

Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College

Strategic Plan 2022 - 2025

The local and national contexts within which we are operating continue to change rapidly. Both the College and our community face a period of financial uncertainty and the educational landscape continues to develop, particularly as the national academies programme moves forward and national skills priorities become an increasing focus of our work. The aim of this plan is to ensure that QE is able to identify key challenges and opportunities and respond positively to change by pursuing our vision through development of our people, partnerships, curriculum and assets.

This plan is informed by our self assessment processes and reflects the position as of April 2023.

1.1 The Current Position

The College has built and retains a very strong reputation for providing excellent education and enjoys great popularity with prospective students and their parents, which is reflected in our admissions data. Figures for student recruitment in August 2022 show that admissions remain high and the College retains a strong market share of available 16 year olds.

The College roll at the October 2022 count date was 2,020.

The College was last inspected in March 2020 using the 'short inspection' methodology. Inspectors confirmed that QE remains a 'Good' college. In January 2022, the College was also subject to a Safeguarding focused monitoring visit. The College has many strengths including high quality teaching and learning, effective safeguarding, the attitudes and achievements of our students and excellent progression rates. Our Whole College Quality Improvement Plan addresses those areas in which we aim to improve standards further and contains more detailed plans for key areas.

The vast majority of the provision currently offered is at Level 3. This is primarily at A Level, but a very successful range of applied and vocational courses has also been developed. This gives students the opportunity to follow 'mixed' study programmes, which provide a very valuable route into university, employment or training. In addition to over 30 A Level subjects, the College curriculum supports students' progression to university, apprenticeships and employment through its English and Maths GCSE resit programme. There is also a one year pre-degree BTEC Art Foundation course for post Level 3 students, which attracts around 30 students each year. Following the removal of funding by Tees Valley Combined Authority, the College chose to suspend the provision of adult evening classes. This situation will be reviewed in the future should conditions become more favourable for running such courses. The recent government review of post-16 qualifications will certainly reduce, and may lead to the permanent removal of, many Applied General qualifications in favour of a two track A Level/T Level model. Our current Curriculum is therefore likely to undergo further change over the next few years. We articulate our curriculum intent in our self assessment document and publish a curriculum intent statement on our website.

1.2 The Context

We have been very successful in attracting large numbers of students from a wide geographical area and achieving strong outcomes and progression rates, with a clear focus on skills acquisition, as documented in our Self Assessment Report. However, this success must be set against an unpredictable and challenging context.

1.3 The Funding Context

In the academic year (2020-21) the national funding rate for 16-19 year olds was increased for the first time in many years to £4,188 and £3,455 for students aged 18 plus. Since then, funding has been uplifted below inflation and in 2022-23 is £4,542 for full time students.

In addition to the funding changes directly impacting upon the College budget, changes in government policy towards Local Authorities, young people's services and support agencies have all impacted negatively on students and affected the College in areas such as transport and mental health support, which has necessitated an increase in College resource being channelled into these areas.

During the same period, costs have continued to rise. In addition to inflationary increases on the price of goods and services, as well as wage growth, other significant factors have changed. The Teachers' Pension employers' contribution has risen, the Additional Insurance rebate for defined benefit pension schemes has been removed and the Apprenticeship Levy introduced.

In response to these challenges, the College has made significant changes to management structures as well as introducing a more efficient specialist tutor model. The curriculum has been adapted to accommodate the transition from modular to linear A Levels, which has enabled further efficiencies to be gained.

Costs associated with management of the COVID-19 pandemic, of course, added further pressures in areas ranging from expenditure for safety related equipment and signage to loss of revenue from transport provision. With inflation at a 41 year high, public sector unions, including teaching unions, have initiated industrial action to seek higher wages for their members.

Despite the difficulties imposed by cuts to funding and rising costs, the College has managed to maintain its focus on its quality, enhance its environment and return 'outstanding' financial health reports throughout this period.

1.4 Demographics and Admissions

A key factor in QE's ability to maintain its financial health in the face of funding pressure has been our success in attracting large numbers of students to the College. This was particularly difficult through a period of 'demographic dip' in 16-17 year olds, which at its most problematic reduced the students available to us by at least 12%. During the next 3 years, year 11 cohorts in our key provider schools will steadily grow, which, with well targeted work, should enable us to retain a student roll of c2000 and therefore benefit from the efficiency advantages of size. Nevertheless, the local context continues to change and with this competition to attract and retain students increases. Our marketing and liaison activities therefore remain key priorities for the College.

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
College roll 16-18	2020	2047	1993	2061	2026	2006	1971

The College has continued to recruit students in line with targets, despite the challenges of the pandemic period. In 2022, the reduction of our Level 2 offer to English and Maths GCSE only will have reduced enrolments by circa 50 students. However, strong recruitment at Level 3 has ensured healthy overall recruitment. The reputation, marketing activity and ability of the College to meet student needs, and those of the labour market, have all contributed to this.

1.5 The Local and National Context

The past decade has seen the most dramatic changes to the educational landscape since the introduction of the comprehensive system in the 1960s, which resulted in, amongst other things, the creation of the sixth form college sector. The wide scale adoption of the academy model, and in particular Multi Academy Trusts, has transformed primary and secondary education from a system led by local authorities to a patchwork of MATs of various sizes with their own financial and accountability arrangements. Darlington was the second authority nationally to see all of its secondary schools academise as indicated below:

	2008	2022	
Hummersknott	LA	MAT	Hummersknott Academy Trust
Longfield	LA	MAT	Swift Academies
Hurworth	LA	MAT	Swift Academies
Wyvern (DSMS, Branksome)	LA	MAT	Consilium Academies
Haughton	LA	MAT	Education Village Academies Trust
St Aidan's (Eastbourne)	LA	SAT	St Aidan's Church of England Academy
Carmel	LA	MAT	Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust
Polam Hall	Independent	MAT	The Woodard Academies Trust

The DfE North East Trust Development Statement for Darlington states: *“Our vision for Darlington is to raise educational standards through the consolidation of the trust landscape, resulting in a smaller number of high-quality trusts.”*

In addition to the changes within the school sector, the option for sixth form colleges to academise has resulted in greater complexity in the sixth form college sector with both mergers and academy conversions of sixth form colleges taking place across the country. QE is now the only ‘stand alone’ sixth form college remaining in the North East of England.

The door has been left open for sixth form colleges to continue to form or join MATs and discussions with the Regional Director indicate that a MAT proposal from QE would certainly be of interest to the Department of Education. The advantages of academisation continue to grow as the incorporated sixth form college sector shrinks. Numerous strategic and developmental incentives can be added to the financial advantages enjoyed by those colleges that have converted. There are potential partners amongst those schools that currently provide students to the College and the academisation route therefore remains under serious consideration as a strategic option for QE.

1.6 Curriculum

The design and delivery of our curriculum are crucial to retaining quality and attracting students in the future and we continue to take steps to ensure that our approach is responsive to both the needs and desires of our students and the requirements of HE and employers. Over several years, the College has adapted to the significant shift to linear A Levels within the parameters of Study Programmes. We have also made careful decisions about the size and scope of our vocational/applied offer following the abolition of Applied A Levels. Our Level 2 offer has now been reduced to GCSE English and Maths only. This supports our clear curriculum intent and enables us to focus on core L3 business in line with student demand and the needs of the labour market.

Our curriculum design at whole college level is, we believe, a statement of our values and intent, with its 5 hour blocks across both Level 3 and Level 2, a wide enrichment programme, Guided Independent Learning sessions and our 2¹/₂ hour Progress Tutoring model. We are also significantly increasing our focus on skills development through subject and tutorial sessions and this is informed by national and local skills priorities to ensure that we support the intentions of our local LSIP and neighbouring LSIPs.

It is clear that the current government is committed to the widespread introduction of T Levels, which may threaten the existence of some of our qualifications in the future, although it should not impact upon our ability to offer students most of the very successful 'mixed' programmes we do at present. The potential for QE to adopt T Levels therefore remains under review, but is not currently planned.

In addition to the academic curriculum, our study programmes include enrichment provision, personal development education, including health and wellbeing support, links with HE, safe behaviour sessions, learning about learning, EDI activities and a large extra curricular offer.

Our teaching for learning framework emphasises research-led pedagogy and independent learning as well as inclusivity and the crucial importance of support for SEND students.

Mental health issues are impacting upon students throughout the education system and we have increased our support capacity in various ways in response. The support sources available to students will be integrated into a new hub area in summer 2023 to help connect our teams and make support more accessible to students.

As the College continues to hone its approach to curriculum, we must always retain our focus on providing students with a high quality experience and successful progression, which supports local and national skills priorities.

1.7 Physical Environment

At some point, our mastery of technology may enable us to provide a high quality educational experience that is less reliant upon our management of the physical environment of the College. It is certainly the case that information and communication technology is now employed across the College to good effect in almost every aspect of our work. Our experience of remote teaching and learning and the strides made by the College in this area during 'lockdowns' point to the possibility of a new era with much greater emphasis on the remote learning model, perhaps blended with traditional 'on-site' experiences. However, for now it remains the case that our estate and its contents create both limitations and opportunities for the delivery of our vision.

Over recent years, we have successfully completed numerous capital projects that have transformed the College and supported improvements in the quality of students' experience. These projects have largely been possible as a result of several successful bids for funding from the Condition Improvement Fund. More recently the capital pot for sixth form colleges has been combined with that for academies with the consequence that there has been greater competition for capital funding. Our most recent application to the CIF was successful and funded the majority of our summer 2021 project to replace defective roofs over the atrium, library and art department. Nevertheless the general good quality of our accommodation does make the likelihood of future CIF bid success slim. In contrast to the limitations of the condition based funding, the ESFA has made money available to sixth form colleges for expansion projects based on the projected demand for post-16 places in each locality. We have been successful in securing significant government funding on this basis and, having secured planning permission in summer 2022, we have now embarked on a significant (circa £2.6 m) project that will increase teaching and administration accommodation.

We are also taking the opportunity to improve the quality and volume of student social space by enlarging and refurbishing the student common room at our own expense. Together, these projects will not only enable to College to cope with future increases in student numbers, but also enhance the experience of students during their time at QE.

In addition, we have plans to further improve our site by re-providing a proportion of the parking adjacent to our main building at Abbey Road and installing a card controlled entrance system. This scheme, plus the creation of a dedicated student services hub, are scheduled to begin once the current projects have been completed.

With stable student numbers, efficient timetabling of College activity, the swift development of remote learning capability and the possibility of reintroducing an admissions policy that carefully controls growth in student numbers, the accommodation challenges we may face in the future are effectively managed. We are also conscious of the environmental impact of our activities and work with the LA and contractors to find sustainable solutions.

2. Vision and Values

The College's Vision and Values statement was developed in consultation with stakeholders including governors and representatives of the staff and student body:

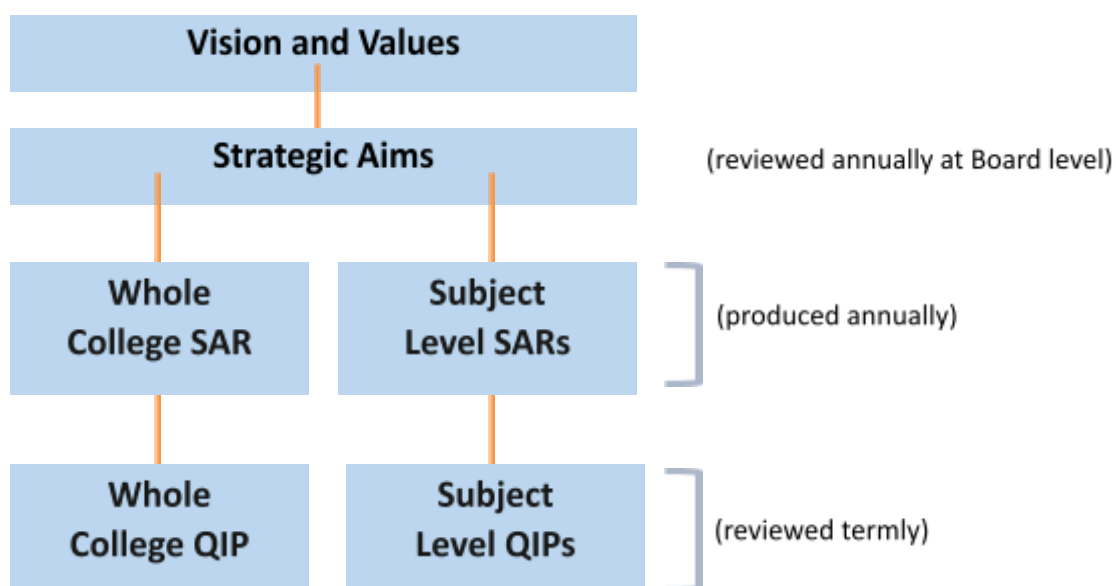
Our Vision

To provide a transformational learning experience that equips students with the knowledge, confidence and skills to flourish in their lives, careers and communities

Our Shared Values

- We work together to achieve educational excellence, empowering our students to reach and exceed their goals
- We create a caring, safe and inclusive culture, promoting equality and diversity, and supporting every member of our College community
- We demonstrate integrity, honesty and fairness in our work, fostering trusting relationships within and beyond the College
- We learn from each other through constructive and purposeful collaboration
- We have high expectations of ourselves and others, supporting each other in our aspirations and helping each other to succeed
- We seek sustainable solutions and consider the environmental impact of our activities

Ultimately, all activity at the College can be traced back to this vision. The strategic aims of the College, set out below, are reviewed annually by the Board. The quality process that underpins these aims includes our annual Whole College Self Assessment Report (SAR) together with subject level SARs, which critically reflect upon our performance, making judgements and generate quality improvement actions. These actions are compiled in Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) at whole college and subject level. QIPs are reviewed at regular points throughout the year to monitor effective implementation and ensure desired impacts are achieved.



3. Strategic Aims

We plan to deliver our vision through achievement of the following strategic aims, all of which are intended to enhance the student experience, helping students to learn and make progress in a safe, fair and ambitious environment:

3.1 Develop our people by:

- Investing in well chosen and high quality staff development activity both within the College and in conjunction with external partners
- Developing the use of new technologies to support individuals and teams in their work
- Ensuring that staff and students understand how they learn and use this knowledge productively
- Creating a productive and engaging learning culture in which students and staff value their own learning as well as that of others

3.2 Develop our partnerships by:

- Working together with other education providers from board to classroom level
- Continuing to assess the viability of legal changes (such as academisation) to enhance our students' experience
- Linking with the business community and HE providers to improve skills and progression opportunities for students
- Maintaining a recruitment and marketing strategy that allows us to respond quickly and effectively to demographic and market changes

3.3 Develop our curriculum by:

- Reviewing and, when necessary, adapting our curriculum in the context of national and regional skills needs and priorities
- Ensuring that the intent, implementation and impact of our curriculum are effective in enabling students to make excellent progress and achieve their objectives
- Ensuring that safeguarding and wellbeing are embedded in all of our practice
- Promoting equality, diversity and British values

3.4 Develop our resources by:

- Maintaining an effective Accommodation Strategy and delivering its objectives
- Reviewing our financial strategy to ensure deliverability and affordability of our strategic aims
- Utilising our existing accommodation as creatively as possible in support of curriculum intent
- Exploiting the potential of technology to support our aims

3.5 Develop our strategic position by:

- Understanding the policy direction of national and local government
- Following and shaping local and regional developments through active membership of key groups and organisations such as SFCA, NorVIC and Darlington Education Strategy Group
- Actively seeking information and intelligence regarding developments outside of QE that may present risks or opportunities
- Maintaining a clear understanding of the needs and ambitions of students and prospective students to ensure that our decision making and objectives are informed and relevant