



Photo: The Courtyard Studio, part of HCA's Digital Skills Centre

Hereford College of Arts Annual Accountability Statement 2026/27

Hereford College of Arts

Annual Accountability Statement 2026/27

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1. Executive Summary

Hereford College of Arts (HCA) is a specialist provider of creative education, delivering Further Education, Higher Education, and professional development opportunities that support learners, employers, and communities across Herefordshire and the wider region. This Accountability Statement sets out how the College responds to local, regional, and national skills priorities while supporting participation, progression, and economic growth.

During 2025/26, HCA strengthened its contribution to skills development through investment in creative digital provision, the continued embedding of the HCA Empower framework, and extensive employer engagement across curriculum areas. Collaboration with employers, schools, higher education providers, and community partners has further strengthened progression opportunities and alignment with workforce needs.

For 2026/27, HCA's priorities focus on three areas: growing participation in creative disciplines aligned with regional and national skills demand; improving inclusion, retention and progression for learners at risk of disengagement; and strengthening employer, school and community partnerships to support local skills development and economic growth. These priorities respond directly to the Marches Local Skills Improvement Plan, the Government's Industrial Strategy, Skills England priorities, and Herefordshire's ambitions for a thriving creative economy.

2. Approach to Developing the Accountability Statement

HCA's priorities have been developed through consideration of national, regional, and local evidence, alongside institutional performance data and stakeholder engagement. Key sources include the Department for Education's Meeting Skills Needs: Guidance on Annual Accountability Statements and Local Needs Duty (2026), the Marches Local Skills Improvement Plan (2026–29), the UK Government's Modern Industrial Strategy (2026), the Creative Industries Sector Plan (2025), Herefordshire's Big Economic Plan, and the Herefordshire Cultural Strategy (2025–30).

These sources identify growing demand for digital capability, employability skills, leadership, adaptability and sector-specific technical expertise, alongside the need for stronger employer engagement, clearer progression pathways, and closer alignment between education and labour market needs. HCA's priorities respond directly to this evidence through the continued development of HCA Empower, expansion of industry engagement, investment in creative digital skills, and provision aligned to the Creative Industries and Digital & Technologies sectors identified within national and regional growth strategies.

3. Review of 2025/26 Objectives

The College made good progress against the priorities set out in its 2025/26 Accountability Statement, strengthening its contribution to local, regional, and national skills needs. Investment in the Digital Skills Centre has supported the expansion of creative digital provision, including continued recruitment to new digital degree programmes (Games Design, and Digital Content Creation), growth in FE pathways, delivery of employer-focused CPD through UKSPF-funded short courses, and increased engagement with schools. These developments have enhanced opportunities for learners to develop digital, creative, and professional skills aligned to identified workforce needs.

Progress was also made in embedding employability and transferable skills across the curriculum through the introduction of HCA Empower. The framework has been integrated across Further Education provision and has strengthened the development of communication, problem-solving, collaboration, and professional practice skills. Students continued to benefit from extensive employer engagement through live briefs, visiting practitioners, exhibitions, work-related projects, and professional practice activity.

The College also strengthened collaborative working with employers, schools, higher education providers, and community partners to support progression, careers awareness, and local skills development. Liaison with industry provides a mechanism for employer input into curriculum review and development, while outreach and partnership activity has increased engagement with prospective learners and schools. Overall, progress has strengthened the alignment between curriculum provision, industry engagement, and the skills priorities identified through the Marches LSIP, Government Industrial Strategy, and wider local economic plans.

4. Local Needs Duty

HCA's contribution to local skills development was considered as part of its most recent Ofsted inspection (2023), which concluded that the college makes a sound contribution to meeting local skills needs. Building on this foundation, the college continues to strengthen its response through employer engagement, the development of HCA Empower, investment in creative digital skills, and expansion of employer-informed short course and CPD provision.

Alignment with local, regional, and national skills priorities is embedded within curriculum planning, validation, quality assurance and continuous improvement processes. Industry input, live briefs, professional practice activity, visiting practitioners, and project work help ensure students develop the creative, digital, and employability skills and resilience identified within the Marches LSIP, Skills England assessments, and national industrial strategy priorities.

Curriculum development takes account of the wider provider landscape across Herefordshire and the Marches region to ensure provision remains complementary and responsive to local need. New programme proposals are reviewed through the college's governance processes, while the expansion of short courses and Digital Skills Centre activity supports local employers, career changers, and adult learners.

5. Working with Other Providers

Hereford benefits from a collaborative post-16 education landscape comprising Hereford College of Arts (HCA), Herefordshire, Ludlow, and North Shropshire College (HLNSC), Hereford Sixth Form College (HSFC), the Royal National College for the Blind (RNC), and The Beacon College. Together these providers offer complementary academic, technical, specialist, and creative pathways, supporting progression opportunities for learners across the county. The Principals of the largest colleges meet regularly to discuss curriculum planning and local skills priorities.

HCA works closely with local providers, employers, and schools to support progression and skills development. This includes collaboration with HLNSC, engagement through Herefordshire's Skills Board, partnership working with NMITE, and outreach, careers education and teacher CPD activity. As the region's specialist creative provider, HCA offers progression routes from community learning and Further Education through to undergraduate and postgraduate study, supporting skills development across the Creative Industries, Digital & Technologies, and wider economy. National relationships with organisations including GuildHE, the Association of Colleges (AoC), Creative UK, and Graduate Futures further inform curriculum development and strengthen student outcomes.

6. Stakeholder Engagement

HCA works closely with employers, industry bodies, community organisations and education partners to ensure provision remains responsive to current and future skills needs. Key stakeholder engagement includes:

- Engagement with the Marches Employer Representative Body (ERB) and Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) process.

- Active membership of the Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce, Hereford BID and Herefordshire Cultural Partnership.
- Ongoing curriculum consultation with employers, creative practitioners, and businesses from both the creative industries and wider sectors.
- Industry engagement providing structured employer input into curriculum review, development, and skills priorities.
- Employer engagement embedded within curriculum delivery through live briefs, industry projects, guest lectures, exhibitions, placements, and professional practice activity.
- Partnerships with national sector organisations including GuildHE, Creative UK, and Graduate Futures, providing access to industry intelligence, employer networks, and workforce development initiatives.
- Collaboration with validating bodies the University of the Arts London (UAL) and University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) to ensure programmes remain informed by current industry practice and skills needs.
- Targeted engagement with industry sectors, including textiles, digital, and creative businesses, fashion business and retail to inform curriculum development and future workforce requirements.

7. National Skills Context

The UK Government's Invest 2035 Industrial Strategy (2026) identifies the creative industries as one of eight growth-driving sectors, recognising their contribution to productivity, innovation, and regional economic growth. This is reinforced by the DCMS Creative Industries Sector Plan (2025), which sets out a long-term ambition to strengthen investment, skills and talent pipelines across the sector. The scale of the sector is significant, contributing approximately £124 billion GVA in 2023 and supporting around 2.4 million jobs.

Evidence from Creative Policy Evidence Centre (PEC) (State of the Nations, 2025) and its 2026 skills analysis highlights sustained sector growth alongside persistent structural challenges, particularly skills shortages, regional imbalance, and freelance working patterns. It also identifies strong employer demand for digital, technical, and creative skills, with increasing convergence between creative and digital production roles driven by emerging technologies including AI. The Skills England Sector Skills Needs Assessment (2026) similarly identifies the creative industries as a priority growth sector, with sustained demand for digital, technical and transferable skills and a need for improved alignment between education provision and evolving occupational requirements. This national evidence establishes the scale of opportunity and challenge within the creative industries workforce.

This evidence highlights sustained demand for digital, technical, and transferable skills, alongside increasing convergence between creative, digital, and business roles. HCA's curriculum, Digital Skills Centre, industry engagement activity, and HCA Empower initiative are designed to respond to these priorities by developing creative, technical, and professional capabilities that support progression into both the creative industries and the wider economy.

8. Regional and Local Skills Context

Herefordshire is a predominantly rural county with a population of 187,522 (Census 2021, ONS) and one of the lowest population densities in England. The county has an older-than-average age profile and a relatively small proportion of residents aged 20–49, reflecting wider rural demographic patterns and the outward migration of younger adults. Hereford is the principal urban centre, with many learners travelling from rural and ultra-rural communities where transport connectivity can be limited. This context reinforces the importance of accessible, place-based provision, and clear progression pathways.

The local economy is characterised by relatively low unemployment but lower-than-average productivity, wages and higher-level qualification rates. Eleven neighbourhoods fall within the most deprived 25% nationally, primarily in Hereford, Leominster, and Ross-on-Wye. The economy is strongly SME-led, with 99.7% of businesses classed as micro or small and self-employment accounting for 14% of the workforce. Alongside key sectors including manufacturing, health and social care, agriculture, construction, tourism and retail, this creates demand for adaptable employees with strong technical, digital, enterprise, and employability skills. Herefordshire's Cultural Strategy and its ambition to become a 'Creative County' further recognise the contribution of arts, culture, and creative enterprise to economic growth, place-making, and talent development.

At a regional level, the Marches Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) (LSIP Report, 2026) identifies Manufacturing & Engineering, Construction, and Health & Social Care as priority sectors, alongside cross-cutting demand for digital transformation and employability skills. The region combines relatively high employment with lower productivity and qualification levels, alongside challenges relating to rural access, progression, and workforce retention. This aligns with the UK Government's Modern Industrial Strategy (2026), which identifies the Creative Industries as one of eight growth-driving sectors. Within the Marches, the Creative Industries support approximately 8,500 jobs (2.6% of employment) and around 1,935 businesses (6.0% - (third highest across all sectors), representing a relatively high business density and a significant ecosystem of SMEs, freelancers, and micro-enterprises. The LSIP highlights continuing demand for digital, technical and professional skills, alongside communication, problem-solving and adaptability (LSIP, 2026). In response, HCA aligns curriculum design, industry engagement, and progression pathways with regional and national priorities, embedding creative, digital, and employability skills development to support progression into the Creative Industries, Digital & Technologies, and wider hybrid creative-digital occupations.

9. Hereford College of Arts in Context

9.1 College Purpose and Value

HCA is a specialist provider of Further and Higher Education in the creative arts, with a 170-year heritage of creative education in Hereford. The college supports learners to develop the creative, technical, and professional skills needed for progression into employment, enterprise, and further study, contributing to both individual opportunity and regional economic growth. In 2023, HCA was graded Outstanding across all areas of Further Education provision by Ofsted, reflecting the college's commitment to high-quality teaching, learning and student support. Many learners progress into Higher Education, employment, or further

training, with progression into positive destinations remaining a central focus of the college's approach.

The college plays an important role within the region's creative and cultural infrastructure, contributing to festivals, exhibitions, public events, and professional practice opportunities. Initiatives such as CMYK, the college's regionally significant print and illustration festival, connect students, alumni, and professional practitioners, supporting freelance and independent creative practice. The college's Digital Skills Centre provides a dedicated resource for creative digital skills development, with creative, digital, communication, design and entrepreneurial skills increasingly required across sectors including manufacturing, tourism, retail and professional services. As a specialist provider, HCA contributes both to the development of future creative professionals and to the wider skills base required for regional economic growth.

The priorities set out within this Accountability Statement are informed by [Hereford College of Arts Five-Year Strategy \(2024–2029\)](#) and its commitment to delivering high-quality creative education that supports individual aspiration, regional economic development, and the future workforce needs of the creative and cultural sectors.

9.2 Curriculum and Progression

HCA's curriculum prepares students for further study, employment, enterprise, and professional practice across the creative industries and wider economy. The college combines technical, creative, and professional skills development within a personalised learning environment supported by specialist facilities and technical expertise, close staff-student engagement, and opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration.

The college offers progression pathways from Further Education through to undergraduate and postgraduate study, alongside a growing programme of short courses and Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Provision spans art, design, media, music, performing arts, craft and creative digital disciplines, including specialist programmes. The majority of FE learners progress into Higher Education, employment, or further training, with progression into positive destinations a core feature of curriculum design and student support.

Curriculum delivery is underpinned by the HCA Empower framework, which embeds careers, enterprise, employability, and personal development alongside subject expertise. Employer engagement, live briefs, industry projects, exhibitions, and public-facing activity support progression into creative employment, freelance, and hybrid careers while helping students develop the confidence, adaptability, and professional skills identified within skills priority areas.

9.3 Collaboration with business, culture and industry

Industry engagement at HCA is extensive and embedded across provision, with approximately 275 recorded current activities across 17 curriculum areas. These include live briefs, masterclasses, work experience, guest lectures, and industry visits, ensuring strong curriculum integration and regular exposure to professional practice for students. The college works closely with a wide range of employers, cultural organisations and sector bodies to

ensure curriculum relevance and to support progression into creative careers. Recent review activity has identified both strong engagement and opportunities to further strengthen and diversify partnerships, including re-engagement with existing contacts and development of new relationships beyond the creative industries. HCA also supports local creative organisations through the provision of space, facilities, and collaborative working opportunities, contributing to the development of the wider creative ecosystem and supporting skills development at a local level.

10.Strategic Objectives 2026/27

HCA has developed its 2026/27 Accountability Statement in response to national policy priorities set out by the Department for Education, with a particular focus on participation, progression, inclusion, employer engagement, and contribution to regional and national skills needs. With the priorities set out below, the College continues to play a key role in supporting the creative industries skills pipeline across the region, while ensuring that learners from all backgrounds can access, remain in, and progress through high-quality creative education pathways.

All activity is underpinned by a commitment to:

- Improving participation, retention and progression into positive destinations
- Strengthening inclusive practice and targeted support for learners at risk of disengagement
- Aligning provision with regional and national creative industries skills needs
- Deepening employer engagement within curriculum design and delivery
- Supporting local economic growth and lifelong learning pathways

AIM 1: Grow provision to meet regional and national creative industries skills needs

To increase participation in priority creative disciplines and ensure curriculum offer is aligned with regional and national skills demand within the creative industries and wider economy.

AIM 2: Improve participation, inclusion, and progression for learners at risk of disengagement or becoming NEET

To strengthen targeted support and transition pathways to improve retention and progression outcomes for learners requiring additional support.

AIM 3: Maximise local skills development and economic impact through collaboration

To deepen employer, school, and community collaboration to strengthen the local creative skills ecosystem and support regional economic growth.

11. Objectives Table: Hereford College of Arts – 2026/27

Objective	Delivery focus	Skills priority alignment	Evidence / Measures
AIM 1: Grow provision to meet skills needs			
1.1 Participation and progression	Increase participation, retention and progression into positive destinations by strengthening recruitment, transition and learner support, while improving English and maths outcomes and developing the creative, digital and transferable skills identified within the UK Industrial Strategy, Skills England and the Marches LSIP.	Participation, progression, skills pipeline development	Recruitment and enrolment data; retention and achievement (including English and maths); progression and destination data.
1.2 Curriculum alignment with skills demand	Strengthen curriculum through employer-informed development through implementation of new Industry Engagement Strategy embedding student entitlement; successful launch and embedding of Fashion Business & Retail; progression of T-Level readiness and investigating pipelines for L4, ensuring provision reflects regional and national skills priorities.	Employer engagement, technical skills development, economic growth	Employer feedback; curriculum review and validation outcomes; programme evaluation; curriculum mapping.
AIM 2: Inclusion and NEET prevention			
2.1 Inclusive Mainstream Funding impact	Appoint a SEND & Inclusion Manager during 2026/27 to lead delivery of the College's Inclusive Mainstream Funding allocation (£24,000), strengthening HCA's offer through adaptive teaching, inclusive learning environments, and targeted interventions that improve attendance, retention, achievement and progression for learners at risk of disengagement.	Inclusion, social mobility, NEET prevention	Recruit SEND & Inclusion Manager; attendance, retention, achievement, and progression data; learner support interventions; staff development in adaptive teaching and inclusive practice; evaluation of targeted interventions.
2.2 Transitions and NEET prevention	Strengthen transition and progression pathways through earlier engagement with schools and targeted support for learners at risk of becoming NEET.	Participation, progression, NEET reduction	Transition tracking; referral data; learner progression; destination outcomes

AIM 3: Skills development and collaboration

3.1 Employer engagement and curriculum integration	Full-year delivery of new Industry Engagement Strategy (presented to Board at C&Q Committee - June 2026) by increasing structured employer involvement in curriculum design, enrichment and professional practice, including Creative Industry Days across curriculum area	Employer engagement, productivity, skills alignment	Industry Engagement Strategy delivery milestones; employer engagement records; curriculum co-design evidence; Creative Industry Day participation.
3.2 Skills ecosystem, outreach and alumni progression	Expand employer-informed short courses and Digital Skills Centre outreach, building on UKSPF investment, and establish the Hereford College of Arts alumni programme - supporting graduates for up to five years - to strengthen lifelong learning, graduate progression and regional skills development.	Lifelong learning, economic growth, skills retention	Short course enrolments; employer participation; Digital Skills Centre engagement; Hereford College of Arts alumni programme participation; graduate destination tracking.



Corporation Statement

The Accountability Statement was approved by the Board of Hereford College of Arts Corporation through delegation to Board committee on 20th July 2026.

Key Supporting Documentation (with weblinks)

National

[DfE Meeting Skills Needs: Guidance on Annual Accountability Statements and Local Needs Duty \(2026\)](#)

[Invest 2035: UK Industrial Strategy \(2026\)](#)

[Creative Industries Sector Plan \(2025\)](#)

[Skills England Sector Skills Needs Assessments](#)

[Creative PEC State of the Nations: Creative Education, Skills, & Talent](#)

Regional

[Marches LSIP 2026–29](#)

[Marches Employer's Voice Reports](#)

[West Midlands Combined Authority Culture & Digital Strategy](#)

Local

[Herefordshire Big Economic Plan](#)

[Herefordshire Cultural Strategy 2025–30](#)

ONS Labour Market Profile

Appendices:

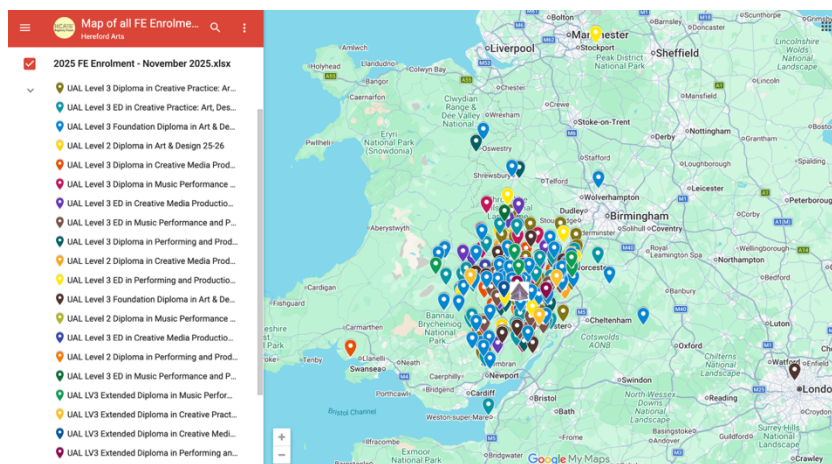
Appendix A: Key Data

- HCA is constituted as a Further Education College, and is an exempt charity
- Total Income £7,257,000 (from HCA Financial Statements 24/25)
- FE student enrolment (from ILR R14 24/25): 16-19 Study Programme Students 486, Adult Funded Students 2, Self-funded Students 29
- HE student enrolment (from HESES 24): Full-time 308, Part-time Undergraduate 33, Postgraduate Full-time 18, Postgraduate Part-time mode 6
- Individual short course enrolments 25/26 (inc. winter/spring workshops) 304
- Staff c. 178
- Operates across two campuses in Hereford City, within walking distance of each other and the city centre
- Both campuses support FE and HE students with shared facilities.
- HCA has embedded over 275 industry engagements across 17 courses areas.

Appendix B: Learner Profile and Recruitment Geography

HCA attracts students from across a wide geographic area, with over half from Herefordshire and significant numbers from surrounding counties including Worcestershire, Powys, Monmouthshire and Shropshire. FE students predominantly live at home, while HE students include both commuters and residential learners, including some international students.

Map of FE student enrolment to HCA 2025



Map of HE student enrolment to HCA 2025



Of the college's HE students, just under half are commuter students, from a similar radius as FE students, and just over half come from out of region and are residential. A very small number of these are international.