



Further Education and West Yorkshire Combined Authority Compact

2025-28



West
Yorkshire
Combined
Authority

Tracy
Brabin
Mayor of
West Yorkshire

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Foreword from the Mayor of West Yorkshire

Skills lie at the heart of our ambitions to build an inclusive economy that works for everyone. They provide the vital link to connect all residents to new opportunities at all stages of their lives and careers.

Our [Local Growth Plan](#) sets out an evidence-led approach to unlock growth and prosperity for West Yorkshire's residents, businesses and communities.

There are so many exciting opportunities driven by our economic sector strengths and specialisms and the transformative investment we are making in mass transit and housing retrofit. But we need the right skills base and talent pipeline to make things happen.

And our strong Further Education colleges play a critical role to develop lives and careers.

West Yorkshire is home to a diverse skills and training landscape which provides a unique launchpad for my Region of Learning and Creativity.

We have both one of the largest and smallest colleges in the country and the only specialist construction college in England.

This mix of institutions, serving the needs of our communities and

businesses alike, means that people at any age and from any background can take their best next step to succeed and thrive in life and good work.

Nothing can happen without working in close partnership across the complex skills system.

I am proud to formalise the close relationship between the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, all of the region's further education colleges and the West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges through this Further Education Compact.

Together, this agreement will supercharge our joint ambitions and help make our ambitious vision for West Yorkshire a reality.



Tracy Brabin
Mayor of West Yorkshire

Foreword from West Yorkshire Colleges

As a consortium of FE Colleges working in partnership, we understand that skills are the cornerstone of building an inclusive and thriving economy.

Our collective mission aligns closely with the ambitions set out in the West Yorkshire Local Growth Plan, which prioritises connecting people of all ages and backgrounds to transformative opportunities.

By equipping our learners with the right skills, we not only empower individuals but also contribute to unlocking growth and prosperity for the entire region.

The opportunities present in West Yorkshire's economic specialisms and high-growth sectors coupled with investments in mass transit and housing retrofit, highlight the critical need for a robust and adaptable talent pipeline.

As Further Education Colleges, we play a pivotal role in meeting these demands and ensuring our workforce is ready to seize these opportunities.

West Yorkshire's diverse and dynamic skills and training ecosystem is a testament to our collective commitment to enabling success for all.

Our region offers unparalleled pathways for learners to progress, excel, and contribute meaningfully to society and the economy.

Partnership is at the heart of everything we do. The Further Education Compact highlights the importance of collaboration between the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, our FE colleges, and the West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges.

We are proud to be part of this collective effort; together, we are committed to driving forward a shared vision for skills and education that meets the needs of our communities and employers, now and in the future.



David Malone

Chair of West Yorkshire Consortium of
Colleges
CEO/Principal Calderdale College

Introduction

West Yorkshire's Further Education colleges served over 63,000 students per year according to latest figures, providing people with a pathway into employment, further and higher education or training, to start, progress or change their careers. From an employer perspective, the colleges are critical vehicles to develop a skilled workforce, addressing skills gaps and maximising economic opportunity.

This Compact captures the joint commitment between the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, West Yorkshire Further Education colleges and the West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges to move to a stronger, strategic partnership model to create a brighter, more prosperous region where everyone can fulfil their potential. The commitments are captured across the following categories:

- A thriving and stable West Yorkshire Further Education sector
- A forward-looking and agile Further Education offer, responsive to the skills needs of employers and emerging opportunities
- An inclusive Further Education offer, responsive to the needs of learners
- Stronger relationships with West Yorkshire's business base and expansion of technical and vocational provision
- Clear arrangements for co-design and co-development of policies and programmes and effective ways of working

The Compact demonstrates that quality, person-centred Further Education provision, rooted in local communities, is of strategic importance to equip people with the right skills to boost productivity and workforce participation, and is a key enabler to ensure all residents can be part of West Yorkshire's growth journey.

Building a Region of Learning and Creativity and raising the skills levels of West Yorkshire residents is at the heart of the ten-year Local Growth Plan, which relies on a close partnership approach to achieve transformative inclusive economic growth.

Devolution of adult skills functions and budgets has allowed the Combined Authority to better align adult skills funding with the opportunities and needs of local residents and businesses, deliver a more joined-up, responsive and accessible skills system and achieve better value for money.

Major opportunity lies in the region's high-growth sectors in digital and tech, financial and professional services, health and life sciences, advanced manufacturing and engineering, creative and cultural and the green economy as well as the delivery of transformational investment programmes including Mass Transit and housing retrofit. Working together, the Combined Authority and Further Education colleges and the Consortium of Colleges are essential

to unlock this opportunity and improve outcomes for West Yorkshire's residents and businesses.

The Compact provides a framework to work effectively together on a local level and on a regional level by setting out aspirational as well as practical commitments and ways of working that increase accountability and transparency.

Partnership

This Compact is an agreement between the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, the West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges and all seven colleges in the region. This includes both working relationships between the Combined Authority individually with all colleges, as well as collectively through the Consortium of Colleges.

The remit of the Compact focuses on West Yorkshire residents and businesses while acknowledging that learner travel patterns and businesses trade is not confined within individual Local Authority areas or West Yorkshire borders.

Local Authorities

Each of the individual Further Education colleges has existing, strong relationships and arrangements with their Local Authority and other key

local partners to deliver for the communities they serve. These are essential to build and maintain a robust network of local anchor institutions, schools, employers and voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations to support learner pathways that are rooted in local opportunities – especially for those learners that face disadvantage or barriers to making their best next step.

This Compact is not seeking to replace or override these arrangements. Instead, the Further Education Compact focusses on convening and strengthening the Further Education colleges across West Yorkshire.

A strong, regional partnership between the Combined Authority and Further Education colleges supports collaborative working and decision making to tackle regional-level challenges and maximise strategic opportunities, for example regarding the region's high-growth sectors and transformational investment in mass transit and housing retrofit.

A regional approach also supports leveraging and delivering on the mandate of the West Yorkshire Mayor for employment and skills but also alongside other mayoral roles, such as police, crime, transport and health.

West Yorkshire



- West Yorkshire brings together the local authorities of Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield.
- West Yorkshire is a diverse and young region of 2.4 million people and a workforce of 1.2 million people.
- West Yorkshire is a polycentric, interconnected and self-contained labour market, with 90% of workers living in the region.
- West Yorkshire's £67 billion economy is made up of an interconnected network of urban centres.
- Almost 100,000 businesses create innovative, high-quality goods and services.
- A workforce of 1.2 million is employed across a diverse range of sectors, with high numbers of jobs in health, manufacturing and financial and professional services.

Local skills landscape

West Yorkshire has the second largest economy in the north of England, with output of £67 billion per annum, 94,000 businesses and employment of 1.2 million.

Its distinctive and diverse economic base is characterised by specialisms in key sectors. For example, relative to its population size, the region has the largest manufacturing base of any devolved area. The region has a strong concentration of activity in finance together with a vibrant health tech sector.

The West Yorkshire economy faces a number of structural weaknesses which affect prosperity in the region, most notably a productivity deficit with the national average of 14% in terms of GVA per hour worked. Along with relatively weak investment performance, a lack of skills held by the region's workforce is a key constraint on productivity growth.

Key aspects of this skills deficit with the national average include:

- Fewer people with qualifications at higher level (Level 4 and above) in most parts of the region and low entry rates into higher education. This limits the ability of the region's firms to offer high value products and services.
- A high proportion of working age people with no qualifications or with qualifications below Level 2, particularly in Bradford and Wakefield. This impacts on individual employability, career

prospects and progression to higher skill levels.

- Underperformance on young people's attainment, with low proportions reaching Level 2 and Level 3 by the age of 19, perpetuating the structural weakness in the region's skills base.
- A significant proportion of people lacking basic literacy and numeracy skills, together with a substantial number of people within the community who cannot speak English or cannot speak English well.
- High and growing levels of claimant unemployment together with an above average prevalence of economic inactivity. Addressing a lack of skills or a mismatch between the skills held by jobless individuals and those in demand in the labour market is often key to supporting entry into sustainable employment.

An additional issue is presented by demographic trends and growth in the number of young people reaching school leaving age. This trend is projected to continue to the end of the decade and presents challenges for Further Education institutions in terms of developing the capacity to meet demand from this group.

Employers also face challenges in obtaining the skills they need to meet business objectives. A key issue is that more than a third (35%) of all vacancies in West Yorkshire are

estimated to be skill shortage vacancies, meaning that employers face a lack of candidates with the required skills to do the job (source: Employer Skills Survey 2022). This is similar to the national average of 36% and a substantial increase on the previous estimate (for 2019) which was only 24% and reflects the tightening of the labour market in the aftermath of the pandemic. The prevalence of skill shortage vacancies is much higher for some occupations and sectors – for example it increases to 55% for the Construction sector in West Yorkshire.

In addition, 19% of employers in West Yorkshire report that they have one or more skills gaps - instances of existing staff lacking full proficiency to do their jobs, an increase on the 15% reported in 2019. Many skills gaps are due to a deficit of practical skills among workers, including job-specific skills and operational skills, such as knowledge of the organisation's products and services. Complex analytical skills, such as problem solving, plus digital skills at a variety of levels, as well as basic skills (functional literacy and numeracy) are also in deficit for many staff.

A lack of the required “soft” skills is common across the workforce, including “self-management” skills

such as time management and managing own feelings, plus team working and persuading / influencing others.

West Yorkshire's colleges are at the heart of the region's education and skills system. The seven colleges recorded learner participation of 63,000 in the 2022/23 academic year, accounting for 43% of total Further Education and skills participation and 54% of participation among under-19s in the region during that year. Colleges are instrumental in delivering apprenticeships, community learning (now tailored learning) as well as classroom-based further education, including T-Levels. All colleges in West Yorkshire engage with a highly diverse student intake and have extensive outreach into the region's deprived communities.

Further Education colleges play a central role in addressing skills shortages. Colleges delivered 24% of total apprenticeship starts in West Yorkshire in 2022/23 but the share increases for skill shortage disciplines, including Building and Construction (81% of starts), Engineering (52%) and Health and social care (29%). Colleges also play a key part in providing opportunities for young people, delivering 44% of apprenticeship starts for the under 19 age group.

Commitment

Formalising the partnership between the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and West Yorkshire's Further Education colleges individually and through the West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges will be captured through individual and joint commitments, aligned to the West Yorkshire Local Growth Plan:

- A thriving and stable West Yorkshire Further Education sector
- A forward-looking and agile Further Education offer, responsive to the skills needs of employers and emerging opportunities
- An inclusive Further Education offer, responsive to the needs of learners
- Stronger relationships with West Yorkshire's business base and expansion of technical and vocational provision
- Clear arrangements for co-design and co-development of policies and programmes and effective ways of working

A thriving and stable West Yorkshire Further Education sector

Combined Authority commitments

- Provide a platform for the Further Education sector to amplify and celebrate its achievements and impact on learners, businesses and the region.
- Seek out and respond to opportunities to work with government to promote system readiness and influence system change based on agreed priorities, including Further Education capital and tutor shortages.

Further Education commitment

- Work with the Mayor of West Yorkshire to support the creation of a Region of Learning and Creativity which is responsive to the needs of learners and employers.

Joint commitment

- Use our individual and collective voices to champion the Further Education sector on a local, regional and national level.

A forward-looking and agile Further Education offer, responsive to the skills needs of employers and emerging opportunities

Combined Authority commitment

- Offer research and intelligence-led data and insight at the most granular level possible.

Further Education commitment

- Explore the potential of AI/tech to transform teaching and learning

Joint commitments

- Champion and actively facilitate the development of future leaders in Further Education, for example through offering shadowing opportunities and increased exposure to regional policy and political decision-making.
- Actively plan and prepare for new opportunities such as the region's high-growth sectors - digital and tech, financial and professional services, health and life sciences, advanced manufacturing and engineering, creative and cultural and the green economy - and around major forthcoming schemes and investments such as housing retrofit and mass transit.
- Work with Local Authorities to identify and address, or escalate if required, sufficiency and capacity issues for Level 1, Level 2 and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision on a local level.
- Explore innovative solutions to key Further Education challenges

An inclusive Further Education offer, responsive to the needs of learners

Further Education commitment

- Ensure the offer of a fully inclusive curriculum with entry points and progression routes into local opportunities, that will enable all residents to develop their skills in priority sectors and gain meaningful employment.

Joint commitments

- Work with key stakeholders to support and simplify the navigation of technical pathways for learners to support transitions into positive destinations, with an emphasis on priority sectors and opportunities within West Yorkshire.

- Explore practical solutions to address region-wide challenges around attainment barriers for residents who do not possess a Level 2 qualification in Maths and/or English
- Together with wider partners, co-design and deliver the West Yorkshire Promise to support the development of employability and transferable skills needed for a lifetime of economic participation – building on existing best practice and flexible enough to tailor to local needs.
- Become part of a person-centred and integrated careers and employment support system that actively and seamlessly supports (re-)entry, progression and career change within the region's labour market.
- Actively address barriers to participation and progress for those learners facing disadvantage.
- Develop a coordinated approach with all system partners, including Local Authorities, to address increasing numbers of those not in education, employment or training.

Stronger relationships with West Yorkshire's business base and expansion of technical and vocational provision

Combined Authority commitments

- Develop and commission pilots for innovative, co-funded modular training to improve responsiveness to employers' immediate skills needs and focussing on specific skills gaps, in particular as they relate to the needs of the region's high-growth sectors including in digital and tech, financial and professional services, health and life sciences, advanced manufacturing and engineering, creative and cultural and the green economy
- Facilitate the engagement of large employers and Further Education to create new opportunities.
- Integrate the region's Further Education offer into its inward investment soft landing and other investor engagement material
- Pilot technical pathways working closely with Skills England.

Further Education commitments

- Actively engage with primary and secondary schools to offer insight into the breadth and depth of the region's Further Education offer and make navigation of technical pathways easier.
- Actively engage with employers to showcase the opportunities of Further Education to recruit and develop talent.

Joint commitments

- Establish and grow forums bringing employers and Further Education together to identify and articulate skills needs, co-design innovative solutions and simplify engagement between business and Further Education.
- Increase progression into higher education, including via Further Education routes, and address gaps in provision with a focus on areas where there are gaps for higher level skills.
- Explore Higher Technical Qualifications (Level 4 and Level 5, one and two year technical courses)
- Champion T-levels, apprenticeships and technical education as well as work placements with employers.
- Develop inclusive technical routes where T-levels and apprenticeships are unsuitable.

Clear arrangements for co-design and co-development of policies and programmes and effective ways of working

Combined Authority commitments

- Where possible, consider direct awards rather than competitive funding to Further Education colleges in recognition of their strategic role.
- Provide early notice where possible, of forthcoming engagement and consultations to allow enough response time.
- Seek to align funding with need over time without impacting on learner choice or disrupting the stability of the Further Education sector.
- Keep levels of bureaucracy for Further Education colleges as low as possible while
 - considering efficiency of reporting;
 - developing practical approaches to commissioning and partnership management; and
 - considering cross-border agreements
- Incorporate learning from a range of evidence bases, alongside consultation with Further Education and other partners, to develop ways in which funds can be better invested to benefit all.
- Ensure representation of Further Education on the Economy Committee to ensure formal involvement in strategic decision making as part of the

Combined Authority's governance arrangements as well as strengthen accountability and transparency.

Further Education commitments

- Strive to deliver outstanding provision that puts the needs of learners and employers at the centre of delivery.
- Develop the place-based curriculum offer and wrap-around support with a clear focus on learner progression.
- Contribute positively to approaches for collaboration and information requests for (government) consultations.
- Offer early notice of significant changes, challenges and plans.
- Facilitate feedback from learners, staff and partners.

Joint commitments

- Make data and information more accessible to aid decision making and enhance transparency.
- Co-develop relevant policies and programmes from the earliest possible stage and address barriers that may hinder collaboration.
- Make sure learning opportunities are joined up to local progression opportunities in life and work.

Terms of Reference

Membership

Members of the Further Education Compact will include representation from the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, the West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges and all seven West Yorkshire Further Education colleges:

- Bradford College
- Calderdale College
- Heart of Yorkshire Education Group
- Kirklees College
- Leeds College of Building
- Luminate Education Group
- Shipley College

Geography

The geographical remit of the Further Education Compact will be West Yorkshire. However, there is an acknowledgement that learner travel patterns and businesses' trade is not confined within individual Local Authority areas or West Yorkshire borders.

West Yorkshire will soon be surrounded by Combined Authorities with devolved adult skills functions. The partnership will therefore look beyond West Yorkshire borders for advocacy, expertise and best practice and to maximise opportunities for learners and businesses.

Lifetime and review

The lifetime of the Further Education Compact will be aligned to the Mayor of West Yorkshire's second term of office, 2024-2028.

A mid-term review of the Further Education Compact will take place in 2026 to ensure all aspects of the agreement remain current and relevant.

Governance

Ways of working will include working relationships between the Combined Authority individually with all colleges, as well as collectively through the Consortium of Colleges.

For the purposes of this Compact, a new strategic partnership group with regular meetings and consistent membership will be established.

This group will take on responsibility to oversee the partnership and implement the Further Education Compact commitments through the development of a practical action plan.

To ensure progress and impact can be monitored and recorded, the partnership will develop and agree annual priorities and consistent measures of success.

Costs

It is anticipated that all individual partners will cover their own costs for contributing time to the partnership.

Disclaimer

The Further Education Compact is not a legally binding document. It is a voluntary agreement and statement of intent between partners of the commitment to work together for the

benefit of West Yorkshire residents and businesses.

Signing the Compact does not constitute the creation of a legal entity or give anyone within the partnership the authority to make binding commitments on behalf of others or act as agent on behalf of others in the partnership.

Publicity and Communications

It is intended that the partnership will agree the form of any publicity or communications material in relation to

the Compact in advance of any publicity or communications being made and that the partners shall participate in and/or co-operate with any reasonable promotional activity relating to the Compact, where possible.

Where any guidelines for the form of any publicity or communications relating to the Compact are required, this shall be referred to the strategic partnership group for consideration and drafting.

Partner profiles

West Yorkshire Combined Authority

In March 2020, West Yorkshire agreed a transformative devolution deal with Government to unlock the region's full potential and improve living standards for local communities through better transport, improved skills and stronger businesses, while tackling the climate emergency. This included control of the region's Adult Skills Fund (formally Adult Education Budget) to closer align spending on skills to the opportunities and needs in the local economy.

- During the 2023-2024 academic year, a total of 44,000 learners (including continuing learners) were supported through West Yorkshire's devolved AEB programme.
- 1,200 learners achieved a first level 3 qualification in 2023/24.
- During the 2023-2024 academic year around 17,300 new learners (or 42% of the total) were resident in the most deprived neighbourhoods (IMD decile 1).

Government is deepening devolution for established Combined Authorities and West Yorkshire is working towards a devolved integrated settlement in 2026, which will enable bold, flexible and long-term investment where it will have most impact.

West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges

West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges (WYCC) operates on behalf of Further Education colleges in West Yorkshire. It is 'The Colleges' Company'. Its purpose is to drive the collaborative objectives of the seven colleges, WYCC and the Combined Authority.

The WYCC Vision is to strengthen West Yorkshire colleges' visibility, position and capacity to deliver the skills needed in West Yorkshire.

The West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges provide services to its members through external investment that drives skills development and delivery that support collaborative ambitions.

Bradford College

‘Working together to transform lives’

Bradford College offers a broad range of vocational and academic qualifications to over 20,000 young people and adults and is the largest institution providing 16-19 education and training within the Bradford local authority area. Strong progression routes exist from Entry Level to Level 7 provision, with strong partnership links to Higher Education, across a broad and responsive curriculum.

The college meets the needs of its wider community with an Adult Learning Centre located in the heart of the city, offers STEM focused apprenticeship provision situated in Bradford’s business district and has recently launched an innovative Green Skills Centre, positioning itself at the cutting edge of sustainable technology education and professional training.

Calderdale College

‘Engage People, Invest in Skills, Transform Lives’

Calderdale College serves a wide community across the West Yorkshire region with an expansive 16-18 and adult provision. The college offers courses to over 5,000 learners across further education, higher education, adults, T Levels and apprenticeships at a local level with the apprenticeship offering also delivering strong collaborative models at local and regional level.

Based in Halifax, the college is the sole provider of higher education in Calderdale and recently unveiled its new media and gaming campus at Dean Clough. Mill Studios will transform the ways in which students studying creative courses learn and are assessed in a new digitalised curriculum which includes Games Design, Esports and a T-Level in Media, Broadcasting and Production.

Heart of Yorkshire Education Group

‘Our staff positively transform our students’ lives and the communities we serve by putting them at the heart of everything we do’

The Heart of Yorkshire Education Group serves approximately 10,000 students, with more than 1,200 Higher Education students and Apprentices from across Yorkshire from its colleges in Castleford, Selby and Wakefield

Castleford College is primarily home to skills-based courses in areas including construction, hair and beauty, engineering and automotive studies. The purpose-built facilities include engineering labs covering mechanical and electrical pathways and construction workshops.

Wakefield College has grown its footprint over recent years to ensure students learn in a modern, state of the art environment with its dedicated University Centre at Wakefield College; a Digital Industries Centre; School of Popular Music & Performing Arts.

Kirklees College

‘Creating Opportunities, Changing Lives’

Kirklees College provides study programmes, adult learning programmes and apprenticeships across a wide range of subjects and delivers programmes for learners who have high needs, supporting over 10,000 students.

The college boasts seven bespoke centres, from its two main centres based in Huddersfield and Dewsbury, to specific learning centres in Animal Care, Construction, Engineering, Process Manufacturing, as well as the Pioneer Higher Skills Centre which is dedicated to higher education and higher skills.

Students benefit from a varied curriculum, state of the art facilities and exceptional resources, including the new Digital Learning Hub housing the latest equipment in DJ and music production. The college works with over 1,000 employers both in the region and nationally.

Leeds College of Building

‘Inspiring lives and building futures’

Leeds College of Building is the only Further Education college in the UK dedicated to construction and the built environment welcoming over 5,000 students each year from across the UK partnering with over 600 leading employers to provide hands on experience for students in the real world as part of their studies.

The college provides world class learning environments, classroom and workshop facilities for craft and higher technical courses in building services engineering, construction trades, rail and higher education, allowing further expansion of provision to meet employer and student needs.

Leeds College of Building work closely with university partners to offer progression from level 2 through to level 6.

Luminate Education Group

‘Together we transform lives’

Luminate Education Group is a group of education providers in Leeds City Region with six-member organisations: Leeds City College, Keighley College, Leeds Conservatoire, Harrogate College, Leeds Sixth Form College and a growing higher education provision through its University Centre Leeds.

Luminate offer courses for young people, businesses and adults in further education, higher education, T Levels and apprenticeships at a local level.

The Group cares for over 30,000 students and apprentices, transforming lives through inspirational education, training and support with a clear focus on student and apprentice destinations.

The group has a devolved ‘bottom-up’ responsive curriculum model; for example, its P-TECH provision is designed for 14–16-year-olds from marginalised communities to help develop their career pathways into digital.

Shipley College

‘To provide the highest quality, inspirational education and training that meets and exceeds the ambitions of individuals, businesses and communities’

Situated in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Saltaire, the Shipley further has approximately 2,700 learners on practical, vocational and work-related courses including Apprenticeships, T Levels, full-time and part-time courses across a range of sectors including Art & Design, Business, Computing, Creative & Digital, Childcare, Sport & travel & Tourism and Rail Engineering from level 1 – 3.

Shipley College has recently launched The Saltaire Institute, as a one-stop shop for adult students looking to gain qualifications and boost or switch their career.

Shipley College has been utilising new technology and equipment to give students immersive learning experiences and help build relationships with key local employers in health and care.

Signatories

Mayor Tracy Brabin
West Yorkshire Combined Authority



Joanne Patrickson, Project Director
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Sam Wright, Principal & CEO
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