by embedding diversity and inclusion into our values, our core business systems and our curriculum development and delivery.





# Section 1: Eliminate unlawful discrimination

**Our approach:**

Treat all students, staff and stakeholders fairly and equitably regardless of a protected characteristic including age, race or ethnicity, disability, gender, gender preference, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, non-belief, membership of professional associations or trade unions, marital status, family responsibility and socio-economic standing.

Raise awareness of equality and diversity within and outside curriculum settings, to challenge and minimise discrimination and prejudice.

Work in partnership with the local communities, Northumbria Police, Cleveland Police and Hate Crime Advocacy to ensure all incidents of hate crime are reported and that support is provided to victims.

**The impact of our work**

As part of the Sunderland Armed Forces Partnership, EPNE is committed to supporting Reservists/veterans/service leavers in the city and wider region. We share best practice, support/organise events across the city such as National Armed Forces Day and promote support for the Armed Forces community.

EPNE achieved the silver award of the Armed Forces Covenant by establishing people policies to support employees from the armed forces community. We have an Armed Forces Training & Mobilisation Policy & Procedure to support mobilisation and demobilisation and grant additional paid leave of 2 weeks per year for the specific purpose of attending Reservist annual camp training.



In June 2024, (EPNE) became the first college group in the region to become a **College of Sanctuary** in recognition of our work to welcome refugees and help them settle and thrive within local communities.

As a Group, we are committed to supporting the College of Sanctuary’s charter and organisational values, including inclusivity, openness, participation, inspiration, and integrity, so that we too can play a significant role in our region, to support building a more welcoming environment for people seeking sanctuary and migrants to the UK.

In its eighth annual celebration, the NASEN Awards recognised 17 schools, individuals, and organisations for their exceptional contributions to ensuring that children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and learning differences achieve their full potential.

Among the honourees, our SEND and High Needs provision received the prestigious **Further Education (FE) Provision of the Year award**, highlighting its outstanding impact in the field.



The **National SEND Award for Inclusion in Further Education** was presented to EPNE and the Talent Pool scheme, which partners with local businesses to provide meaningful experiences and foster integration into the local community.

The judges were particularly impressed by the scheme’s effective combination of tailored individual support and comprehensive provision for young people. They commended the collaborative effort of organisations coming together to meet the diverse needs of young people with SEND, showcasing a model of excellence in inclusion.



Three Group wide campaigns, aligned to protected characteristics, were carried out over the 2023/24 academic year:

- **International Woman Day**

Each campus's reception was decorated in purple for visibility of the event. Group resources were developed and launched via Workplace and SharePoint related to 'Amazing women who changed the world' and 'Impactful ways to support women in the workplace'.

- **Pride Month**

Group resources were developed and launched on Workplace and SharePoint related to 'A guide to using LGBTQIA+ inclusive language in the workplace'. A 'Trans Equity' policy was developed which covers the suggestions on moving forward with gender identity and key dates for LGBTQIA+ celebrations.

- **Black History Month**

Group resources were developed and launched on Workplace and SharePoint providing context on how Black History Month began in the UK, and providing information on 'The lack of black male teachers in the UK'.

We reviewed and updated two Group People Policies (Disciplinary and Capability) with the associated equality impact assessment, to assess whether the policy may disproportionately impact any minority groups.



**“We must never forget what happened then and must continue to raise awareness of the impact prejudice can have today.” – Student**

### **Holocaust Memorial Day**

Holocaust Memorial Day was promoted, with staff and students taking part in various activities to raise awareness of events past and present. Our immersive spaces were used to facilitate awareness sessions, where these all-encompassing environments brought home a deeper understanding and highlighted how the inhumanity of what occurred, can still be seen in some parts of the modern world.

### **True Colours**

The College's LGBTQIA+ group has continued to strengthen, with over 50 students regularly joining together across all campuses. The group offers peer support and the opportunity to talk in confidence in a safe, supportive environment.

The Group has also been instrumental in helping EPNE to make changes and improvements that create a more inclusive environment for the LGBTQIA+ community. Students from our True Colours group organised a Pride March to celebrate inclusion, respect and community. We also host and support the LGBTQIA+ group for younger children across Sunderland at our City Campus.

### **Hate Crime Awareness**

As part of the Group's Self, Society and Skills Roadshows, Hate Crime Awareness sessions were delivered across our campuses to students. The sessions play a key role in fostering empathy, understanding, and inclusivity within diverse communities. By educating young people about the devastating effects of hate-based violence, these sessions encourage them to challenge stereotypes, recognise discrimination, and take a stand against intolerance.

They also help students develop skills for responding to and preventing hate crimes, creating a safer and more supportive environment for everyone. Our Uniformed Public Services students also had the opportunity to work with Northumbria Police to support their Hate Crime awareness resources for schools.

### **Active Bystanders**

Two of our Student Participation Officers were trained to deliver Active Bystander to staff and students – raising awareness of sexual violence and misogyny to empowers individuals to recognise and safely intervene in harmful situations. By equipping participants with the knowledge and tools to challenge harmful behaviours, the training fosters a culture of accountability and respect. It encourages bystanders to speak out against sexism and abuse, promoting a safer environment for everyone.

**“Attending the hate crime awareness session opened my eyes to how deeply prejudice and discrimination can affect people's lives. It made me realise the importance of standing up for others and creating a community where everyone feels valued and safe.” – Student**



# Student profile

The vast majority of students at EPNE are in Further Education programmes with approximately 7% studying Higher Education.

Overall, the student profile is 54% male compared to 46% female. The vast majority of students studying at EPNE are English, Welsh, Scottish or Northern Irish British with 14% of students coming from minority ethnic backgrounds.

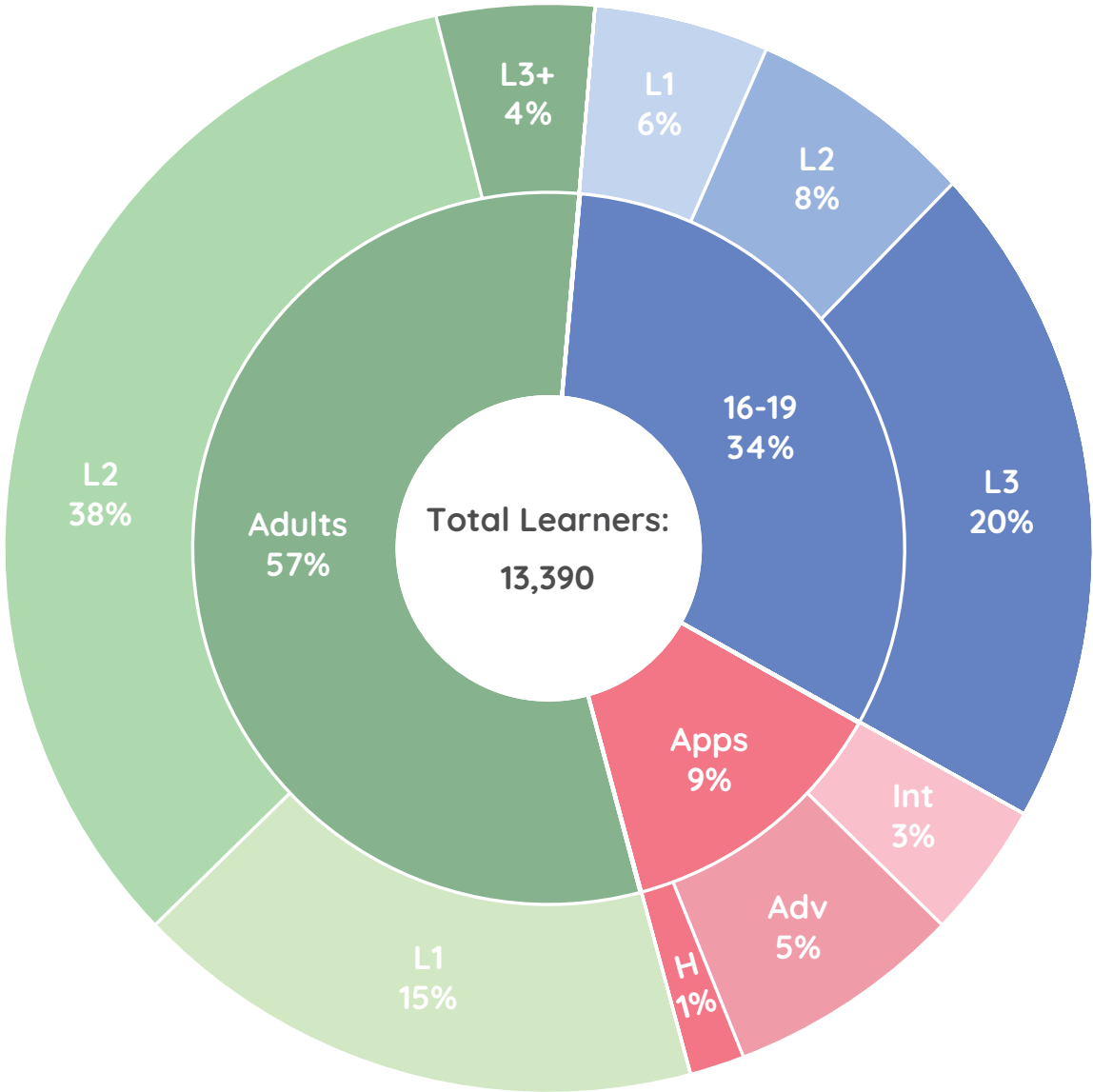
A significant proportion of Further Education students come from disadvantaged backgrounds with 76% 16-18 year olds, 56% adults and 50% of apprentices.

The student profile for Higher Education programmes is predominately students over

31 years old. 60% of students come from the lowest participation post codes (POLAR Quintiles).

A significant proportion of Further Education students come from disadvantaged backgrounds with 76% 16-18-year-olds, 56% adults and 50% of apprentices.

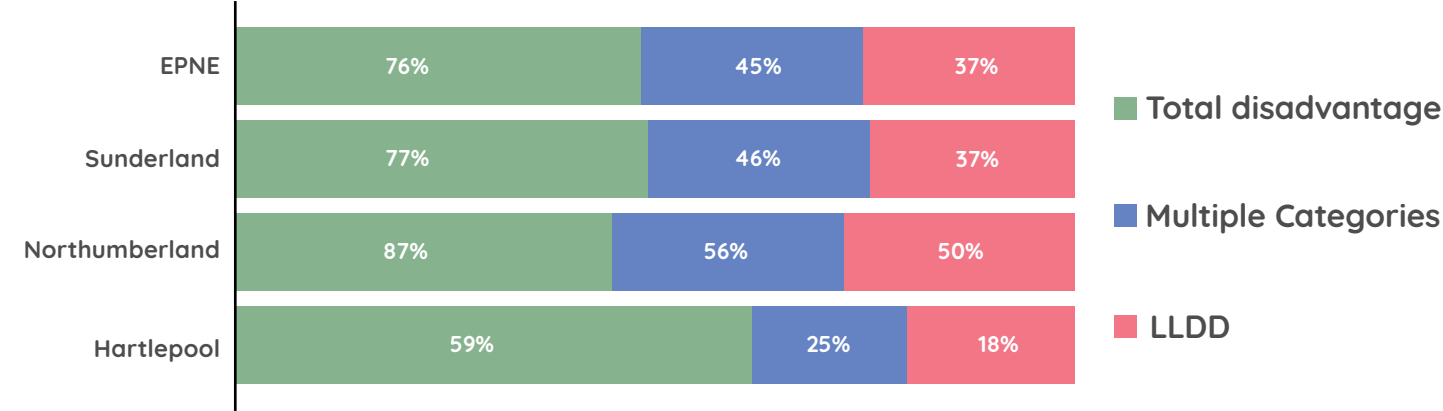
The Group recruits a significant proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities. Overall, 21% of all students (with 3% 16-18-year-olds, 8% adults, 12% Apprenticeships and 14% of Higher Education students) declaring a learning difficulty or disability.



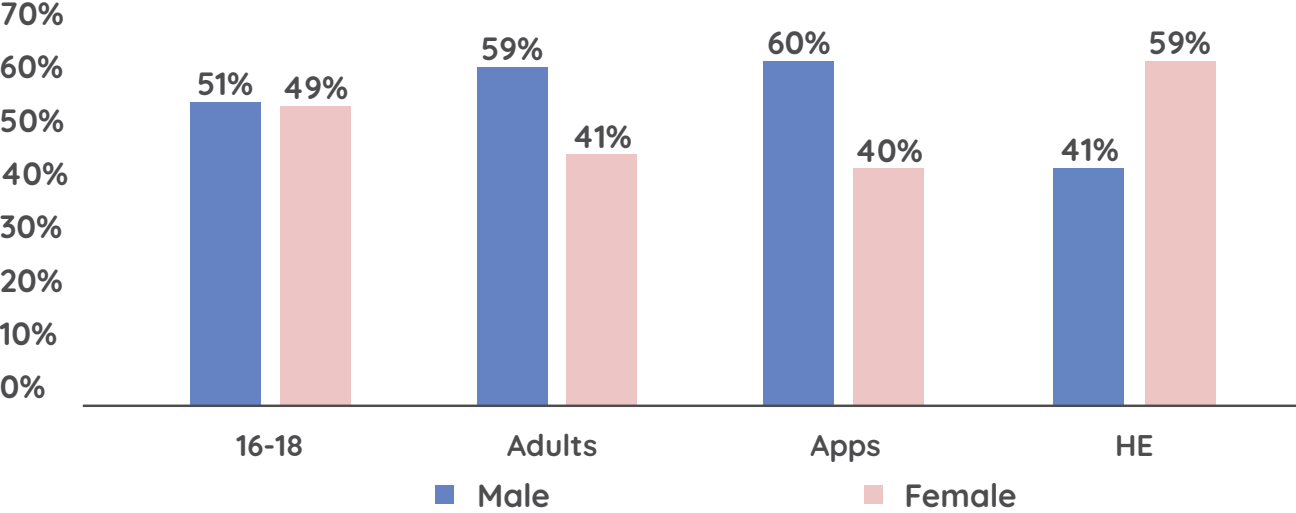
	Learners	%College	%GFE/SC	%NE GFE/SC
16-19 Funded	4,500	34%	44%	40%
Level 1 or below	770	6%	11%	8%
Level 2	1,100	8%	11%	9%
Level 3	2,630	20%	22%	22%
Apprenticeships	1,250	9%	12%	15%
Intermediate	420	3%	3%	4%
Advanced	680	5%	7%	9%
Higher	150	1%	2%	2%
Adults (Adult Skills & Loans)	7,640	57%	44%	45%
Level 1 or below	2,070	15%	17%	17%
Level 2	5,070	38%	22%	23%
Level 3+	500	4%	5%	5%
Total	13,390	100%	100%	100%



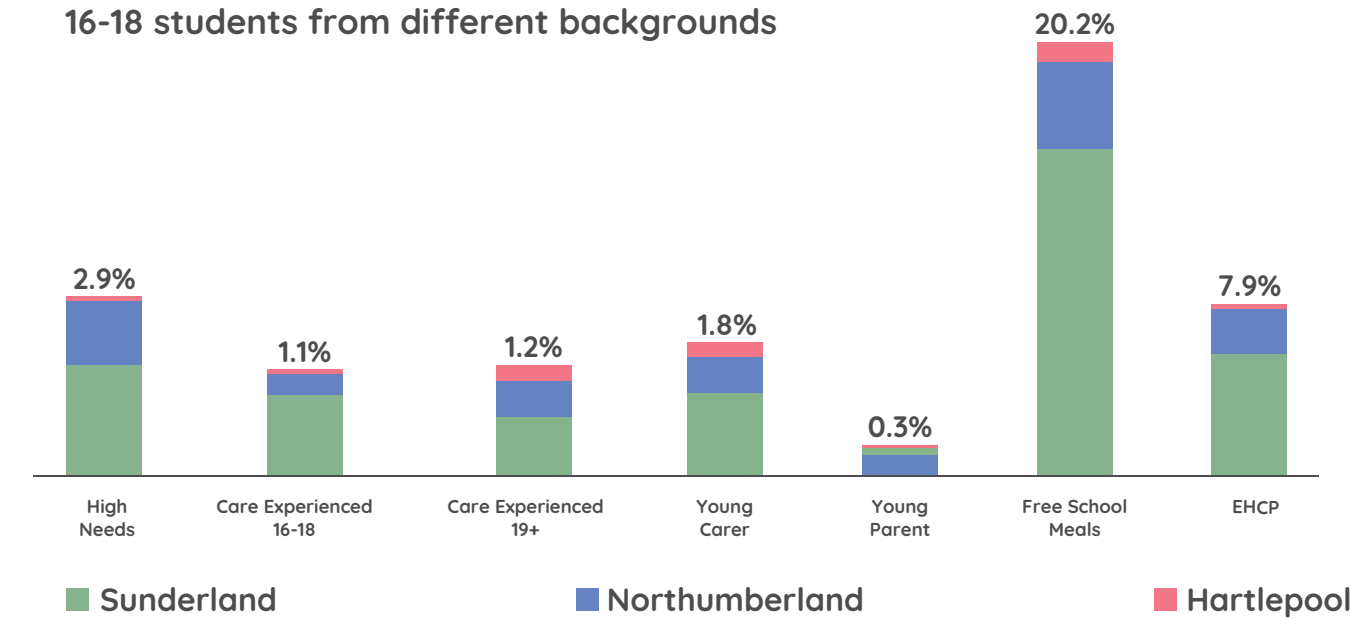
Levels of Disadvantage



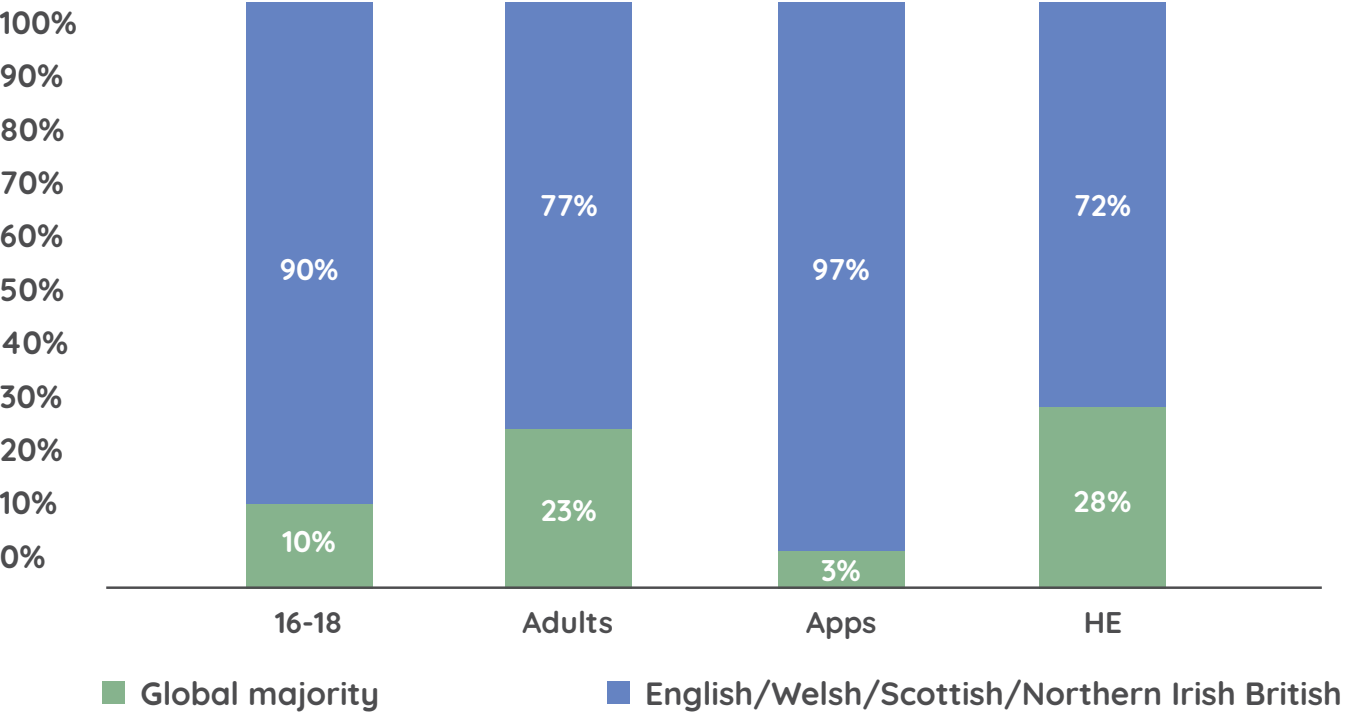
Proportions of male/female student by funding type



16-18 students from different backgrounds



Proportions of students by ethnic background by funding type



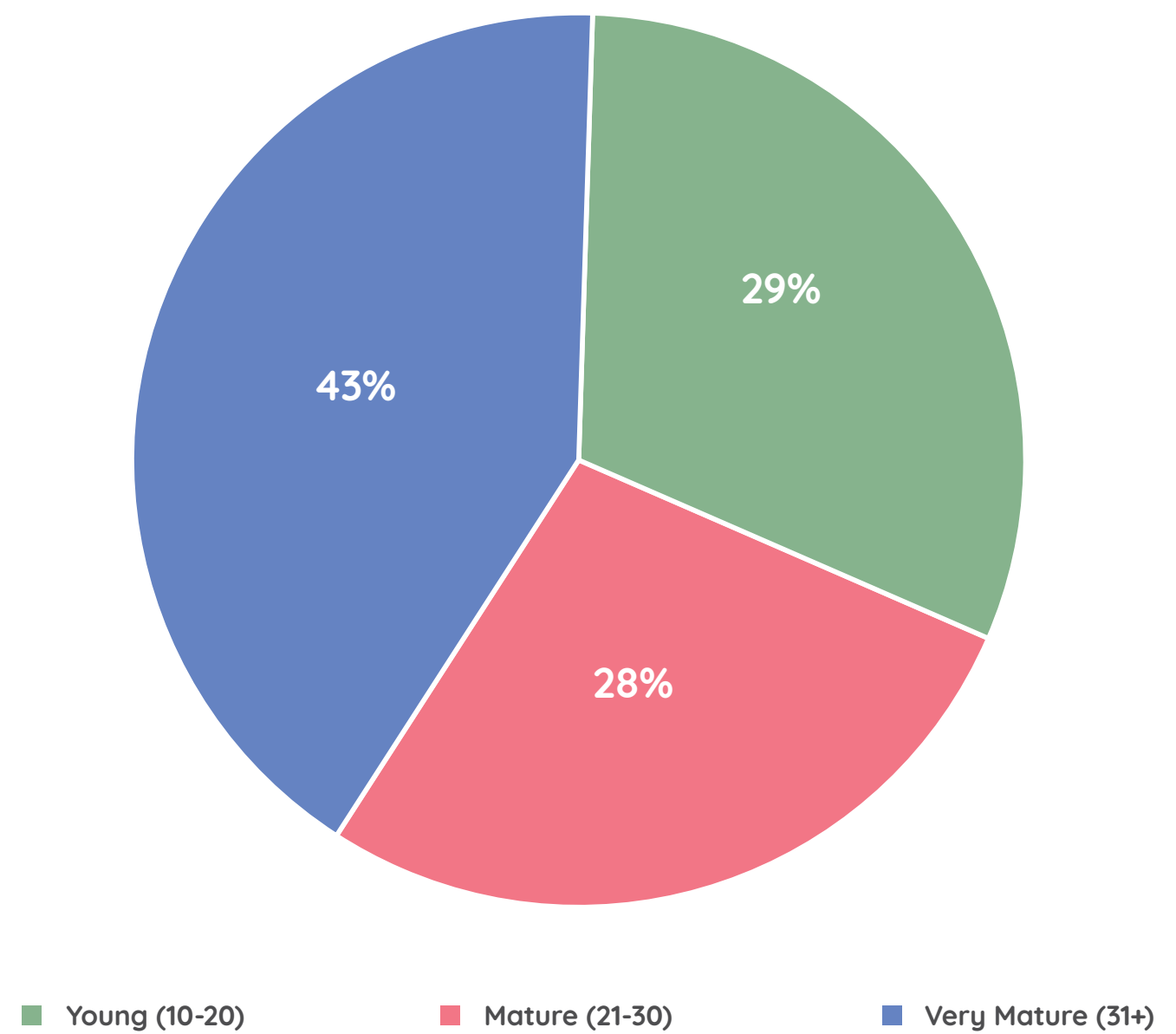
Number of 16-18 students from different backgrounds

	Sunderland	Northumberland	Hartlepool	Total
High Needs	99	33	5	137
Care Experienced 16-18	42	8	2	52
Care Experienced 19+	34	15	9	58
Young Carer	54	23	9	86
Young Parent	11	5	1	17
Free School Meals	678	199	76	953
EHCP	212	150	8	370

	16-18	Adults	Apps	HE
Male	51%	59%	60%	41%
Female	49%	41%	40%	59%
Global majority	10%	23%	3%	28%
English/Welsh/Scottish/ Northern Irish British	90%	77%	97%	72%

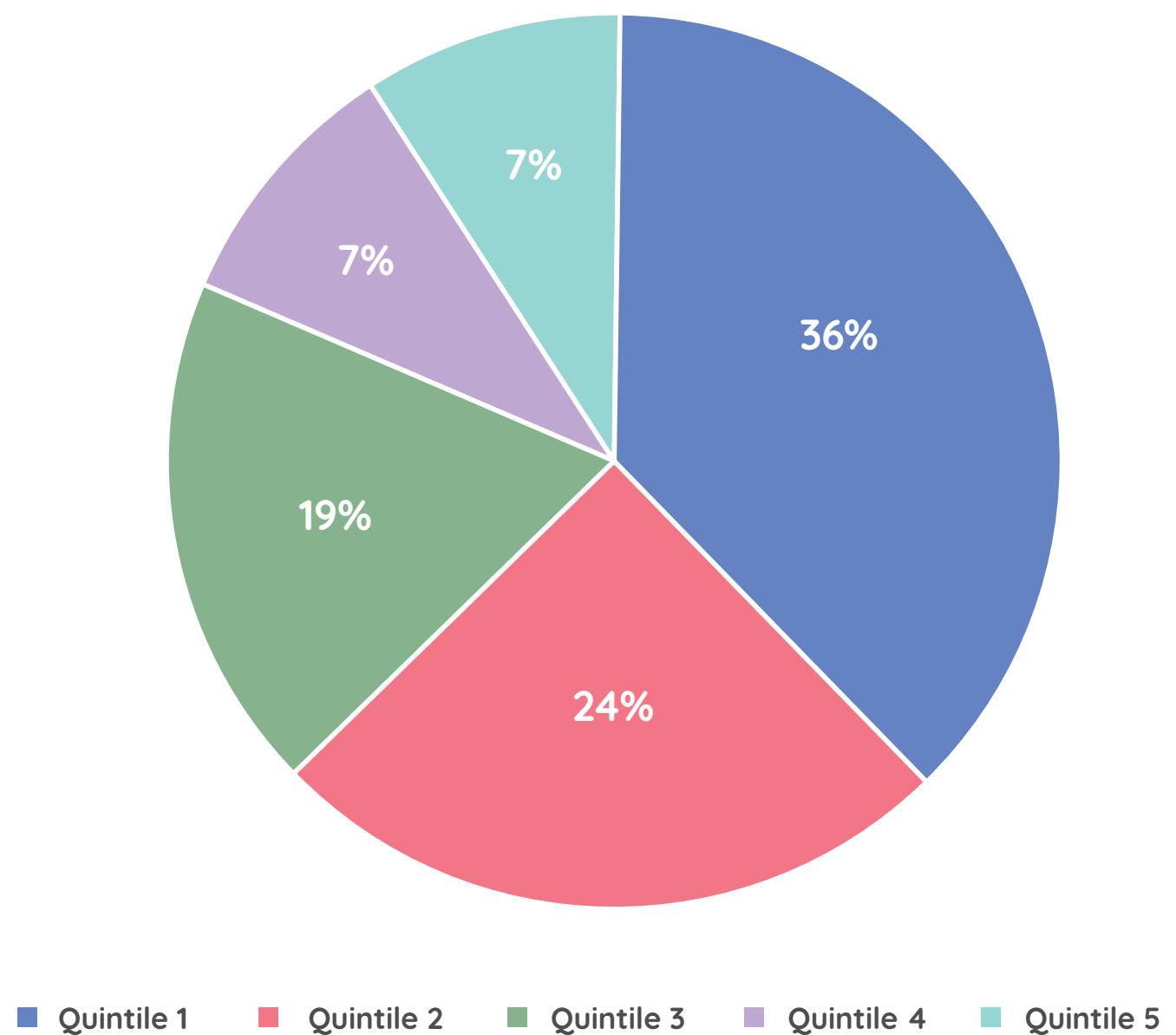


Proportions of Higher Education students by age band



Higher Education Age	
Young (10-20)	29%
Mature (21-30)	28%
Very Mature (31+)	43%

Proportions of Higher Education students by POLAR Quintile

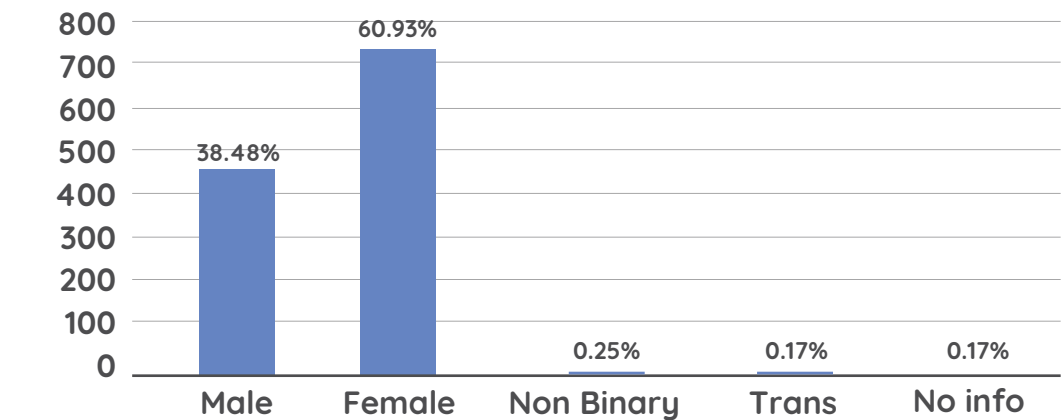


Participation of Local Area (POLAR)	
Quintile 1	36%
Quintile 2	24%
Quintile 3	19%
Quintile 4	7%
Quintile 5	7%

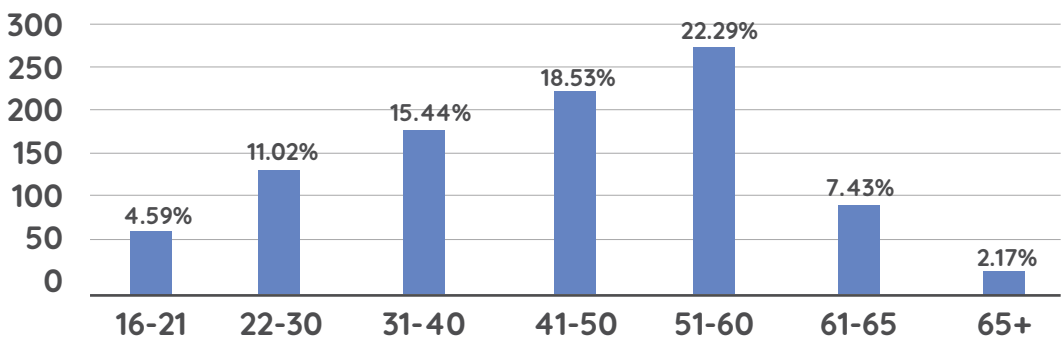


# Staff profile

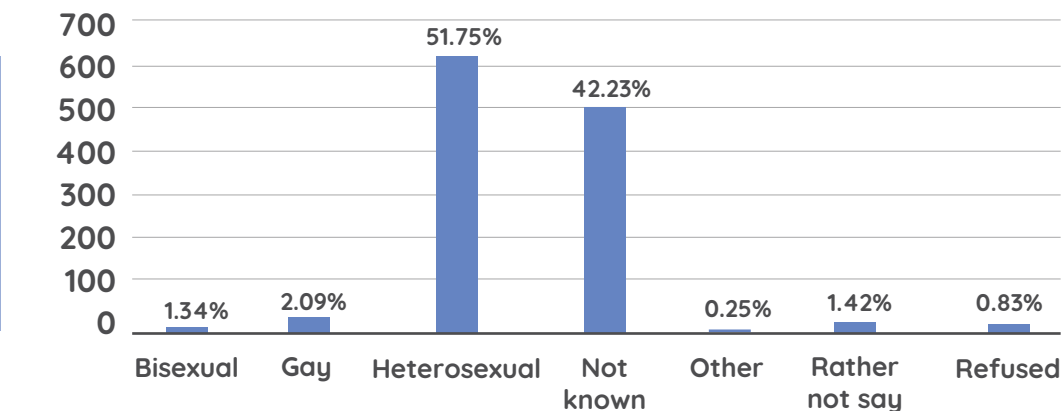
Gender Split	
Male	461
Female	730
Non-Binary	3
Trans	2
No info	2



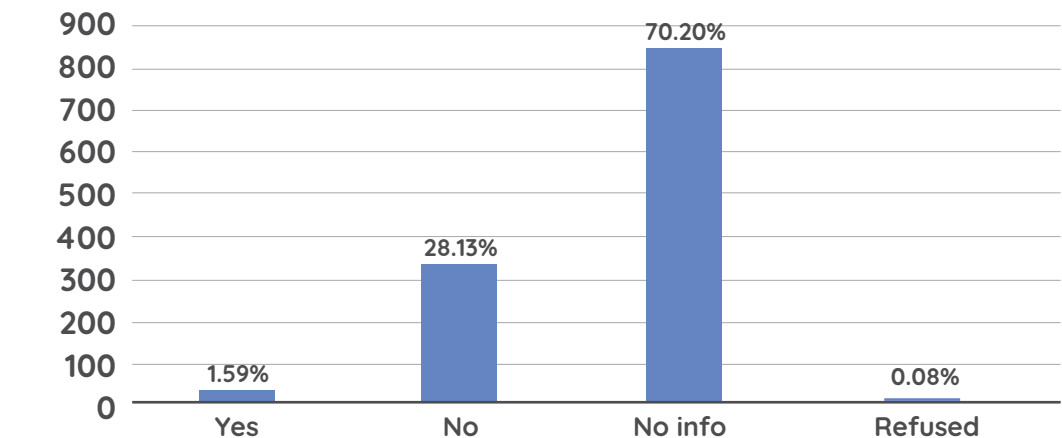
Age Profile	
16-21	55
22-30	132
31-40	185
41-50	222
51-60	267
61-65	89
65+	26



Sexuality	
Bisexual	16
Gay	25
Hetrosexual	620
Not known	507
Other	3
Rather not say	17
Refused	10



Disability	
Yes	19
No	337
No info	841
Refused	1



Ethnicity	Percentage	Total
Any other Asian	0.33%	4
Any other mixed	0.08%	1
Any other white	0.92%	11
Arab other	0.42%	5
Asian and other ethnic	0.42%	5
Asian Chinese	0.08%	1
Bangladeshi	0.17%	2
Black African	0.67%	8
Black - Congolese	0.08%	1
Black - Ghanaian	0.08%	1
Black - Nigerian	0.08%	1
Black - Somali	0.08%	1
Filipino	0.08%	1
Indian	0.5%	6
Information not yet obtained	21.04%	252
Italian	0.08%	1
Other Asian	0.08%	1
Other gthnic group	0.08%	1
Other mixed background	0.17%	2
Pakistani	0.50%	6
Refused	1.34%	16
Vietnamese	0.08%	1
White - English	43.91%	526
White - British	27.88%	334
White - Irish	0.33%	4
White - Scottish	0.42%	5
White and Black African	0.08%	1

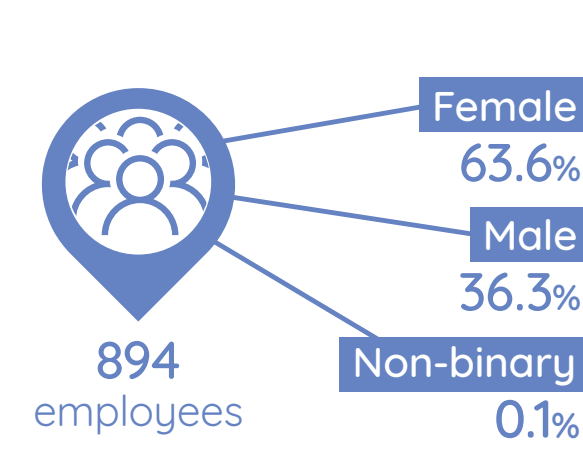
The introduction of a new e-recruitment system has driven an increase in the number of protected characteristic declarations:

- Disability completion = 38.45%, an increase of 7.31%
- Nationality completion = 86.09%, an increase of 5.22%
- Ethnicity completion = 83.87%, an increase of 83.2%

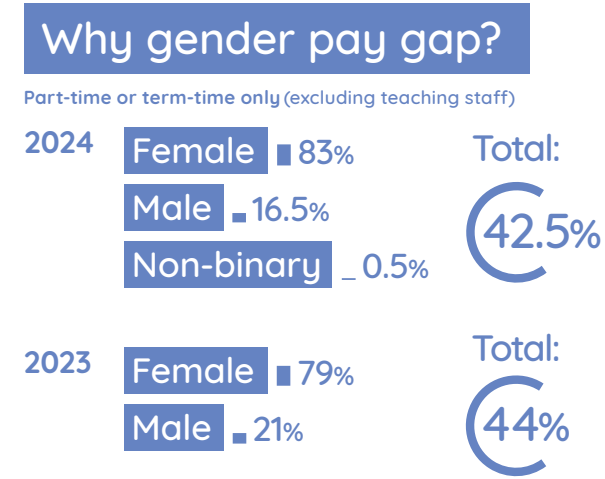
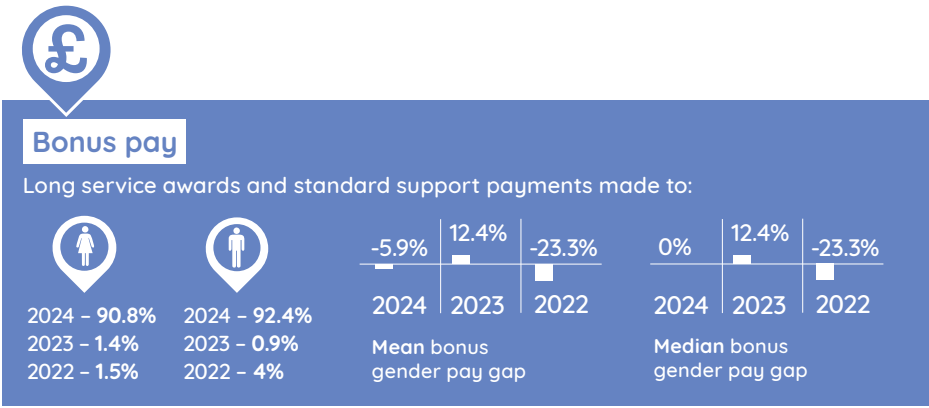
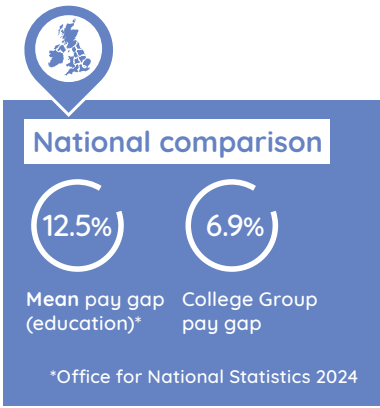


# Gender Pay Gap Report

## Gender split at EPNE



Gender pay gap				
Mean	2024	£16.43	£17.64	6.9%
	2023	£15.27	£16.58	7.9%
	2022	£14.81	£15.82	6.4%
	2021	£14.71	£15.71	6.4%
	2020	£14.44	£15.34	5.9%
	2019	£14.26	£15.28	6.7%
Median	2024	£14.80	£16.92	12.5%
	2023	£13.96	£15.71	11.1%
	2022	£13.42	£15.02	10.7%
	2021	£13.68	£14.80	7.6%
	2020	£13.55	£14.80	8.45%
	2019	£13.55	£14.80	8.45%



Employment quartile bands			Grand total
Lower Quartile	150 72.1%	58 27.9%	208
Lower Middle Quartile	138 66.7%	69 33.3%	207
Upper Middle Quartile	121 58.5%	86 41.5%	207
Upper Quartile	120 58.0%	87 42.0%	207
Grand Total	529	300	829

# Governance and DEIB

Our Board of Corporation is committed to DEIB as is reflected in the policies and practices they support and approve as well as the creating a culture where everyday interactions ensured that every individual feels valued, respected and empowered to contribute their unique talents and experiences.

Governors are dedicated to building a more inclusive and equitable future, where diversity is not just acknowledged but actively embraced. This is reflected in the work Governors have undertaken in 2023-24.

## During 2023-24 governors and co-optees have:

- Worked with students to identify a new, more inclusive way in which to recruit and appoint student governors making the process much more inviting and welcoming
- Worked with an external recruiter who specialises in creating diversity in board membership to recruit a diverse group of external board member candidates
- Participated in a session on Allyship led by Diversifying Group to increase awareness and knowledge on privilege and advocacy
- Governors outside of meetings worked with staff to develop the Principles of Pedagogy which have a focus on inclusive learning practices
- The Lead Governor for SEND focused visits on non-discreet provision with extra query on the use of learning assistants

- Approved a strategic partnership with the University of Hull expanding the HE provision of the College making HE accessible to a wider group of potential students
- Approved an inclusive Curriculum Offer for 2024-25 which provides something for everyone no matter their age or previously acquired qualifications. The offer provided for special focus on enhanced curriculum in the form of Skills, Society and Economy embedded in every course to help our students become informed and active citizens
- Adopted our Accountability Agreement 2024-25 which continues to articulate our commitment to supporting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged within our communities through the embedding of collaborative alliances, establishment of new delivery models and deepening our expertise in inclusive delivery
- Approved the annual Modern Slavery Statement setting forth the College's commitment against human trafficking
- Approved a staff pay award ensuring the College remains a Real Living Wage employer
- Scrutinised and approved the publication of the Gender Pay Gap Report requesting a race pay gap review



# Section 2: Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't

## Our approach

- Ensure policies, services and practices reflect the College's commitment to equality
- Celebrate diversity and enable everyone to achieve

## The impact of our work

EPNE is a Disability Confident employer, reaccredited at the end of 2023/24 academic year. This accreditation guarantees an interview to those who declare a disability and meet the essential criteria.

As part of the Armed Forces Covenant, the same guarantee applies to those from the armed forces and their families. The standard recruitment process incorporates 'blind' shortlisting to reduce the likelihood of unconscious bias influencing decision making.

**EPNE Cultural Festival May 2024:** staff and students in collaboration with West End Refugee Service (Newcastle) planned and experienced vibrant cultures, sampled international cuisine and world music. The event provided the opportunity to appreciate and understand more about how we can provide support and opportunities to those seeking asylum in the North East and celebrate the diverse cultures within the Group.

Our supported internship programmes are successfully running across both Sunderland and Northumberland College in partnership with Together for Children and Places for People. These programmes are designed to support young people with SEND in gaining meaningful employment, equipping them with the skills, confidence, and experience

- Develop self-confident students who realise they have the potential to be successful and achieve their goals
- Foster inclusivity and removal of barriers

needed to thrive in the workplace. This last year, we supported 6 students with SEND in supported internships developing their skills and confidence.

Our Foundation Learning students have continued their valuable contributions to the "Pull Up a Chair" research initiative in collaboration with the University of Sunderland. They have been actively involved in Project 2999, which focuses on addressing the critical issue of school exclusions, further demonstrating their commitment to impactful educational research and advocacy.

Our SEND Champions across the Group have played a key role in improving the recruitment process for individuals with SEN/LDD. They contributed to creating a more inclusive application process, ensuring accessibility and fairness for all candidates.

Additionally, they developed induction materials specifically designed to support SEND learners, with a particular focus on autism. These materials were produced in collaboration with SEND learners, ensuring they reflect their experiences and needs.

These efforts highlight our commitment to fostering an inclusive environment and empowering individuals with SEND to thrive.

**"I feel comfortable to open up about my mental health in a relaxed setting. It made me realise that talking about it isn't something to be ashamed of, and I'm not alone in what I'm going through."** – Student

## Tea and Talk

"Tea and Talk" initiatives offer a welcoming and informal space for students to discuss mental health without fear of judgment. By encouraging open conversations over a cup of tea, these sessions help break down the stigma surrounding mental health struggles, making it easier for people to share their experiences and seek support.

They promote understanding, reduce isolation, and highlight that mental health is just as important as physical health. This approach fosters a sense of community, where individuals feel safe, heard, and empowered to prioritize their well-being without shame.

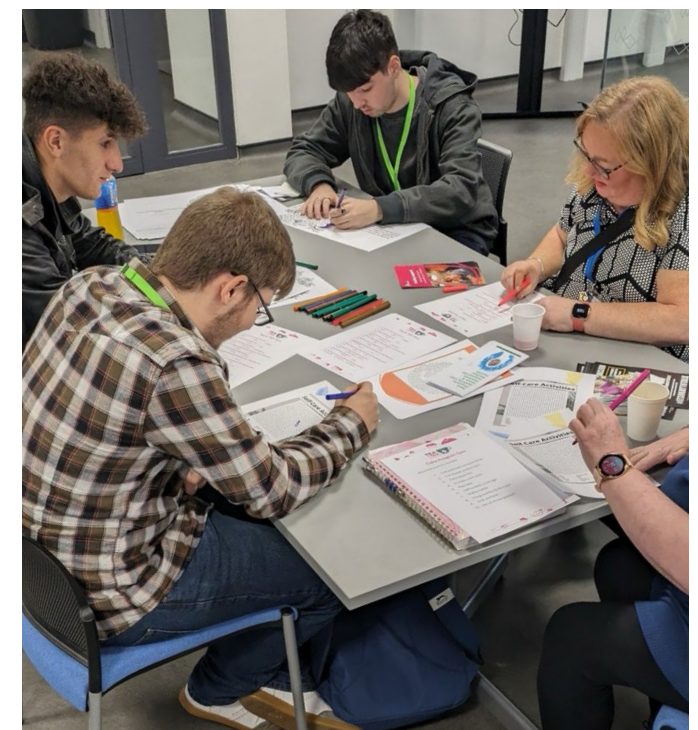
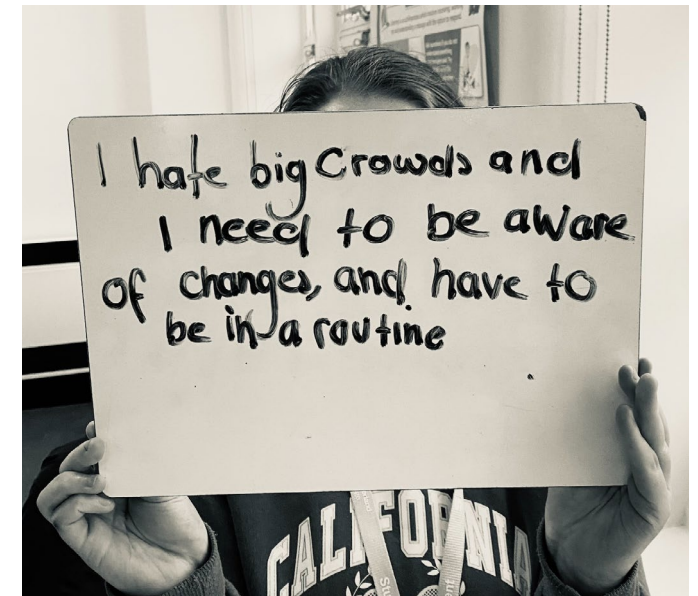
## Poverty Proofing

The impact of poverty-proofing audits across all campuses, in collaboration with Children North East, has been significant in identifying and addressing barriers faced by students from low-income households.

The work has further strengthened the support we provide to create a more equitable learning environment by highlighting areas where financial hardship may affect access to education, resources, and support services and implementing practical solutions, such as providing financial additional financial support, reducing hidden costs, and offering additional initiatives.

This proactive approach ensures that every student, regardless of their economic situation, has the opportunity to thrive and succeed in their education.

**"The financial support I get from College lets me focus on my studies without worrying about money or how I can afford college. I know I can always get help."** – Student





Narrowing achievement gaps

Achievement gaps continue to be narrow for Education Partnership North East. Further Education 16-18 year olds and Adults continue to have very low gaps in the achievement rates and all achievement rates are well above the National rates.

The Group continues to strive for excellence within inclusion. While students who are from care experienced backgrounds achieve above the national rate, the Group will have further focus in 2024-25 on ensuring that those students achieve as well as their peers.

	21/22	22/23	23/24	22/23 NR	Diff NR
Eligible for free school meals	92.3%	89.8%	90.0%	84.2%	+5.8%
Not eligible for free school meals	91.0%	90.0%	89.5%	84.2%	+5.3%
Has a learning difficulty or disability	89.8%	90.4%	90.2%	81.4%	+8.8%
Does not have a learning difficulty or disability	91.5%	89.8%	89.4%	84.6%	+4.8%
From a minority ethnic	90.5%	91.1%	90.1%	84.2%	+5.9%
Not from a minority ethnic	91.2%	89.9%	89.5%	84.2%	+5.3%
From a disadvantaged ward	90.3%	89.6%	88.7%	84.2%	+4.5%
Not from a disadvantaged ward	92.1%	90.5%	90.7%	84.2%	+6.5%
Care experience 16-18	87.6%	84.6%	85.4%	84.2%	+1.2%
Those who are not care experienced	91.2%	90.0%	90.7%	84.2%	+6.5%

Apprenticeship narrowing achievement gap

Apprenticeships continue to be narrow with apprentices from minority ethnicities perform significantly above the national rate and above their peers. Female apprentices perform slightly better than males and this is in line with the national trend.

Students with a learning difficulty or disability perform well above the national rate, and a significant increase in achievement from 22/23 to 23/24 (+6.1%). This area remains a focus for EPNE. To take this further the college will be implementing a new inclusion approach specifically focused on subcontracting partners and apprentices. This approach will ensure the access, inclusion, apprentice experience and outcomes are equitable and in line with their peers.

	22/23	23/24	NR	Diff NR
Has a learning difficulty or disability	58.6	64.7	53.9	+10.8
Does not have a learning difficulty or disability	62.2	74.8	58.6	+16.2
From an minority ethnic	61.5	78.6	48.3	+30.3
Not from an minority ethnic	61.8	73.6	54.4	+19.2
Female	63.8	75.4	59.6	+15.8
Male	60.3	72.6	56.4	+16.2

Higher Education

Higher Education programmes are delivered across the College Group. Continuation rates for different types of students in most instances are above the OFS numerical threshold of 75%. Continuation rates for 21/22 are not finalised for full time programmes. Predicted continuation rates for 23/24 indicated an improving trend for full time programmes and in most instances different type of students continues in their studies as well as their peers.

Full time Other Undergraduate Continuation rates

	21/22*	22/23*^	23/24*^
All	76.8	91.6	90.4
Male	71.0	91.6	90.3
Female	81.3	91.7	90.5
Quintile 1 and 2	75.0	89.5	89.9
Asian	83.3	100	83.3
Black		100	100
Mixed	100	80	66.7 (3)
Other		100	100
White	76.3	87.6	90.3

\*Excluding Subcontracted provision    ^Not finalised yet

Part time programme continuation rates are well above the OFS numerical threshold 55% for all types of students in 23/24, these rates are not yet finalised. 23/24 rates indicate that continuation for male students has improved compared to 21/22 and 22/23 and this is reflection of the improvement work within Engineering where the greatest proportion of males are studying.

Part time Other Undergraduate Continuation rates

	21/22^	22/23^	23/24^
All	83.0	84.3	89.0
Male	78.2	80.8	91.5
Female	85.1	86.0	87.0
Quintile 1 and 2	86.0	83.3	90.3
Asian	66.7 (3)	0.0 (1)	100
Black	33.3 (3)	50.0 (2)	
Mixed	50.0 (2)		100
Other		0.0	
White	84.9	85.8	88.8

^Not finalised yet



Student Voice

As part of the comprehensive student voice strategy, students have a number of different ways to provide feedback on equality and diversity; through cross-college student surveys or focus groups, through the Student Collective meetings where equality and diversity is a standing item and through being invited to present at key college committees. Through these opportunities students are involved in the decision-making process and have the opportunity to improve the learning experience for themselves and others.

Students state they consistently feel they are treated fairly by staff across the Group. Different types of students feel they are treated fairly by staff in line with their peers. Different types of adult students are particularly satisfied with the support their tutor provides and Higher Education students feel part of a college community of staff and students.

Student experience for Higher Education is rated Silver by the Teaching, Excellence Framework and remains well above sector benchmarks which demonstrates further the engagement the Group has with students.

Further Education

I am treated fairly by staff

Types of students	21/22	22/23	23/24
16-18	94%	96%	96%
Apprentices	97%	98%	96%
Males	94%	96%	96%
Females	95%	97%	95%
From a minority ethnic	98%	94%	95%
Has a learning difficulty of disability	93%	95%	96%

Adults

The help and support my tutor provides is good

Types of students	21/22	22/23	23/24
Apprentices	92%	98%	97%
Males	96%	98%	97%
Females	91%	98%	97%
From a minority ethnic	93%	97%	97%
Has a learning difficulty of disability	88%	100%	96%

Higher Education

I feel I am part of a community of staff and students (I get the right opportunities to give feedback on my course)

Types of students	21/22	22/23	23/24
HE Year 1	94%	90%	92%
HE Year 2	88%	88%	90%
Male	92%	90%	89%
Female	95%	90%	94%
From a minority ethnic	100%	75% (8)	100%
Has a learning difficulty or disability	90%	88%	93%

Different types of students have high levels of satisfaction and above external benchmarks across the Group with their experience within the college. Improved student satisfaction has been seen Higher education students with a learning difficulty or disability from 93% to 88%. In 23/24 the Group placed an emphasis on creating HE spaces for students across campuses with further focus on this for 2024-25.





# Section 3: Foster or encourage good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't

## Our approach

The College strives to be inclusive in all aspects of the provision that it delivers and recognises the richness that comes from strong, diverse and engaged communities.

Working with valued community partners ensures our students have opportunities to influence, not only the College environment, but the communities within which they live and work. We provide opportunities for students to become active citizens and good role models who embrace British Values.

The Group fosters good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not through supporting community organisations and their development through student projects. Strategically, the College has representation on various Boards and Committees across the region, which ensures the College is reflected in and understands the local community.

This includes the North East Local Economic Partnership, Children’s Strategic Partnership, Safer Sunderland Partnership Board, Economic Leadership Board, Educational Leadership Board and Sunderland BID.



## Key partnerships with external agencies include:

### General

- Advocacy Centre North
- Answers
- Cleveland Police
- Collaborative Outreach Programme
- CYPs
- NHS
- Kooth
- Northumbria Police
- Northumbria Healthcare
- Sunderland Care and Support
- Sunderland & Washington Mind
- Sunderland Carers Centre
- Northumberland Carers Centre
- School Nursing Team
- Live Life Well
- Psychological & Wellbeing Services
- MESMAC
- Virtual School for Looked After Children

### Age

- Age UK

### Disability

- Hidden Disabilities
- Disability Rights UK

### Pregnancy & maternity

- Brooke Advisory Service

### Gender reassignment

- Sunderland and Newcastle Pride
- LGBT Foundation

### Race

- Friends of the Drop In (FODI)
- North East Refugee Centre

### Religion & belief

- The Interfaith Network

### Sex

- White Ribbon
- The Girls’ Network

### Sexual orientation

- Sunderland and Newcastle Pride
- Stonewall

- NECA
- Together for Children
- Pears Foundation
- Children North East
- Young Minds
- Brainwaves
- YDAP
- Princes Trust
- Carers Federation
- Blooms Resilience
- NECA
- Citizens Advice
- BIC
- THINK
- Papyrus
- Global Teacher
- Connor Brown Trust

- Dementia Friends

- Disability North
- Washington Riding Centre

- Terence Higgins Trust
- Stonewall

- Sunderland BME Network
- Young Asian Voices (YAV)

- Women into Policing
- Washington Women in Need

- LGBT Foundation



### The impact of our work

As a member of Sunderland Workplace Health Alliance, the Group aims to align college health and wellbeing activities to local public health priorities, and to target specific health and wellbeing activities in areas of the college where sickness absence is problematic.

The alliance is a network of local businesses with the aim to work collaboratively to improve health and wellbeing within Sunderland workplaces. Members learn from the practice of various industries and implement what works for them.

Membership is free and provides access to resources, information and networking opportunities. As active members of the Alliance we have maintained our Better Health At Work award status – building on the ‘Maintaining Excellence’ Award in 2022/23 to achieve ‘Ambassador Status’ in 2023/24.

We enhanced our staff’s expertise by providing training in specific SEND therapies, including LEGO® Therapy and Rebound Therapy, integrating these approaches into our PMLD curriculum. These additions have enabled us to engage learners in innovative and meaningful ways, fostering their development and participation. By tailoring activities to individual needs and interests, we have created opportunities for enhanced communication, interaction, and sensory exploration. This commitment to upskilling our team reflects our dedication to providing a dynamic and inclusive learning environment that supports the growth and well-being of all learners.

Learners in the PMLD programme proudly represented the college in the National Sensory Tennis Competition, hosted virtually by Sense College. Demonstrating exceptional skill and dedication, they achieved first place in every category of the competition.

This outstanding accomplishment highlights their hard work, perseverance, and ability to excel in a national event. The learners’ success also showcases the effectiveness

of our inclusive approach to education and the opportunities provided to nurture their talents.

Mainstream SEND learners proudly represented the Group at the WorldSkills Competition, participating in a variety of events and showcasing their exceptional talents on a global platform. In addition, they played a key role in the winning team during the inter-class competition week, excelling across creative arts.

These achievements highlight their dedication, creativity, and determination to succeed. Their accomplishments not only demonstrate the learner’s individual abilities but also reflect the inclusive opportunities provided by the college to nurture and celebrate diverse talent.



### Refugee Week ‘Our Home’

Refugee Week offered a diverse range of activities designed to foster community, inclusion, and understanding, with a focus on the theme “Our Home.” Students participated in football matches, with Sport students volunteering to facilitate the sessions, chess tournaments, and engaging workshops hosted by Amnesty International, which highlighted the challenges faced by refugees and the importance of solidarity.

The week also featured relaxing picnics in the park and scenic walks, encouraging students to connect with one another in a meaningful and supportive environment.

Through these events, students were invited to share their personal interpretations of “home”, celebrating the unique backgrounds and experiences that make up their shared community.

The initiative not only raised awareness about the refugee experience but also built a stronger sense of belonging and unity among students.

### Student Conference ‘Together We Thrive’

The student conference, themed “Together We Thrive,” had a profound impact on fostering a sense of belonging and unity among students from across the college group.

Powerful speeches from students sharing their personal journeys and lived experiences resonated deeply, inspiring others to overcome barriers and embrace their potential. The conference provided an opportunity for team-building activities, allowing students to collaborate and celebrate their collective successes.

By acknowledging the challenges many have faced and highlighting their resilience, the event created an empowering environment. The day was capped off with a treat zoo experience, symbolising the diversity and richness of the students’ journeys, reinforcing the idea that, together, they can thrive despite adversity.





**“Attending the conference was such an inspiring experience. Hearing other students share their journeys made me realise how strong we all are, and it reminded me that no matter the challenges we face, we can thrive together.” – Student**





# Our priorities

Priorities and their links to United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals	Year 2 2024-25	Year 3 2025-26
<b>Diversifying workforce</b> 	<p>Confirm commitment to Unison Anti-Racism Charter</p> <p>Review Recruitment processes to identify and address race disparities in equality of opportunity</p> <p>Analyse reasons staff leave to identify and address race disparities in retention of staff members</p> <p>Review our recruitment practice to see what actions can be taken to encourage more female staff to apply into male dominated academic subjects</p> <p>Agree a plan to increase applicant and workforce declarations for equal opportunity data</p> <p>Conduct additional analysis in line with the gender pay gap service recommendations to further understand why the pay gap continues to exist and appropriate actions which can be implemented to further reduce the gap</p> <p>Review our existing process for capturing exit data and carry out additional turnover data analysis to understand reasons for leaving, to determine appropriate actions to encourage retention</p>	<p>Achievement of Gold Status – Armed Forces Covenant</p> <p>Undertake ethnicity pay gap recording and publicly publish results</p> <p>Track and monitor progress on action taken to increase diversity in applicants</p> <p>Track and monitor progress toward increasing the number of applicants and staff declaring equal opportunity data</p>
<b>Principles of Pedagogy: meeting diverse learner need</b> 	<p>Development of a EPNE SEND pedagogical approach across academic and inclusive learning</p> <p>Review skills and qualification framework for inclusive practitioners in SEND</p> <p>Development of SEND training and skills matrix</p> <p>Targeted development for both academic and support staff to meet the needs of ASC and SEMH</p> <p>Targeted development for both academic and support staff to develop capabilities and understanding of how to meet the needs of students from different cultural backgrounds and experiences</p> <p>Professional development delivered across group on those with an experience of care</p> <p>Curriculum planning emphasis on those from care experienced backgrounds</p>	<p>Implement SEND training and skills matrix across all colleges</p> <p>Develop qualifications and SEND specific resources to support skill and knowledge enhancement for SEND practitioners</p> <p>Develop and validate of HE Inclusive Practice</p> <p>Roll out training in Pedagogical Principles to 'Participatory Story Telling'</p> <p>Professional development delivered across group on those who are young carer/parents</p> <p>Curriculum planning emphasis on those who are young carer/parents</p>

Priorities and their links to United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals	Year 2 2024-25	Year 3 2025-26
<b>Addressing social-economic deprivation</b> 	<p>Development and publication of a Poverty Proofing Framework</p> <p>Financial Support Scheme revised to reflect outcomes of audit</p> <p>Delivery of Skills bootcamps</p> <p>Development and publication of Stronger Communities Framework</p>	<p>Continue to implement Poverty Proofing framework and publish impact</p>
<b>Culture of belonging</b> 	<p>Develop a clear and visible anti-racism programme of initiatives and actions for staff and students</p> <p>Implement unconscious bias and anti-racism training for all staff members.</p> <p>Implement year of focussed activity for those that are 'care experienced'</p> <p>Refresh and republish Mental Health Framework aligned to AoC Mental Health Charter</p>	<p>Development of a plan for College of Sanctuary re-appraisal in 2026/27.</p> <p>Implement year of focussed activity for those that are 'young parents/carers'</p> <p>Refresh and republish DEIB Framework aligned with new corporate values</p>
<b>Report/support: bullying &amp; harassment</b> 	<p>Development and launch of a digital tool to provide support and a way to anonymously report for staff and students</p> <p>Policy reviews and development of a specific policy around harassment and sexual violence/misconduct</p> <p>Launch of separate surveys to staff and students to better understand experiences of bullying and harassment at college</p> <p>Development of a single source of information document for students on harassment and sexual misconduct</p>	<p>Expand digital support tool to provide further areas of support and information</p> <p>Deliver training to students around harassment and sexual misconduct</p> <p>Launch any targeted initiatives stemming from one full year of reporting</p>





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