Cheshire College
South & West

Accountability Agreement

2025|26



Inspire

Believe

Achieve

Cheshire College
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Purpose

Cheshire College's purpose is:

"Nurturing talent and empowering people to achieve their full potential; supporting businesses to succeed and communities to thrive."

The College is celebrating its eighth year of inception following the successful merger between South Cheshire College and West Cheshire College. The College is dedicated to providing outstanding opportunities for its stakeholders, inspiring learners to excel and delivering the best possible outcomes for its staff, communities and employers.

Strategic Priorities (2022–25)



1 Our Teaching, Learning and Support

1.1 We will inspire all learners to achieve their full potential through consistent high-quality teaching, learning, assessment and support.

1.2 We will provide innovative and flexible teaching, learning, assessment and support, making best use of the latest technologies through blended learning.

1.3 We will provide our learners with a curriculum that develops the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to excel in employment and higher-level learning.

1.4 We will listen to and understand our learners in order to provide appropriate pastoral support for their personal development, resilience, confidence, health, social and emotional wellbeing.

2 Our People

2.1 We will value, respect and recognise the contribution of all colleagues.

2.2 We will retain, attract and recruit high calibre talent with shared values and a desire to excel.

2.3 We will enhance the performance and career opportunities for colleagues through highly effective Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

2.4 We will maintain a positive culture where ownership, accountability and involvement in decision making is championed at all levels.

2.5 We will promote and support health and wellbeing opportunities for all colleagues.

Cheshire College
South & West



3 Our Learning Environments

3.1	We will invest in a high-quality digital and data infrastructure to support blended learning and access to the latest technologies.
3.2	We will remove barriers to learning by providing all full-time learners access to a personal digital device.
3.3	We will implement a capital investment and rolling refurbishment programme that will deliver inspirational learning environments across all curriculum areas.
3.4	We will strive to develop an estate that is net zero carbon.

4 Our Finances

4.1	We will be a financially robust College by remaining efficient, offering value for money, and maintaining a secure cash position.
4.2	We will seek out opportunities and apply for projects/grant applications that support the College's strategic aims.

5 Our Communities and Economic Contribution

5.1	We will ensure our Campuses are at the heart of the local communities that we serve.
5.2	We will work with local, regional and national agencies, partners and employers to deliver economic growth through an offer that meets current and future skills needs, including the development of higher-level technical programmes.

The Strategic Plan was approved by the Governing Body on 7 July 2022 and can be found here.

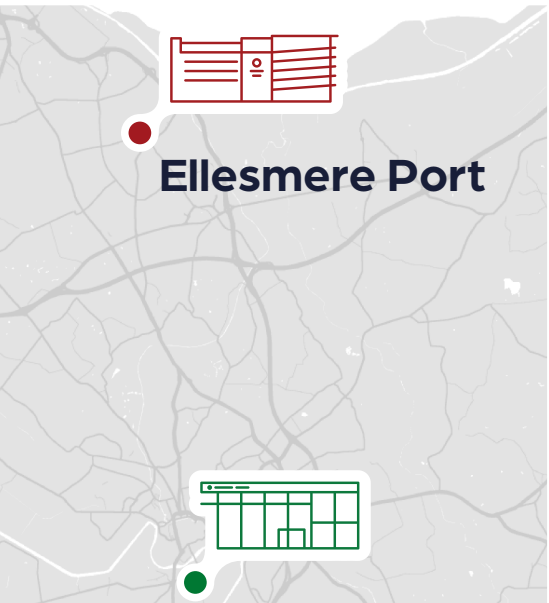
Since its publication, national skills policy has continued to develop. Therefore, this annual accountability plan takes account of these changes, including the Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs).

South Cheshire Chamber of Commerce & Industry is the designated Employer Representative Body (ERB) for Cheshire & Warrington with responsibility for producing the LSIP.

On 15 May 2025, the Governing Body passed a resolution to progress a type B merger with Macclesfield College, subject to due diligence, statutory consultation, approval of the Department for Education (DfE) and the agreement of creditors where required. It is expected that the merger will be completed 1 August 2026.

Cheshire College
South & West

Context & Place



Cheshire and Warrington is a region located in the North West of England, comprising the local authorities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, and Warrington. The area is home to a diverse population of around 1 million people, with a mix of urban and rural communities. The population is predominantly White British, although there are significant ethnic minority communities in some areas.

The region has a mix of cities, towns, and villages, with Chester and Warrington being the largest urban centres. Other notable towns include Crewe, Ellesmere Port, Nantwich, Northwich, Winsford and Wilmslow. There are pockets of deprivation in some areas, particularly in the larger urban centres. The College is located in a densely populated area, with main Campuses in Chester (Cheshire West and Chester), Crewe (Cheshire East) and Ellesmere Port (Cheshire West and Chester). The College is highly responsive to the needs of its communities, with the highest levels of recruitment coming from the areas with the greatest need.

The region has a strong industrial base, with strengths in sectors such as advanced manufacturing; the professional, scientific and technical sector; and the financial and insurance sector. The local economy includes manufacturers such as Bentley Motors Ltd; major life science companies like AstraZeneca and Recipharm; significant energy and utilities companies including Engie, Sellafield (Warrington) and United Utilities; major retail finance centres, including the headquarters of M&S Bank and the credit card operations of Lloyds Bank; the global Innovation Centre of Barclays Bank; and the UK's largest outlet shopping centre at Cheshire Oaks. The region also has a strong agricultural sector, particularly in the production of dairy products, and is home to a number of rural communities.

Strengths of the Region

- The sub-region has an employment rate of 79.6%, which is higher than the national average. It also has higher economic activity at 81.5%.
- Job density is high and the area is a net importer of labour, drawing workers from surrounding areas, benefiting from the neighbouring cities and their services and housing offer.
- Availability of jobs in innovative sectors (including high-tech manufacturing, science and technology) is higher than the regional average, although innovation jobs are highly concentrated in certain localities, such as Alderley Park, Trident and Hurdsfield industrial estates.

Cheshire College
South & West



- There are 102,000 jobs in knowledge-based sectors (an increase of 26% since 2015 vs an increase of 6.2% in England). Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) related professionals represent 7.5% of the workforce, the 5th highest out of 40 Nomenclature of Territorial Units 2 (NUTS2) sub regions in England.
- Compared with England, Cheshire and Warrington has a higher percentage of employees employed in the Manufacturing sector, in the Retail sector, in Administrative and Support Service Activities, in Finance, and in the Professional, Scientific & Technical sector.
- The area has a high-skilled working age population, with a high proportion of working age residents with Level 4+ qualifications (49.1%).
- There is good alignment of Further Education (FE) delivery for those that need it, in the places where many of those people live. Additionally, more adults and young people travel into Cheshire and Warrington to learn than travel out, particularly at Level 3.

Challenges

- Cheshire and Warrington has an ageing population. The proportion of the population who are of working age is projected to fall from 60.1% in 2018 to 55.2% in 2040.
- The area has an historically strong economy but recent success has been achieved without productivity growth. Productivity has remained stagnant since 2008, although it is still above national average.
- The area has a lower than average business birth rate (10.7% compared to 12.1% nationally).
- Growth in the population with NVQ4+ has slowed. The proportion of people with NVQ4+ skills has increased at only half the rate of the rest of the country. There is a growing gap for skills at Level 3+, with forecast demand from employers far outstripping current supply.
- There is a lower than average proportion of adults completing 19+ FE and skills training (compared with England). There are sectoral gender disparities in FE and apprenticeships.
- There are gaps in KS2 and KS4 educational attainment between pupils on Free School Meals and those not. Children in places with the highest income deprivation have poorer progression and job outcomes.
- The claimant count has risen while the number of claimants looking for work has fallen.
- There are growing levels of economic inactivity due to early retirement and poor health.

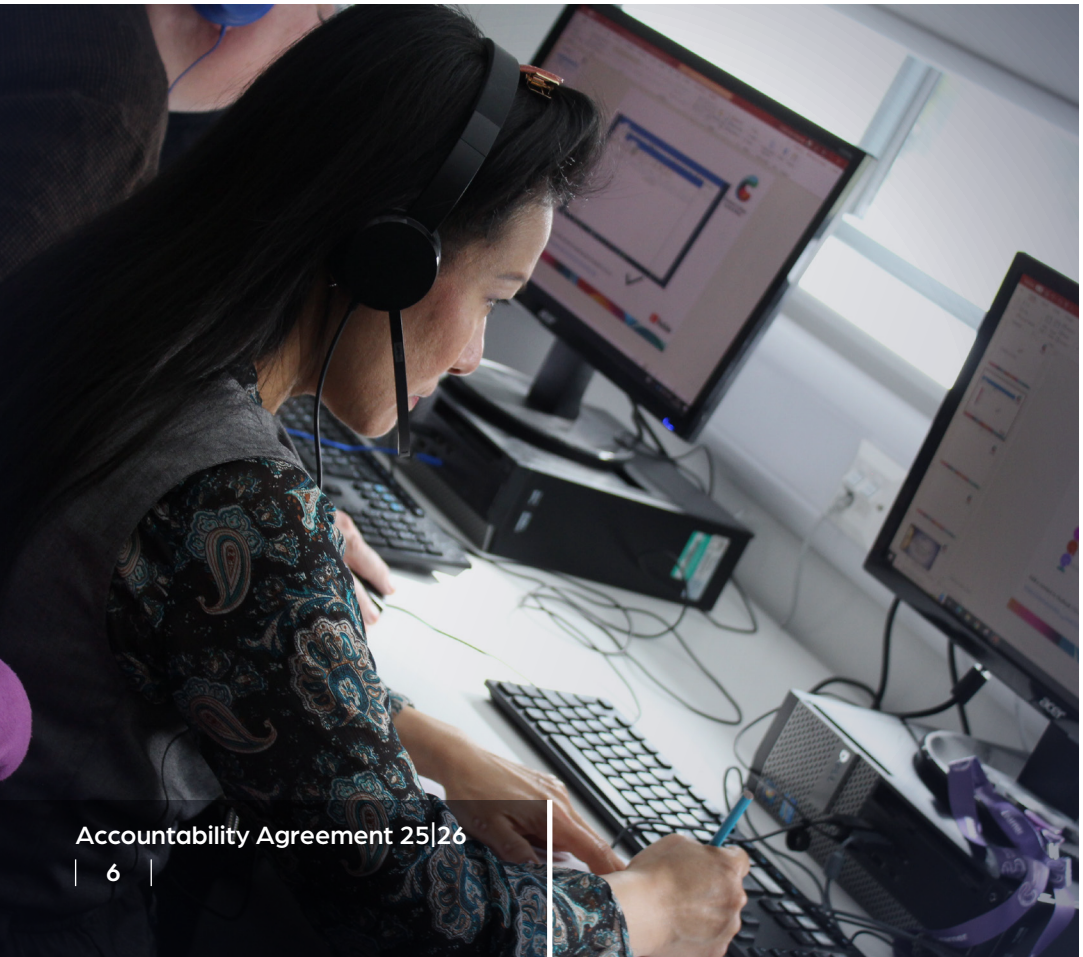
Cheshire College
South & West

Approach to Developing the Annual Accountability Statement

The development of the Accountability Statement has been integrated into the annual College planning cycle, which includes curriculum, financial, estates and strategic planning processes, all of which are interdependent.

The College constantly engages with a range of local, regional and national stakeholders, to ensure that learners have a high-quality learning experience to gain the relevant skills, knowledge and confidence required to succeed. These stakeholders include:

- Learners
- Apprentices
- Individual Employers
- Strategic Skills Advisory Board
- Employer Advisory Boards
- Prospective learners/ apprentices
- Parents/Carers
- Staff
- Governors
- South Cheshire Chamber of Commerce & Industry
- West Cheshire & North Wales Chamber of Commerce & Industry
- Federation of Small Business
- Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington
- Crewe Town Investment Board
- Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)
- Ellesmere Port Development Board
- Cheshire West & Chester Council
- Cheshire East Council
- Members of Parliament
- Councillors
- Local Residents
- Neighbouring Colleges
- Independent Training Providers
- Local Schools (Primary and Secondary)
- Universities
- Cheshire East Leaders Board
- Cheshire West Anchor Institutions Group
- Institutes of Technology Network
- Department of Education



The various ways in which the College engages with stakeholders to plan, develop and deliver education training and support is set out in the College's Skills & Employer Strategy (2023–26).

Cheshire College
South & West

Local Needs Duty

To meet the Local Needs Duty and produce the Accountability Statement, the College has worked collaboratively with other local providers and partners across the region most notably through formal and informal local networks. Planning of curriculum across the region is developing and is particularly strong at Level 4 and 5, to ensure that the region's future need for high technical skills is met. As a consequence, co-ordinated and complementary investment in new buildings and facilities is happening Crewe, Nantwich, Winsford and Macclesfield, through the establishment of the Cheshire & Warrington Institute of Technology (IoT). This is a joint initiative between Reaseheath College, Macclesfield College, Warrington & Vale Royal College, Priestley College and the University of Chester, with Cheshire College as the lead partner. Collaboration and planning between colleges has also secured significant investment via the Strategic Development Fund (SDF) and LSIF to continue to ensure the region has the best resources to meet specific needs identified by employers. In addition, the College in partnership with Reaseheath College, Warrington & Vale Royal College and Torus housing association has worked collaboratively to scale up the current Retrofit Skills offer across Cheshire and Warrington. This included both upskilling new and existing teachers and designing curriculum content and associated resources.



Furthermore, the College works with industry training boards to ensure currency of skills, national standards are met and to deliver a curriculum reflective of the sector. This includes College collaboration between national project leads such as HyNet Project (produce, store and transport low carbon hydrogen) and Engineering Industry Construction to design and develop Skills Bootcamps.

The College works with several local charities and community-based organisations, for example Her-Place Charitable Trust a women's charity based within Cheshire East. The College works closely with Her-Place Charitable Trust to support their service users and wider community engagement. The College has a strong partnership with Youth Federation which has led to learners benefiting from bespoke provision and the delivery of Careers Information, Advice and Guidance to young people and adults integrated into their study programmes.

Working in partnership with Department for Working Pensions (DWP) local Jobcentre Plus offices, the College has supported claimants access to digital resources and development of basic skills to support reviewing job vacancies, preparing CVs and applying for roles. This has been successfully extended to YMCA service users to support engagement in education and training.

The College allows local schools and Independent Training Providers (ITPs) to share resources and facilities at each Campus and in some instances employers and ITPs are co-located on Campuses to provide a co-ordinated offer. This allows the College to best utilise these combined resources to meet the region's needs.

The Principal/CEO and Deputy Principal/Deputy CEO are members of town and regional boards ensuring close alignment of curriculum to local skills needs.

The College's leaders and Chair work collaboratively with other FE Colleges regionally and nationally. The Group also works closely with local schools and other providers through the relevant forums. Every year, the College Campuses are used to deliver Primary and Secondary College. During this time, the Campuses are only used by year 6 and year 10 pupils working on projects with employer partners.



The College undertakes an annual review of how well it meets local needs through the Self-Assessment process, which is challenged and validated by Governors and approved by the Corporation. This follows the clear criteria within the Education Inspection Framework (EIF). The outcomes of the Self-Assessment process contribute to the objectives that are set out in the annual Accountability Statement. The Board also approves the overall annual Curriculum Plan, which includes oversight of any proposed changes in provision. To provide monitoring and oversight of the Local Needs Duty and the Accountability Statement. Performance against the Annual Accountability Statement is reported formally to the Corporation.

Curriculum Planning and Engagement with the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)

The College's annual planning cycle has an emphasis on ensuring the College meets current and emerging employer demand and skills needs, as prioritised by the Cheshire & Warrington Employer Representative Body (South Cheshire Chamber) and other organisations. The annual curriculum planning process uses Local Market Intelligence (LMI) sources, including Lightcast (labour market analytics specialist), the National Careers Service, RCU Marketing Intelligence & Research in FE, Office for National Statistics and Department of Working Pensions well as on-going dialogue with local authorities and employers to review and amend the College offer to ensure identified skills growth and gaps. In recent years this has led to significant investment, upskilling and relocation of curriculum to best meet the needs of the region.

Cheshire College
South & West

Employer Advisory Boards

The College has a well-developed Skills & Employment Stakeholder Strategy, approved by the Corporation in 2023, to meet current and future local and regional skills needs. The College works with over 500 employers across a wide range of sectors. An established and strong relationship with key employer representative groups such as South Cheshire Chamber of Commerce, West Cheshire & North Wales Chamber, Crewe Town Investment Board, Ellesmere Port Investment Board and Enterprise Cheshire & Warrington ensures the College is seen as a core partner in meeting local and regional skills needs. A close relationship with key regional employers such as Bentley Motors, Stellantis, Utilita, Grief, Unipart Rail, Belong Villages and several NHS Trusts further enhances the College's ability to respond to needs as does the close partnership with the Economic Development teams at both Cheshire East and Chester and Cheshire West Local Authorities.

This well-established close relationship with employers is further enhanced by the College's Employer Advisory Boards (EABs) across a range of sectors which inform curriculum planning and content as well in some instances joint delivery. The EABs influence the design and content of the current College offer whilst also informing future developments and investment decisions. This form is essential as it provides interaction, discussion and feedback, which informs the College offer, ways of working and provides constructive challenge. For employers it also supports growing recognition of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), as employers look to give back to the communities they operate in. It also provides social value for those delivering large scale government contracts.



Cheshire College
South & West

Contribution to National, Regional and Local Priorities

In the 2024–25 Accountability Statement the College set out a series of targets to achieve in the previous academic year. As a result, the College achieved:



1. The development of digital skills and opportunities for learners to gain Microsoft Digital badges is now embedded with the Study Programme and is part of the Schemes for learning for tutorial delivery. This includes a focus on Artificial Intelligence (AI), and how to use it ethically and within the College's policy.

2. The College's offer continues to be aligned to 14 out 15 of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) career routes, providing opportunities for learners to develop technical skills aligned to national and regional priorities. The Adult curriculum has been developed to enable progression through the breadth and level of the skills priorities.

3. Hospital wards at the Crewe and Ellesmere Port Campuses have been closely aligned with national and regional priorities through partnerships with employer stakeholders and wider groups via seminars and webinars. The curriculum has been carefully designed to reflect current and emerging industry skills across Level 2, 3, and 4 pathways, whilst fostering broader skills such as personal care, patient dignity, and the analysis and recording of patient data.

4. An Access to Higher Education course in Medical Science has been successfully launched, equipping adult learners with the necessary knowledge and industry standards to facilitate a career change, enabling progression onto higher education courses in the following year. External stakeholders and employers have played a crucial role in designing this valuable offering.

5. Applications for 2025–26 are now at the mid-point in the cycle. Whilst it is too early to draw conclusions, some potential areas of growth can be seen. When compared with the same point in the cycle last year:
   - Science based courses are experiencing an increase in applications by 58% from 33 (2024–25) to 52 (2025–26)
   - Engineering based courses are experiencing an increase in applications by 28% from 95 (2024–25) to 122 (2025–26)
   - Digital based courses are experiencing an increase in applications by 9% from 43 (2024–25) to 47 (2025–26)

6. An increase in curriculum opportunities, with 91 tailored learning programmes being created across all sector pathways to provide bespoke skills development for adult learners. Learners completing the tailored flexible learning programmes are then able to progress onto accredited programmes.

Cheshire College
South & West



Sustainability and green skills are a focus across all 10 Sector Employer, and Stakeholder Advisory Boards. However, to ensure a more concentrated approach, the College has established a unique Green Skills Employer and Stakeholder Advisory Board. Employers from this board have provided guidance on skills development for teachers and advised on programs of interest in green skills, such as data analysis apprenticeship standards and project management apprenticeship standards. These apprenticeship standards will now be part of the College's apprenticeship offer in 2025–26.

These are some of the highlights, however there are still areas that require further progress and development including:

Further development to extend the range and reach of the curriculum offer relating to digital, sustainability and carbon literacy, particularly through Skills Bootcamps.

Increased awareness and continued focus on engaging learners within the non-traditional areas of learning. Even though there has been an increase compared to last year of gender in non-traditional pathways, the College is striving to improve this further.

A robust programme of support has been implemented for HE and Adult learners to ensure a wide range of engagement and support is available through a specifically designed Careers Programme. However, this is in its first year and wider/higher levels of engagement need to be secured.

Below shows the aims and target outcomes for 2024–25 in an Action Plan, that reflects how the College is responding to national, regional and/or local priorities and skills needs.

Aim/Action	Outcome/Impact
Ensure learners on Study Programmes develop digital, business and employability skills so they can and do progress to employment, self-employment and further learning.	— Continue to prioritise the development of digital skills within the tutorial programme so that learners recognise the value of their digital skills and gain Microsoft Digital badges. — Create further opportunities within the study programme for learners to recognise and develop digital skills, employability skills and, where relevant, business and entrepreneurship skills.
Ensure the Colleges' T Level, Higher Education HTQ and Apprenticeship offer provides opportunity for learners to develop technical skills aligned to national and regional key priority areas.	— Design and implement recruitment strategies to attract and enrol learners onto courses that align with the identified National key priority career routes in Subject Sector Areas: Construction, Digital, Health and Social Care, Manufacturing, Engineering, Science and Maths. — Fully utilise the Adult Skills Fund, Tailored Learning and Free Courses for Jobs, so that Adults can progress from a point of low prior attainment to at least Level 3. — Continue delivering Skills Bootcamps in Health Care and multiskilled Railtrack operatives. — Develop Skills Bootcamps across Construction and two foundation apprenticeship pathways to provide progression opportunities onto apprenticeships.

Aim/Action	Outcome/Impact
Extend the range and reach of the curriculum offer relating to sustainability and carbon literacy.	— Provide additional opportunities within the 16–19 construction and wider offer to extend the skills and knowledge surrounding sustainability and carbon literacy. — Pro-actively promote an enhanced offer of Adult Education focused on sustainability. — Promote the use of the sustainable house located at the Ellesmere Port Campus to engage employers in the development and delivery of innovative educational activities. — Deliver Skills Bootcamps in Green Skills for example installation of electrical vehicle charging points and solar installation photovoltaic panels. — Develop and deliver three new apprenticeship Standards for 2025–26 in Groundworker, Engineering Construction Pipefitter and Low Carbon Heating Technician.
Exploit opportunities created by Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington and the Local Skills Improvement Plan.	— Integrate skills development and LMI systematically within the curriculum planning cycle to ensure alignment with current and future workforce needs. — Continue to embed the Employer Advisory Boards to ensure strong representation by employers and key stakeholders, providing meaningful opportunities to influence and support curriculum development. — Embed the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to support effective stakeholder communication and relationships.
Support employers and local stakeholders to develop an understanding and awareness of the Cheshire and Warrington Institute of Technology.	— Continue to identify key employers and develop meaningful interactions whereby employers derive benefits from these interactions leading to increased employer support for the College. Promote the benefits to employers of investing in their existing workforce by engaging with higher level study. — Maintain a Level 4+ curriculum offer that is accessible to employers and employees, supporting them as they work to advance their career.
Continue to provide an extensive range of Information, Advice and Guidance activities to ensure people get valuable information to help them make informed decisions about the subjects to study and the career pathway to follow.	— Collaborate with strategic partners and schools to further develop and implement a comprehensive transition programme that ensures all learners experience a seamless and high-quality progression from secondary school to post-16 education. — Collaborate with strategic partners to develop and implement strategies and support services aimed at assisting young people in the region who are most at risk of becoming not in education, employment, or training (NEET). — Ensure all adult learners have access to impartial information, advice and guidance as part of their studies. — Design and implement campaigns aimed at challenging and dismantling gender stereotypes within various industries, promoting inclusivity and equal opportunities for all, and increasing enrolment in non-traditional fields of study. — Develop an adult curriculum offer that promotes opportunities across the life sciences sector including an enhanced offer of GCSE Sciences and Access courses.

The College is meeting the needs of local learners and preparing them to become successful employees and citizens who contribute to local, regional and national economy. A core focus for learners throughout their time at the College is the development of behaviours and skills required by employers. These behaviours include social, problem solving, teamwork, adaptability, and resilience.

Cheshire College
South & West

Corporation Statement

On behalf of Corporation of Cheshire College – South & West, it is hereby confirmed that the plan as set out above reflects an agreed statement of purpose, aims, and objectives as approved by the Corporation.

Lesley Davies CBE FCFE
Chair of Cheshire College – South & West

The plan will be published on the College's website within three months of the start of the new academic year.



Supporting Documents

Strategic Priorities (2022–25)

Statutory Accounts (2023–24)

Ofsted Inspection (2024)

Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington – Skills and Education Priorities

Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington – Data and LMI

NOMIS Cheshire & Warrington Labour Market Statistics

DfE Local Skills Dashboard (Cheshire & Warrington)

ONS Economic activity status, England and Wales: Census 2021

Cheshire College Skills & Employment Stakeholder Strategy (2023–26)*

Cheshire College Estates Strategy (2022–27)*

Cheshire College Marketing Strategy (2022–25)*

*These documents are confidential but are available upon request