



Strategic Plan

2023-2026

Welcome

It gives us great pleasure to present the 2023-26 Strategic Plan for Ashton Sixth Form College. The plan is the product of months of consultation and collaboration with staff, students and governors and we are immensely grateful for their contributions and their ongoing commitment to the College.

The plan summarises our recent journey and identifies the opportunities and challenges ahead (those we can anticipate) before laying out what we hope to achieve over the next three years and what we want to 'look like' in 2026.

At the time of producing this plan, the College is in a strong position. With an excellent reputation locally and within the post-16 sector, ASFC is the provider of choice within the borough for school leavers who wish to study for level 3 academic or broad vocational qualifications. They enjoy their studies, achieve well and progress successfully to higher education or high quality employment. We also have a thriving and successful Adult and Higher Education offer through which adult returners can significantly enhance their confidence, career and life-chances. For this reason, our existing vision, 'transforming lives through learning', remains relevant and we will continue to be guided by this vision during the next strategic phase.

With changes locally, nationally and in the educational landscape on the horizon, the College will most certainly 'look' different in 2026, but what we can assure our community of is that learning, support, guidance and progression will remain our 'core business' and that we will always strive for excellence in all that we do. Diversity and Inclusivity are of paramount importance and this is the perfect opportunity for us to re-state our commitment to ensuring that ASFC remains a place where everyone feels safe, valued and that they belong. It is an honour to lead ASFC and its people, working alongside our valued stakeholders, through this exciting next stage of its journey.



Lisa Richards
Centre Principal

Colin Challenger
Chair of Governors

“Since joining the governance team in July 2022, I have been overwhelmed with the commitment, the enthusiasm and dedication demonstrated by the Senior Leadership Team at the college. Their desire to give every student the best possible opportunity in life is a credit to their professionalism.”

– John Clark, Governor



“Ashton Sixth Form is a real asset to the community that I am so proud to represent.”

– Angela Rayner MP, Parliament





Our Vision

Transforming lives through learning

Missions

To engender a love of learning through an excellent standard of Teaching and Learning for all

To promote wellbeing and inspire students and staff to lead fulfilling lives

To lay the foundations for career success

We Believe in

Ambition
and Aspiration

Excellence
and Success

Equality
and Respect

Maximising
Opportunities

Resilience

Key Strategies

Teaching
and Learning
Strategy

Careers and
Employability
Strategy:
Be Ambitious

Enrichment
Strategy:
Ashton Explore

Equality and
Diversity
Strategy

Wellbeing
Strategy

Introduction

Established in 1980, Ashton Sixth Form College now has a forty-year history of providing a high quality education to school leavers and adult students, driven by its vision of 'transforming lives through learning'. We see it as our privilege that students choose to study at ASFC and we owe it to each and every one of them to provide the very best standard of education and care so that they fulfill their potential and progress successfully to their chosen next steps. 'Transforming lives' could be regarded as a somewhat grand aim given that the two years that students study at ASFC (and for many of our adult students, less than this) is a relatively short element of their educational journey. However, this is no over-statement when young people become the first in their families to progress to higher education, or where a student achieves a set of grades placing them in the top 10% of the national cohort having come to ASFC two years earlier with a modest set of GCSEs. It is equally transformative when an adult student begins their 'return to education' journey by enrolling on a basic English and Maths programme, leaving us a few years later as a qualified teacher having achieved a degree and PGCE along the way. 'Transforming lives' must be our vision!

With 2,400 16-19 year-old students and over 400 enrollments onto adult learning and higher education programmes our vision must apply to them all. ASFC exists to provide the widest possible range of opportunities, to remove as many barriers to success as possible, to encourage and support ambition and to play a key role in building students' confidence and cultural capital. Behind the well-publicised success stories there must be success for all. We believe strongly that, without equality, quality simply doesn't exist.

ASFC is located within the borough of Tameside, around 6 miles east of Manchester City Centre. As one of the two major providers of post 16 education within Tameside, ASFC plays a key role in the success and prosperity of the borough by raising achievement rates for young people and adults and by contributing to the local skills agenda with a relevant curriculum offer. As an academy within Stamford Park Trust, a Tameside-born Multi-Academy Trust, the College will also contribute to the success of the borough through collaborative work to raise educational standards across all Trust academies; three at present but this will increase as the Trust expands.

Following the devolution of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), Tameside is one of 10 boroughs working together more closely to meet the current and future social and economic needs of the wider Greater Manchester area. The success of Tameside is interwoven with the success of Greater Manchester more widely and vice versa. Therefore, as a significant post-16 educational provider ASFC will contribute to the implementation of the Greater Manchester Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP).

Over the past 40 years, the College has seen many changes, nationally and locally as well as within the post-16 sector, that have shaped its journey. The current context is no different; the educational landscape is in constant flux with further significant changes ahead. It will be the role of College leaders, governors and staff to ensure that ASFC responds appropriately to these changes so that we remain relevant and successful, meeting individual, local and national needs whilst remaining true to our vision.

This Strategic Plan provides a picture of the College at the time of writing (July 2023) and identifies the College's current position and the opportunities and challenges that may be faced during the next strategic phase. It lays out a series of strategic aims and sets a direction of travel for the College for the next three years. The plan has been developed in consultation with staff, students and governors who will all play a key role in its implementation.

Structure of this Strategic Plan

The plan will begin by laying out the College's vision and missions, and the beliefs that underpin all our work. It will briefly chart the College's recent journey to its current position before laying out the strategic aims that are in place to ensure the College's continued relevance and success during the strategic phase 2023 – 26 and beyond.

The College's journey: The past 5 years

Over the last 5 years, the College has seen several developments, enjoyed many successes and navigated a number of challenges – each outlined briefly below – that bring it to its current position.

Developments, successes and challenges in the last 5 years

Academisation and the establishment of Stamford Park Trust

ASFC converted from a designated Sixth Form College to a 16-19 academy in February 2019, concurrently establishing Stamford Park Trust as a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). Initially ASFC was the sole institution within the MAT, but in January 2021, the College was joined by both Longdendale and Rayner Stephens High Schools.

The College's vision and mission nestle within the broader vision of the Trust, which is to ensure 'Excellence and ambition for all'. As the founding member of the Trust, the College's values, culture and ambition have played a significant part in shaping Stamford Park Trust, and in turn, the Trust now provides a set of structures and frameworks to guide our work. We are deeply committed to working collaboratively with the other Trust academies to improve the quality of teaching, learning and outcomes for all of our pupils and students.

Changes in structure and leadership

The establishment and development of Stamford Park Trust necessitated significant structural and operational changes at ASFC. Most crucially, in August 2022, the Principalship of ASFC was de-coupled from the role of Trust CEO, with Anton McGrath moving permanently into the Trust CEO role and the new position of Centre Principal of ASFC being created, as well as a new SLT structure including newly appointed members. This new structure took effect from August 2022, its timing aligning well with the start of a new strategic phase; a chance for the team to work together to establish the direction of travel for the College over the coming years.

Other changes to structure include the establishment of a Trust Central Services Team into which several key College departments and staff have moved, for example: Human Resources, Finance and Marketing. Inevitably, such changes have led to structural changes within College more widely than at SLT level, as well as the establishment of new ways of working. As the Trust continues to evolve and grow, further changes to College structures and operations are likely, increasing the need for a flexible and resilient culture.

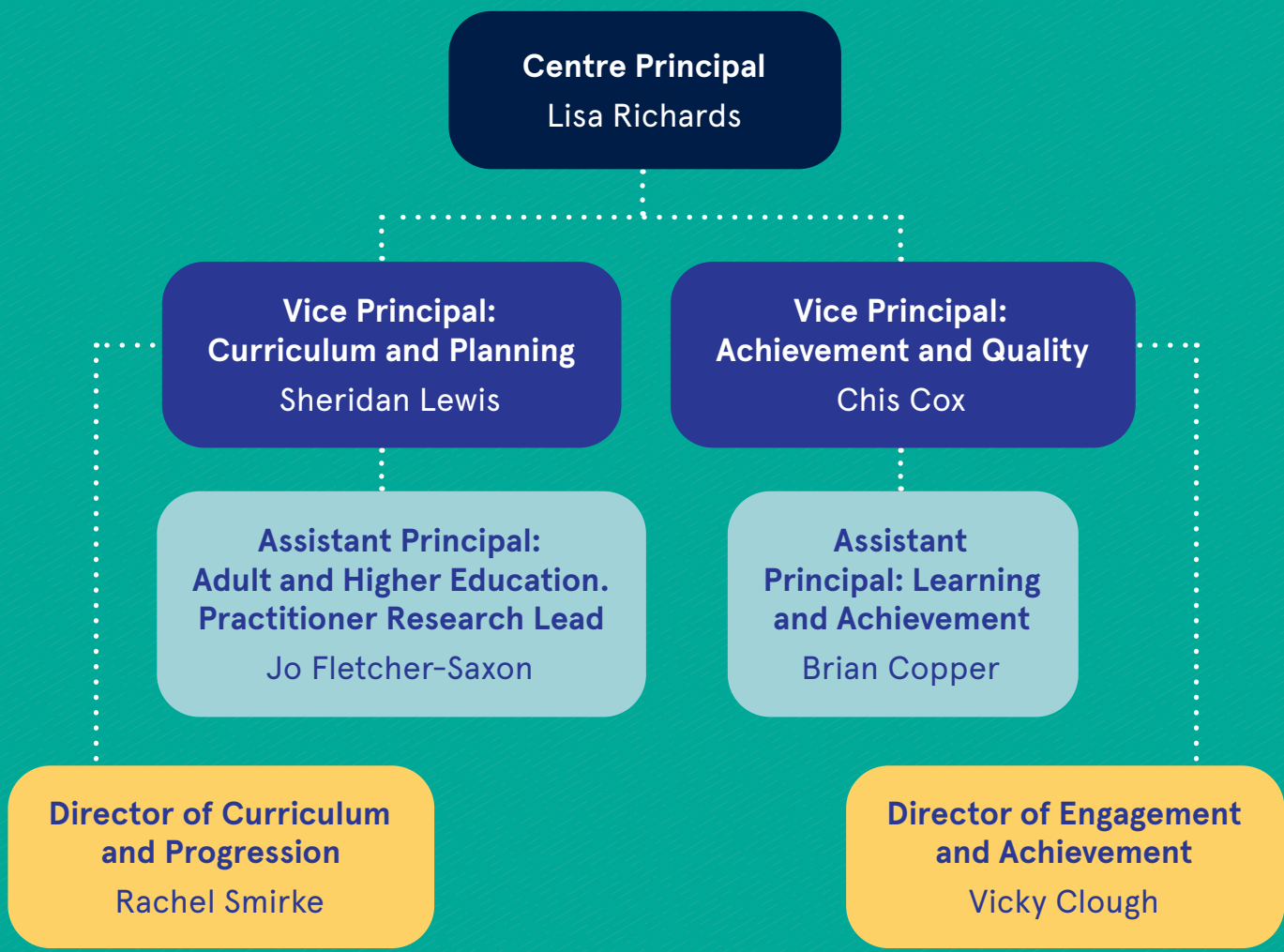
“Ashton Sixth Form College – a learning experience that lasts a lifetime... would I recommend ASFC? I would go further than that, my son is completing his A-Levels this year. He has Asperger's and the prospect of attending college was daunting not just for him but for us as a family, I cannot speak highly enough of the well-being ASFC have provided to my son. It has been fantastic to watch him grow and learn during the last 2 years, his confidence levels have soared. Working with the college as a stakeholder has been very positive too.

Why would you chose anywhere else?”

– European IT Director at Kelloggs
Employability partner and parent



SLT Structure 2023 - 26



“As the parents of three boys, we have been delighted with the quality of education and support our sons have received at ASFC. They were all able to take the range of courses that suited them and thrived under the expert guidance of their teachers both in and out of lessons”

“The preparation they received for the next stage in their education was second to none, with visits to universities, guest speakers, practice interviews and extensive support with the UCAS application process.”

“We are really pleased with the college and highly recommend it”

– Eric & Iva Allott
Parents



Ofsted 'outstanding' judgement –January 2020

The College was last inspected in January 2020, resulting in a judgement of 'Outstanding' in all areas. In previous inspections (2008, 2011, 2016), the College had been graded as 'Good', but improvements in student experience, outcomes and progression underpinned our self-assessment as 'outstanding' from 2018 onwards and it was heartening to have this recognised by Ofsted in 2020. We continue to strive for continuous improvement so that each new cohort of students experience the high standards that are expected of an outstanding College, and it is hoped that these standards and the student experience that we have created will again be recognised in our next Ofsted inspection.

Global Pandemic

It is no overstatement to say that the COVID-19 pandemic had a seismic impact upon society including economic downturn and unemployment. Such wider social effects impact upon the education sector but there are additional impacts upon the children and young people we educate including lost learning at critical stages, reduced opportunities for enrichment and enhancement and a greater prevalence of mental health and wellbeing issues.

However, it is important to acknowledge the opportunities that pandemic has brought about, including a realisation of the possibilities of technology to aid teaching, learning and assessment as well as the business of the College. The return to 'normal' actually represents the return to a 'new normal'. In many ways, emerging from the different ways of working during the pandemic years of 2020-2022, whilst working on our strategic plan, has meant that we can approach 2023 as 'year zero'; rather than simply building upon previous years' work, we can actually consider the practices, provision and systems we wish to retain from before the pandemic, those we wish to keep from the pandemic years and things we wish to start afresh.

It is vital then, that this strategic plan considers the challenges and opportunities arising from COVID-19.

Growth in numbers, curriculum change, student choice, becoming a level 3 College

The College has grown significantly over the past 5 years, from 1900 16-18 students in 2017 to over 2400 today. There are a number of reasons for this, including: demographic growth, an improvement in outcomes in local schools, the effects of the pandemic (teacher assessed grades enabling more students to access Level 3 courses and the reduction in other opportunities such as apprenticeships) and the College's strong reputation locally.

While this has led to some pressures in relation to accommodation (outlined later), this growth is overwhelmingly positive in ensuring the financial health of the College and our continued ability to maintain a wide and diverse curriculum offer and a strong infrastructure of support and enrichment.

For many of the reasons stated above, we have seen a change in students' course choices with far more students selecting to study A Levels and mixed study programmes and proportionally fewer choosing full time vocational courses. We introduced two T Levels in September 2022, in Education and Health. Numbers are initially small but it is expected that these will increase year-on-year.

Becoming a provider of Initial Teacher Training (ITT)

The College began offering Initial Teacher Training for those wishing to teach in post 16 several years ago. In 2016, we introduced two new routes – PGCE Primary and PGCE Secondary (various subjects). Initially this work was with Staffordshire University. The secondary programme always remained small. Over the 4 years it was offered, a maximum of 7 students enrolled. The primary route, however, did start to grow.

In 2019, this partnership ended as the university decided to take their ITT back in house. We therefore started a new partnership with Allied Merseyside Partnership in 2021, as a provider within their school centred initial teacher training programme. We had students graduating from our BA (Hons) Education who wanted to stay on and training to teach at ASFC. The primary route resumed but we have not yet brought back on board any secondary routes. This will become possible further down the line as the Trust develops.

PGCE primary has gone from 8 trainees completing in 2016 to 30 expected starts in September 2023. There has been highly successful progression for trainee teachers entering Tameside and Greater Manchester schools and some heading overseas. The main attraction for trainees is the range of primary schools that we work with. We offer Good and Outstanding schools with skilled and experienced coaches to support them.



“Since attending Ashton Sixth form college I have not only grown as a person, but I have excelled academically in my chosen course which is public services. From day one I had amazing support from my Tutors, Teachers, and Inclusive learning. This has allowed me to access the highest grades possible to progress in my adult life”

“Overall the support, I had was incredible and I am immensely proud to say that I attended this college”

– Maddie King, Student

ASFC Today

Our students 16-19

At ASFC, we put students at the heart of everything we do and ensure that this is the bedrock that the College's successes are built upon. The College's 16-19 student population each year is approximately 2,400. Our students predominantly enroll for a full-time level 3 study programme, with a small number (around 20 per year) pursuing our Art Foundation course.

Our 16-19 student community are enrolled predominantly from 16 Tameside high schools/academies, making up on average 65% of enrollments with the remaining number recruited from out of area schools in Glossop, Oldham and Manchester. In total, our students come to us from over 60 different high schools.

Our students are diverse in every way, and our community is all the richer for this. In 2023, students organised and ran a 'Culture Day' to celebrate their heritage, with over 50 different countries being represented. It is hoped that this becomes an annual event.

It is important that we learn from this diversity and encourage student-led awareness-raising events, such as facilitating an active LGBT group and Pride events, providing prayer facilities for those who wish to worship during the College day and creating the conditions for students with visible and hidden disabilities to deliver information events for staff and their peers.

The 16-19 students can be broken down as follows:

Males 41%	Females 59%
White British 70%	Ethnically Diverse Communities 30%
With LLDD 19%	Without LLDD 81%
With Ward Uplift 47%	Without Ward Uplift 53%

Our 16-19 students choose one of four level three pathways

A Level Pathway	Mixed Study Programme Pathway	Full time Vocational Pathway	T Level Pathway
Students study three A Levels over a two year period.	Students study for three separate qualifications – a combination of A Level (s) and vocational equivalents. Two year programme.	Students choose a two-year full time broad vocational course. These are mainly BTEC or Cache programmes, and are offered in a range of subjects.	Students choose one T Level programme to study for two years. These courses involve a substantial amount of work placement and greater employer input than the other pathways. Offered in two subject areas at present.
Students on these pathways may add additional qualifications into their programme of study, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core Maths in the A1 year • EPQ in the A2 year 			

Some students may sit GCSE Maths or English alongside their chosen level three pathway. For A Level/Mixed Programme students, this is rare and would usually be to improve upon their GCSE that they have already achieved at least a grade 4 in. Some full time vocational and T Level students may need to improve from a grade 3.



The 16-19 experience

Sixth form is the shortest educational phase, so we take seriously our responsibility to make the best use of the time we have and to maximise opportunities. To this end, we have identified 5 key components to success for our 16-19 students, each articulated in the visual representation of our vision and mission at the start of this Strategic Plan. These are:

- **Teaching and Learning** – quality teaching is our first priority and crucial to inspire students and prepare them for a lifetime love of learning.
- **Enrichment** – to enhance learning and wellbeing, to create opportunities to socialise and for enjoyment.
- **Employability** – although over 70% of our students progress to higher education, they are all heading to the workplace within a matter of a few years. Therefore, ASFC has a crucial role to play in preparing students for their future in the (ever changing) workplace.
- **Equality and Diversity** – to repeat a point made earlier: Quality does not exist without Equality. All students need to feel that they belong and that they have fair and equal access to opportunities. The College should aim to remove as many barriers to success as is possible.
- **Wellbeing** – supporting students to be well in themselves and look after their physical and mental wellbeing is crucial for them to thrive in all other aspects of their lives.

There is a strategy for each of these components that will run alongside this Strategic Plan.

“As a local Member of Parliament and Member of the Stamford Park Trust, I strongly endorse the work of Ashton Sixth Form College”



“I am immensely proud that the college has performed consistently well for several years in guiding students through their studies and helping them with their next steps onto further education or employment”

– Jonathan Reynolds MP
Parliament

“The support my daughter has received from her tutor, IL and her counsellor, has got her through her first year and made her believe in herself. I can’t fault the pastoral care at all at ASFC”

– Parent (anon Parental Survey)

16-19 Achievement and Progression

Our 16-19 students achieve well with pass rates and high grade rates that are typically higher than national averages and positive value-added scores. Retention rates have usually been high, but have been somewhat impacted by the pandemic and the aftermath of this. The key strategies being launched alongside this Strategic Plan are key to ensuring high retention rates going forward.

Progression from the College is strong. Most (70-75% on average) go onto Higher Education, but a significant and steadily growing proportion take up either employment or apprenticeship opportunities, mainly within the Greater Manchester area. Around 23% of those who progress onto higher education take up places at Russell Group Universities. While this is not necessarily appropriate for all students, it is a College goal to work towards an incremental increase in Russell Group progression. Given the density of universities within the North West and West Yorkshire, around 70% of our students progress to a university within 40 miles of Tameside, although ex-ASFC students can be found currently studying in almost every UK university.

Our Students

Adults and Higher Education

The College also has a significant adult student population with on average 400 students enrolled at ASFC at any given point in the year.

These students can be broken down as follows:

Higher Education Students

32%

Adult Education Students

68%

Our Adult and Higher Education (HE) students mainly reside in the Greater Manchester and Derbyshire areas, with a smaller number coming from neighbouring boroughs. Adult students who study at the College come from a diverse range of educational backgrounds and hence the broad range and level of courses on offer. One of the department's key strengths is offering qualifications to those in the Health and Education Sectors, two priority areas locally. In addition, there are opportunities to study both full-time and part-time, which greatly appeals to many adult returners.

The College works with a range of institutions, organisations and partners in order to successfully deliver its programmes and these include:



In an average year, the Adult and HE Department work with as many as 47 primary schools and 12 childcare settings across its Adult Education programmes. In addition, the department works with 28 primary schools within its PGCE School Direct programme.

Many of our Adult Education students who study at Level 2 and Level 3 then go on to enroll on courses within our Higher Education offer, with some students progressing from level 2 to post-graduate level, hugely influencing the social mobility of these local adult returners.

The Adult and HE Experience

While our work with Adult and HE students has some differences to our work with 16-19 students, the five key components for success remain and these are embedded in our Adult and HE programmes as appropriate.

HE and Adult achievement and Progression

Our adult students typically achieve exceptionally well on their GCSE courses and above national averages on Functional Skills and vocational programmes. HE students at ASFC are awarded First Class and Upper Second Class degrees in high numbers, often proportionally higher than students in our partner university and their other partners.

Adult students return to study for a multitude of different reasons; some for career change, others to progress within their existing sector/ workplace and for some, simply to build confidence and try something new. While progression cannot always be measured in the same way as for 16-19 completers, there are many success stories including students who initially enroll for Level 1 Functional Skills and leave ASFC a few years later as a fully qualified primary school teacher.



“At Staffordshire University, I have worked with Ashton Sixth Form College, one of our most longstanding partners, for almost 20 years”

“Throughout this time, it has been a very professionally rewarding collaboration with dedicated and highly experienced college staff who have consistently high expectations for their learners. The focus the college staff have put on research and staff development has been inspirational. It has been a privilege to work with the college and hope to do so far into the future, as well”

– Tina Richardson
Staffordshire University

Our colleagues

At ASFC we believe that our colleagues and our students are our greatest asset and we aim for both to feel a sense of belonging, that they are suitably challenged and are valued members of the College community.

The College acknowledges that our successes are directly linked and attributed to the quality of the people who work as part of the organisation. We believe passionately in seeking employees who are culturally the "right fit" for our organisation as well as investing heavily in their professional development in order for colleagues to engender a high-performance culture with sustained outcomes that truly benefit our students.

The College has 222 members of staff on substantive contracts and 30-40 who join us during examination periods as examinations invigilators. Our staff are employed in a wide range of teaching, support and management roles.

122 Teaching Colleagues	93 Support Colleagues
7 Leadership Colleagues	36 Exams Invigilation Colleagues

At ASFC, equality of opportunity is truly embedded within the culture of the organisation and reflects the diversity of both our student population but also that of our colleagues. The College has an overall staff gender statistic of 67% female, 33% male. Staff from Ethnically Diverse Communities (EDC) represent 13% of the whole staff population and our colleagues are diverse in relation to other protected characteristics such as sexual orientation, religious background, age and marital status.

Continuous Professional Development

Our staff are an enormous asset; they are the 'carriers' of our culture and are significant influencers of our students. In recognising this, we place a great emphasis on staff CPD which takes place through internal training (including our bespoke 'Be Curious' programme) as well as more specialist external training that is appropriate to the staff member's individual role.

We encourage innovation across all departments and support staff to undertake work experience/shadowing in other environments as well as building connections with other post-16 providers to share and bring back best practice.

Our accommodation

The College is an attractive and ever-developing environment. It is set on a single campus with six separate buildings that have been added in different decades as the College has evolved and grown.

Given the growth in student numbers over the past 5 years, from 1900 students in 2017 to a high of 2600 students in 2021 and levelling out at between 2300-2400, the focus for accommodation planning has been focussed on ensuring this growth in numbers was managed successfully. This includes ensuring rooms and resources are fit for purpose. The growth in student number has been managed by leasing two large Portakabins, providing 8 additional classrooms as well as using study spaces as classrooms. Managing this growth has proved to be challenging and has led to other issues which we now need to address: social spaces, independent study space and food outlets with enough space to sit and eat. A further challenge is that the number of toilets has not increased in the same way as classroom space.

Longer term planning to manage the significant increase in student numbers has led us to bidding on a number of Capacity Fund bids. In May 2023, our most recent bid was approved and will enable us to build 10 new classrooms and renovate the sports hall. Meetings are now underway to finalise the build over the next 18 months. We will continue to make short-term improvements to the estate, focusing on student social space and space to eat, which is at a premium. We will also ensure that curriculum areas have the correct rooming and resources to deliver their courses. Once the new build is completed, we will have the opportunity to assess the full estate and put in place some specific longer-term improvements that we have been planning for. Routine maintenance is continuous with a significant amount of work being done on roofs and boilers recently; each summer we plan to do more cosmetic work on the College environment for the benefit of students and staff.





ASFC – the next three years

Opportunities

Leading the way in pedagogy

The opportunity to build upon our excellent reputation for pedagogical research and practice. The College already places great emphasis on developing pedagogical practices and taking an innovative approach to all our work, as well as making an important contribution to SFCA events and publications. We will continue to drive forward pedagogy in this way.

Demographics and enrollments

There is the opportunity to maintain strong numbers or continue to grow due to healthy local demographics for 16-18 year olds.

Position within the local borough and the opportunities to expand partnership work with local schools

The College has a well-established Realising Aspirations Programme for year 10 pupils. Over 200 pupils from across Tameside schools participate in the programme, and there is scope to consider where there are gaps in pathways offered.

Launching and embedding of Ashton Explore (Enrichment Strategy)

It is our intention to increase the volume and range of enrichment opportunities offered to students so that all students experience a range of curriculum and non-curriculum based encounters to their College journey.

A new Enrichment Strategy for 2023-26 will be introduced, with the intent of bringing together existing activities as well as supplementing with new initiatives with the new branding of 'Ashton Explore'.

The College has enhanced the provision offered to students regarding Enrichment and Employability. There is scope to offer out the chance for local school pupils to access aspects of these programmes.

The prospect of establishing a student leadership programme is a further development that can be rolled out to schools once embedded.

The recent restructure of XL provision (June 2023) provides the opportunity for increased liaison work with feeder schools to maintain numbers in the XL cohort.

Such work will contribute to the success of the borough in terms of promoting high aspirations and social mobility.

Launching and embedding of Be Ambitious (Careers and Employability Strategy)

New careers and employability initiatives introduced in 2022/23 will be consolidated and built upon from 2023-2026 within a new Careers and Employability Strategy with the new branding of 'Be Ambitious'.

Enhanced links with employers and other key stakeholders will bring new and enhanced opportunities to students, offering even better preparation for a range of pathways after ASFC.

Launching and embedding The XL Academy

The existing Ashton XL programme has been re-structured in June 2023 in readiness for a re-launch from September 2023. A new strategy will be written, at the heart of which will be two key dimensions:

1. An enhanced package of enrichment and support for ASFC's XL cohort which will be both generic and pathway-based.
2. An increased 'offer' to local secondary schools for their most able students, to provide stretch, challenge and inspiration across 4 key pathways.

The new academy will have its own branding, identity and in time, physical base within College.

Growth of Stamford Park Trust

As Stamford Park Trust evolves and grows, there will be increased opportunities for both students/pupils and staff.

For students – there will be increased opportunities to participate in programmes connected with Trust schools, including mentoring, work placements and event organisation. As each academy opens up a wider invitation to activities and enrichment, this will be of benefit to all pupils and students who study at an SPT academy.



For staff – there will be a greater number of opportunities for shared staff development/CPD, leadership development, succession planning and talent management. Newly established connections will strengthen through annual shared training events, benefitting both support and curriculum staff.

Expansion of initial teacher training to include some Secondary subject routes

Partnerships with good and outstanding secondary schools will allow us to re-launch this programme. Ideally, we will focus on schools within the Trust for placements. This will support teacher supply in the Trust.

Improvements to classroom accommodation

Our successful 16-19 Capacity Fund bid (May 2023) will enable us to increase the number of classrooms and afterwards, consider wider developments within the College campus. For example, increasing and improving student social and study spaces.

Artificial Intelligence

Although AI has been around for some time, its capabilities are advancing at pace, bringing about both opportunities and challenges for educational institutions. At the time of writing this plan, we are really only at the beginning stages of our understanding of the possibilities of AI but this will be an area of significant focus going forward.

“Leaving a career I had worked in for over 20 years and returning to education was, at the time, one of the scariest things I have ever done. It turned out to be one of the best decisions of my life. The tutors were so welcoming and helped everybody to settle in and get to know each other”

“I started to think ‘I can do this’. Applying for University and attending interviews was exciting and scary and receiving three offers within quick succession was unbelievable.

In September I will be starting my Adult Nursing Degree at the University of Salford. I hope I have also taught my three children, to never be afraid of change and if you want something bad enough, anything is possible”

– Nicola Davies
Adult Student – Access to
HE Diploma in Health

ASFC – the next three years

Challenges

Curriculum change

Significant curriculum change is planned at national level that will have a huge effect upon the 16–18 curriculum offer at ASFC (in particular, the de-funding of several BTEC and other AGQs) with a potential effect upon student numbers and associated impact on funding.

The expected growth in numbers of students on T Levels poses different challenges, not least the difficulty in securing high quality extended placements.

A potential change in government could reverse the plans to remove funding for AGQs which would be a welcome development but would make future curriculum planning difficult.

New competition

A new school sixth form will open in September 2023 and a potential new 16–19 free school academy on the Ashton/Oldham border to open September 2024. Both could impact upon numbers and impact upon the size of our XL cohort.

Funding and finance

16–19 funding remains a significant pressure. The College has been a supporter of the SFCA/AoC 'Raise the Rate' campaign to increase baseline funding, which has resulted in some success. However, against the backdrop of inflation and rising costs, it is becoming ever more difficult to sustain sound financial health and offer the breadth of provision we are accustomed to providing. Of real concern is the impact to College of unfunded pay rises as well as the possibility of ongoing industrial disputes and strike action.

A significant issue arising partly (though not wholly) from financial pressures is the recruitment and retention of staff.

Recruitment and retention of staff

Until recently, Sixth Form Colleges had been less likely than schools to experience difficulties with staff recruitment and retention. ASFC, along with other post 16 providers, are now facing this challenge that has arisen for a combination of reasons, including pay and, for those in some support roles, the more flexible working opportunities offered in other industries.

Accommodation challenges: student recreation and study space

The increase in enrollments and growth in student numbers has led to increased pressure on social and study space available. This has become a major consideration for College leaders and is likely to remain so for the coming years.

Mental health and wellbeing

This was already a growing concern for College leaders, but pandemic seems to have exacerbated existing health issues and created new concerns relating to anxiety over lost learning as well as the impact of significant periods of time where opportunities for socialising and social connectedness were reduced. This impacted everyone – staff and students, but for young people in particular, the pandemic came at a critical time in their development and College support services are coming under considerable strain in helping students to work through/overcome their difficulties.


Potential changes in accountability measures and/or a new Ofsted framework

The current Chief Inspector's term of office is due to end in late 2023 and it is likely that a new incumbent will spearhead a change in focus.

While not necessarily problematic in itself, it does mean that the College will need to remain abreast of any developments and new demands.

Devolution of adult funding to GMCA

Devolution of the adult education budget to GMCA may at some point lead to a focus on large providers with significant contracts, leaving smaller (albeit successful) providers vulnerable to the need to cease provision.



“I love the positive atmosphere and energy at ASFC. I find the progressive culture and both the staff and learners an ongoing source of inspiration. I also enjoy the diversity of the community and knowing that I am helping people and providing a service. I feel valued in my role and appreciate the contribution I make in giving our students a well-rounded education, facilitating strong outcomes and outstanding pastoral care.”

– Rick Allanson

“Ashton Sixth Form taught me to be resilient in difficult times, but most importantly I learnt to believe in myself. I came to Ashton Sixth Form as a student who had high aims and not a lot of self confidence but by the time I left I grew into an independent young lady who has faith and believes in herself”

“Ashton Sixth Form showed me that if you believe it, you can achieve it! That is something that will stick with me for a lifetime”

“I do feel that Ashton Sixth Form college has definitely prepared me for my future though the brilliant carers team and all the opportunities on offer outside the classroom”

– Charlotte Walton-Thorpe
Student



“Although I am a relatively new teacher at ASFC, there is a huge sense of community here and from the start as an Early Career Teacher, I was made to feel part of it. There is also an element of trust bestowed on us, from SLT as they know we will always make the right choices for the students. The open door policy of the principal is extremely important because I was always made to think that my voice was being heard!”

– Danielle Proverbs-Brown

Strategic aim 1:

To create an aspirational culture and achieve excellence in all that we do

- 1.1 To create the conditions to enable outstanding practice in Teaching and Learning.
- 1.2 To encourage innovation, forward-thinking and a quest for continuous improvement in all aspects of the College's work.
- 1.3 To invest in the professional development of staff.
- 1.4 To embed a culture of trust, curiosity and collaboration so that we learn and develop from our own experience, each other and our connections outside the College.
- 1.5 To ensure excellent and consistent outcomes for all to pave the way for career success.

Strategic Enablers



Strategic aim 2:

To deliver a relevant, ambitious and engaging curriculum which meets the needs of students and contributes to the needs of the wider community

- | | | | |
|-----|---|-----|---|
| 2.1 | To enroll with integrity enabling all students to achieve and progress. | 2.4 | To provide a wide and relevant range of enrichment and employability opportunities to equip students with knowledge and skills beyond their qualifications so that they enjoy their time here and are able to go on to fulfill their potential. |
| 2.2 | To offer a choice of level three 16-19 pathways that will provide students with an excellent basis to progress to Higher Education, high quality apprenticeships or employment with further training. | 2.5 | To respond proactively to external initiatives and national changes in priorities and qualifications. |
| 2.3 | To offer Adult and Higher Education provision in areas of expertise that provide clear pathways to further studies and career success for students while contributing to local and regional priorities. | 2.6 | To create dynamic partnerships with employers that support a relevant and innovative curriculum. |

Strategic Enablers



Strategic aim 3:

To promote a positive culture that enables all members of the College community to develop and thrive

- 3.1 To promote a thriving and respectful community where everyone feels that they belong and are valued.
- 3.2 To promote inclusivity and celebrate the diversity of our community.
- 3.3 To recognise, celebrate and reward success.
- 3.4 To listen to and respond to student, parent/carer and staff feedback.
- 3.5 To reduce bureaucracy and workload in order to contribute to a healthy work-life balance.
- 3.6 To take a pro-active approach to promoting wellbeing and positive mental health.

Strategic Enablers

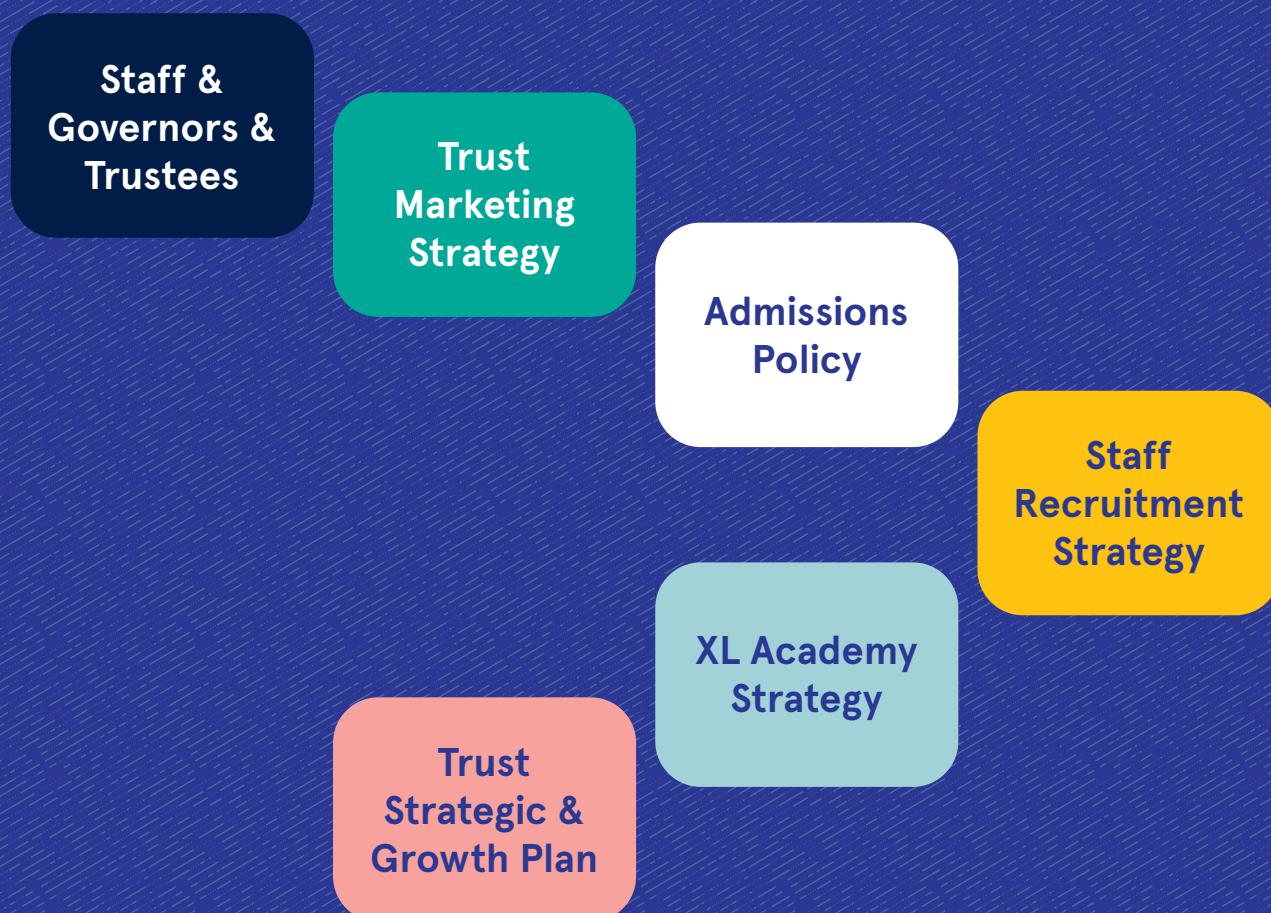


Strategic aim 4:

To secure a sustainable and successful future for the College and contribute to the success of Stamford Park Trust

- 4.1 To increase market share of school leavers to consolidate the College's position in the local area.
- 4.2 To develop the College's accommodation to enable optimal delivery of the curriculum and provide students with a learning and social environment that is fit-for-purpose.
- 4.3 To recruit, develop and retain highly skilled and dedicated staff.
- 4.4 To engage positively with collaborative work across Stamford Park Trust and contribute to widening opportunities and improving outcomes for all students within the trust.

Strategic Enablers



Strategic Enablers

Our Strategic Enablers are the significant groups, structures, strategies and resources that will enable us to work towards achievement of our strategic aims over the next three years.

Staff, governors and trustees

People are the College's biggest asset. They 'power' the organisation and are carriers of the College's ethos and culture. Staff work most closely with students, modelling our standards and expectations; they implement strategies and initiatives, and innovate continuously so that the service to students is of the highest quality. Governors and Trustees play a vital role in setting the strategic direction of the College and overseeing operations in order to ensure the continued success of the College.

Students

Students are the reason why ASFC exists. They also form the largest proportion of the College's population, and as such, play a vital part in the culture and 'feel' of the College. Their feedback is essential in ensuring the continued relevance of the College, so student views are sought in a variety of ways including: student leadership attendance at Senior Leadership meetings, student voice mechanisms (e.g. surveys, focus groups) and the quality cycle. Student-led initiatives (e.g. culture day, tutorial input) contribute to the sense of inclusion and belonging within College.

Curriculum Plan

The College's curriculum plan is updated annually, providing the opportunity to re-visit the rationale behind the curriculum offer, to consider its continued relevance and to plan for key changes.

Quality Cycle

The College's quality cycle is re-visited annually to ensure effectiveness and fitness-for-purpose. It is the means by which leaders at all levels judge the quality of College provision and the driver for improvement plans. There is a College quality cycle used by College leaders that sits within a wider quality cycle that allows governors and Trustees to carry out their role in holding College leaders to account.

Teaching and Learning Strategy

A three year strategy, from 2023-26 that outlines the direction of travel in Teaching and Learning, including approaches to pedagogy and teacher CPD.

Staff CPD Programme

Given that staff are the College's main permanent asset, it is important for College to invest in their professional development. The staff CPD programme includes internal and external CPD for established staff to enhance their performance continually, as well as a new staff induction programme, leadership development and a bespoke and robust ECT programme.

Enrichment Strategy: Ashton Explore

Ashton Explore is the brand and banner under which all non-curriculum enrichment opportunities sit, including additional qualifications (e.g. First Aid), one-off trips, visits or experiences, 'Speaker of the Month' and longer - usually 6 week - programmes. Through it, students develop skills, knowledge, confidence and meet new people. It is a vital piece of the jigsaw in building students' cultural capital and encouraging high aspirations, as well as engendering a sense of 'belonging'.

Employability Strategy: Be Ambitious

Be Ambitious is our employability strategy that brings together a wide range of employability opportunities that are offered to better prepare students for their next steps and ultimately, to be successful in the workplace. With close links to the Ashton Explore strategy, it is also a significant piece of the jigsaw in building cultural and social capital in students and encouraging high aspirations.

Strategic Partnerships and external connections

Formal and informal partnerships with key stakeholders enable the College to remain connected and relevant. Formal partnerships include those with Staffordshire University (for our Higher Education Courses), Associated Merseyside Partnership Scitt and Liverpool Hope University (for our Primary ITE programme), Tameside Hospital (who provide T Level Health Placements), GMCA (we have signed up as part of the LSIF programme), various universities, The Six College Consortium, and many links with employers, charities and other organisations.

Equality and Diversity Strategy

It is our belief that quality cannot be achieved without equality. It is a core part of our vision and mission that our students have equal access to an excellent standard of education. Similarly, we value the diversity in our College community and the wider community of Tameside; our Equality and Diversity Policy is an important document that articulates our commitment to these beliefs along with a set of objectives to strive for.

Belonging Project

The Belonging Project is multi-faceted and is intended to ensure that all members of the College community feel that they have a place here and are part of the community. For both staff and students, this involves induction programmes, regular opportunities for recognition, opportunities for enrichment, the chance to give feedback to leaders etc.

ASFC Recognition Programme

The College places great emphasis on recognising student and staff contributions and achievements as often as is possible. This includes 'Ashton Appreciates' for staff, and Principals' Recognition lunches for students. The Awards Programme for students is also being enhanced to include Employability and Enrichment Awards to recognise achievements in other aspects than academic achievement.

Wellbeing Strategy

Launched in January 2023, the Wellbeing Strategy articulates the ASFC approach to creating conditions conducive to student and staff wellbeing. Alongside this is a portal containing resources for staff and students to access.

College Calendar

Although the academic year at ASFC is a busy one, careful calendar planning each year takes place to ensure that business needs are met, that events are reviewed regularly for appropriateness, and that the year plan is as well-balanced as is possible with regard to staff workload.

Trust Marketing Strategy

The Trust's Marketing Strategy is an important tool to ensure that the College (as well as the Trust) has a 'presence' and positive image within the wider community. This allows for recognition of staff and students – important in its own right- as well as making a significant contribution to enrollments, funding and viability.

Admissions Policy

This policy provides an overarching structure to our approach to admissions, including entry requirements, key processes and the principles that underpin these. This policy relates mostly to strategic aims 2 and 4.

XL Academy Strategy

The Ashton XL Programme has been re-launched and re-structured for September 2023 start as 'Ashton XL Academy'. A 3 year strategy will be produced in the Autumn term 2023/24 with a plan for provision for students and prospective XL students. This strategy intends to improve the provision for most-able learners once they are enrolled, but also to secure our market share of this cohort.

Staff Recruitment Strategy

Vital to attract (and then retain) highly qualified and well-motivated staff to the College.

Stamford Park Trust Strategic and Growth Plan

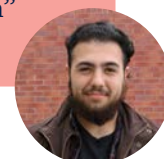
This is the three-year Strategic Plan for SPT, documenting the direction of travel of the Trust and plans for strengthening links between each academy. ASFC will play a key role in Trust activities for the benefit of all students and staff.



“The teachers at this college are more than just ordinary teachers but instead act as a genuine partner and friend. In my experience, I could approach any of my teachers and expect nothing less than the up-most support and guidance regarding any issues I had found myself facing”

“The teachers I have been surrounded by not only furthered my love for the subjects I'm passionate in but have genuinely been vital in me recognising that teaching is a career path I wish to explore. From my friends' experiences, I can note that every department shares this passion”

– Hamza Aslam, Student



ASFC 2026

The vision as expressed by students, staff & governors

1. Outstanding achievement & student progression

2. A centre of excellence for teaching & learning, a leader in pedagogical research

3. Attractive campus that meets all needs

4. A great place to work with excellent staff recruitment and retention

5. A fully embedded employability strategy that enhances students' work recruitment

6. Retain Ofsted Outstanding status


7. A vibrant and positive culture where all feel valued and that they belong

8. Extensive opportunities are provided to build cultural capital



Our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity

Our vision, transforming lives through learning, is a vision for all. We want every student to thrive and be successful and for all members of our community to feel a sense of belonging. We welcome diversity, embrace difference and we are intolerant of intolerance. We are deeply committed to eradicating barriers and creating opportunities for those who may otherwise be disadvantaged, including students with SEND needs and those who experience personal, social, financial or health difficulties.



9. Strong connections with a range of stakeholders

10. Successful provider of primary, secondary and post-16 initial teacher training

11. Play a central role in an expanded Stamford Park Trust

12. Remain diverse and inclusive

13. Play a key role in Tameside and Greater Manchester

14. Emphasis on recognition and reward

15. Healthy student recruitment - The place to study in the borough



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