



**SWC**

**SOUTH WEST COLLEGE**

**2024 - 2025  
COLLEGE  
DEVELOPMENT  
PLAN**

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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The South West College's 2024-2025 College Development Plan outlines the College priorities for the year ahead, and details their alignment with Ministerial Priorities:

- Good Jobs
- Raise Productivity
- Regional Balance
- Decarbonisation

South West College's comprehensive industry aligned offering will attract 12,385 learners in 2024-25 ensuring a greater number of citizens can avail of high quality Further and Higher Education locally and supporting the achievement of a regionally balanced economy. In the year ahead the College will maintain its focus on increasing the number of Apprentices and Higher Level Apprentices employed locally in 'good jobs'. We anticipate robust recruitment to Apprenticeships, despite the impact of a downturn in the Materials Handling manufacturing sector, with 1969 individuals studying at our campuses in the 2024-25 year. Low productivity remains a challenge for industry within the region. The College has aligned its resources to addressing the challenge presented by of low levels of productivity, targeting an expansion of 5% in the number of businesses supported to undertake product and process innovation. The College's commitment to decarbonisation is detailed in the newly developed Sustainability and Net Zero Action Plans which detail the road map to Net Zero by 2050.

South West College is one of six FE colleges in Northern Ireland (the FE sector), which are all Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) and are a key delivery arm of the Department for the Economy (DfE). Under Article 20 of the Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, FE Colleges are required to produce and submit College Development Plans in line with DfE requirements. These College Development Plans reflect the sector's mandate to play a central role in supporting a strong and vibrant local economy through the development of professional and technical skills, increasingly at higher levels, by helping businesses to innovate; and supporting those with low or no qualifications, or who have other barriers to learning; through social inclusion programmes aimed at providing them with the skills and qualifications needed to find employment and to become economically active.

Figure 1: College Priorities 2024-25



South West College has made considerable progress with its organisational change programme and the 2024-2025 year will see the organisation transitioning to a business-as-usual model, guided by a further action plan detailing key activities. The overarching theme of Organisational Development is also identified as a key priority in 2024-25 (Figure 1).

The College is committed to strengthening the partnership with the communities we serve, to provide citizens from across the region with lifelong high quality, full and part time learning opportunities. A key focus this year will be on student experience and initiatives designed to positively enhance the experience of all students. Commitments are underpinned by the vision, mission, and values which reflect the College's commitment to inspire, promote and empower lifelong learning for the people of the region, working in partnership with our local employers and industry (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: College Vision, Mission and Values**



The College's primary intake area effectively covers the council districts of Fermanagh and Omagh (F&O) and a significant component of Mid Ulster (MU), an extensively rural industrious region, highly successful in many respects. However, there are several sub-regional issues pertinent to the area that shape College priorities, community engagement and the skills and employability initiatives we offer to our students, figure1 belowabove. Economic inactivity remains an ongoing issue for the region with a quarter of the working age population considered as economically inactive. In addition to this, the region has consistently ranked high in terms of its percentage of working age residents having no formal qualifications, with above NI average rates and falling within the lowest performing council areas. It is against this background that the College continues to prioritise targeted social inclusion and employability initiatives as the initial steps on a pathway where all learners can enter at their level and progress through a range of professional and technical education options leading to further and higher education.

Whilst the region continues to be challenged by pockets of low qualification attainment and economic inactivity, it is also home to a significant industrial base including the Mid Ulster Manufacturing cluster which employs almost twice as many people in this sector than any other Council region in Northern Ireland. Health and Social Care, Construction and Retail also remain economically important sectors of the regional economy.

This College Development Plan sets out the aims, objectives and operational targets that the College has set for 2024-2025, aligned with the strategic priorities of The Department for the Economy (DfE) and endorsed by our Governing Body. The College will strive to deliver these priorities, working together with our staff and students, DfE, the wider FE sector, and our industry and community stakeholders.

## 2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

### Executive's draft PfG Outcomes Framework

#### Grow a Globally Competitive Economy

**Action:** Through a series of multi-million pounds committed investments, we will make this a more vibrant and inclusive place to live, work, invest and visit. Central to every part of our plan for a globally competitive and sustainable economy will be employers and workers, supporting them to build the skills needed both now, and in the future, will be vital if we are to harness our economic potential.

#### Minister's Economic Vision

The College is a key delivery partner in taking forward the Minister's priorities set out in his Economic Vision to:

- Increase the proportion of working-age people in **Good Jobs**;
- Promote a more **Regionally Balanced** economy;
- **Raise Productivity** of businesses; and
- **Reduce Carbon Emissions** in the transition to a greener and more sustainable economy.

#### Strategies / Priorities

- [Delivering the Economic Vision A three year forward look & 2024/25 Action Plan](#)
- [Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland](#)
- [Trade and Investment Strategic Priorities](#)
- [Climate Change Act \(NI\) 2022](#)
- Review of the FE Delivery Model
- [Developing a More Strategic Approach to 14-19 Education and Training - a Framework to Transform 14-19 Education and Training Provision](#)
- [Sub Regional Skills Barometer - West](#)

### 3. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE / POSITION

#### 2024/25 Forecast Position

The table below sets out the college resource of £34,869k and £1,130k capital requirements for a total of £35,999k for 2024/25.

	PROGRAMME / ACTIVITY					
	A	B	C	D	E	F
	Further Education	Higher Education	Apprenticeships / Traineeships	Business Development	Social Inclusion	Other
	EL - Level 3 (not under B – F)	Level 4+	Programmes up to Level 3 including AppsNI; Traineeships; Skills for Life and Work; TfS	InnovateUs; Skills Focus; Assured Skills Academies; Flexible Skills; International Programmes; Innovation Voucher Scheme	Access NI; Essential Skills; ESOL; College Connect; NI Prisons Service; VEP; Princes Trust; UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Step Up	Miscellaneous income including VAT reclaim and bank interest receivable
Direct Teaching Costs - Pay	6,350	3,159	5,150	72	2,037	-
Direct Teaching Costs - Non Pay	344	171	279	114	113	-
Non-Direct Costs*	9,923	5,151	8,618	1,661	4,819	158
<b>Total Delivery Cost</b>	<b>16,617</b>	<b>8,482</b>	<b>14,047</b>	<b>1,848</b>	<b>6,969</b>	<b>158</b>
Non-Grant in Aid Income	1,184	3,499	5,429	1,013	1,814	313
<b>Net Requirement</b>	<b>15,434</b>	<b>4,983</b>	<b>8,618</b>	<b>835</b>	<b>5,154</b>	<b>-155</b>

\* Includes total support service/non-front-line activity overheads apportioned based on delivery hours.

<b>TOTAL RESOURCE REQUIREMENT (£000's)</b>	<b>£34,869</b>
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Capital Expenditure	£1,130
Capital Receipts	£0
<b>Net Capital Requirement (£000's)</b>	<b>£1,130</b>

## Impact of the Reform to Save Scheme

Staff numbers control has been provided by South West College and evidenced by the targets provided in the following table:

Staff numbers FTE	Staff Type	Actual 31st July 2023	RtS Leavers	Actual 31st July 2024	Target 31st March 2025
	Teaching	326	16.08	288	280
	Non-Teaching	299	12.24	305	322
	Total	625	28.32	593	602
Externally funded posts		25		-12	-22
Vacant posts		15		20	14
DfE funded posts		615		601	594

The staff numbers included in the table are based on the Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) average staff numbers over the relevant financial year.

Funded posts are not paid for from the DfE Budget Allocation and vary from year-to-year dependent on the timeframe of the projects they relate to. They should therefore be excluded from the baseline staff numbers (FTE).

The College is monitoring staff numbers each month to ensure salary costs are controlled and target staff number levels are achieved and maintained.

## 4. 2024/25 COLLEGE PLANNED DELIVERY

The College takes into account the College profile and Sub-regional Operating Context to prioritise resource utilisation to areas of greatest need, aligned to the Strategic Context.

### A. COLLEGE PROFILE FOR 2024/25

South West College operates across the four major towns in the region; Omagh, Dungannon, Cookstown and Enniskillen and falling within the Council Districts of Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and a significant component of Mid Ulster. Collectively both councils have a population of approximately 268,000<sup>1</sup>. The College's footprint covers a large rural area within those Council Districts servicing a population of 215,000 people approximately. Although encompassing a primarily rural area, our campuses are located within an industrial region which is home to key sectors including Manufacturing, Engineering and Construction. The College offers a broad spectrum of high quality professional and technical education aimed at meeting the needs of our students, the local community and industry in this region.

**Figure 3: Staffing Profile**

#### STAFF COMPOSITION | 31 JULY 2024

Principal & Chief Executive  
and Deputy Directors



College Management Team

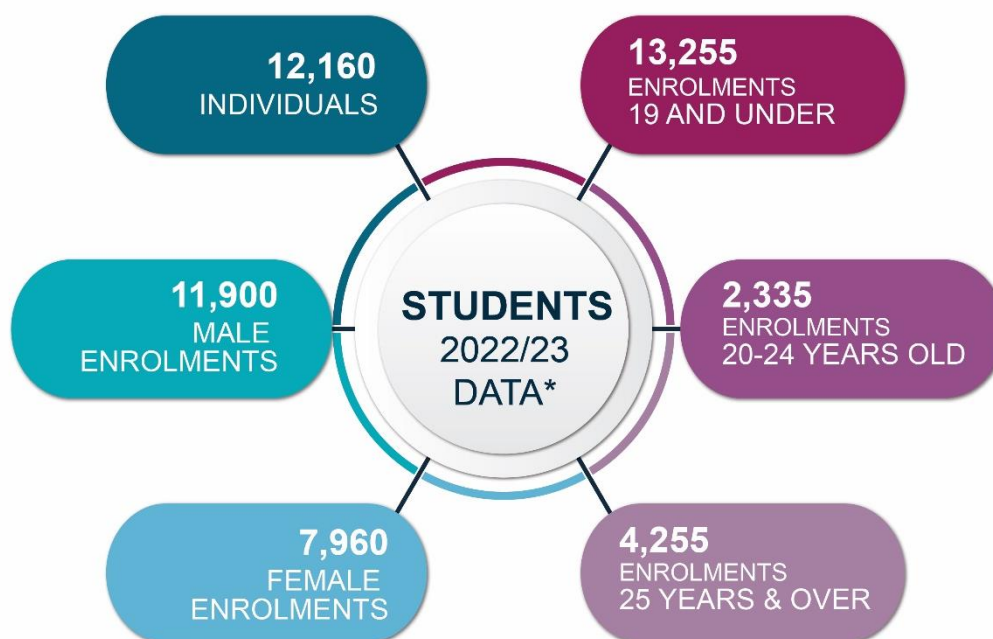


Employees  
(excluding Part-Time Lecturers)





**Figure 4: Student Profile**



### **CAMPUS PROFILE**

South West College has a vibrant, contemporary estate which strives to contribute towards our ethos of being a greener, more sustainable organisation. The Erne Campus in Enniskillen is an exemplar for our commitment to a sustainable estate, having been awarded PassivHaus Premium energy certification and BREAAAM standard. Working in partnership with Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, the College have transformed an historic landmark former workhouse into a modern business entrepreneurship facility. Opened in, 2023 adjacent to our Erne Campus, the Workhouse serves to support businesses and entrepreneurs by providing contemporary workspace, hosting networking events and offering a range of business support options including technical and innovation support. The Centre for Renewable Energy Sustainable Technologies (CREST) is located at our second Enniskillen base, the Technology and Skills Centre. The CREST Centre is central to the delivery of the College's sustainability curriculum which includes the PassivHaus Designer and Tradesperson qualifications.

Our sustainability agenda is underpinned by our Sustainability Action Plan and Net Zero Action Plan. Actions will be implemented across the college in support of these two key plans. Carbon baseline reports for 2021/22 have been completed for all campuses.

At our Omagh Campus, we deliver a range of FE, HE and Work Based Learning (WBL) programmes aligned with the sub regional industrial base with a focus on sustainability and a significant number of apprenticeship programmes with a focus on automotive courses (ie agricultural machinery and heavy and light vehicle repairs). Delivery of the automotive provision takes place both on the main campus and at our satellite premises on the Gortin Road.

The College's main campus in Mid Ulster is based in Dungannon, where a broad spectrum of Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing programmes are delivered, servicing the needs of the Engineering industry cluster in the region. The College also retains two smaller facilities in Cookstown including an industrial training facility in Kilcronagh Industrial Estate which is focused on welding, with an increased focus on robotic welding.

Future proofing the College estate, equipment and resources and maintaining alignment between provision and industry need is resource intensive. During the 2023-24 year the total capital investment was £1.1 million, with £432,000 expended on direct support to the curriculum including the purchase of robotics and hydrogen vehicle technology equipment.



**Figure 5: College Campus Profile**

### **COLLEGE STRENGTHS**

According to Further Education Outcomes: Academic Year 2022/23, 94% of FE leavers from the College were satisfied with their FE experience. In the same survey, 41% of leavers indicated that they needed their FE qualifications to get their current job, 84% of College leavers felt they had good job security, 73% felt they had opportunities for career progression and 83% indicated that they had autonomy to make decisions on how they carry out tasks within their roles.

South West College had three students shortlisted at the NI Apprentice Awards 2024, with Joanne McCubbin, Higher Level Apprentice employed by Manfreight Ltd ultimately being recognised as the Higher Level Apprentice of the Year. Participating in skills competitions with the support of Lecturers and Skills Champions enhances the confidence and motivation of participants alongside building professional and technical skills. Past competitors have highlighted that competing was an enjoyable experience and had a beneficial impact on their overall attitude to learning or work. WorldSkills UK states “Over eight in ten said that competing made them feel more ambitious in pursuing their career. 85% of competitors stated that they had increased their technical skill level and 90% said that competing had given them a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses within their skill area which they can work in when they get back to their college, training provider or employer.”

In 2023-24, the NI Skillbuild competition finals was hosted at the Technology and Skills Centre Enniskillen on 23rd May 2024, with three South West College students securing medals. The College is keen to maintain the momentum with preparations for the 2024-25 intercampus competitions commencing early in the new year. Given the benefits to participating students, the target for student participation in 2025 has been increased to 350.

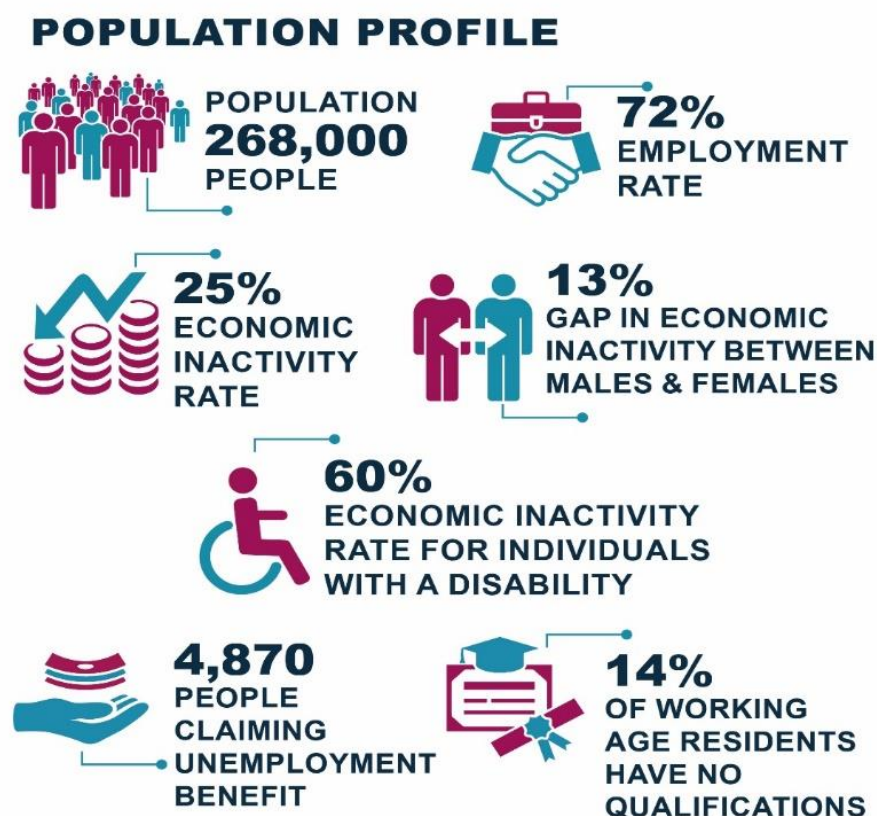
During the academic year 2023/24, the College achieved both the Cyber Essentials Certification and the Cyber Essentials Plus Certification, which is the highest level of external, independent assurance from the National Cyber Security Centre.

## B. SUB-REGIONAL OPERATING CONTEXT

### POPULATION PROFILE

The West, defined by the Local Government Districts of Mid Ulster and Fermanagh and Omagh, is characterised as rural, industrious and highly successful in many elements. However, there are several sub-regional issues pertinent to the area that shape College priorities, community engagement and the skills and employability initiatives we offer to citizens. Relatively high levels of economic inactivity, people who are not in work nor looking for work, are a long-standing feature of the sub regional labour market. Although there has been reduction over the long-term, 25% of the working age population in the region are considered economically inactive. Contributing factors include the educational attainment profile of the region alongside the disability and gender employment gap that exists among citizens

Figure 6: Sub-regional Population Profile



Historically the region has consistently ranked high in terms of its percentage of working age residents having no formal qualifications, above the NI average and among the poorest performing Council areas in this measure. To address this, the College will continue to offer opportunities that support a culture of upskilling and reskilling locally and ensure pathways are available for all learners to enter at their level and progress through qualifications. Furthermore, there is a significant issue with gender and disability employment gaps in the region. Economic inactivity rates are disproportionately higher for females and those with a disability, well above the NI average in both cases.

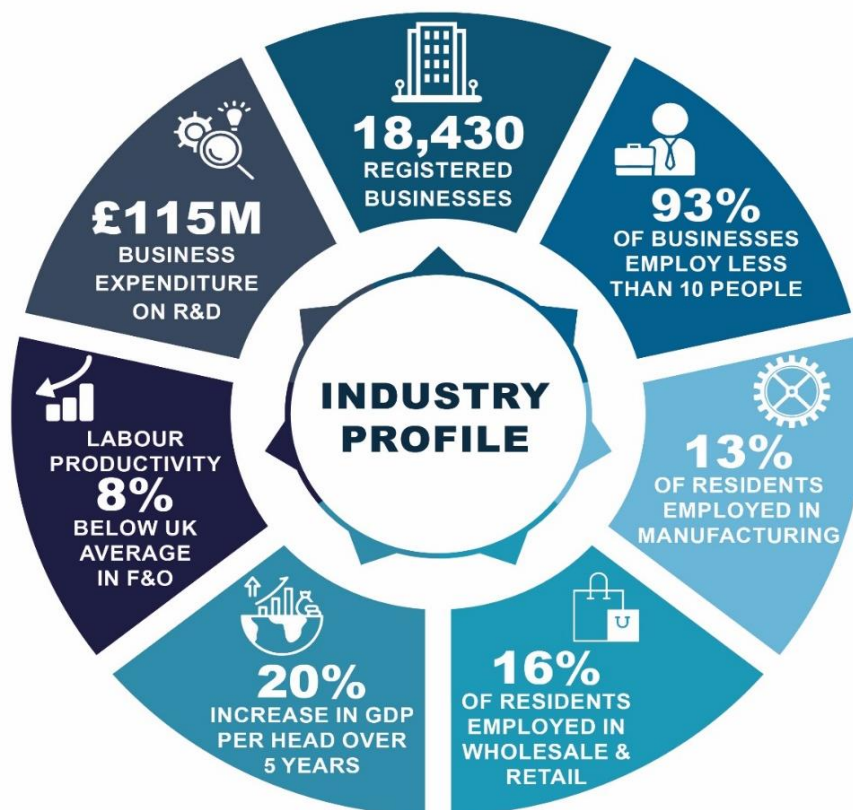
Unemployment challenges remain including addressing the number of young claimants (16-24). The number of people claiming unemployment benefits has experienced a recent rise to almost 4,900 people, of which 12% of total claimants are aged 16-24<sup>10</sup>. Continued expansion of skills and

employment interventions, complemented by our regional labour market partnerships, will be at the forefront of College delivery to ensure more citizens are in a position to access a 'good job'.

## INDUSTRY PROFILE

The sub-region is dominated by micro businesses that account for 93% of the business population<sup>13</sup>. There is a concentration of employment in Manufacturing, Construction and Retail, with Mid Ulster having the highest percentage of residents employed in Manufacturing of any council area in NI, a direct correlation to the significant industrial base in this area. Ensuring the College's business and industry services caters largely to the needs of smaller businesses and delivering a curriculum that is mindful of the region's more dominant employment sectors will remain at the forefront of College activity.

**Figure 7: Sub-regional Industry Profile**



Productivity in NI is a widespread issue, consistently ranking below the UK average and labelled as one of the least productive regions of the UK. Issues translate to all areas of NI, with Fermanagh and Omagh having relatively lower levels of labour productivity and GDP per head (economic growth) in comparison to NI as a whole. However, there has been significant improvement in recent years, particularly around economic output (GVA) per job filled, which has grown at rates higher than the NI average in both council areas. The sub-region continues to possess weaknesses in key areas that drive long-term growth in productivity including the skills profile of citizens, business characteristics and performance as well as the infrastructure and connectivity issues associated with a rural region. To support the drive for higher levels of productivity, the College will strive to ensure the foundations are in place for this in terms of investment in skills, research and development, and innovation.

## **C. COLLEGE ENGAGEMENT/COLLABORATION**

### **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

South West College engages with a wide range of employers, their sectoral representative bodies and the organisations within the community and voluntary sector, to co-design curriculum, the provision and services needed to meet the needs of our students, industry and regional stakeholders. During the 2023-24 year, the College collaborated with a range of industry representative bodies to co-design curriculum, including the MEGA (Manufacturing Engineering Growth Advancement) network to provide support for Engineering industry. This support included Level 3 Mentoring programmes to aid retention, achievement and progression in Mid Ulster Manufacturing companies.

The College has worked with the Mineral Processing Association Northern Ireland (MPANI) in the development of a funding application for a Concrete Sustainability Innovation Centre (CSIC) through the MSW Growth Deal and a Peace Plus proposal for Powering Research & Innovation in Sustainability Manufacturing (PRISM) to be submitted in October 2024. The College also collaborated with the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) in the development of Green Accelerator Skills Programme (GRASP) Peace Plus funding application.

The College collaborates with local industry to ensure provision is aligned with need and to build talent pipelines for local companies. The annual Get Engineering, Apprentice Connect and 'Captains of Industry' events provide opportunities for networking and engagement with companies, potential students/apprentices and their parents. During 2023-24, 100 companies, and in excess of 500 young people and their parents/guardians attended those events across the campuses. During 2024-25 the College has worked closely with Invest NI in the development of the Regional Economic Action Plan for Fermanagh and Omagh and Mid Ulster.

The College delivers a vibrant Entitlement Framework provision with 694 school pupils participating in 2023-24 (318 at pre 16 and 376 at post 16). Participating pupils were drawn from 25 schools across four area learning communities. New curriculum provision to be introduced in 2024/25 includes Level 3 Construction at the Dungannon Campus and Level 3 Travel & Tourism at the Omagh Campus. Students enrolling on the Entitlement Framework programme courses are anticipated to increase in this academic year.

Senior College staff engage with Councils via a range of forums, including Community Planning and Labour Market Partnerships, with the Director of Development and Support chairing the FODC Labour Market Partnership and the College/FODC Partnership Board of the Enniskillen Workhouse. The College led Rural Economic Accelerator Programme (REAP) has been co-designed with statutory and Community and Voluntary delivery partners FODC, First Step Women's Centre, Fermanagh Rural Community Initiative and South Tyrone Empowerment Programmes to provide integrated social inclusion and employability programmes which meet the needs of economically inactive citizens across the region.

### **CURRICULUM HUB & SECTORAL PARTNERSHIPS**

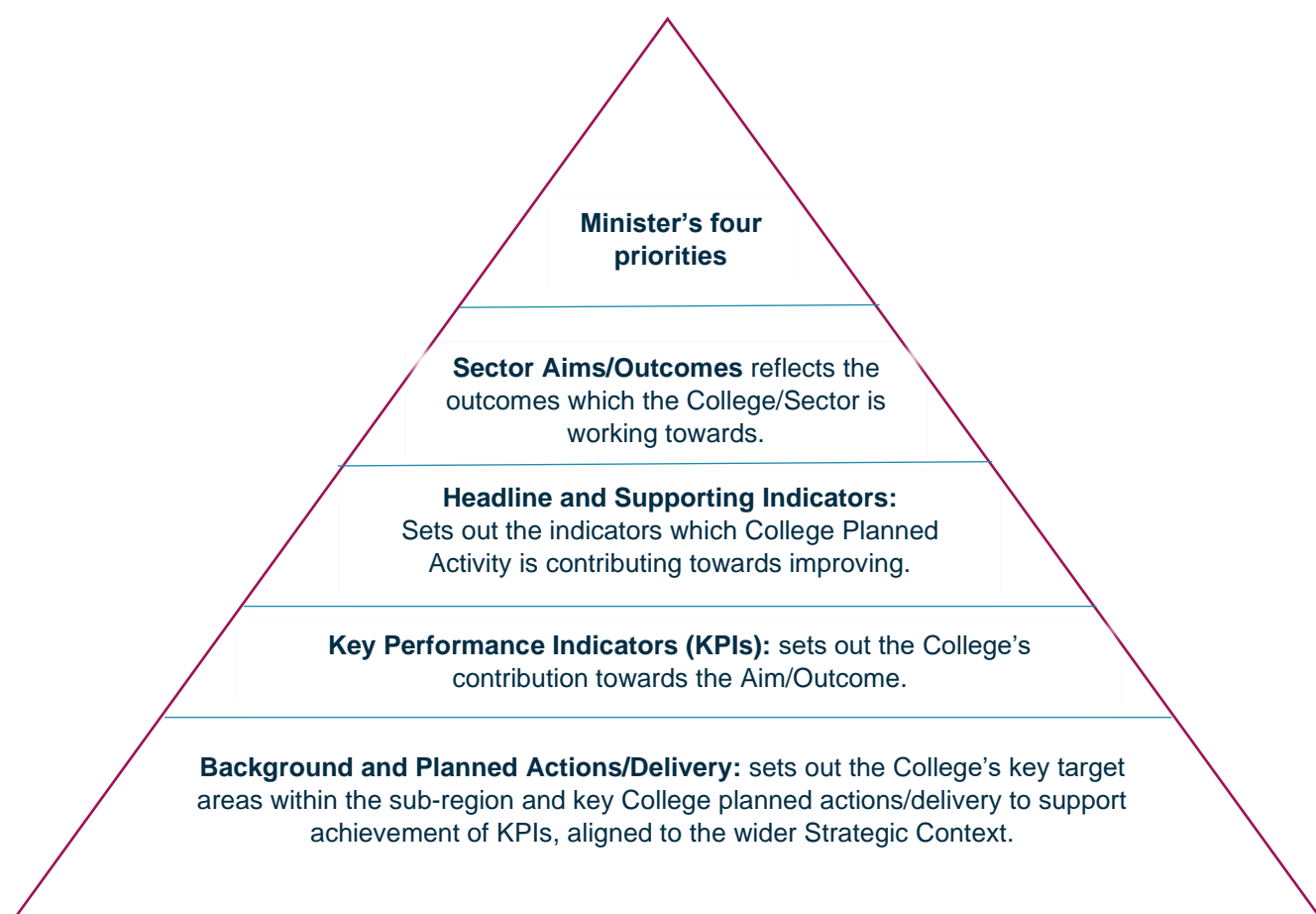
The SWC led Engineering Curriculum Hub ensures that curriculum is standardised across the sector and aligned with the needs of industry. Extensive development activities have been undertaken in 2023-24 by cross college working groups leading to the introduction of refreshed Traineeship / Apprenticeships and the revalidated Foundation Degree with Ulster University. College staff provide secretariat support to the Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering Sectoral Partnership (AMESP), supporting the review and development of industry aligned curriculum, including most recently the Level 2 Industrial Coatings and Level 2 Water & Wastewater Framework.

The Business and Professional Services Partnership, for which the College provide secretariat support, is this year focused on the development of a Business Traineeship model and the review of Business Administrations Level 2 and Level 3 Apprenticeship frameworks to include a pathway into Business in Higher Education and the development of a Business Administration HLA Level 4 by September 2025.

College leadership of the Engineering Hub and discharge of the secretariat function for AMESP enhances connections with industry and our sector counterparts; and has leveraged CPD opportunities for staff including Industry 4.0 Microcontrollers training, with future activities set to focus on AI in Manufacturing. During 2024, the Engineering Hub hosted its inaugural FE NI Industry Connect Conference, bringing together curriculum staff and industry experts to review the skills needs across the NI sector. Additionally, cross-sector collaboration efforts are being developed to address Diversity in Industry.

## D. 2024/25 PLANNED ACTIVITY

The College Planned Delivery has been set out to show the College contributes to the Minister's four priorities as follows:



In-year College Development Plan Progress Reports tracking '**how well**' the College is performing will be provided to the Department for the Economy. The Department for the Economy will publish reports on performance against Headline and Supporting Indicators to show if actions are 'moving the dial' on the Minister's priorities i.e. '**anyone is better off**', along with progress reports on the Department's Delivery Plan 2024/25.

The below table provides a summary of the Aims/Outcomes and associated KPIs included the proceeding tables.

AIM/OUTCOME		KPI	
1	To increase regional business productivity/growth through the delivery of tailored/bespoke training programmes.	1.1	To increase delivery of innovation-based projects in SMEs from 105 no. in 2023/24 to 110 no. in 2024/25 financial year.
		1.2	To increase delivery of tailored training programmes from 130 no. in 2023/24 to 136 no. in 2024/25 financial year and to support 350 no. individuals via Skill Up in 2024/25 financial year.
2	To upskill / reskill individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to secure employment, meet employer needs for today and the future and support economic growth of the region.	2.1	To increase the total number of individuals enrolled in the College from 12,209 no. individuals in 2023/24 to 12,385 no. individuals in 2024/25 academic year.
		2.2	To equip 420 no. individuals participating in international programmes with key employability skills necessary through participation in Turing and Skills Competitions in the 2024/25 academic year.
		2.3	To increase the number of individuals supported by the College who are furthest away from the labour market and with low or no formal qualifications from 5,598 no. in 2022/23 to 5,849 in 2024/25 academic year.
		2.4	To increase the retention rate within the College from 88% in 2022/23 to 89% in 2024/25 academic year.
		2.5	To increase the achievement rate within the College from 83% in 2022/23 to 83.5% in 2024/25 academic year.
		2.6	To increase the number of 25-64 year olds participating in education and training from 4,255 no. individuals in 2022/23 to 4,298 no. individuals in 2024/25
3	To address the skills needs of the future workforce in green industries through upskilling and reskilling individuals in support of a net zero economy in Northern Ireland.	3.1	To train 5 College staff in delivery of green sustainable skills in the 2024/25 academic year.
		3.2	300 no. individuals participating on green/sustainable courses in the 2024/25 academic year.

4	<b>To deliver against the Public Body reporting duties of the Climate Change legislation delivering an energy efficient and sustainable estate.</b>	4.1	<b>To establish the key actions to improve/maintain energy efficiency in the College in 2024/25 academic year.</b>
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<b>Raise Productivity</b>	
<b>Aim/Outcome - 1</b>	<b>To increase regional business productivity/growth through the delivery of tailored/bespoke training programmes.</b>
<b>Headline Indicator</b>	<b>Output per hour worked</b>
<b>Supporting Indicators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Innovative active businesses (including number of Innovation Recognitions)</b></li> <li></li> </ul>
<b>Background</b>	<p>More innovative businesses and a skilled workforce lay the foundations for regional balance and business productivity. The College harnesses a range of funded programmes to realise this aim. Supporting R&amp;D and driving innovation across businesses is delivered through InnovateUs, Innovation Vouchers, Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) and Innovation Boost (formerly Fusion). This is complemented by the delivery of upskilling and reskilling initiatives including Skills Focus, Skill Up and the SME Productivity Booster Scheme. The delivery of business support programmes ensures the College has an active role in creating more innovative businesses and driving an increasingly skilled workforce, collectively shaping subregional economic performance and growth.</p> <p>Innovation activity in NI is however historically the lowest of all UK regions and remains concentrated in a few government districts. Of the £850m total Business Expenditure on R&amp;D in 2022 (NI Research &amp; Development Survey, 2022), only £115m was spent in this sub-region, with Mid Ulster accounting for the significant majority of this. The College will continue to play a pivotal role in helping to foster a culture of innovation and strengthen local business capacity for undertaking RD&amp;I activities. Our drive to support businesses to innovate will continue to be supported by the Workhouse, a dedicated business enterprise facility working in partnership with key stakeholders to house and support local businesses.</p> <p>The College's Business Industry Services (BIS) team of 12 technical consultants successfully delivered 105 innovation projects in 2023-24. SWC will deliver 110 innovation-based projects with SME's in 2024-25, aligned to priority growth sectors including, Agri-Tech, Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering and Low Carbon, underpinned by support to embed Digital Technology. As the Innovation accreditation is now mandatory for the Innovation Voucher Scheme and InnovateUs, it is intended that the College will support 80 businesses through this accreditation.</p> <p>Growth in 24/25 will be driven through enhanced engagement with industry via the 'Captains of Industry initiative'. During 2024-25 the BIS team have scheduled six thematic workshops for industry: AI in Manufacturing, Additive Manufacturing, Cyber Security, AR/VR and Carbon Accounting. Staff will engage with attending employers to promote the support available to help businesses embrace innovation. Sustaining engagement with businesses participating in the Assured Skills Academies will be pivotal for the strategic innovation programmes and SME Productivity Booster Scheme. Collaboration with Universities in the Republic of Ireland and trade bodies will also be harnessed with the aim of maximizing Intertrade Ireland funding.</p> <p>Through the Connected NI programme, the College's collaboration with Ulster University will enhance and support the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics within the Manufacturing sector. These technologies are critical for optimising production, reducing waste and enhancing product quality; aligning with the Minister's objectives around</p>

increasing productivity and reducing carbon emissions. The College will deliver a number of industrially focused workshops focusing on the practical application of AI in manufacturing and the development of AI-driven robotics solutions.

In October 2024 SWC as lead partner submitted a PEACE Plus application under the SME Innovation Challenge Fund focused on Powering Research & Innovation for Sustainable Manufacturing (PRISM). The aim of the project will be to drive decarbonisation in the Manufacturing Industry, supporting SME's to accelerate the development of net zero products and solutions and decarbonise their manufacturing processes. This will be achieved through cross-border RD&I support from a consortium of academic partners.

SWC will continue to support the advancement of a highly qualified skilled workforce locally, equipping the labour market with the skills needed by industry. With an available budget of £250,000 for Skills Focus, the College will deliver Level 2 and above qualifications to 100 businesses in 2024-25, however with the reduction to 75% funding, we are anticipating a reduction in the number of businesses supported through Skills Focus given the 25% employer contribution now required. Delivery will be targeted in key areas such as Advanced Manufacturing, Construction, Sustainability/Green Technologies, and Leadership & Management. There were a number of new qualifications developed over the last year through Skill Up that SWC intends to roll out through Skills Focus such as the Level 3 in Carbon Accounting and AI in Manufacturing qualifications. Skill Up provision will also increase in 2024-25 to include 27 approved courses in several new curriculum areas.

The SME Productivity Booster scheme will be harnessed to boost productivity, focusing on innovation/creativity and skills including leadership, project planning, communication, reducing Carbon Emissions, entrepreneurship and automation. South West College will deliver 10 projects with businesses this year under this programme.

The College has a very well developed and long-standing relationship with the Manufacturing industry in Mid Ulster and engages proactively with MEGA to meet the skills needs of local companies. The College continues to collaborate with MEGA to deliver ILM Level 3 Mentoring via Skills Focus. This qualification is delivered through teaching and a series of workshops across the Manufacturing sector to support those staff who will be inducting and managing apprentices within their organisations. There are 3 cohorts scheduled for 2024-25.

The Industrial Training Facility in Cookstown provides an industry aligned space for the delivery of welding programmes and staff will continue to collaborate with MEGA to organise welding programmes to address the need for training welders in the Mid Ulster Region. There are three Assured Skills Academies in Welding scheduled in the 2024-25 financial year. These academies will support 36 enrolments.

SWC has approval to run a further three Industry 4.0 (Robotics and Automation) Assured Skills Academies in 2024-25 to enhance the competitiveness of Manufacturing and Engineering companies in the area by supporting them to develop a workforce with expertise in automated technologies.

<b>KPI 1.1</b>	<b>To increase delivery of innovation-based projects in SMEs from 105 no. in 2023/24 to 110 no. in 2024/25 financial year.</b>	
<b>Planned Activity:</b>		
With an available budget of <b>£350,000</b> for InnovateUs	Complete <b>84</b> projects <sup>1</sup> .	
Innovation vouchers	16	
Innovation Boost (Fusion)	4	
Business Explorer	6	
<b>KPI 1.2</b>	<b>To increase delivery of tailored training programmes from 130 no. in 2023/24 to 136 no. in 2024/25 financial year and to support 350 no. individuals via Skill Up in 2024/25 financial year.</b>	
With an available budget of £250,000 for Skills Focus (now 75% funding only)	Support <b>100 businesses</b> – Reduction in funding to 75% in 2024-25 will impact the attractiveness for businesses	
SME Productivity Booster	Support <b>10</b> projects	
Assured Skills Academies	<b>26</b> businesses supported through 6 Academies – 3 x Welding Academies and 3 x Industry 4.0 Academies (Robotics and Automation)	
Skill Up	<b>350 individuals</b> supported through Skill Up	

<sup>1</sup> Calculated by number of businesses who completed a project (DER) minus those who completed more than one in the year

<b>Good Jobs/Promote Regional Balance/Raise Productivity</b>	
<b>Aim/Outcome - 2</b>	<b>To upskill/reskill individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to secure employment, meet employer needs for today and the future and support economic growth of the region.</b>
<b>Headline Indicators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Good Jobs measure based on earning, permanent contracts and minimum guaranteed hours.</b></li> <li>• <b>Regional Employment Rate</b></li> <li>• <b>Output per hour worked</b></li> </ul>
<b>Supporting Indicators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Work Quality Indicators</b></li> <li>• <b>Proportion leaving NI HEIs with narrow STEM qualifications<sup>2</sup></b></li> <li>• <b>Qualifications by Level of Study</b></li> <li>• <b>Economic Inactivity Rate excluding students</b></li> </ul>
<b>Background</b>	<p>College provision, ranging from entry level – level 6, is focused on strengthening and enhancing the skills profile of the area, to ensure citizens can access ‘good jobs’, industry needs are being met and that we lay the correct foundations for addressing productivity and regional balance issues. This year, the College is seeking to increase our overall student numbers from 12,209 in 2023-24 to 12,385 in 2024-25, supporting the development of our students through a range of programmes.</p> <p>As traditional Level 2 FE FT programmes have moved to a traineeship model, the numbers of FE FT students have been decreasing accordingly, as the number of traineeships increase. This year, we have introduced three new Traineeships – Level 2 programmes in Beauty and Nail Services, Creative Arts &amp; Digital Technologies and Business Administration.</p> <p>The strength of the industrial base and desire for local companies to secure talent is key to the College’s aspiration to increase student numbers. Consistent recruitment to ApprenticeshipsNI and Higher Level Apprenticeship (HLA) is a outcome of strong college-industry relations and the codesign of provision to align with industry need. Get Engineering Careers, Apprentice Connect and ‘Captains of Industry’ initiatives were attended by almost 100 local companies in 2023-24. The focus in 2024-25 is to further enhance alignment between the College provision and the evolving needs of industry, building on the progress made to date and the solid foundations that exist. However, we are mindful that apprenticeship numbers will be impacted by the downturn in the Materials Handling Sector, with the ripple effect impacting on Engineering and Manufacturing companies in the region.</p> <p>As with Apprenticeships, it is anticipated that there will be a decrease on the number of HLAs this year due to the downturn in the Materials Handling Sector and across the discipline including the Manufacturing and Engineering industries. This will impact on our Engineering numbers and knock-on support functions including Business and Accountancy HLA student numbers. The HLA in Construction has also changed to a new curriculum model and the move from a two-year Foundation Degree to a 3-year programme will delay progression to degree level HLA.</p> <p>Employer feedback has illustrated a desire to provide upskilling opportunities for existing employees to support their progression within companies, therefore the growth in Team Leading and Management</p>

<sup>2</sup> First degrees and postgraduate qualifications. Indicator to be updated to include narrow STEM qualifications via Further Education College and / or Higher Level Apprenticeship route.

Apprenticeships is a key priority for South West College in 2024-25. Such opportunities will be targeted at 24–64 year-olds, as all-age apprentices, with pre-existing experience within professional and technical disciplines. In addition to supporting in-work upskilling, the College will deliver a range of initiatives which will support career changers and those individuals furthest away from the labour market into employment. Funding for the Skills for Life and Work programme has been extended for another year after a period of funding uncertainty.

There will be a renewed focus on Essential Skills outcomes again this year, particularly on Numeracy. A cross campus Essential Skills Co-ordinator was appointed in 2023-24. The overall achievement rate for Essential Skills was 65% in 2022-23, as we continue to experience the impact of the pandemic and the disruption to learning, especially in key skills such as numeracy and literacy.

Through engagement with the Turing Scheme the College aims to cultivate well-qualified, globally minded, and internationally experienced young individuals, preparing them holistically for their future educational pursuits and careers. The experiences gained by students during work and placements have proved invaluable in terms of gaining subject specialist knowledge, developing transversal skills and having the opportunity to interact with people from different cultures. In the academic year 2023-24, 61 students participated in placements ranging from 15 days to 3 weeks under four mobility programmes in Aruba, the USA, Canada and Iceland. In 2024-25 a minimum of 5 mobility cohorts are planned to five different countries - Iceland, Aruba, Tenerife, the United States and Canada involving approximately 70 students in total.

Embedding a skills-culture across all professional and technical areas remains a key focus for SWC. A total of 21 staff were appointed as Skills Champions, supporting the development and delivery of 18 internal skills competitions. A total of 316 students engaged in internal competition activity with 176 participating in cross campus competitions. 54 students progressed to regional heats with 7 participants advancing to represent Northern Ireland at the UK skills competition. Participation in skills competitions, both internally and at a sectoral level, enhances the participants' vocational and transversal skills effectively equipping participants with key employability skills. Feedback outcomes include;

- 87% of previous entrants stated that they improved their technical skills after taking part.
- 79% said they improved their personal and employability skills.
- 83% said they can apply the skills they developed to their education, work or other parts of their life.
- 60% of average earnings of those who have participated in WorldSkills UK's competition development programmes have higher than those of a comparable per group.

The College currently offers an extensive range of social inclusion and employability programmes which are specifically designed to support disengaged young people and those furthest from the labour market transition into education, training or employment. initiatives include STEP-Up, Rural Economic Accelerator Programme (REAP) and Youthscape+.

Such programmes provide opportunity for the College to work with those furthest from the labour market for example, young people, women, ethnic minorities and individuals with a disability or health condition. They provide mentorship support, career guidance, opportunity to achieve qualifications and complete basic skills. The Youthscape + project supported by PEACEPLUS, aims to drive forward a pioneering Cross-Border Good Relations Programme that is dedicated to fostering positive relationships among young people across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Current funding for STEP UP and REAP is due to end in March 2025. This will negatively impact those most disadvantaged and further from the labour market.

During 2024-25 the College will deliver a 22-week part time Woman Returners programme. This initiative will support women returning to the classroom and the workplace whilst undertaking a Level 3 Certificate in Business Administration. In addition to gaining a qualification and work experience, participants will be eligible for a training allowance and will undertake workshops in confidence building, interview skills and resilience. In addition, the delivery of Assured Skills Academies in Industry 4.0 and Welding will support skills development aligned with industry needs.

The College's Widening Access and Participation (WAPP) programme will continue this academic year to support underrepresented groups in the region access HE opportunities. These groups include perspective students from disadvantaged backgrounds with lower household incomes. Annually the College spends £170,000 on WAPP activities. The focus is on ensuring access to Higher Education (HE) for all students and enabling comprehensive academic mentoring and pastoral support. To assist underrepresented groups, the College utilises the WAPP budget to support bursary schemes, tuition fee reductions, academic mentorship and health and well-being initiatives.

**KPI 2.1** To increase the total number of individuals enrolled in the College from 12,209 no. individuals in 2023/24 to 12,385 no. individuals in 2024/25 academic year.

<b>Plans to achieve in the 2024/25 academic year:</b>		
<b>Level 0 - 3</b>	<b>No. of individuals on PT FE</b>	7,450
	<b>No. of individuals on FT FE (including Advanced Techs)</b>	1135
	<b>No. of individuals on Skills for Life and Work programme</b>	68
	<b>No. of individuals on Traineeships programme</b>	545
	<b>No. of individuals on Apprenticeships NI programme</b>	1439
	<b>No. of individuals on Essential Skills programme<sup>3</sup></b>	238
<b>Level</b>	<b>No. of individuals on PT HE in FE</b>	443

<sup>3</sup> The number of Essential Skills (ES) Individuals reflects individuals solely completing ES, it does not include those individuals who are completing ES alongside their main programme of study.

4+	No. of individuals on FT HE in FE	537
	No. of individuals on High Level Apprenticeship programme	530
<b>KPI 2.2</b>	To equip 420 no. individuals participating in international programmes with key employability skills necessary through participation in Turing and Skills Competitions in the 2024/25 academic year.	
<b>Planned Activity:</b>		
<b>Planned Mobilities</b>	A minimum of 5 mobilities are planned for 2024/25 to five different countries - Iceland, Aruba, Tenerife, the United States and Canada involving approximately 70 students in total across all mobilities	
<b>Skills Competitions</b>	Subject to funding, a total of 350 individual students <sup>4</sup> participating in Skills Build competitions including internal competition activity, cross campus competitions, regional heats and UK Skills competitions	
<b>KPI 2.3</b>	To increase the number of individuals supported by the College who are furthest away from the labour market and with low or no formal qualifications from 5598 no. in 2022/23 to 5849 no. in 2024/25 academic year.	
<b>Plans to achieve in the 2024/25 academic year:</b>		
No. of individuals Quintile 1 and 2		5849
No. of individuals declaring a disability/long term health problem		806
No. of individuals on ESOL programmes		259
No. of individuals on STEP UP programmes <sup>5</sup>		349
No. of individuals on REAP programme <sup>6</sup>		200
No. of individuals on Skills for Life & Work		68
WAPP spend		£171,200
No. of individuals on Youthscape Plus		120
<b>KPI 2.4</b>	To increase the retention rate within the College from 88 % in 2022/23 to 89% in 2024/25 academic year.	
<b>Planned Activity:</b>		
<b>Retention Rate</b>	<p>To increase the retention rate in C&amp;G Level 2 NVQ Diploma in Hairdressing (Dungannon Campus) by 16% from 44% in 2023/24 to 60% in 2024/25 academic year.</p> <p>To increase the retention rate in BTEC Level 3 National extended Diploma in IT (Dungannon Campus) by 19% from 41% in 2023/24 to 60% in 2024/25 academic year.</p> <p>To increase the retention rate in Level 3 National Extended Diploma in Sport and Exercise Sciences by 9% from 51% in 2023/24 to 60% in 2024/25 academic year.</p>	

<sup>4</sup> To reflect the range of competitions which individuals are registered on e.g a learner registered on three competitions would be reflected as three learners

<sup>5</sup> Please note that the activity is based on the financial year (1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025)

<sup>6</sup> Please note that the activity is based on the financial year (1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025)

<b>KPI 2.5</b>	To increase the achievement rate within the College from 83% in 2022/23 to 83.5% in 2024/25 academic year.	
<b>Planned Activity:</b>		
<b>Achievement Rate</b>	<p>To increase the achievement rate in Essential Skills Numeracy by 12% from 38% in 2023/24 to 50% in 2024/25 academic year.</p> <p>To increase the achievement rate in Level 3 Extended Diploma for Children’s Care Learning and Development (Dungannon Campus) by 16% from 44% in 2023/24 to 60% in 2024/25 academic year.</p>	
<b>KPI 2.6</b>	To increase the number of 25-64 year olds participating in education and training from 4,255 no. individuals in 2022/23 to 4,298 individuals in 2024/25	
<b>Planned Activity to cover the increase of:</b>		
<b>All Aged Apprenticeships</b>	100 individuals aged 25 years old and over enrolled on All Aged Apprenticeships	
<b>Individuals on the Woman Returners Programme</b>	12 individuals	

<b>Reduce Carbon Emissions</b>	
<b>Aim/Outcome - 3</b>	To address the skills needs of the future workforce in green industries through upskilling and reskilling individuals in support of a net zero economy in Northern Ireland.
<b>Headline Indicator</b>	CO <sup>2</sup> Emissions per Capita
<b>Supporting Indicators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proportion of electricity consumption generated from renewable sources</li> <li>• Energy Intensity</li> <li>• Energy Efficiency</li> <li>• Circular economy material and carbon footprint</li> </ul>
<b>Background</b>	<p>The College has an integrated sustainability offer, which has as its foundations in three distinct initiatives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Schools outreach programme which has engaged 1,510 school children focusing on Biodiversity / Renewable Technology and Water Conservation</li> <li>2. Online sustainability module completed by 800 staff and students</li> <li>3. Carbon Literacy completed by 230 staff</li> </ol> <p>In addition, the college continues to roll out accredited sustainability programmes with 2 individuals undertaking the Passiv Tradesperson and /or Designer qualifications in 23/24.</p>



	<p>College staff have engaged in a number of initiatives and developed additional curriculum through Skill Up funding including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30-hour level 2 Award Ventilation Design, Install Commission and Maintain</li> <li>• 30-hour level 2 award Heat Pumps Install and Maintain</li> <li>• 30-hour level 2 award Solar PV Design Install and Maintain</li> </ul> <p>These qualifications are awaiting awarding body approval. The Sustainability Programme content developed cross-sectoral, common, introductory strands that will form the foundation of knowledge for all businesses. The College developed a Level 3 in Carbon Accounting for Businesses which is currently awaiting accreditation. Once this qualification has been approved, the College intends to offer it to businesses through the Skills Focus programme.</p> <p>In May 2024 the Green Accelerator Skills Programme (GRASP) consortium, led by South West College submitted an application to Peace Plus Measure 2.3 Programme Area Skills Development. This proposal has a budget of €10m and, if funded, will support the development of green skills in the construction industry. The consortium partners include South West College, Education and Training Boards in Donegal, Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan and Monaghan and North West and Southern Regional Colleges along with the Irish Central Border Region Network (ICBAN) and Atlantic Technical University.</p> <p>This initiative has the potential to provide 2,000 existing employees and new entrants to the industry with opportunity to develop the skills required to decarbonise housing and commercial stock. Emissions from the construction sector account for 40% of total national emissions, almost all of which will have to be eliminated over the next thirty years. Achieving this goal will require a co-ordinated programme of interventions. These interventions will need additional workers, equipped with the skills required to deliver them – it is this challenge that GRASP will address. The programme has been co-constructed with industry representatives and is supported by the eight councils across the ICBAN region.</p> <p>If successful, GRASP will provide citizens from across the region with access to a range of fully funded upskilling via apprenticeships and micro credentials delivered across the provider network. In addition, GRASP will deploy by a range of cross cutting thematic interventions to underpin the upskilling activities and maximise impact. The funding decision will be communicated in mid-October 2024 with delivery commencing across the network in Q2 2025.</p>
<b>KPI 3.1</b>	<b>To train 5 College staff in delivery of green sustainable skills in the 2024/25 academic year.</b>
<b>Planned Activity:</b>	
<b>In 2024/25 academic year, improve baseline position of completion of the Sustainability Induction module</b>	<b>To increase the staff completion rate of the online Sustainability Induction module from 59% in 23/24 to 85% in 24/25.</b>

<b>Training College staff in the delivery of green sustainable skills</b>	<p>To put <b>5</b> number of College staff through accredited green sustainable skills courses (such as Passiv Haus designer, Passiv Haus tradesperson, Renewable technologies etc) to support the delivery of green sustainable skills.</p> <p>To train <b>60</b> College staff in SWC Carbon Literacy</p>
<b>KPI 3.2</b>	<b>300 no. individuals participating on green/sustainable courses in the 2024/25 academic year.</b>
<b>Planned Activity:</b>	
<b>Green Skills Courses</b>	<p><b>300 individuals</b> enrolled on Green Skills Courses offered through the Skill Up Programme and Skills Focus courses.</p> <p>Courses will include subjects such as Sustainability and the Green Environment, Electric &amp; Hybrid Vehicle Level 2 &amp; Level 3, Passiv Haus Designer and Passiv Haus tradesperson, Carbon Accounting and SWC Carbon Literacy training.</p>

<b>Reduce Carbon Emissions</b>	
<b>Aim/Outcome - 4</b>	<b>To deliver against the Public Body reporting duties of the Climate Change legislation delivering an energy efficient and sustainable estate.</b>
<b>Headline Indicator</b>	<b>CO<sup>2</sup> Emissions per Capita</b>
<b>Supporting Indicators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Proportion of electricity consumption generated from renewable sources</b></li> <li>• <b>Energy Intensity</b></li> <li>• <b>Energy Efficiency</b></li> <li>• <b>Circular economy material and carbon footprint</b></li> </ul>
<b>Background</b>	<p>Currently 9.1% of the College's electricity consumption is generated from renewable sources for whole estate. Electricity generated from photovoltaic (PV) systems can often be used to offset other emissions, thereby reducing the overall carbon footprint of SWC. The electricity from SWC's renewables systems has been used to offset its overall emissions. During the Academic year of 21/22, our campuses generated a substantial amount of electricity—177085 kWh (kilowatt hours)—through their PV system.</p> <p>Utilising the conversion factor for 2021/2022, this renewable energy output translates into a meaningful offset of 34.24 mtCO<sub>2</sub>e (metric tonnes of carbon equivalent). When deducted from Scope 1,2 and 3 emissions – SWC is left with an overall carbon footprint for 21/22 of 1771.45 mtCO<sub>2</sub>e.</p>

SWC's electric production has increased year on year, and the introduction of the Erne Campuses PV's production in 21/22 has had a significant effect on our scope 3 emissions. The solar PV panels, which cover an area the equivalent of nearly 14 tennis courts, as of April 2023 produced approx. 70% of all of Erne Campuses electric production. Moving forward it is expected that this PV system will continue to offset emissions which cannot be reduced.

**Baseline Energy Usage data** – To aid progress towards Zero Carbon, this project falls into Government policy, strongly influenced by the new Climate Change Bill for N Ireland (2022) which seeks to achieve a zero-carbon target by 2050.

**Promotion of Electric Vehicles** - Development of Sustainable Transport by installing a series of electric vehicle chargers at each campus in 2023/24 which will encourage the use of electric passenger vehicles among staff and students.

South West College is dedicated to achieving excellence in Sustainability and Climate Action, aspiring to attain a net-zero status by 2050. During the baseline assessment in the Academic Year 21/22, SWC calculated its carbon baseline emissions to be 1805.69 mtCO<sub>2</sub>e, 1771.84 mtCO<sub>2</sub>e, after carbon offsetting is applied. SWC has taken significant strides toward achieving carbon neutrality through our commitment to sustainable practices, particularly evident in the adoption of PV production methods, that has successfully offset a portion of its carbon emissions. Leveraging renewable energy sources, the College's PV production offset an impressive 34.24 mtCO<sub>2</sub>e, which is a testament to SWC's dedication to cleaner energy solutions.

The College showcases a strong commitment to carbon neutrality, setting a commendable example for environmentally conscious practices in the academic sphere which is evident from its Sustainability Action Plan. Benchmarking reveals commendable performance across the campuses, with all buildings significantly outperforming 'typical' benchmarks for both electricity and fossil fuel consumption. Moving towards 2050, SWC will remain proactive in reducing indirect emissions, even those excluded from the net-zero target. In addition, SWC will produce a Net Zero Action Plan clearly strategizing and prioritising decarbonisation projects. SWC will set ambitious yet achievable targets, and any remaining emissions (after reductions have been obtained) will be offset for a true 'net-zero' status.

SWC is leading the way in sustainability by printing their 2024-25 Full-time Further and Higher Education course listings on Carbon Balanced Paper. This initiative is part of SWC's ongoing efforts to reduce their carbon footprint. The comprehensive course listing is designed with a reduced page count on an A4 guide to minimise paper waste while providing all the necessary information about SWC's 2024-25 Recreational, Further Education, and Higher Education courses.

This initiative reflects SWC's broader commitment to renewable energy and sustainability, exemplified by the new South West College Erne Campus.

	<p>This campus is the first and largest educational building worldwide to achieve the Passive House Premium rating, the highest international standard in environmental construction.</p> <p>We intend to implement energy-efficient measures and explore renewable energy sources to achieve our energy efficiency targets target. Planned activities include educating the campus community on climate change impacts and mitigation strategies through awareness campaigns and dissemination of metrics. This includes promoting energy conservation awareness through specialised campaigns weekly to all staff and students.</p>
<b>KPI 4.1</b>	<b>To establish the key actions to improve/maintain energy efficiency in the College in 2024/25 academic year.</b>
<b>Planned Activity:</b>	
<b>In 2024/25 financial year, to apply for monies towards minor works projects<sup>7</sup> that contribute towards a sustainable College estate.</b>	<b>£300,000 for minor works to contribute towards a sustainable College estate</b>
<b>In 2024/25 academic year, to establish key actions to improve / maintain energy efficiency of College campuses.</b>	<p><b>Action 1</b> - Set up net zero action group by the end of the academic year 2024/25.</p> <p><b>Action 2</b> – Conduct viability analysis for Renewable Energy and Low-Carbon Technologies for our two PFI sites – Omagh and Dungannon. To be completed in this academic year 2024/25.</p> <p><b>Action 3</b> - Reduce our net energy consumption by 30% by 2030 across all campuses (aiming for 10% by the end academic year 2024/25).</p> <p><b>Action 4</b> - To increase our electricity consumption generated from renewable sources from 9.1% to 10%.</p>
<b>In 2024/25 academic year, improve baseline position for each College campus.</b>	<p><b>Action 1</b> - Our aim is to reduce our net energy consumption by 30% by 2030 across all campuses and specifically aiming for 10% by the end academic year 2024/25.</p> <p><b>Action 2</b> - Establish a Net Zero Action Group with a sole focus of achieving the net zero agenda by implementation of the signature projects by the end of the academic year 2024/25.</p> <p><b>Action 3</b> – To conduct viability analysis for both Renewable Energy and Low-Carbon Technologies for our two PFI sites (Omagh and Dungannon. To be completed in this academic year 2024/25.</p>

<sup>7</sup> Includes Invest to Save Funded projects.

	<p><b>Action 4</b> – To enhance Industry Collaboration through the provision of tailored workshops (both online and face to face) and outreach for Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) compliance, Corporate Social Responsibility Disclosures, Carbon Literacy and Sustainability for 150 participants.</p> <p><b>Action 5</b> – The creation of a Climate Resilience Action Plan by the end of 2024/25.</p>
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## 5. KEY CHALLENGES/CONSTRAINTS

The below table sets out the top five corporate challenges/constraints towards achievement of planned delivery set out in section 4 above.

Challenge	Potential Impact	Mitigating Actions
<p><b>Economic Planning Complexity</b> – Pace of change of the key drivers for education and skills in FE Sector with new economic priorities and target actions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Challenges in aligning College Development Plans to evolving indicators.</li> <li>Staff resources committed to existing curriculum delivery with limited flexibility.</li> <li>Work required to integrate local College curriculum plans with regional LEP plans.</li> <li>Differential levels of engagement between College, Councils and FE in developing regional plans.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CDP working group now established between DfE and Colleges.</li> <li>Ongoing engagement to refine performance indicators from FE programmes to link to economic priorities.</li> <li>More clarity required on the approach to regional planning and LEPs and alignment with Council and InvestNI roles.</li> <li>Formal re-engagement with InvestNI commenced September'24</li> </ul>
<p><b>Uncertainty and Complexity Around Funding Streams and Delays in LOOs</b> – impacts on ability of Colleges to include planned delivery in curriculum build and associated targets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Late approval or visibility of additional funding streams becoming available can make it difficult to build into delivery planning which starts at different time-frames compared to the commencement of the academic year in September whilst requiring full-spend by March.</li> <li>Range and variety of funding pots and compliance and eligibility issues takes time to put in place and test learner eligibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More visibility through NIFON and Curriculum Directors on scale of opportunities</li> <li>Explore the opportunity to pull a number of separate programmes in over a central theme : Business and Innovation, Support for Inclusion</li> <li>Wider consideration of the funding model requires NIFON input in terms of different rates to ensure consistency and viability.</li> <li>Work with funders for release of LoOs earlier in the year to enable full integration into curriculum planning and delivery</li> <li>Identification earlier from funders of new or additional in-year allocations to enable building of capacity</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recruitment challenges Impacting on Enrolment</b> – Colleges not being able to attract lecturers/trainers in traditional trade and STEM areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trend for last 5 years of significant interest in trade and STEM areas which cannot be accommodated due to recruitment challenges.</li> <li>Aging profile of the workforce may have longer term impact in key sectors with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiate review through HR sector working group of trends in applications and enrolments in last 3 years</li> <li>Understand the opportunity for more flexible approach in terms of recruitment premium for agreed occupational areas</li> </ul>

Challenge	Potential Impact	Mitigating Actions
<p><b>Investment in facilities (including IT and AI) and infrastructure to ensure competitiveness and to support action towards net zero targets in context of one year budgetary landscape</b></p>	<p>significant critical skills gaps.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative impact on curriculum offer, quality of service provision and learner success.</li> <li>• Inability to be at the forefront of new advances in technology developments.</li> <li>• Failure to implement full obligations under the Climate Change Act and impact on net/zero/sustainability targets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure pay remit approval to progress towards salary expectations</li> <li>• Industrial Relations review to commence following reestablishment of the CEF, focusing on pay parity and terms and conditions</li> <li>• 3 year bids placed to DfE to secure funding to deliver new initiatives</li> <li>• In-year bids and realignment to cover emerging pressures</li> <li>• Progress commenced with establishment of baselines and initial progress towards targets</li> </ul>

The College has a Risk Management Framework in place including Corporate and Operational Risk Registers from which key risks are reflected.

## 6. ANNEX 1

### College Data Analysis

## **SUB-REGIONAL PROFILE – SUPPORTING ANALYSIS**

### **A growing and aging population**

The population of the South West region is growing and has a combined population of 268,000<sup>1</sup>. The working age population (16-64) account for 60% of the local demographic, with the population aged 65+ increasing across both districts at a rate of 2% in the last year.

### **Developing and enhancing provision to address high rates of economic inactivity and below average employment rates**

The employment rate in Fermanagh and Omagh (F&O) is 70%, which falls below the NI average (74%) and represents the fourth lowest in NI<sup>2</sup>. Relatively high levels of economic inactivity, people who are not in work nor looking for work, are also a long-standing feature of the sub regional labour market. Although there has been reduction over the long-term, 25% of the 16-64 population in the region are considered economically inactive, estimated to represent 40,000 individuals<sup>3</sup>.

### **Targeting cohorts of the economically inactive population who are furthest from the labour market**

It is important to recognise that an estimated one third of the economically inactive population are students<sup>4</sup>. Understanding the additional divers of economic inactivity in the region and continuously aligning the Colleges offering to this is vital. For instance, economic inactivity rates are disproportionately higher for females (30%) creating a 13% gap in economic inactivity between males and females in the region <sup>5</sup>. Female focused skills and employability interventions that encourage women to reskill and return to work should be prioritised across the region to reduce this gender gap.

There is a significant disability employment gap with Mid Ulster having the largest Disability Employment Gap of any council area at 50.8%<sup>6</sup>, calculated as the difference in employment rates for those individuals with a recorded disability, compared to those with none. Likewise, individuals with a disability have a much higher economic inactivity rate (60%)<sup>7</sup> across the region, higher than the NI average in both districts. The College will continue to deliver bespoke programmes such as STEP UP that are tailored to the needs of those furthest from the labour market, supporting them to re-engage with skills and education through individualised and supportive pathways.

### **Working collaboratively to address unemployment**

There are two measures that can be used to describe unemployment: 1. The Labour Force Survey (LFS), which essentially captures all people who are currently not working but are available for work. 2. The actual number of people claiming unemployment benefits also known as the 'claimant count'.

When measuring sub-regional unemployment using the Labour Force Survey, both council areas have experienced an increase in unemployment rates over the past year, from 1.3% to 2.2% of the 16+ population in Mid Ulster and 1.9% to 4.6% in Fermanagh and Omagh<sup>8</sup>. Unemployment data derived from the sub-regional Claimant Count figures also indicates an increase. Claimant count figures from July 2024 estimate 4,870 individuals are claiming unemployment benefits, representing 3 % of the working population. This signifies an increase of 1,175 individuals from the same month last year<sup>9</sup>. Youth Unemployment (16-24) has experienced a downward trend in recent years, currently accounting for 12% of claimants<sup>10</sup> which sits below the NI average.

SWC need to fully understand the drivers behind the recent surge and work collaboratively with local stakeholders to transition unemployed individuals into employment. Continued expansion of skills and employment interventions such as apprenticeships and skills academies, complemented by regional labour market partnerships, will support citizens to reengage in skills and education and access a 'good job'.



## **Addressing persistently high percentages of working age residents with no qualifications and creating a culture of upskilling & reskilling**

Historically the region has consistently ranked high in terms of its percentage of working age residents having no formal qualifications. In 2023, 14% of the total working age population in both districts had no qualifications, above the NI average (12.3%), placing the region among the three lowest performing council areas<sup>11</sup>. The College will continue to prioritise targeted social inclusion and employability initiatives as the initial step on a pathway where all learners can enter at their level and progress through a range of professional and technical qualifications.

The region also has a below average percentage of working age residents with a higher qualification, with just 35% of residents holding a level 4+ qualification in 2023. Promoting educational participation at all ages and creating a culture of lifelong learning is essential for changing the skills profile of our region, focusing on encouraging individuals to avail of opportunities to upskill and reskill through programmes such as Skills Focus and Skill Up.

### ***Enhancing opportunities for young individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds***

Enhancing opportunities for young individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds is a key focus for the College. Half of SWC's regulated enrolments come from students residing in highly deprived areas, with 50% of those in the 2022/23 academic year belonging to the lowest 2 multiple deprivation quintiles, above the sector average of 44%<sup>12</sup>.

### **A region dominated by micro businesses with a concentration of employment in Manufacturing, Construction & Retail.**

In 2024 the region had 18,430 registered businesses, with micro businesses accounting for 93% of the business population. Over 60% of all business registered belong to three broad Industry Groups; Agriculture, Construction and Production<sup>13</sup>.

The most recent Census data indicates the top three industries of employment in the region for residents are Manufacturing (13%), Construction (12%) and Wholesale/Retail (16%). In Mid Ulster, 15% of residents are employed in the Manufacturing sector, the highest rate of any council district<sup>14</sup> which can be linked to the significant industrial base in this area. Ensuring the College's business and industry services caters largely to the needs of smaller businesses, and delivering a curriculum that is mindful of the region's more dominate employment sectors, will remain at the forefront of College planning.

### **Productivity remains a challenge across Northern Ireland**

Productivity is a key driver of higher wages and better living standards, however, Northern Ireland has remained below the UK average for decades. The headline measure of productivity, GVA output per hour worked, indicates NI is 13.2% below the UK average in 2022. This trend translates to all council areas in NI, with labour productivity levels in Fermanagh and Omagh 8% lower than the UK average<sup>15</sup>. It is important to note there has been productivity improvement in recent years, particularly around economic output (GVA) per job filled, which has grown at rates higher than the NI average in both council areas<sup>16</sup>.

GDP per head, a reflection of economic growth, has increased by 23% in Mid Ulster and 16% in Fermanagh and Omagh over the period 2017-2021. However, Fermanagh & Omagh remains below the NI average in this measure, supporting the view of lower productivity in this council area <sup>17</sup>.

Whilst there have been significant improvements in business productivity, driving further increases in productivity through delivery of higher-level skill and innovation support will support better jobs and greater regional balance.

### **Underinvestment in R&D**

Innovation activity in NI is however historically the lowest of all UK regions and remains concentrated within too few firms and government districts. Of the £850m total Business Expenditure on R&D (BERD) in 2022, £115m is spent in this sub-region, with Mid Ulster accounting for the significant majority of this. Only 3% of total expenditure can be attributed to businesses in Fermanagh and Omagh. With nearly 45% of total BERD based in Belfast, the sub-region needs to do better at ensuring capacity and capability for R&D is strengthened, and translating its innovation inputs into innovation outputs in order to support the Ministers vision for improved productivity<sup>18</sup>.

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## **DATA SOURCES**

### **College Profile for 2024/25**

DfE (2024) Further education sector activity in Northern Ireland: 2018/19 to 2022/23

DfE (2024) FE Outcomes 2022-23

### **Sub-Regional Profile**

<sup>1</sup> NISRA (2023) 2022 Mid-Year Population Estimates for Northern Ireland.

<sup>2</sup> NISRA (2024) Labour Market Status 2023, Table 1.1d: Labour market structure by council area, aged 16 to 64, rate, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> NISRA (2024) Labour Market Status 2023, Table 1.1c: Labour market structure by council area, aged 16 to 64, number, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Mid Ulster (2023), LMP 2022-23.

<sup>5</sup> NISRA (2024) Labour Market Status 2023, Table 1.3d: Labour market structure by council area, female, aged 16 to 64, rate, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> NISRA (2024) Labour Market Status 2023, Table 1.11a: Employment estimate and rate by disability status, ages 16 to 64, local government districts, number and rate, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> NISRA (2024) Labour Market Status 2023, Table 1.11b: Economically inactive estimate and rate by disability status, ages 16 to 64, local government districts, number and rate, 2023.

<sup>8</sup> NISRA (2024) Labour Market Status by LGD 2009 to 2023, Table 3g: Fermanagh and Omagh and Table 3j: Mid Ulster.

<sup>9</sup> NISRA (2024) Claimant Count Monthly Data.

<sup>10</sup> NOMIS (2024) Claimant count by sex and age, NI LGD.

<sup>11</sup> NISRA (2024) Labour Market Status by LGD, Table 1.15b: Labour market structure and qualification level by district council area, ages 16 to 64, 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Dfe (2024) Further education sector activity in Northern Ireland: 2018/19 to 2022/23, Table A22: Regulated enrolments of Northern Ireland domiciled students by relative multiple deprivation quintile and FE College (2018/19 to 2022/23).

<sup>13</sup> NISRA (2024) Inter Departmental Business Survey, Worksheet 3.1-3.4 LGD breakdown.

<sup>14</sup> NISRA (2023) Industry of employment by sex, MS-H06Aa,

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<sup>15</sup> ONS (2024) Regional and subregional labour productivity, UK: 2022,

<sup>16</sup> Invest NI (2024) Performance council area Fermanagh and Omagh, Mid Ulster.

<sup>17</sup> ONS (2024) Regional gross domestic product, UK: 2022.

<sup>18</sup> NISRA (2024) Northern Ireland Research & Development Survey 2022.