

# About Higher Futures

Who we are and what we do



## Welcome

**“The mission of Higher Futures is to transform access and progression to higher education for vocational and work-based learners. This is a new and exciting collaboration between the two Sheffield universities, and ten further education colleges to create a lifelong learning network across South Yorkshire, North Derbyshire and North Nottinghamshire.**

**“It is a vital collaboration that will enable around 6,000 learners to access higher education. All the partners are committed to the success of Higher Futures. It is embedded in the values of all the institutions involved to support the achievement of individuals’ personal potential and fulfilment, and to support the contribution that educational achievement can make to the economic and social wellbeing of the region.”**

**Professor Rhiannon Billingsley**  
Chair of Higher Futures

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### What is Higher Futures?

Higher Futures is the Lifelong Learning Network for the sub-region and its travel-to-study area, encompassing South Yorkshire, North Derbyshire and North Nottinghamshire.

### What is a Lifelong Learning Network?

Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) are a joint initiative between the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

In June 2004, they invited Further Education Colleges (FECs) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to forge partnerships, bringing together different types of learning provider in a single network. These networks would provide fresh opportunities for progression for vocational and work-based learners, supporting vocational education, learner development and lifelong learning. Higher Futures was set up in 2006 and is one of many LLNs operating in each region across the country.

[www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/lln](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/lln)

### Our mission

Higher Futures will create a higher education network to transform progression pathways and opportunities for vocational and work-based learners.

### Aims and objectives

Through effective collaboration, Higher Futures will:

- Enhance the supply of higher education provision and transform institutional cultures, processes and procedures;
- Improve progression opportunities to higher education through vocational routes;
- Increase demand from employers and vocational learners for higher level skills and education;
- Improve access to information, advice and guidance (IAG) and transition support.

### This will be achieved by:

- Building on existing areas of excellence and linking with other local partnerships, ensuring the continuation and integration of Higher Futures' effective working practices;
- Developing shared agreements and practices across the network through the implementation of a Vocational Learner Progression Framework – removing barriers, facilitating attitudinal change, supporting and increasing learner progression;
- Actively engaging employers to influence curriculum design, content and accessibility, and to generate increased awareness and take up of higher education by employers, training providers and vocational learners;
- Improving information, advice and guidance, and providing enhanced support, to ensure vocational and work-based learners achieve their potential.

**“Lifelong Learning Networks would... offer a wide-ranging curriculum, combining the strengths of further and higher education. They would include colleges that are centres of vocational excellence and those with significant higher education provision of their own: HEIs with a research-intensive mission as well as those more focused on teaching and engaged in serving local and regional economies. At the heart of every Network will be arrangements to facilitate progression.”**

**Sir Howard Newby,  
Chief Executive, HEFCE  
The 2004 Colin Bell Memorial Lecture**

## Priority sectors

Higher Futures has identified five priority sectors, aligned to the regional priorities set out in the Regional Economic Strategy, Learning and Skills Council Strategic Review and by the Regional Skills Partnership.

Higher Futures' activity builds the partnership's existing areas of strength - Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs), and higher education research, teaching and learning excellence.

Dedicated sector development staff are based within the two universities, and in the partner colleges leading each sector.

Their work includes:

- Working with Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs), Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and employers;
- Establishing relationships with stakeholders and other relevant groups;
- Linking with Sector Working Groups on employer engagement;
- Facilitating the dialogue needed for developing the curriculum;
- Articulation and development work for progression agreements, in partnership with the Access and Progression Officers (see page 14, Progression agreements);
- Ensuring IAG and transition developments meet employer, training provider and local employee/trainee needs.

### The priority sectors are:

#### Early Years Education

Training and development for those working in early years education and childcare has become a national priority, with an emphasis on training all staff to meet national standards and improving leadership and management skills. Higher Futures will address the lack of joined up working, cited as one of the major obstacles to progression in this sector.

Lead partner: Doncaster College

#### Engineering

To maintain the level of workforce as it stands, an estimated 32,000 new staff will need to be recruited each year within the engineering and manufacturing sector. The majority of these new recruits will require qualifications at level 3 and above to develop a flexible and dynamic workforce to ensure that UK companies can compete in a global market.

Lead partner: Rotherham College of Arts and Technology

#### Health and Social Care

The health and care sectors in the region are well established and employ significant numbers of people. There is an increasing demand from employers for their workforce to undertake higher level skills training and education throughout their working lives.

Lead partner: The Sheffield College

#### Public Wellbeing

Wellbeing, and everything it constitutes, is a largely vocational area of study, which has proved consistently popular with students over the last twenty years. With the growth of the leisure and sport industries, there are changing skills required in the sector.

Lead partner: Dearne Valley College

#### Sustainable Communities

A large and diverse workforce is required to develop the social, economic and environmental components of a sustainable community. Professions creating the infrastructure of these communities – including built environment, neighbourhood renewal, and community development – increasingly demand higher level skills training and education to meet the needs of existing and future generations.

Lead partner: Northern College

**“Higher Futures represents a step change in partnership working between higher and further education that will become the benchmark for growing vocational and work-based progression opportunities in our region.”**

**Rob Harrison**  
Director, Higher Futures

**“Lifelong learning requires us to engage with providers, employers and learners to understand the higher knowledge and skills needed today and tomorrow to develop our organisations, businesses and communities. Higher Futures will help all partners meet that challenge.”**

**Professor Sue Webb**  
Chair of Higher Futures Operational Management Group

## Our partners

Higher Futures has the full commitment of the Vice Chancellors and Principals of our key partners:

- Barnsley College
- Chesterfield College
- Dearne Valley College
- Doncaster College
- Longley Park Sixth Form College
- North Nottinghamshire College
- Northern College
- Rotherham College of Arts and Technology
- The Sheffield College
- Sheffield Hallam University (lead partner)
- Thomas Rotherham College
- The University of Sheffield

Other agencies, who have key advisory roles in the partnership, include the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the Regional Development Agency (RDA), Foundation Degree Forward (FdF), and Sector Skills Councils (SSCs).

Employers' organisations, training providers, trades unions, and voluntary and community sector organisations concerned with lifelong learning also play a partnership role.

Together, these agencies and organisations will act as the wider stakeholder audience and barometer of the network's performance and achievements.

## Benefits for partners

Higher Futures will:

- Provide a strategic partnership approach to programme planning to meet the needs of the target group of learners;
- Develop multilateral progression opportunities between network partners;
- Give the opportunity for providers to work to their strengths;
- Encourage and support holistic approaches to open up access to new markets, reach out to under-represented groups of learners and attract participation from employers.



**“We need all institutions to play to their own unique strengths and to provide students with the best possible service they can.**

**“These Networks are made up of people passionate about engaging with their communities and encouraging people to aspire for more.”**

**Bill Rammell**  
Further and Higher Education: Models of  
Cooperation Speech  
March 2007

## Benefits for employers

Higher Futures will:

- Provide constructive information and advice about the higher education, training and education pathways available across the network in priority sectors;
- Promote the benefits to employers of combining higher education knowledge and skills with work experience to promote a lifelong learning culture in support of professional development;
- Value and prioritise employer contribution to the work of the network;
- Develop and deliver a new and adapted curriculum to give potential employees the skills employers want;
- Make access to higher level skills training and education easier for employers and employees.

**“There must be a choice of routes open to every young person with the vocational as respected as the academic. This requires involvement, investment and commitment from local employers.”**

**Alan Johnson**  
**The New Economic Revolution Speech,**  
**Sheffield Chamber of Commerce**  
**January 2007**





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## Benefits for learners

Higher Futures will:

- Widen access to learning opportunities;
- Guarantee progression pathways and opportunities;
- Provide sound, targeted and impartial information, advice and guidance to learners;
- Create supportive infrastructures for higher education experiences;
- Encourage learners to (re)engage with higher education and lifelong learning;
- Recognise and give value to qualifications and achievements through an articulated credit transfer process;
- Provide opportunities to access flexible learning developed in partnership with local employers;
- Provide the opportunity for learners to contribute to the ongoing work of Higher Futures.

**“By working with learners to create individualised learning plans, the networks will offer them real choice. They will work to see that individuals can have a clear route to their chosen goal. They will develop programmes to help individuals to reach this goal and to offer them maximum flexibility.”**

**Dr Kim Howells**  
**Widening Participation in Higher Education:**  
**Developing Vocational Pathways Speech**  
**December 2004**

## Progression agreements

Progression is integral to the success of Higher Futures – facilitating progression of the workforce in priority sectors, working for the social and economic progression of the region, and, most importantly, promoting learning and career progression for individuals.

Higher Futures will create smooth progression pathways for vocational and work-based learners, including a new local credit framework and articulated pathways.

Central to this activity are network-wide progression agreements that remove the barriers faced by vocational and work-based learners in accessing higher education opportunities. These agreements bring about attitudinal change within the partnership for supporting progression in, and between, vocational and academic learning.

To support the internal development of progression agreements, Higher Futures is funding staff in each of the two universities. These staff will work closely with sector development colleagues around access, progression and related issues.

Their work includes:

- Changing processes and procedures within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs);
- Development work on progression agreements;
- Development of a new and adapted curriculum;
- Liaison within their base institution to change admission procedures and processes for recognising work-based and vocational learner achievements.

## Information, advice and guidance (IAG) and transitional support

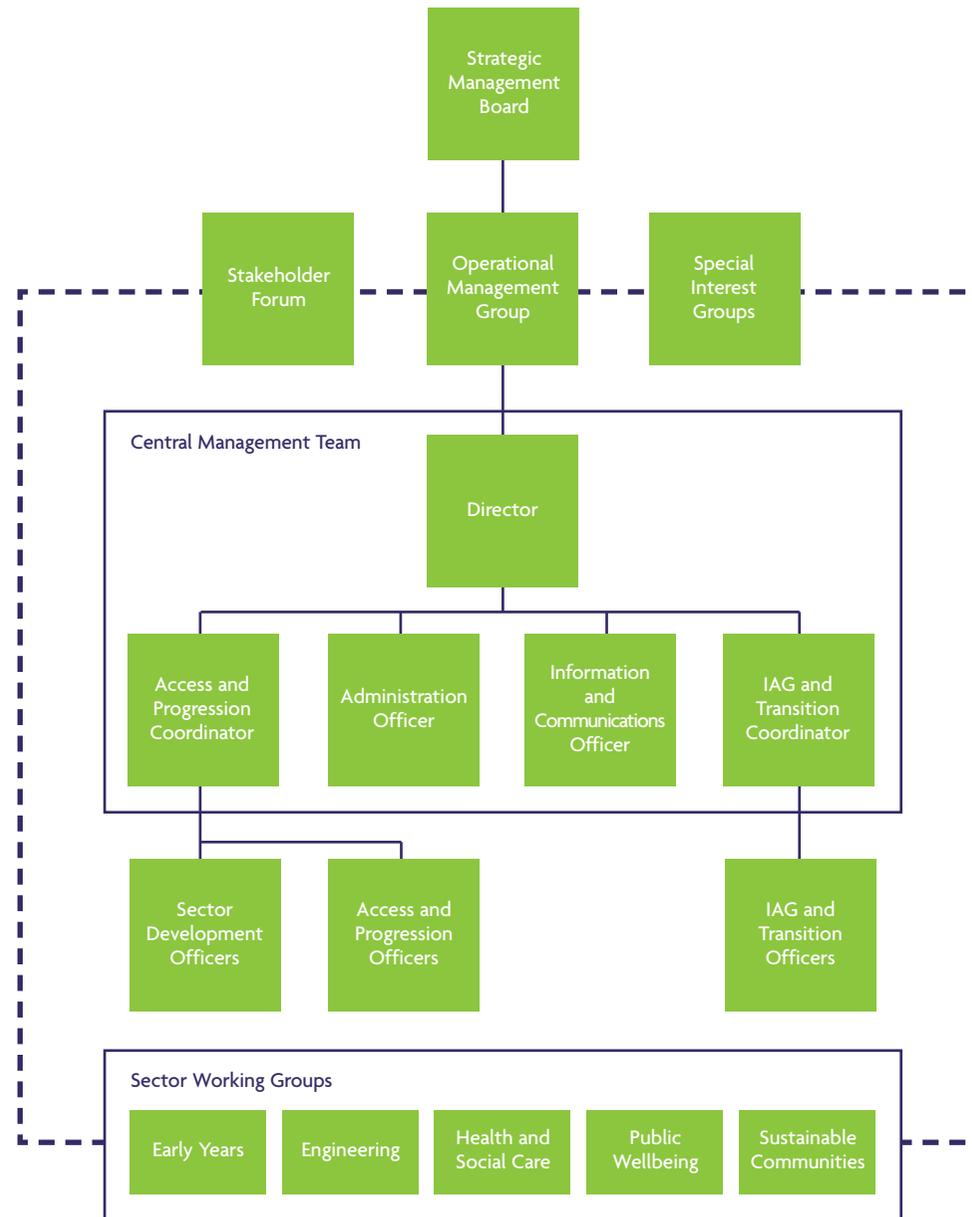
The information, advice and guidance services provided by Higher Futures complement existing services, both within and outside the network, and coordinate with local and national initiatives.

A dedicated IAG and Transition Officer is based in each partner institution, working with existing provision, to ensure an enhanced service for our 'community of learners'.

Their work includes:

- Identification of the appropriate learners at level 3 and 4;
- Providing ongoing individual support for learners;
- Offering specific support for applications, interviews, pre-entry activities and induction, group work, and organising or working with a student mentor scheme;
- Facilitating progression for individuals to higher education via liaison with partner organisations, academic departments, student services and other areas;
- Introducing Higher Futures and the IAG role to relevant staff in the organisation;
- Liaison with IAG and Transition Officers at other partner institutions to support transition;
- Tracking and identifying destinations of Higher Futures learners.

## Our structure





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