

# Accountability Statement

2025-26



Education  
Partnership  
North East

S  
Sunderland  
College

N  
Northumberland  
College

H6  
Hartlepool  
Sixth Form  
College

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# Purpose

Education Partnership North East (EPNE) is a regional college group formed after Sunderland College and Hartlepool Sixth Form College merged in 2017, and then joined forces with Northumberland College in 2019. One of the largest college groups in the region, EPNE is a trading name and comprises:

- › City of Sunderland College (legal entity)
- › Northumberland College
- › Hartlepool Sixth Form College
- › Sunderland College
- › EPNE Training

EPNE is a place-based provider which actively contributes to regional socio-economic progress. Offering a wide range of courses including technical education, apprenticeships, sixth form, degrees and other Higher Education. All campuses deliver courses for both 16-19-year-olds and adults.

The group has developed specialist delivery centres including SEND, Animal and Land, Construction Skills (open 2024-25), Technical, and Academic.



Developed within the spirit of accountability agreements, our Strategic Plan sets out our vision and purpose to:

- › Ensure curriculum pathways meet the current and future demands of the regional labour market.
- › Maintain an unwavering and relentless focus on developing students through outstanding teaching, learning, support and assessment.
- › Build culture and develop high performing people, empowered to lead, innovate and take ownership.
- › Build financial resilience and resources to ensure all stakeholders benefit from outstanding learning environments.
- › Ensure we are an engaged sector leader with a strong reputation and growing partnerships.



# Context and Place



EPNE’s geographical footprint stretches from the Tees Valley to the Scottish Border; an area comprising Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) and the North East Combined Authority (NECA)

- Economic characteristics**  
Pan-regional sectors of strategic economic areas of importance include:
- Advanced manufacturing, including electric vehicles.
  - Process industries.
  - Agriculture and food production.
  - Digital and technology.
  - Creative industries, including high end TV and film.
  - Clean Energy, including offshore wind.
  - Health and social care, pharmaceuticals and life sciences.
  - Education.
  - Business and professional services.
  - Transport and logistics.
  - Construction and housing.
  - Visitor economy including hospitality and retail.

## LSIP priorities identified in 2023 (phase 1)

Tees Valley	North East	North of Tyne
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Green Energy and Net Zero – Construction</li><li>• Green Energy and Net Zero – Operational</li><li>• Health and Social Care</li><li>• Business and Professional Services</li></ul> <p><b>Cross-Cutting Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Digital</li><li>• Professional Development and Business Skills</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Automotive/advanced manufacturing</li><li>• Construction industries</li><li>• Digital</li><li>• Health and health sciences</li><li>• Transport and logistics</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Construction</li><li>• Green Energy and Net Zero</li><li>• Health and Social Care</li><li>• Business and Professional Services</li><li>• Culture, Creative, Hospitality and Tourism</li></ul> <p><b>Cross-Cutting Themes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Digital</li><li>• Core and Professional Skills</li><li>• Employability</li></ul>

# Social and demographic characteristics

In the **NECA area**, the population is **1,061,962**, of which:

- **650,669** are of working age (16-64)
- **474,198** are economically active.
- **176,471** are economically inactive, of which **23,025** are looking for employment.

As of 2023 the region’s population increased by **1.3%** since 2018, growing by **14,058**. Population is expected to increase by **1.0%** between 2023 and 2028, adding **10,364**.

From 2018 to 2023, jobs increased by **3.1%** in the NECA local authorities from **360,193** to **371,431**. This change fell short of the national growth rate of **6.5%** by **3.4%**.

In terms of educational attainment, **21.3%** of the selected regions’ residents possess a Degree or Equivalent and Above (**12.3%** below the national average), and **9.3%** of residents have no qualifications.

In the **NTCA area**, the population is **842,541**, of which:

- **552,546** are of working age (16-64)
- **379,000** are economically active.
- **143,536** are economically inactive, of which **25,667** are looking for employment.
- There are **47,800** workless households (**18.5%** in the area)

As of 2023 the region’s population increased by **1.9%** since 2018, growing by **16,086**. Population is expected to increase by **1.7%** between 2023 and 2028, adding **14,256**.

From 2018 to 2023, jobs increased by **5.5%** in the NTCA local authorities from **371,632** to **392,159**. This change fell short of the national growth rate of **6.5%** by **1.0%**.

In terms of educational attainment, **31.4%** of the selected regions’ residents possess a Degree or Equivalent and Above (**2.2%** below the national average), and **7.7%** of residents have no qualifications.

In the **TVCA area**, the population is **679,450**, of which:

- **411,327** are of working age (16-64)
- **302,595** are economically active.
- **108,731** are economically inactive, of which **20,534** are looking for employment.

As of 2023 the region’s population increased by **0.8%** since 2018, growing by **5,166**. Population is expected to increase by **0.3%** between 2023 and 2028, adding **1,771**.

From 2018 to 2023, jobs increased by **5.6%** in the Tees Valley local authorities from **258,244** to **272,651**. This change fell short of the national growth rate of **6.5%** by **0.9%**.

In terms of educational attainment, **22.1%** of the selected region’s residents possess a Degree or Equivalent and Above (**11.5%** below the national average) and **9.2%** of residents have no qualifications.

**The whole area is characterised by:**

- High youth unemployment and high adult worklessness.
- Slow labour market recovery but remains below national average.
- Underperformance in Gross Value Added (GVA) per head.
- Skills gaps in growth sectors being acute.
- Household income below UK average.



# Local authorities and campuses

The main campuses of EPNE are located in the 3 local authority areas:

- The borough of Hartlepool: Hartlepool Sixth Form College
- The City of Sunderland: Sunderland College
- The county of Northumberland: Northumberland College

## • Hartlepool Sixth Form College

- Provides mainly level 3 academic and technical provision.
- Travel to learn is mainly from the borough of Hartlepool and immediate surrounding area.
- Provision links to 9 out of 12 strategic economic areas.
- Pathways to Higher Education or apprenticeships cater for 3 out of 4 Tees Valley LSIP priority areas.

## • Sunderland College

### City Campus

- Provides entry to level 5 in technical further and Higher Education.
- Travel to learn is mainly from the city of Sunderland and immediate surrounding areas.
- Provision links to 7 out of 12 strategic economic areas.
- Pathways to Higher Education or apprenticeships cater for 3 out of 5 North East LSIP priority areas.

### Bede Campus

- Provides entry to level 6 in academic and technical further/Higher Education.
- Travel to learn is from Sunderland City and immediate surrounding areas.
- Provision links to 5 out of 12 strategic economic areas.
- Pathways to Higher Education or apprenticeships cater for 2 out of 5 NE LSIP priority areas.

### HICSA

- Opened in 2025, the Housing, Innovation and Construction Skills Academy is home to Sunderland College's Construction courses and apprenticeships.
- Offers a clear progression pathway from secondary school to Higher Education, and professional qualifications.

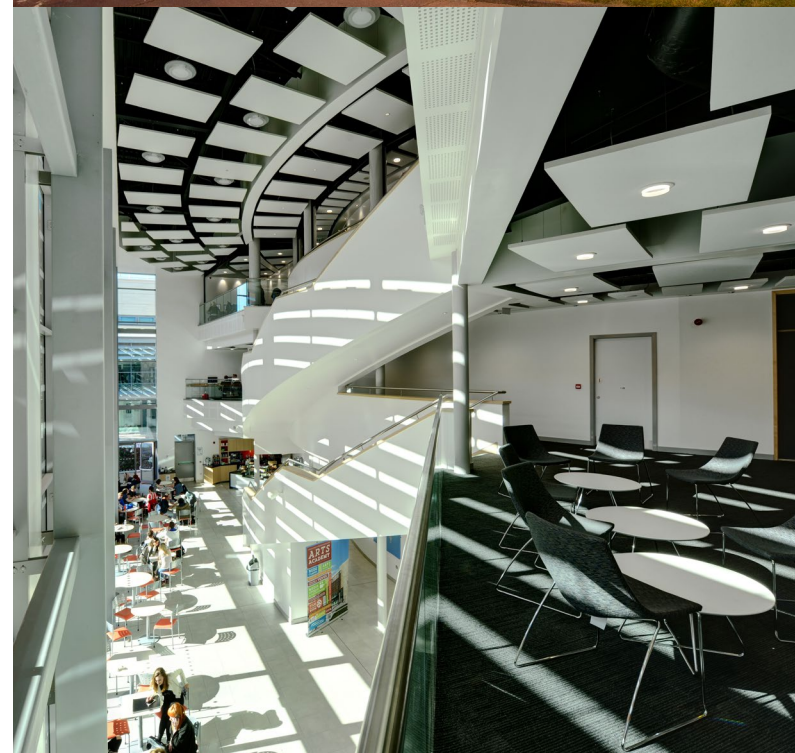
## • Northumberland College

### Ashington Campus

- Provides entry to level 6 in technical further/Higher Education provision.
- Travel to learn is mainly from the town of Ashington and the surrounding areas in southern and central Northumberland such as Blyth, Morpeth, Bedlington and Cramlington.
- Provision links to 10 out of 12 strategic economic areas.
- Pathways to Higher Education or apprenticeships cater for 5 out of 5 North of Tyne priority areas.

### Kirkley Hall Campus

- Provides entry level to level 6 technical further and Higher Education provision.
- Travel to learn is mainly from the south-east and north of Northumberland and immediate surrounding areas, although as a national land-based campus with residential provision, travel to learn patterns do extend beyond the local authority area.
- Provision links to 4 out of 12 regional strategic economic areas.
- Pathways to Higher Education or apprenticeships cater for 2 out of 5 North of Tyne LSIP priority areas. However, provision specifically links to 8 out of 12 national land-based disciplines.





# Approach to developing an annual accountability statement

Key priorities within this accountability agreement are already included within the Strategic Plan for EPNE. This was developed following extensive consultation with internal and external local, regional and national stakeholders. It was shaped following formalised stakeholder research led by a third party in Sunderland, Northumberland and Hartlepool, obtaining formative contributions from the North East Chamber of Commerce, community partners, industry/employers, staff, students, governors and others.

Other contributors from the education sector were the Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust and Northumbria University, and our active engagement within the three LSIP Partnerships has involved the wider colleges across the North East.

EPNE’s curriculum portfolio and delivery underpin the new strategic plan. All curriculum is robustly planned and delivery is informed and specifically mapped to Standard Occupational Classification Codes and labour market data trends before approval. Employer advisory boards linked to specific industry/sectoral areas actively feed into the shaping of curriculum for the skills needs of today and tomorrow.

Curriculum linked to specific industry priority areas such as in Health and Social Care, have also been developed through internationalisation supported by the Education and Training Foundation. Providers have supported EPNE to develop a community connected approach to curriculum intent and implementation.

Additionally, EPNE’s specific priority areas have been developed through industry partnerships and provider collaborations via the Strategic Development Fund and Local Skills Improvement Fund Programmes, Skills Bootcamps, and extensive engagement with local authorities, private training providers, Further Education colleges, charities, schools and employers. This work is specifically prevalent in the high demand and technical priority areas of Advanced Manufacturing, Engineering, Automotive and Logistics, Energy and Construction Industries, including digital and modern construction.

EPNE, together with other providers, have co-created purposeful strategic alliances with the breadth, expertise and capacity to shape, develop and deliver real, valuable and impacting systematic change within existing and emerging LSIP priority industry/skills areas.

For example, following the successful partnership with Northumbria University, the coming year will see increased strategic collaboration and sharing of practice and innovation with the University. This will ensure a regional approach develops much needed specialist training in Construction and Modern Methods of Construction and breaks down barriers to progression.

The aforementioned is one example of how EPNE, as a regionally focused group, is investing in meaningful pan-regional strategy

with preferred visionary partners to develop much-needed, collaborative and cohesive specialist localised training pathways. Similar approaches have been developed in other key economic areas such as within manufacturing, engineering, automotive/ logistics and green skills. For example, with the design of MADE NE.



This accountability statement has has been approved in its final form by the Board of Corporation for Education Partnership North East whose working aged members represent the wider North East and Tees Valley region.





# Contribution to national, regional and local priorities

The annual economic contribution of EPNE to the local business community in the region is £400.6 million and the average annual return on investment to students is 14.4% in higher wages and to society is 13.7%. Contribution is delivered through our Strategic Plan 2025-2030 which prioritises changemaking curriculum strategy. This is and will continue to be underpinned by our four clear values and six statements that define the Group’s high level, broad and balanced curriculum intent.

## Our values

- 
- > Courage
  - > Respect
  - > Authenticity
  - > Excellence

1. Establish educational **Centres of Excellence** that transform delivery models of the past, look to the future, and pioneer visionary further and Higher Education systems.
2. Foster deeper collaboration with industry to influence, co-design and deliver a **Future Focused Curriculum**, meeting priority skills, and occupations in demand.
3. Enable all, regardless of background, age and ability to holistically develop and excel, reducing inequalities through the relentless pursuit of **Outstanding Educational Quality**.
4. Shape and provide **Inspirational Real-world Opportunities** to take education beyond competencies, to excellence, supporting students to progress in employment or higher study.
5. Embrace emerging technologies, innovate through **Outstanding Pedagogical Approaches**, creating exceptional learning experiences for all students.
6. Inspire and equip students with **Changemaker Mindsets**, and the critical skills to thrive in a rapidly changing global economy.







Reflecting regional and local priorities including specific areas of relevant LSIPs (included in the Strategic Plan for Education Partnership North East), the following are examples of some of our aims and targets:

1. Construction Industries (identified in LSIP for North East and NoT)		
	Objective	Intended impact
1.1	Expand the delivery within the Housing Innovation and Construction Skills Academy (HICSA) – a skills hub for Sunderland to focus on the Housing Standards and Regulations.	Introduce 2 Chartered Institute of Housing Qualifications.  Introduce short course provision to support transformation in the social housing sector.
1.2	Design and deliver clear progression pathways to higher level study within Construction and Housing.	Increase numbers by 20%.
1.3	Deliver a new future focused model of Further Education and skills with a large employer to that of traditional approaches (in partnership with Schools, SMEs, Local Authority, HEIs and Industry).	Engage with a school, university, Independent Training Provider and employer to expand the collaboration.
1.4	Introduce a planned spoke of HICSA at Northumberland College (New Ashington Campus), to become part of a new MMC build in partnership work with the Department for Education (enabling integration of net zero principles within resources and curriculum).	Increase construction numbers at Northumberland by 2%.

2. Engineering, Manufacturing, Chemical, Automotive and Logistics (identified in LSIP, TVCA, North East and NoT)		
	Objective	Intended impact
2.1	Introduce an approach to women in STEM.	Increase the number of females into Advanced Manufacturing by 25%.
2.2	Design and deliver a broader curriculum focusing on manufacturing excellence, automation, digitalisation and electrification.	Introduce three new L3 Apprenticeship standards to support pathways into technician roles.
2.3	Introduce an Engineering cluster of excellence 14-16 academy in Northumberland.	Increase 14-16 year olds at Northumberland by 10-15 in 2025-26.

3. Green Skills (identified in LSIP, North East and NoT)		
	Objective	Planned impact
3.1	Support the national and regional economic and skills agenda through the lens of green and sustainability skills development and curriculum delivery.	Enrol over 2,000 Adult learners on green and sustainability skills development courses, an increase of 35%.
3.2	Deliver green skills curriculum relevant LSIP priority areas through Skills Bootcamp delivery.	Deliver to 600 Adults through Skills Bootcamps.
3.3	Work with an alliance of providers to deliver meaningful skills solutions that focus on sustainable, safe and efficient housing.	Introduce a Housing Curriculum Offer to train 15 Managers in a Higher Education Chartered Institute of Housing Qualification.



4. Progress and enhanced approach to supporting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged (identified in Internal Strategic Priority)

	Objective	Planned impact
4.1	Introduce a Social Cohesion and Community Framework to target Inclusivity.	No achievement gaps for vulnerable groups.
4.2	Implement Place Based delivery models to drive positive change and impact within low skills/workless communities with the introduction of a Community Engagement Framework.	Increased community delivery by 50.
4.3	Deepen our expertise in delivery for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged across our communities through the enhancement of a North East NEET Assessment Framework.	Reduce 16/17 year old NEETs within the region by 2%.

5. Embedding Technical Reform (identified in LSIP, TVCA, North East, NoT, National Strategy, Strategic Plan, Self-Assessment)

	Objective	Planned impact
5.1	Continue to roll out a full suite of T Levels across Sunderland, Northumberland and Hartlepool in line with economic priority areas while addressing a whole EPNE approach to improving T Level retention.	Improve T Level retention by 3%.
5.2	Continue to implement well planned HE Pathways in partnership with preferred university and Higher Education providers.	Validate and introduce 2 new HE Programmes.
5.3	Expand Real World Maths and increase the overall progress that young people make to support progression to higher level study.	Increase those who make progress by one grade or more by 6%.



# Local Needs Duty

The governing body regularly reviews how the college group is meeting local, regional and national skills needs through a range of quality assurance mechanisms that enable both long-term strategic planning and operational oversight.

Key processes include the annual curriculum planning cycle, which ensures alignment to priority sectors and labour market demand; the strategic plan, which takes an outward-looking approach to position the college at the forefront of changing skills needs.

This year’s accountability statement focuses on addressing key LSIP priority areas Construction, Advanced Manufacturing and significant New Builds in both Sunderland and Northumberland which will provide new state of the art innovative facilities.

Key external partnerships establish the Group as a key institute across the region linking education, industry and the community. We recognise partnerships and collaboration are essential to meeting skills needs and note the strong links demonstrated with employers, educational partners and other key civic and community stakeholders in both the identification of skills needs and in the co-design of provision. The opening of HICSA (Housing Innovation & Construction Skills Academy) is a strong example of the importance of this type of collaboration.

While meeting economic needs, progression and support of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people once again remain a priority in the annual Accountability Agreement and is further supported by the work to include Academic and Technical reforms to support the advancement of the curriculum now and in the future.

The Corporation continues looking outward, responding to changing local, regional and national landscapes. This approach enables the Corporation to ensure that the Group leads on academic and technical education, supporting industry and regional priorities ensuring a strong contribution to meeting the local skills need.







# Corporation/Governing Body statement

On behalf of the EPNE Board of Corporation, it is hereby confirmed that the Corporation conducts reviews in line with the local needs duty, as such resulting in this plan. The annual accountability statement sets out an agreed statement of purpose, aims and objectives as approved by the corporation at their meeting on 13 May 2025.

The plan will be published on the Education Partnership North East website within three months of the start of the new academic year and can be accessed from the following link:

[educationpartnershipne.ac.uk/legaldocuments](https://educationpartnershipne.ac.uk/legaldocuments)

## Supporting Documentation:

[Education Partnership North East Strategic Plan](#)

[NELEP Strategic Economic Plan](#)

[Tees Valley Strategic Economic Plan](#)





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