



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

Hereford College of Arts

Annual Accountability Statement 2025/26

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College Purpose

Hereford College of Arts (HCA) is a specialist provider of arts education across Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE), delivered between two Hereford campuses. As its precursor, the first government funded School of Art and Design in the city, opened in 1853, HCA has celebrated over 170 years of creative education in Hereford. Today's college is focused wholly on creative education that supports students to thrive in the modern world, both to their benefit and that of wider society. Our courses are shaped to meet both current and future needs of the creative industries, and the professional skills required across all the key industry sectors, including those needed for self-employment.

Creative education brings value to individuals and to wider society:

- It prepares students to succeed in careers in the creative and cultural industries that are integral to economic development both locally and nationally, and which also deliver value to society in many other ways – from placemaking to innovation and wellbeing.
- It supports the development of transferable skills that are widely recognised as critical to current employer needs, and to emerging job roles, including self-employment, inside and outside the creative industries.
- It promotes personal development and wellbeing.

HCA was designated OFSTED Outstanding in all 7 categories for its Further Education provision following a full inspection in October 2023.

Many creative careers require graduate level skills, so an aim of HCA's FE provision is successful progression to HE and then into employment. However, those seeking employment directly from FE into career paths both within creative sector occupations and across the wider economy are actively supported, as are those taking further training outside of HE.

HCA's recently refreshed *Five-year Strategy* was developed to reflect our character and strengths as a specialist arts college, but also to support local, regional and national skills priorities, grow positive student outcomes, and contribute actively to local and regional growth.

Mission

Our mission is to empower creativity to enrich our world

Vision

- **Transformation:** to transform lives as a thriving centre of practice-based, thoughtful and future-facing creative education that develops skills, ideas and imagination to

benefit people and place, creative industries and the wider economy, individuals and society.

- **Growth:** to attract more students to HCA for our outstanding and inclusive teaching of superbly designed courses, modern arts school culture and community, industry connections and exceptional location.
- **Inclusion and progress:** to support students from all backgrounds to grow as highly innovative and dynamic creatives who thrive in sustainable careers in the creative industries and many other areas of employment, enterprise or personal practice.

Five Core Strategic Themes for 2024-2029

Theme 1: Agile curriculum and portfolio development to meet the changing needs of students and society

We are passionate about the role creative industries and the arts play in our region and across the world to support economic and societal development and wellbeing, and advance environmental sustainability. Our curriculum is designed to support these industries now and as they change, as well as skilled roles in other sectors. It also empowers personal practice and supports progression to further learning and research.

Theme 2: External connection, collaboration and co-design of more strategic and impactful partnerships

Education partnerships: We have many, diverse relationships with schools, colleges, universities and other education providers, but seek to develop deeper strategic partnerships, working together to benefit more students and collaborating around shared challenges.

Collaboration with business and cultural organisations: We are ambitious to work ever more closely with industry partners to benefit student learning and meet business needs. Collaboration with business and cultural partners supports students' learning in multiple ways, including through real-world project briefs, professional placements and sharing industry insight. We are keen to expand this work with a wider range of businesses including more employers outside the creative industries.

Civic and community engagement: We are proud to have played a leading role in the Stronger Hereford collaboration of county and city councils, business, community and education organisations and seek to amplify this work to help Hereford thrive as a greener, fairer, more connected, skilled and creative city.

Theme 3: People: nurturing a dynamic creative community of knowledge and practice, that is rooted in place and connected to world to support student success

Staff and students are supported via development activities. These include courses, events, seminars, public lectures and masterclasses which encourage skills and knowledge sharing and development. The Launchgrad programme engages with

alumni and involves events and communication to support early career development.

Theme 4: Financial and environmental sustainability

Prudent financial management supports the operation of the college and effective delivery of our study programmes. Environmental sustainability is built into our programmes and informs our operations, but is also seen as developing key skillsets for future employment.

Theme 5: Impactful communication, telling stronger stories about ourselves, our partners and our region

Our programmes produce excellent creative outcomes, but also graduates and students with technical and subject-related skills which are highly relevant across creative sectors and across the economy. Communicating these outcomes and supporting industry and other partner engagement with us are important elements of our communication approach.

The college has a reputation and record of accomplishment for delivering high-quality, creative education through short courses, post-16, and degree programmes. HCA has an international reputation as a leading provider of degree level education in Artist Blacksmithing and is ambitious for all its provision.

The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy has identified Creative Industries as one of eight Growth-driving Sectors. HCA's programmes address the technical skills required for the creative industries themselves, but also have direct utility across the other sectors. In addition to these widely applicable creative technical skills, Skills England has identified in their June 2025 *Sector evidence on the growth and skills offer* document '...a substantial and growing demand for digital and wider technology skills.' Skills England has also identified the requirement '...to meet the need for cross-cutting, essential skills for employment...' which are developed through our project-based learning approaches and deepened via the *Empower* skills development initiative.

In its *Sector skills needs assessments* for the Creative Industries from June 2025, Skills England notes the economic importance of the creative industries nationally.

'The creative industries are a cornerstone of the UK's economy and cultural identity. In 2023 they contributed over £124 billion to the economy, accounting for approximately 5.2% of the UK's Gross Value Added (GVA) and employed 2.4 million people (representing 7.1% of the national workforce). This is an increase of 23,000 people from 2022 and of 318,000 from pre-pandemic 2019 estimates.

The creative industries are one of the country's highest growth industries with their GVA growing at 1.6 times the national rate between 2010 and 2023 (35.4% vs 22.4%). Filled jobs in creative industries grew by 54.9% between 2011 and 2023, from 1.6 million to 2.4 million, 4.3 times the rate of the UK economy.'

1. Context and Place

Profile of Hereford College of Arts

Hereford College of Arts is a dedicated arts college with a specialist focus on art, media, design, craft, digital design, music and performing arts. We offer undergraduate and postgraduate degrees alongside further education and short course programmes. HCA's creative programmes, from introductory level, through FE and HE into postgraduate level, develop students' capabilities and skills for practice or employment locally, regionally or nationally. The development of higher education provision alongside post-16 is an important part of both the college strategy and Herefordshire Council's economic development vision for the county, in order to contribute to the skills ladder for local students and to attract students from the wider region for specialist FE programmes and residential HE.

The college operates as a hub for the region's professional creative community in several ways. For example, involvement in the planning and delivery of festivals and events in Hereford and across the region. HCA provides key work-related education opportunities for students and makes an important contribution to developing the local economy. The college's cultural contributions also grow Hereford's attractiveness as a place to work and for inward investment.

Public lectures, business events, and exhibitions showcase student and staff work, and provide valuable experience and networking opportunities for students. HCA's popular print and illustration festival *CMYK*, attracts professionals from across the region to promote and sell work alongside students, while creating a platform for artists and designers to form professional connections in a sector where most are independent freelancers. In collaboration with Hereford BID, our festival of artist blacksmithing, *Ferrous*, has attracted additional footfall to the City centre of around 50,000 according to local authority estimates (as noted by the Hereford BID Chief Executive at the opening speech of the 2024 *Ferrous* festival), and acts as a major showcase for professional crafts practice in the region and nationally.

The college also supports creative organisations with campus resources when appropriate, providing space, facilities and sometimes staffing for events and projects. For example, in the music sector, Encore's *Inspire* regular weekend events are based at our FE campus, and we have hosted recordings of *BBC Introducing* sessions. HCA's new strategy notes the value of growing this role through, for example, more formal learning and informal networking opportunities for local creative industry professionals, developing skills at a local level.

The new Digital Skills Centre at the College Road campus is a key element of the city-wide Stronger Hereford initiative and provides a significant resource for digital skills development identified locally and nationally as priorities. The Digital Skills Centre is a direct and tangible response to the digital skills needs highlighted in the Marches LSIP and other regional and national reports as an area for development.

2. Key facts

- HCA is constituted as a Further Education College, and is an exempt charity
- Turnover £6,801,000 (from HCA Financial Statements 23/24)
- FE student enrolment (from ILR R14 23/24): 16-19 Study Programme Students 486, Adult Funded Students 5, Self-funded Students 28
- HE student enrolment (from HESES 22): Full-time 308, Part-time Undergraduate 33, Postgraduate Full-time 18, Postgraduate Part-time mode 6
- Individual short course enrolments 23/24 (not student FTEs) 318
- Staff c. 112 FTE
- 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.

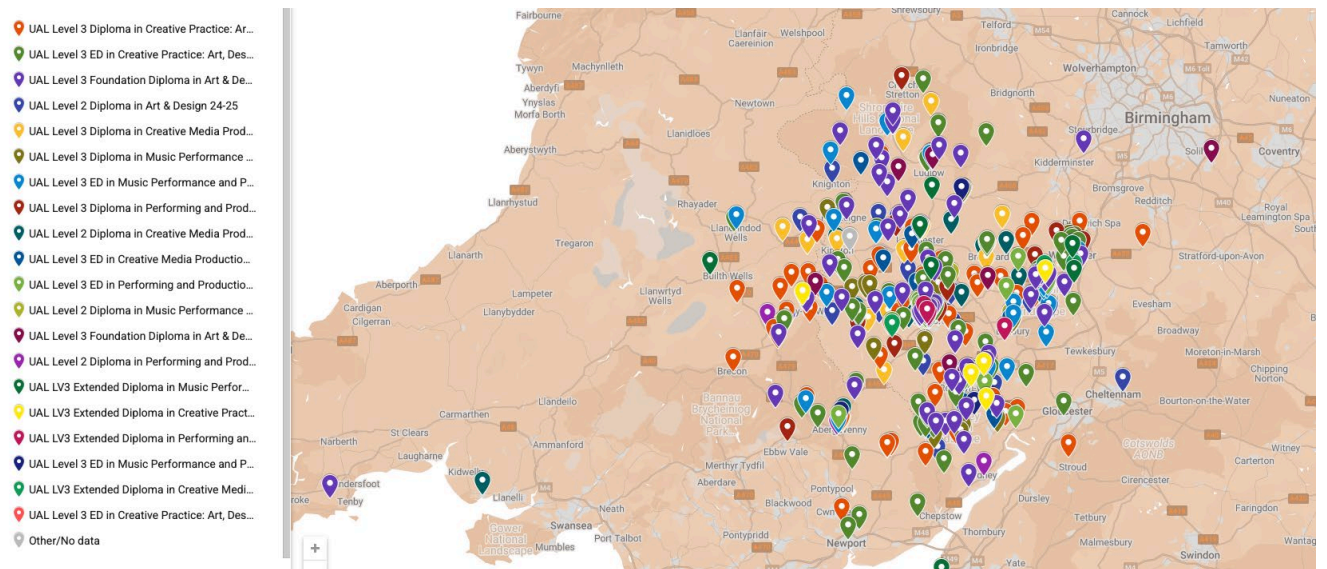
3. Progression

The majority of our FE students progress to further training or Higher Education. Of these, most progress to degrees directly related to the creative industries, although some students - often those from the L3 (post-A Level) Foundation Diploma Course - have selected the qualification with the intention of taking their creative skills into other study such as medicine, business, or history. The college also supports students to go directly into employment or other positive progression routes, skills from creative disciplines are highly valued by other sectors.

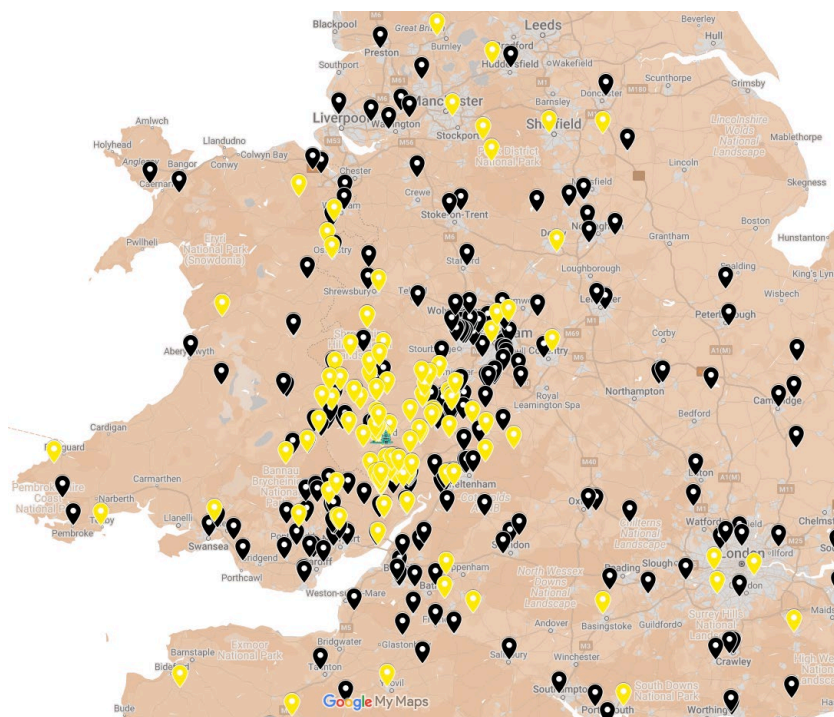
4. Student travel to study

Hereford College of Arts' creative specialism attracts FE students to travel to college from across a wide area with over half from Herefordshire, around a sixth coming from Worcestershire, and smaller intakes from Powys, Monmouthshire, Shropshire, and other counties. The travel to study area only partly aligns with the Marches LSIP area which includes Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin. The two maps below show the home locations for FE and HE applicants. Both groups are broadly local in emphasis but FE students predominantly live at home; whereas HE students both live at home and commute, and live in Hereford in college accommodation or private rental properties. HE recruitment is from a wider geographical range and includes some international students.

Map of FE student recruitment to HCA 2024



Map of HE student recruitment to HCA 2023/24



Key to HE Map: Black 2024 applications, Yellow 2024 enrolments

Of the college's 355 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.

5. Place

The college is in Hereford, a compact, historic city set in the midst of Herefordshire's exceptional countryside. Herefordshire had a population of 187,522 according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2021 Census, and along with neighbouring Shropshire, is one of the least populated areas of England. The ONS noted that the percentage of people over the age of 50 in Herefordshire was above the national average, with the largest group aged 55-59 years comprising 7.6% of the county's population, whereas Herefordshire's population aged 30-49 years was below the national average. The smallest group, aged 20-24 years, made up just 4.4% of the county's population'. Herefordshire borders a similarly rural area of Wales. Hereford is the largest centre with around 64,000 residents followed by three larger market towns of between 10,000-12,000 residents each. Many of the college students come from smaller towns and villages or in ultra-rural areas; many have very limited access to public transport.

6. Local Economy

Herefordshire has relatively low unemployment rates but economic output is also low. The county also has a lower than national average proportion of its workforce possessing higher-level qualifications, and average wages are lower than the national or regional average. Eleven Herefordshire neighbourhoods are in the most deprived 25% nationally, mainly in the south of Hereford, Leominster and Ross-on-Wye.

The 2025 Herefordshire Economy and Cost-of-living Compendium notes that the four largest business sectors in Herefordshire by numbers employed are wholesale and retail trade (17.7%), manufacturing (13.9%), health and social care (13.9%) and agriculture, fish & food (11%). Accommodation and food services, and education at 8.9% each are the next largest; with construction, defence and security, food and drink production, agriculture, professional and scientific, and tourism all smaller in scale.

In economic terms, measured by GVA, the four largest sectors are manufacturing (at 16%), logistics and communication (17%), real estate (16%), and wholesale and retail (13%), with public administration, health, education and other professional services making up a further 15% of GVA. The Compendium notes 'agriculture and manufacturing account for a much higher proportion of jobs in Herefordshire than regionally and nationally (2023 figures)'.

From 2023-24 figures, Herefordshire's overall rate of self-employment at 14% (male 17%, female 10%) is higher than regional or national figures of 10%. Micro-businesses and SME's make up 99.7% of the business base - 90.4% being micro businesses with fewer than nine employees. Many of the businesses are home grown and the county has a higher than national survival rate for businesses after five years. The proportions of public and private sector employment match national figures at 20% and 80% respectively.

The ONS Labour Market Profile data for Herefordshire for 2025 show average wage levels for full-time employees at 4% below West Midlands rates and 10.5% below national figures. Pay levels for female workers are on average about 10.7% lower than male county-based employees. Herefordshire Council's 'Understanding Herefordshire' report shows levels of ill

health and disability (17%) at similar to national statistics. ONS data (January to December 2024) show that 44% of Herefordshire adults are qualified to RQF Level 4 or higher, which is higher than the West Midlands rate of 43.3%, but lower than the national figure of 47.6%.

Herefordshire Council convened representatives across the public, private, voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors in The Herefordshire Sustainable Growth Strategy Board. In March 2023 this Board published a vision for Herefordshire in 2050 that gives an overview of some of the opportunities and advantages of the area alongside the challenges above. The 2050 vision highlights the role of creative and cultural industries in Herefordshire's future growth in innovative and productive businesses - a 'Creative County'. It calls out the importance of the area's growing arts and cultural scene as part of place-making and a growing visitor offer, for example through festivals.

Herefordshire is also roughly equidistant from Birmingham, Cardiff and Bristol which are all significant centres for film and other creative content production, which offers opportunities for Herefordshire-based businesses.

The Herefordshire *Big Economic Plan* also highlights the role of higher education in the city's development, with Hereford College of Arts, alongside new engineering HE provider NMITE, and Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College (HLNSC), helping create a higher skilled population, retain talent and attract more people and investment to the city. Education at school level is also seen as a strength of the area with secondary schools mostly judged good or outstanding by Ofsted, alongside five distinctive post-16 colleges in Hereford.

7. The Marches

The Marches LSIP covers Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and has identified the 25 Skills most in demand from local employers. Core economic sectors in the region are seen as Manufacturing and Engineering, Construction and Professional Services, Health and Social Care which encompass the top 12 LSIP priorities.

Emerging sectors which were seen during earlier research to have high future economic and productivity growth potential comprise, environmental technology, cyber security and resilience, and agri-tech. Other enabling sectors include visitor economy, retail, logistics, construction, health and social care, education and voluntary, community and social enterprise. The LSIP has also identified a series of 'Quick Wins' including Employer Engagement, Digital Age Issues, Flexibility, and Employer Knowledge Share and these are further informing our skills development approaches.

The Employer Representative Body (ERB) focussed research for the LSIP into current skills needs in the following sectors: Engineering and Manufacture including Food, Construction and Environmental Technology, Health and Social Care and Professional Services.



Photo: Studio B, one of four zones in HCA's new Digital Skills Centre and equipped with high-spec gaming PCs with dual screens

8. Curriculum

Responsive to the context above, HCA's courses prepare students for further study and professional practice across the creative industries and wider industry sectors, focusing on developing both technical and essential professional skills linked to employment.

At FE, HCA currently offers University of the Arts London (UAL) qualifications in four curriculum areas from Level 2: *Art, Design and Communication*; *Music and Production Arts*; *Performing and Production Arts*; *Creative Media Production and Technology*. The college also supports students in Maths Functional Skills and GCSE Maths and English. At HE we currently offer 13 BA (Hons) degrees, including BA(Hons) Games Design, and BA(Hons) Digital Content Creation, which began in September 2024 and expanded our digitally focused curriculum. HCA also offers a range of Masters programmes including MAs in Contemporary Crafts, Fine Art, Photography, Curatorial Practice and Forged Metal Arts. All of HCA's higher education provision is validated by University of Wales Trinity St David.

HCA has run a series of short courses throughout the year providing access to a range of skills development opportunities from introductory to professional level, including digital skills (such as Adobe products, website design, CAD, App design), digital fabrication, print, textiles, ceramics, drawing. Weekly short courses are supplemented by Easter and Summer School programmes and Master-classes from visiting professionals aimed at professional practitioners as CPD. The range of short courses and CPD is being grown, building on the success of our existing provision. These short courses offer access and progression opportunities in addition to conventional school and college-based routes, enabling progression from introductory level practice through to postgraduate study.

As an education institution the college is committed to promoting British Values but have also identified the following as HCA values to inform our operations and provision. Students and staff are supported to be: collaborative, curious, brave, inventive and individual. These values are referenced through practical delivery of our programmes via the new *HCA Empower* initiative, which identifies and develops personal and professional skills and attributes within programme delivery and via extra-curricular activity.

The connection between arts and business is at the heart of the college's new strategy. HCA works with a wide range of businesses to further support students' personal and professional development. Real world commissions from external clients, or Live Briefs, have long been at the heart of our provision and feature across all curriculum specialisms and levels. Live Briefs are projects where students work directly with businesses and organisations to simulate current professional practices, benefitting from industry specialist input, critique and advice, and creating an authentic development experience.

Support for students with Special Educational Needs and for a wide range of neurodiverse students is a key element of our provision and we recognise the value that they bring to employment contexts – as do many employers - and help them to maximise their capabilities, and often unique, skills.

Traditional work experience placements can be challenging to secure in the creative sector - particularly in a rural area – however, the college has been working inventively with external partners to design off-campus projects to develop student confidence outside the studio/workshop as a development priority. The annual 'Pop Shop' is an example of off-campus working where FE students have taken over an unoccupied retail unit in the city centre as a project, selling products and artworks to the public, and developing valuable commercial skills and insight.

9. Approach to developing HCA's annual Accountability Statement

We have identified key priorities aligned with college strategy and with local, regional and national skills priorities. We also reviewed the data for the college in the new data dashboard.

In addition to the Herefordshire *Big Economic Plan*, we have considered the findings of the Marches LSIP which identifies 'soft skills' for employment as a cross-sector concern. There are three industry sectors identified in the National Skills Priorities which have direct relevance for HCA's portfolio of qualifications (creative industries, digital and technologies, and professional and business services) all of which are noted in the Government's 2025 Industrial Strategy. As a specialist provider a key element in ensuring local skills needs are met is our active collaboration with other providers to ensure cross-sector coverage and complementarity.

To respond both to needs within these three industry sectors and to address broader skills requirements across all sectors, HCA has developed a personal and professional development initiative - *HCA Empower* - which is being embedded into its courses. A skills and attributes taxonomy for HCA Empower has been developed using key industry skills reports and taxonomies such as those from the World Economic Forum, NFER/Nuffield, Skills Builder, the UAL Creative Attributes Framework, and from HCA alumni working in industry. Strong consideration was also given to National Skills Priorities and those identified locally and regionally through the LSIP. These skills and attributes are seen as important both for entry into creative industries employment, but are also frequently cited as

necessary across the economy. A clear taxonomy will assist in identifying HCA's contribution to meeting local skills needs and addressing shortages identified in the Local Skills Improvement Plan. The personal skills and attributes, and professional skills and attributes are clearly mapped against the five HCA Values from the Strategic Plan.

The Marches LSIP document *The Employer's Voice*, Stage 2, March 2024 Update, noted that it was clear that staff who can turn learning into practical application, could problem solve, have the right attitude to work, resilience, creativity, risk taking, and have an understanding of professional over domestic applications of media, would be more employable and successful in their jobs. On page 11 the report noted that 'Using information via Lightcast, 79% of unique recent adverts did not state specific qualifications', effectively reinforcing the case for the value of transferable/essential professional skills alongside specific subject skills.

The Marches LSIP also highlights employer concerns about careers guidance and understanding of the workplace, something HCA addresses through industry engagement activity, 'live briefs' from employers, and careers advice from specialist advisers.

Regionally our priorities align with the Marches prioritisation of Professional Services (with regard, for example, to professional services around marketing and creative content for marketing) as well as the Marches identification of digital skills needs within the Marches LEP Local Skills Report Jan 2022. Our programmes also have the capacity to contribute to Manufacturing & Engineering via student training and practice in our manufacturing workshops across a range of programmes, and more directly in the skills shortage area of Fabrication and Welding via our Artist Blacksmithing degree programmes. To address the LSIP-identified Digital Age Issues, we will be delivering short courses and training via our Digital Skills Centre.

The potential for economic growth in the creative sector has also been recognised in the wider West Midlands area. A key goal of the wider West Midlands Combined Authority is to harness the potential of the creative sector to drive further growth.

10. National Skills Priorities

National Skills Priorities identify creative industries as one of three key growth areas, alongside green jobs, and science and technology (including AI and quantum computing). Creative skills also feature strongly in the Digital and Technology sector, for example, through digital content creation, web-based services, computer games, and graphic design.

In *The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy*, from June 2025, the Creative Industries is identified as one of eight industrial sectors in its own right. Creative industries skills are also a key element of Professional and Business Services, which is also identified as one of the sectors linked to National Skills Priorities. All of HCA's programmes are aligned with the Creative Industries and/or Digital and Technologies sectors identified within National Skills Priorities. The draft Industrial Strategy also notes that there is a shortage of workers with skills in digital, design and data within the creative industries.

Creative occupations are key economic and functional enablers for other sectors as well as being important in their own right as a named sector – amounting to around 6% of GDP nationally. The digital skills, transferable skills (noted in our Strategic Plan as Essential Professional Skills), creativity, problem-solving, team-working, and communication, which are core to creative subjects, are cited as skills needs across all industry sectors.

To meet digital skills needs, in particular, we deliver programmes at both FE and HE level linked to computing, digital content and games design aligned to our newly constructed Digital Skills Centre. The development of all of these courses has been strongly informed by industry consultation, including with our Digital Advisory Group, which includes local and regional representatives from across key digital industry sectors.

The Skills England *Creative Industries sector needs assessments* document from June 2025 notes key gaps in skills provision nationally, including, ‘...transferable skills that enable professionals to move between different roles and sectors. In creative industries, there is a sector-wide understanding that practical, hands-on skills and experience are equally valuable to transferable skills, particularly in fields like live events, film and theatre, where technical skills and expertise are paramount to delivering these roles.’

11. Key external stakeholders inform our priorities

Business and employers

- Engagement with the Employer Representative Body (ERB) in the development of the LSIP, and ongoing updates and liaison
- Ongoing curriculum level liaison with a wider range of industry contacts from both the creative industries and other sectors
- An Industry Liaison Group which acts in an advisory capacity for our courses and includes local digital creative industry professionals is part of creating formal liaison groups for all areas, aligned to local and national skills priorities. Industry consultation at an individual business level has been embedded in the delivery of programmes for many years, but is being strengthened through a more structured approach.
- We have developed a liaison process with textiles businesses via surveys and related outreach, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of trends and priorities in skills requirements. This approach will be extended to other industry sectors to improve our targeting of specific skills requirements.
- Active membership and dialogue with the Herefordshire business networks such as Hereford BID and the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce as well as creative industry bodies such as the Herefordshire Cultural Partnership
- All of our full-time programmes involve ‘live briefs’, which are projects where students work directly with businesses and organisations in ways which simulate current professional practices and benefit from industry specialist input, critique and

advice. These live briefs are also a key opportunity for course tutors and leaders to discuss industry trends and skills requirements with employers and practising professionals.

Additionally, the Principal is chair of the Stronger Hereford Board overseeing the delivery of Hereford's £22.4m Stronger Towns Grant to deliver Hereford's Town Investment Plan. The Board brings together city and county council, business, voluntary and community sectors.

As part of the Town Investment Plan, HCA is working with Hereford's new engineering HEI, NMITE in the Skills Foundry coalition of college, HEI, business and community groups in order to develop new ladders of opportunity between some of Hereford's more deprived areas. HCA was awarded a Towns Fund grant for the creation of the new Digital Skills Centre to support creative digital skills development.

Curriculum teams also work closely with charities and other community groups which informs and supports their understanding of skills needs.

12. How we are working with other education providers to meet skills needs

There are five post-16 education colleges in Hereford collaborating and making a distinct contribution to the range of opportunities available to young people and adults:

- Hereford College of Arts (HCA)
- Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College (HLNSC) – High quality vocational and technical education
- Hereford Sixth Form College (HSFC) – Academic A Level provision with some applied vocational programmes.
- Royal National College for the Blind (RNC)– Specialist SEND provision
- The Beacon College – Specialist SEND provision

The colleges seek to work collaboratively and Hereford Sixth Form College, HCA and HLNSC work closely together to ensure curriculum planning is complementary. HCA collaborates particularly closely with HLNSC in the delivery of our HE Artist Blacksmithing provision. The colleges also collaborate in careers and progression information for students. HCA also collaborates with NMITE around student projects when there is mutual benefit, giving Arts students an improved understanding of engineering and technology considerations and how to work with those from other industry sectors.

Members of all the college Boards are also invited to meet in development sessions. The three larger colleges (Sixth Form, HLNSC and HCA) are also members of Herefordshire Council's Skills Board alongside other training providers which has become an increasingly effective forum for strategic and operational collaboration.

HCA is a member of the county High School Head Teachers' group which helps the college keep in touch with High School concerns at a senior level. In addition, there are multiple contacts between teaching and outreach staff. The college supports High Schools in

developing student understanding of creative careers and post-16 options. The college also works with a number of schools to support teacher CPD and plans to expand this work.

We are in a unique position within the region in providing a wide range of creative education programmes from short courses and introductory sessions, though our FE provision up to Level 3, and then on to HE at Bachelors and Masters Degree levels. Students gain both subject and technical skills, and transferable Essential Professional Skills, at all levels through our progression pathways. Our suite of programmes is designed with employment skills and professional competencies at its heart and enables participation by those with a range of backgrounds and capabilities to develop their creative potential and capacity to undertake employment.

At a national level HCA is an active member of GuildHE, which represents small and specialist HE providers including many in the creative sector. Our membership of *GuildHE Creative*, a grouping within GuildHE, provides a national forum for creative education and practice across key creative institutions and enables links with a wide range of industry bodies and employers, membership of which assists HCA in establishing skills priorities and enabling stronger employment outcomes for students. This is mirrored by membership the Association of Colleges (AoC) which represents a broad spectrum of providers delivering both FE and HE. Our FE validating body, The University of the Arts London (UAL) also works closely with industry in the development of its qualifications and shares industry insights amongst its partner institutions.

13. Review of 2024/25 objectives

The aims and objectives from the 2024/25 Accountability Statement are aligned to the LSIP, and wider local and national skills needs, as HCA students progress both directly into work and to further study, both locally and nationally. These objectives are aimed at developments and improvements over several years. Progress is noted in this section alongside areas where additional work is required.

Aim 1: Grow delivery of services from the Digital Skills Centre

Objective	Comments	Rating
To begin delivery of the new digital skills courses, including BA(Hons) Games Design and BA(Hons) Digital Content Creation	Successful first enrolments to new Digital degrees. Growth in delivery of digital skills via FE specialist digital programmes and across other subject areas, including short courses and CPD aligned with identified regional skills shortages.	
Delivery of skills development and careers sessions to schools as part of the Stronger Hereford programme.	Skills uplift sessions for schools beginning in June 2025, with plans to grow. A successful pilot has been run with a Hereford High School. Digital Skills Centre is fully operational.	

Aim 2: Boost our student professional development and employer engagement

Objective	Comments	Rating
To develop a cross college student personal and professional development strategy for careers, enterprise and employability including 'soft' and transferable skills (essential professional skills).	The college has developed a skills taxonomy, glossary and delivery plan for <i>HCA Empower</i> based on established skills strategies. Together with the college careers advisory offer, <i>HCA Empower</i> will also address career opportunities for FE students outside standard creative industries roles, to include cross-sector employment – for example, tourism, manufacturing and retail.	
Continue to extend and embed the range of employer encounters for FE and HE students.	All FE students have a minimum of 3 quality employer encounters per year and there has been an increase in off campus work experience. FE and HE courses include 'live briefs' throughout to ensure authentic industry engagement. We continue to grow our range of industry events across HCA subject areas. Events such as the well-established HE Professional Practice Conference include contributions from wider industry sectors as these often provide the context for, or commission, creative work. FE <i>Pop Shop</i> projects have enabled students to show and sell their work in city centre retail units.	

Aim 3: Maximise local skills development through collaboration

Objective	Comments	Rating
To pilot soft and transferable skills development project with school partners. This will include sharing alumni stories to enhance careers insight.	A pilot has been proposed with school partners to explore the impact of post-16 students helping develop younger students' soft skills, for example through performance, whilst at the same time developing the older students' skills. Staff turnover has limited progress in this new area of outreach.	
To deepen employer engagement in curriculum review and design.	Industry liaison work has been expanded with the establishment of other liaison groups to facilitate ongoing collaboration between the college and industry partners. This has included survey work with the Textiles industry, for example to inform the group.	

14. Local Needs Duty

In addition to the interactions with industry partners and stakeholders noted above, our approach to meeting local skills needs formed part of a recent OFSTED inspection, during which it was concluded that we make a reasonable contribution. Deepening engagement with employers, professionals and industry bodies during the next year will strengthen the college's position in this area, aligning with all other aspects of our FE provision where we achieved an Outstanding grade. As indicated in the new HCA Strategic Plan, we will build further upon relationships with existing industry partners and grow the reach of our partnerships linked to our new digital programmes and future developments. Part of our curriculum development process involves consideration of the wider course provision across Herefordshire providers. Curriculum development policy includes consideration by the college Board of the local provider context.

Alignment with local, regional and national skills priorities is both part of the development and validation processes, and linked to continuous improvement and quality assurance, for all of our programmes. Creative skills and essential professional skills (transferable skills) are required to varying extents across the sectors identified in the Marches LSIP Priorities, but are particularly matched to Professional Services (administration, in-house IT support, customer service); Manufacturing & Engineering (fabrication and welding, IT support, CAD/CAM). 'Soft Skills' and Creative Industry capability are also identified as key elements in the success of Herefordshire's tourism strategy. New main course development including contribution to meeting the local needs duty is reviewed by our Board Quality and Curriculum Committee and main Board. With our new focus on growing short courses, we have included more detailed review of these, including with respect to Local Need Duty, into our 25/26 schedule of business.

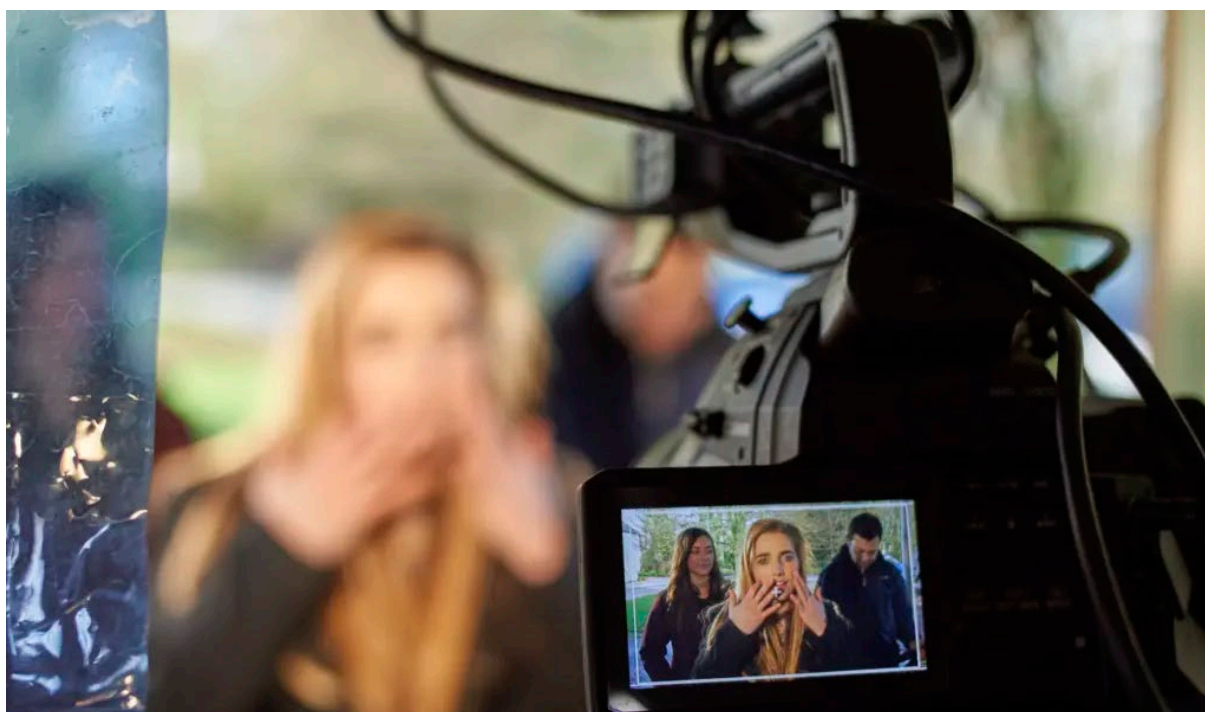


Photo: developing media skills at our Folly Lane campus in Hereford.

15. Contribution to national, regional, local priorities - 2025/6 aims, objectives and targets

AIM 1. Grow provision to meet regional and national creative industries skills needs	Current position	Targets for 2025/26 delivery	Skills Priorities
Objectives			
1.1 Grow overall FE course recruitment to address regional skills needs.	FE total enrolment 514 for 2024/25.	FE total enrolment target of 540 for 2025/26.	Creative arts courses meeting both sector and cross-sector skills needs.
1.2 Grow delivery of digital skills, through our new BA(Hons) Games Design and BA(Hons) Digital Content Creation degrees, by further developing digital courses at FE level including the L2 and L3 Creative Media Production and Technology and growing short course provision for industry and commerce.	Digital facilities are housed in excellent new facilities and with an extensive range of high-quality digital equipment and software, including high specification games design capable dual-screen PCs and a new Mac suite. Digital manufacturing equipment is also used in campus workshops.	Continue to grow the range of full-time and short course digital programmes during 2025 and following years. Grow enrolment in digital courses. Continue growth in intake to full-time FE digital courses by 10% on 25/26 intake. Planning of new provision to complement existing Creative Media Production and Technology from 2025 for potential 2026/27 start.	Local/regional/national digital skills priorities. Links to digital skills and manufacturing skills needs and to Professional Services priorities.
1.3 Delivery of skills development and careers and work-experience insight sessions to schools.	Digital Skills Centre supplemented by other facilities.	Delivery of creative digital skills sessions to at least three local schools.	Local/regional/national digital skills priorities.

1.4 Further develop the college's industry skills focussed short course provision	Digital Skills Centre supplemented by other facilities.	New provision including short courses and CPD related to industry skills needs, developed for delivery from 2025/26. Areas in development include website design, content creation, Adobe Suite, App design, data visualisation. At least five new short courses introduce for 2025/26 delivery.	Local/regional/national digital skills priorities.
AIM 2. Deliver professional development and employer engagement to students linked to local and national skills priorities.	Current Position	Targets for 2025/26 delivery	Skills Priorities
Objectives			
2.1 Embed <i>HCA Empower</i> as a key element of cross-college student personal and professional development for careers, enterprise and employability, including 'soft' and transferable skills (essential professional skills).	Student issues around wellbeing, confidence and communication have increased, requiring increased support. Personal and professional development activity takes place across all HCA programmes, but actively identifying and embedding these skills and attributes further will provide key employability benefits for students.	Embed <i>HCA Empower</i> student personal and professional skills development programme across all FE courses and begin delivery at HE level during the 2025/26 academic year. Evaluation will be included in 2025/26 annual course Self-assessment Reports (SARs) and evaluation will be provided for the college Board. Improve maths and English attendance and outcomes on 24/25	Local and National Skills priorities have informed identification of essential professional skills and attributes, together with key industry skills insights from WEF, NFER/Nuffield, Skills Builder and HCA alumni feedback. Our approach also been honed by consultation with our industry partners.

<p>2.2 Continue to extend and embed the range of employer encounters for FE and HE students. This will include opportunities to develop their communication and community engagement capabilities linked both to identified local creative industries skills needs and wider skills priorities.</p>	<p>All courses offer a range of employer encounters through the year, some which are off-campus, but HCA is ambitious to extend these. Industry encounters include visits, visiting lectures, Live Briefs, and the employment of dual professionals who teach alongside professional practice. Industry events and public lectures such as our <i>170 Lecture Series</i>, the CMYK and <i>Ferrous</i> festivals, also offer significant industry engagement opportunities.</p> <p>The extensive use of Live Briefs enables students to gain direct feedback on their work from industry professionals on project work which uses an industry context, or a problem set by a business directly. FE Pop Shops grow administration, and customer service skills and gain valuable feedback from the public and professionals.</p>	<p>Continue to provide at least 3 quality employer encounters each year for FE students. Continue to grow the range and quality of live briefs and authentic industry projects across HE courses. Increase awareness amongst all students of the personal and professional development opportunities from industry engagement. Evaluation via regular Further Education and Higher Education Management Team meetings, and through annual course-level quality assurance and enhancement processes.</p> <p>A minimum of 25 students will be involved in community engagement projects during 2025/26 in response to industry feedback on the importance of increasing students' understanding of community engagement and co-production.</p>	<p>Local and National identification of personal and professional skills and attributes to maximise employability and work capabilities.</p>
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AIM 3. Maximise local skills development through collaboration	Current Position	Targets for 2025/26 delivery	Skills Priorities addressed
Objectives			
3.1 Soft and transferable skills development with school partners.	Regular work with Schools in the city and region to deliver creative careers-related content via assemblies, careers fairs and mock-interview events.	Co-design delivery with at least one school partner. Sharing the <i>Empower</i> framework and enabling degree and FE level students to also work with schools to enhance skills development.	Cross-sector transferable skills, linked to the LSIP and national skills priorities.

3.2 Support creative teachers using collaborative activity with industry through the Creative Connections network. Using the network to further develop careers advice for schools to grow insight into creative and wider sector opportunities.	Consultation has confirmed schools would welcome more support around creative careers and creative industry work experience	Re-launch the Creative Connections network to develop events and resources which support creative careers advice. Working through HCA courses and the outreach team, careers advice development will be explored further with creative teachers and careers advisers in schools. Using the HCA Empower skills and attributes taxonomy in the delivery of sessions. Delivery of careers-related alumni content via the college website. Evaluation through the SAR process.	Local and national skills priorities and demand for essential professional skills and transferable skills alongside technical capability.
3.3 Deepen employer engagement in curriculum review and design.	Whilst all main programme curriculum areas have extensive industry contacts the college is keen to develop this engagement more strategically.	An expanded cohort of industry liaison groups during academic year 2025/26 aligned to course developments.	National skills policy and LSIP priority to deepen industry involvement in curriculum design and delivery.

Corporation Statement

The Accountability Statement was approved by the Board of Hereford College of Arts Corporation through delegation to Board committee on 17th June 2025.

Key Supporting Documentation (with weblinks)

Hereford College of Arts Strategy 2024-29

Hereford College of Arts Financial Statements 2024

Herefordshire Big Economic Plan: Big Economic Plan – Herefordshire Council

Herefordshire Economy and Cost-of-living Compendium for 2025

UK Government *The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy Creative Industries Sector Plan*

UK Government *The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy*

Department for Education. *Skills England: Sector evidence on the growth and skills offer, June 2025*

Department for Education. *Skills England: Sector skills needs assessments. Professional and Business services. June 2025*

Department for Education. *Skills England: Sector skills needs assessments. Digital and Technologies. June 2025*

Department for Education. *Skills England: Sector skills needs assessments. Creative Industries. June 2025*

ONS Labour Market Profile for Herefordshire, April 2025

Stronger Hereford Town Investment Plan: HerefordTownInvesmentPlan

Marches LSIP Employers Voice – Stage 1 March 2023

Marches LSIP Employers Voice – Stage 2 Employer's Voice January 2025 Report

Full stage one final report Marches LSIP

West Midlands Combined Authority: Culture and Digital (wmca.org.uk)