

ANNUAL ACCOUNTABILITY
STATEMENT Part 2

2026/27

June 2026

ANNUAL ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT 2026-2027 (PART 2)

1 Purpose

The Northern School of Art is a specialist art & design provider with equally important and significant Higher and Further Education provision across its twin campuses in Middlesbrough (FE) and Hartlepool (HE). It is anticipated that in 2026-27 the FE activities of the School will be conducted by its subsidiary, The Northern College of Art, which will have become a designated further education institution. This change was not certain at the point of finalising this Annual Accountability Statement.

The School works in close alignment with the creative industries, promoting students' social mobility, and ultimate progression into creative employment in the Tees Valley and beyond.

Mission statement:

“Exceptional education for creative careers”

The School’s Strategic Plan 2025 to 2028 sets out our vision:

By 2028 the School will be ready to become the only specialist arts university in the North East having secured Degree Awarding Powers without time limit.

We will continue to provide excellent student learning, and progression. We will further enhance student support at both FE and HE within well-resourced creative environments. We want to sustain our supportive creative community enhancing personal development, resilience and adaptability.

We will sustain realistic growth in student numbers in line with our marketing and resource planning. The School will continue to undertake scholarly activity and research that fosters innovation and enables the growth and nurturing of external relationships with industry and academics at the forefront of their specialism.

The School will continue to enhance students’ experience, enabling them to progress to aspirational destinations of their choice with additional support from our alumni network and employability services. In further developing these links with industry, deepening our ties to the creative industries, we will enhance our reputation and visibility to both industry partners and potential students, encouraging both groups to seek us out as their educational partner of choice.

As the School moves towards gaining university status, we see our strong links to our local communities and creative networks becoming increasingly important, fostering creativity and innovation by establishing and developing connections with both the public and our network of creative professionals. These create a dynamic exchange of ideas and opportunities benefitting students, creative practitioners and the wider community.

To this end, the School works well with regional councils, for example working as a key partner in the development of the Production Village in Hartlepool and as a member of Middlesbrough Creative Partnership. The School also fosters close links with art and design teachers across the region via its Northern Creative Network (formerly NESCAN), acting in part as a professional development forum

whilst also providing a networking platform linking education with the creative sector.

By 2028, we will deliver the following outcomes for our students, staff, and region:

- Outcome 1: A future-focussed curriculum
- Outcome 2: Sector leading specialist teaching and learning
- Outcome 3: Excellent student experience and support
- Outcome 4: Sustaining growth in student numbers
- Outcome 5: Creating opportunities
- Outcome 6: Sustainable, viable and healthy resources

In relation to Outcome 4, by 2027-28 the School expects to see a 52.7% increase in its undergraduate intake when compared with 2023-24, and a 56.8% increase in overall undergraduate student numbers in the same period. Again when compared with 2023-24, the School expects to see a 15.6% in total FE student enrolments by 2027-28. It is expected that this target for undergraduate student growth may well be met a year early, whilst FE student growth, which was significant from 2020-21 to 2023-24, has slowed considerably.

As the creative sector is predominantly qualified to at least graduate level, our principal orientation is to enable FE students to successfully progress to HE and then enter industry.

Following a feasibility study in 2023, the School has taken forward an application for transfer to the HE sector. The School undertook a detailed public consultation on this in the summer and early autumn of 2023 which demonstrated overwhelming support for the creation of a new group structure with a Higher Education Institution encompassing our provision in Hartlepool and a new specialist Further Education College taking on our FE provision in Middlesbrough. We are awaiting confirmation of a Ministerial decision in respect of this matter, but expect that The Northern School of Art will be designated as a higher education corporation from 1 August 2026, with The Northern College of Art becoming a designated further education institution from the same date.

Progression of our further education students to undergraduate study is significant. As an institution our FE provision and its positive impact on young people in the region is very important to The School. We will always seek to preserve, enhance and grow our FE provision in recognition of its importance to local young people and the growing sector we serve. The new group structure highlights the continuing importance of further education provision.

The School has expanded its Level 2 provision, with the expectation that this will increase opportunities for local students who are not immediately ready to undertake Level 3 study on leaving school, but whose chances of progressing to undergraduate study will be significantly increased by attending the School. Thus, the School is seeking to facilitate greater levels of progression to undergraduate study, noting that the creative industries are an industrial sector where 75% of the workforce is qualified to graduate-level or above.

2 Context & Place

The Northern School of Art is the only specialist art school in the North East of England, with a unique character founded on the personalised development of creative skills and thinking, focussed on practical making. This is directly supported by the nature of our staff scholarly activity and educational culture that offers outstanding student support and progressive industry and community partnerships.

We stand out as an institution which welcomes, supports, and educates students from all areas and backgrounds, providing high quality personalised learning opportunities. We value diversity, and the Office for Students and Ofsted have recognised that we offer outstanding tailored provision for all our students. We are committed to opening opportunities to the people of our home region and beyond.

The creative industries are identified as central to the growth of the whole region with both elected mayors emphasising investment in growth particularly in the screen and digital spheres. This is echoed at national level through the Creative Industries Council (an industry/government partnership) and the clear recognition by the newly-elected government that creativity is central to economic growth and social inclusion following the identification of the creative industries as one of the eight growth-driving sectors in *Invest 2035: the UK's modern industrial strategy* (November 2024), the industrial strategy Green Paper.

The School continues to play a central part in developments at a regional level. The development by the School of The Northern Studios, and as part of the region-wide North East Screen Industry Partnership, has helped grow the industry from two regionally-based major TV productions annually in 2020 to eighteen in 2024.

In recent years the School has increased the alignment of its FE curriculum offer to its HE stage and screen specialisms, with a re-focusing of its 3d course to include increased links to its Set Design degree and the creation of a Level 3 Costume course, very directly aligned to its highly successful Costume degree. With greatly enhanced levels of TV/film production in the region, these changes have increased the alignment of the School's FE offer to a growing regional jobs market in the TV/film industry.

The Studios development is also central to the successful Levelling Up Fund project in Hartlepool which, over the period to 2028, envisages the creation of a production village serving the screen sector across the region and country, especially as Crown Works, the large studios planned in Sunderland, come on stream. As part of this exciting future the School continues to be an active part of developments offering hope and opportunity to our students and graduates, as well as the communities we serve.

Our recent achievements, the nature of our students, and developments in the creative industries regionally and nationally set the frame for our goals over the next 3 years.

The School serves an area facing challenges:

- Middlesbrough and Hartlepool were, respectively, the 1st and 5th most income-deprived of England's 316 local authority areas (ONS 2021).
- Across the six key FE feeder parliamentary constituencies, percentages of POLAR4 Quintile 1& 2 postcode areas (those least likely to participate in HE) range from 60.2% to 75.9% of all postcodes, with a mean of 68.4% (OfS).
- This mean figure places the area in the top 15% nationally for Quintile 1&2 dominance – and hence low likelihood of HE participation.

The School exists within the rapidly growing creative sector in the UK and the North, where our reputation is strong. Sector growth has been sustained over more than 20 years. More particularly, in the five years up to 2017 the sector in the north east grew faster than anywhere else in England apart from London (47% growth by value). The sector has grown faster than the UK economy since 1998 – the creative industries employ 1 in 11 people in the English workforce and are predicted to need an additional 700,000 graduates by 2030 (DCMS, 2018). The Creative Industries' Policy Evidence Centre states that 71 per cent of workers in the Creative Industries are qualified to at least degree level.

The alignment of the School to the creative industries, and the dominance of degree level employment in the sector, are significant in relation to the School's FE curriculum. The majority of FE provision is at level 3 with a clear focus on progression to undergraduate study.

The School delivers very high achievement rates (c.95%) for its FE learners, and maintaining this very high level is a key priority. In addition, the School typically sees a good level of progression to positive destinations for its leavers (c.90%), with c.75% of Level 3 leavers progressing directly to higher education. The School seeks to maintain or ideally improve these statistics each year.

The School has a well-established Curriculum Development Group which regularly monitors and considers all forms of FE and HE qualifications including; vocational, academic, and technical qualifications. In the UK the vast majority of creative industry employers are micro or small businesses and as a consequence there is very limited scope for them to engage with technical qualifications such as apprenticeships and T levels which require them to devote scarce resources to work placements. This issue is particularly relevant in our region which currently lacks large employers in the sector. We remain open to working with industry to develop bespoke provision or pathways to enhance the training offer and are already working with industry and the Combined Authority on this.

Our student recruitment to FE is regional, largely mapped on to the Tees Valley (and its LSIP) but extending into North Yorkshire and County Durham. Our HE recruitment is national, with the majority of students coming from the three northern regions.

Approach to developing the Annual Accountability Statement

This statement and our approach to our learning offer is informed by our focus on the progression of students. It is focussed upon our research into, and collaboration and partnership with, the creative sector.

This Statement therefore reflects our annual curriculum review which is driven by:

- Feedback from students via various means including Course/Programme Boards, the FE Forum, Planning & Partnership Group and extensive surveys.
- Feedback from our Industry Liaison Group members.
- Direct engagements with large industry partners – notably Aardman Animation and Toon Boom.
- National research – notably by the BFI, Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC), Creative Industries Council and Creative UK.
- Intelligence gathered through professional networks – notably Creative UK, BAFTA, Society of British Theatre Designers, Association of Photographers, UKADIA and the Costume Society.
- Regional partnerships – North East Screen Industries Partnership, North East Screen, TVCA Creative Place Advisory Group.

Links to some key evidence are cited below (see Supporting Documentation).

We are a member of FE+ the partnership between the five Tees Valley FE Colleges which has, collaboratively conducted a joint review of provision across the region and explored this alongside the labour market growth and change projected by the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA). This work is reflected in the later section on the Statement of Needs.

Contribution to national, regional, local priorities

In the Tees Valley, the School is the only specialist provider of FE and HE education in the creative sector and highly performing on many measures – The School is a key part of the skills development pipeline for the sector, which is a strategic priority for the devolved Tees Valley Combined Authority. Notably, the School is a member of the Tees Valley Creative Place Advisory Group and Tees Valley Cultural Education Partnership. Within our local context, the School is making a significant contribution to social and economic development through its Saturday Clubs, free professional development for teachers through The Northern Creative Network, the award-winning Northern Festival of Illustration and participation in many other community-based projects. ‘Place’ is important to us, we will:

- continue our own efforts, and those of the Tees Valley Combined Authority, to grow the regional economy, develop an arts infrastructure and develop community arts engagement;
- promote our location as a special place, an extended studio for our students, graduates and staff; and
- seek to foster creative clustering around our campuses and The Northern Studios.

The particular context of the Tees Valley and its devolution deal mean that creativity and culture is recognised as strategically important and worthy of investment. This is recognised as a priority within the Strategic Economic Plan for the Tees Valley and in the Mayoral Authority’s Creative Place Growth Plan.

Following the opening of our commercial subsidiary, The Northern Studios (the only large scale film and TV production facility in the north east) we will continue to invest in our screen based provision working alongside the regional screen development agency North East Screen and as a member of the North East Screen Industry Partnership to grow and sustain the talent pipeline for people entering the screen sector and also supporting inward investment and job creation in a Tees Valley cluster (of regional significance).

Our objectives for 2026/2027 are:

- Continue to grow FE and HE student numbers;
- Increase the number of FE leavers qualified at Level 3 who progress to positive destinations;
- Increase the number of graduates progressing to industry relevant employment;
- Continue to review curriculum relevance to industry; and
- Invest in the development of our screen sector related HE programmes.
- Continue to explore new technical education pathways with our industry partners, in line with DfE priorities.

The Local Skills Improvement Plan for the Tees Valley does not include our industrial sector as one of its three key priorities. However, it emphasises the need for transferable skills such as creativity, communication, and readiness for work – areas that we focus on in our curriculum delivery as recognised in our 2022 and 2025 Ofsted Outstanding rating. We note current activity to develop a new LSIP, and have made contributions to this work.

The School is mindful of the current developments in Post-16 level 3 and below pathways. Change in this area will not impact creative subject areas until 2029 at the earliest. The School is actively considering how it will address the challenges posed by the proposed reform, and is contemplating V Level delivery alongside its existing A Level provision, as well as an enhanced T Level offer. The School's approach is dependent on achieving much greater clarity in relation to the detail of what is proposed, especially in respect of V Level subject choice. Development of the School's response to this challenge is a key area of focus for 2026-27 and beyond.

The Inclusive Mainstream Fund (IMF)

The Inclusive Mainstream Fund (IMF) provides additional, non-ring-fenced grant funding to mainstream post 16 providers (schools, sixth form colleges and FE colleges delivering 16–19 provision) to help them become inclusive by design, rather than relying on statutory or specialist routes as first response.

The College intends to use its Inclusive Mainstream Fund allocation in 2026 to further strengthen the quality of education for students with SEND, in line with the SEND reforms and the expectations of high-quality, inclusive mainstream provision. Funding will be prioritised across three key areas. Firstly, the College will increase specialist staffing capacity to support the delivery of targeted interventions. This will be complemented by peer support and mentoring to develop staff confidence and

expertise in adaptive teaching, with a particular focus on meeting the needs of learners with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) difficulties, reflecting a significant area of local and regional demand. Secondly, professional development will be offered to staff, focusing on inclusive practice and trauma-informed approaches to ensure teaching is consistently responsive to learners' needs. Finally, the College will further develop its approach to Preparation for Adulthood (PfA), embedding strategies that support learners to develop independence, employability and successful progression.

Local Needs Duty

As mentioned earlier, the FE+ group of colleges has undertaken a Curriculum Review, examining current levels and types of provision alongside projected labour market needs developing the joint statement below.

During Spring 2024, all five colleges mapped our provision against local labour market needs and carried out a full local curriculum review including an independently facilitated workshop involving members of all college corporations. Data presented at the review and the subsequent analysis highlight that the colleges' curriculum offer and outcomes for learners support the Tees Valley economy especially in the engineering/manufacturing, construction and healthcare sectors.

The review identified a number of areas that all Colleges can work on to enhance our response to local employer needs as follows:

FE+ agreed actions to work on
<i>Develop further employability skills in our young people while strengthening their confidence and resilience.</i>
<i>Improve digital skills of all of our students</i>
<i>Minimise impact of qualifications reform on level 3 numbers</i>
<i>Increase the numbers training in logistics, digital and professional skills</i>

This Review gives granular detail on learners in our subject areas. It shows that since 2020/21 there has been significant growth in 16-19 learner numbers (up by 37% for art and design) with a total of 1,371 learners enrolled on 'arts, media & publishing' courses. This growth largely reflects our own success in attracting new students over this period. For the same subject areas the review shows some 600 HE learners. With more than 1,100 FE and HE students it can be seen that the School is the predominant provider meeting the sectoral need for replacement and additional workers in the region. TVCA has predicted the creation of 6,000 new jobs in the digital creative and cultural sub-sectors by the end of 2027, therefore our continued expansion is a key part of meeting this target.


Corporation statement

On behalf of the corporation board of The Northern School of Art we can confirm that this Statement has been considered and approved for submission to DfE and for publication on our website.



Professor Stuart Bartholomew

Chair



Dr Martin Raby

Principal & Chief Executive

Dated: 6 July 2026

Hyperlink

[To be included](#)

Supporting documentation

This statement is informed by the following:

From The School

[2025-28 Strategic Plan](#)

[Academic Strategy link to be updated](#)

From Ofsted

[Link to 2025 report](#)

From Tees Valley Combined Authority

<https://teesvalley-ca.gov.uk/sep/>

<https://teesvalley-ca.gov.uk/business/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/03/Tees-Valley-Cultural-and-Creative-Industries-Baseline-Report.pdf>

<https://teesvalley-ca.gov.uk/creative-place/>

<https://teesvalley-ca.gov.uk/investments/north-east-screen-industries-development-programme/>

North East Screen Industries Partnership

<https://northeastscreen.org/about/nesip-page/>