



ACTIVATE  
LEARNING

# EXTR▲ORDINARY LEARNING

Activate Learning Strategy 2025–30

# Introduction

## A message from Gary Headland DL, Chief Executive, Activate Learning

At Activate Learning, we take pride in being a trusted anchor partner embedded in the heart of the various communities we serve, actively contributing to their growth and prosperity.

Every day I am inspired by our extraordinary staff and remarkable learners and apprentices, whose commitment and passion lie at the core of everything we do.

We exist to do more than educate. We aim to create extraordinary learners and apprentices, ready to embrace ambitious careers and to serve communities by delivering transformative education aligned with local, regional and national priorities.

Working closely with employers and other stakeholders, we ensure our learning provision across our eight colleges over three counties, plus our award-winning online provision, addresses real-world needs, enabling us to deliver not just qualifications, but impactful, relevant experiences.

Our new five-year strategy builds on our legacy of excellence and bold ambition. Co-designed with input from employers, stakeholders, students, staff and the Board of Governors, it provides a clear path forward.

Anchored in our mission, grounded in evidence and focused on delivering extraordinary outcomes, Extraordinary Learning is a plan that speaks to our collective purpose: empowering extraordinary students and apprentices, supporting our staff and creating meaningful value for employers and communities alike.

I'd like to offer a huge thank you to everyone who has helped to shape this strategy, and to those who will help to deliver on it over the next five years.

**Together, with determination and unity, we will use this strategy to drive change, inspire innovation and continue shaping bright futures through education.**



# Who we are

Activate Learning is a forward-thinking education group serving more than 20,000 learners and apprentices through our campuses in Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Surrey and via our range of national education provisions.

We pride ourselves on being an anchor partner in the communities we serve, providing education and training that empowers learners, apprentices and employers alike. Our provision spans further education, higher education, apprenticeships, adult learning and online learning, reflecting a comprehensive commitment to lifelong learning and skills development.

We believe in transforming lives through learning and innovation, consistently adapting to meet the needs of learners, apprentices, businesses and the communities we serve. Our national education offering allows us even greater reach and impact beyond the three counties in which we physically operate.

## Our college network:

- Banbury and Bicester College (Banbury)
- Bracknell and Wokingham College (Bracknell)
- City of Oxford College and University Centre (Oxford)
- Farnham College (Farnham)
- Guildford College (Guildford)
- Merrist Wood College and University Centre (Merrist Wood)
- Reading College and University Centre (Reading)
- The Leys College (Oxford).

## Our national education offer:

- Activate Apprenticeships
- Activate Business School
- Activate Cycle Academy
- Activate Learning Online.

The blend of our campus-based provision and our national offering forms a cohesive group that is pioneering in its approach to education, blending academic, technical, and professional learning. We're a place-based organisation with both national and international reach. We collaborate with secondary schools, the wider FE sector, universities and employers as a trusted partner to support regional growth and drive social mobility through life-long learning.

In all we do, we remain rooted in our vision to be an extraordinary provider of learning for the learners and apprentices, employers and communities we serve, using our award-winning Learning Philosophy.



# Activate Learning at a glance

in 2024-25:

Data accurate as of June 2025 as compiled in the Activate Learning Accountability Statement.



Learners were from over



# Our vision

Through our people, we will be an extraordinary provider of learning for the learners, apprentices, employers and communities we serve.

We strive to be a transformative force in education, continually innovating to deliver outstanding learning that meets the evolving needs of our learners, apprentices, employers and communities. We are committed to driving excellence, embracing change and creating lasting impact for every stakeholder we serve.



# Our purpose

**To deliver consistent, high-quality education and training that meets local and national skills needs and makes a difference to the learners, apprentices and communities we serve.**

We do this by igniting confidence in our learners, expanding opportunities for all, energising our communities and generating prosperity in the regions we serve. This purpose statement captures why Activate Learning exists: To empower people of all ages through education, fuel personal and economic growth and contribute positively to society. It reminds us that every initiative we undertake and every lesson we deliver should ultimately help learners to realise their potential and improve their lives.



# Our values

**Our core values guide our culture, decision making and daily actions. They represent what we stand for as an organisation and are integral to our Learning Philosophy and strategy.**

We are committed to living these values in all that we do:

## We care deeply about what we do

At Activate Learning, passion and dedication drive every interaction, decision and initiative. Our commitment ensures excellence in teaching, learning and support, positively impacting learners, apprentices, staff, employers and the wider communities we are part of.

## We value everyone

Inclusivity, respect and fairness are at the heart of our culture. We recognise and celebrate diversity, creating environments where our students and people feel valued, respected and empowered to contribute and succeed.

## We transform lives

Through our award-winning Learning Philosophy, we empower our learners and apprentices to overcome barriers, realise their potential and achieve aspirations they might not have imagined possible. Using our partnerships with employers and stakeholders, we support our learners and apprentices to transition seamlessly into successful careers.

## We are ambitious and forward-thinking

We foster a culture of innovation, curiosity and continuous improvement. Embracing change and striving for excellence, we remain responsive to evolving educational and economic landscapes, ensuring our educational provision stays relevant, impactful and future-focused.

## We act with trust and integrity

Integrity, openness and trust underpin all our actions. By operating transparently, ethically and responsibly, we build and maintain trust among learners, apprentices, staff, partners and the wider community, establishing Activate Learning as a reliable and respected education provider that always does the right thing.



# Our Learning Philosophy

Our award-winning Learning Philosophy is the foundation of our approach to education and training. It provides a common set of principles across our various offerings, uniting our colleges, training providers and workplaces around how best to teach and how our learners and apprentices learn most effectively.

At its core is the belief that anyone can achieve extraordinary things through learning, given the right mindset, motivation and support. We know that the only barriers to success are a lack of self-belief and the absence of opportunity, barriers we are dedicated to breaking down.

This philosophy highlights three essential elements that underpin effective learning:

## The brain, emotions and motivation.

We understand from neuroscience that the brain grows stronger and adapts through effort, practice and persistence. Every time someone practises a skill or concept, neural connections are reinforced, making learning easier over time.

We also recognise that learning is an emotional experience, where positive emotions like confidence, trust and feeling safe, open the mind to learning, whereas fear or negativity can hinder progress.

Motivation is crucial, so it's important for learners to understand why they are learning something and see its relevance to their goals. When this happens, they are far more engaged and driven to succeed.

By embracing these three elements, our Learning Philosophy creates a supportive and dynamic learning environment for all. It underpins how we design our curriculum, how our staff interact with and encourage learners and apprentices, and how we ourselves continue to learn and evolve as an organisation.

Our Learning Philosophy is the golden thread running through everything we do and is a vitally important part of our Extraordinary Learning strategy.

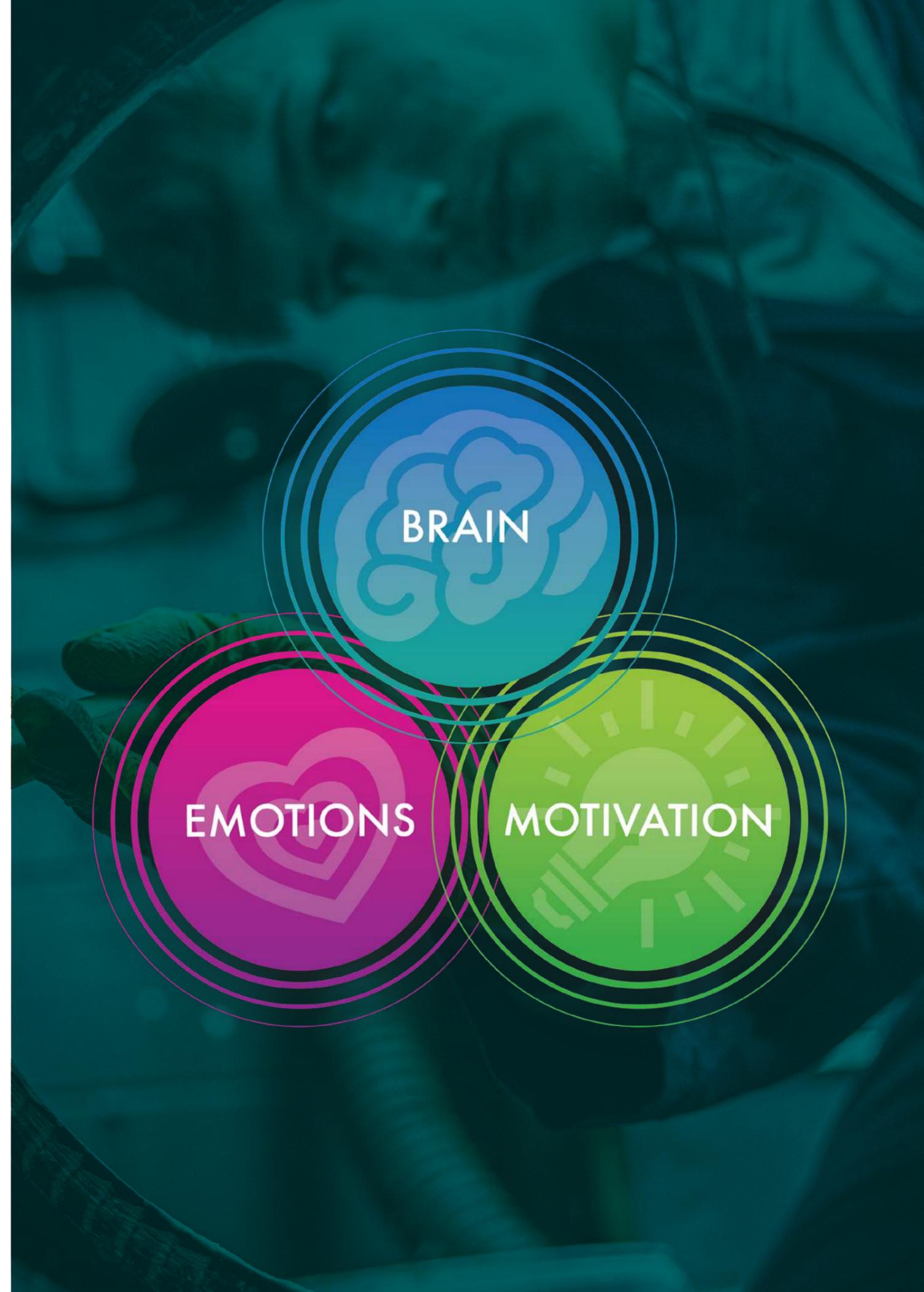
In February 2023, we won the JISC sponsored AoC Beacon Award for the Innovative Use of Technology in FE.



With the use of their Learning Philosophy, they developed an online programme that prioritises continual feedback to help learners develop and succeed at their own pace.

Since implementing the programme, Activate Learning has seen improvements in GCSE pass rates and received positive feedback from learners who are benefitting from a more flexible way of working.”

**JISC report February 2023.**



# Operating context

The landscape of education in the UK is evolving rapidly, and the period 2025–30 will demand agility and resilience from all providers.

Here are some of the things that we will need to consider over the next five years of our strategic cycle:

## Local and national skills needs

The UK's Industrial Strategy and Local Skills Improvement Plans highlight the urgent demand for skills in priority sectors such as advanced manufacturing, creative industries, defence, digital, health, construction and green technologies. Net zero ambitions and the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) are reshaping workforce requirements, creating new roles and transforming existing ones. Locally, employers need agile, work-ready talent with both technical and transferable skills. Nationally, there is a growing emphasis on aligning education with economic growth and productivity.

## Changing needs of our learners and apprentices

The expectations of our learners and apprentices are evolving rapidly. Young people increasingly seek purpose-driven work and flexible pathways into meaningful careers. There is also a growing demand for high-quality SEND provision, reflecting increased awareness and identification of learning needs. Adult learners often prefer bite-sized, modular learning delivered through technology, enabling them to upskill around work and family commitments. Across all groups, learners and apprentices expect inclusive, personalised and digitally-enabled experiences that support progression, wellbeing and lifelong learning in a fast-changing world.

## Devolution

The shift towards localism in education funding and governance presents a significant opportunity to improve outcomes for local people. Devolved authorities and mayoral combined authorities are gaining greater control over skills budgets, enabling more targeted responses to regional priorities. This changing landscape encourages collaboration between education providers, employers and civic leaders to co-design solutions that reflect local economic and social needs.

## Changing workplaces and expectations of our people

Workplaces are being transformed by technology, hybrid working and changing employee expectations around wellbeing, purpose and development. Staff increasingly value inclusive cultures, opportunities for growth and meaningful work that aligns with personal values. These shifts are influencing how organisations attract, retain and support their people. In education, the ability to adapt to new ways of working and foster a culture of innovation and collaboration is essential. The expectations of staff are evolving alongside those of learners and apprentices, requiring organisations to rethink how they lead, engage and develop their workforce.

## Government policy in Further Education

Government policy in further education is increasingly focused on driving productivity and economic growth. Initiatives such as the Skills and Growth Levy, the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, T Levels and Skills Bootcamps reflect a shift towards more flexible, employer-responsive and outcomes-driven provision. There is a growing emphasis on aligning education with labour market needs.



# Organisational goals

To achieve our vision and purpose, we have identified seven key organisational goals for 2025–30. These goals focus on our people, our financial resilience and the reach and impact of our educational provision.

Each goal is critical to our success over the next five years and will guide our initiatives, investments and efforts.

## People and culture

We will foster an extraordinary mindset in our staff and continue to develop an inclusive culture at Activate Learning, where we invest in our people to make our colleges and various training providers outstanding places to work and grow.

We will co-create a positive and supportive workplace culture that attracts, develops and retains talented colleagues. This means living our values and placing a strong emphasis on wellbeing, equity and continuous professional development.

Our Learning Philosophy will form the foundation of how we support and nurture our colleagues, ensuring everyone can learn, progress and succeed in a safe and encouraging environment.

We want every colleague to feel a sense of belonging and purpose, to have their voice heard and to know how they contribute to our mission. By building an environment where our people can be at their best, we will not only be an employer of choice in our sector but also drive better outcomes for our learners and apprentices through engaged and motivated people.



## Connecting young people to opportunities in local and national priority sectors.

We will strengthen the links between education and employment so that young people leaving Activate Learning have clear routes into meaningful careers in high-growth and high-need sectors.

To do this, we will work closely with employers, industry, councils and local enterprise partnerships, to ensure our curriculum is current and relevant to emerging workforce needs.

We will develop programmes and qualifications in priority sectors, for example, digital technologies, engineering, healthcare and green industries, and embed real-world learning experiences such as industry projects, work placements and mentorship into our programmes.

Activate Learning is committed to helping to address regional and national skills gaps by reinforcing our role as a provider of talent for business and a catalyst for economic growth.

## Transforming our approach to adult education

We will reimagine how we deliver education for adult learners, making it more accessible, flexible and responsive to their needs.

This includes broadening our range of courses for adults, from foundational skills to higher-level qualifications and offering more flexible learning options such as online and hybrid programmes, evening or weekend classes and short courses that fit around work and family life.

Building on the success of our award-winning Activate Learning Online provision, we will continue to remove barriers that adult learners often face, by providing supportive, personal and technology-enhanced learning environments.

We will also strengthen partnerships with local employers and community organisations to ensure our adult education offer is closely linked to the needs of our local economies, helping individuals reskill or advance in their careers.

By transforming adult education, we aim to empower more adults to engage in lifelong learning, which in turn drives social mobility and fulfils our commitment to transforming lives at every stage.



## Expanding programmes for learners with high needs

Activate Learning has a proud reputation for excellence in its high-needs and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision, earning Good with an Outstanding features for specialist programmes and support by Ofsted in our last three inspections

Over the next five years, we will build on this strength by significantly increasing the capacity of our high-needs provision. This means welcoming more learners who have SEND or require extra support and ensuring we have the infrastructure and expertise to help them thrive. We will invest in additional specialist staff, training and resources to maintain this provision.

Our campuses and services will continue to be fully accessible and inclusive, providing safe and nurturing environments for learning.

We will also work closely with local authorities, schools and parents to identify needs early and create even smoother transitions into our colleges for high-needs learners.

By expanding opportunities for these learners, we reaffirm that our mission to transform lives through learning truly extends to everyone, regardless of circumstance.



## Growing our education provision in Surrey

Having incorporated our Surrey colleges into Activate Learning in 2019, we are committed to unlocking their potential as vibrant centres of learning and skill development.

Over the course of this five-year strategy, we will focus on increasing student and apprenticeship enrolment, broadening curriculum offerings and enhancing the quality of provision at our Surrey campuses.

Our goal is to see Guildford College, Merrist Wood College and University Centre, and Farnham College flourish with their own identities, but which strengthen the larger group. By growing our Surrey colleges, we want to extend our mission into new areas, ensuring that more learners and apprentices across the region have access to the extraordinary learning experiences and opportunities that define our group.



## Financial stability and health

It's important for us to secure the long-term financial sustainability and health of the organisation to enable our strategic ambitions.

We will maintain a strong and sustainable financial position that underpins all aspects of this strategy. By safeguarding our financial health, we can remain resilient in the face of external challenges and continue to provide high-quality education and services. In short, financial stability is key to our ability to expand opportunities for learners and deliver on every goal in this plan.

## Maximising the Activate Learning advantage

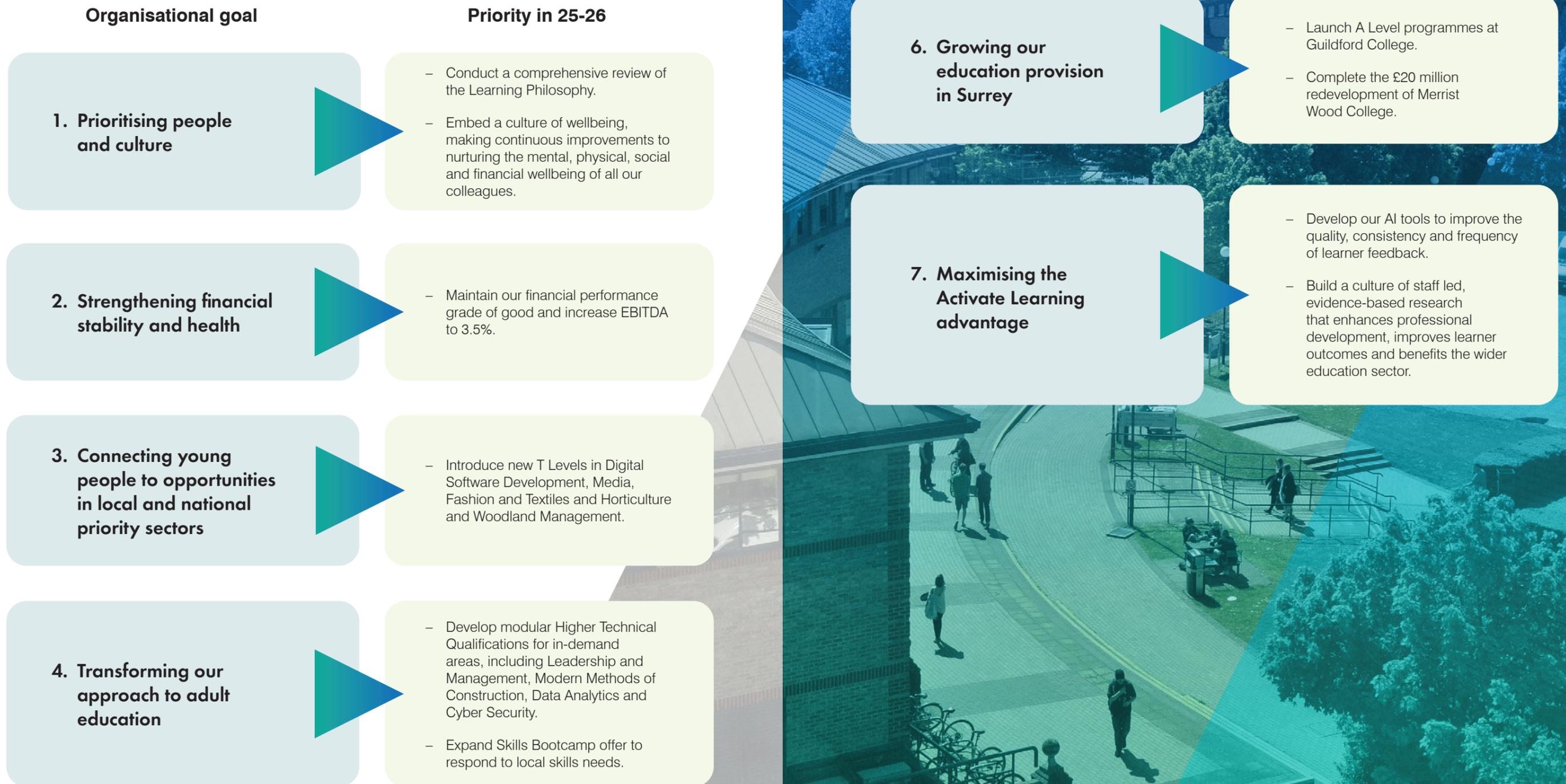
We will leverage our strength as one of the country's largest further education groups and capitalise on our strong digital, AI and online learning capabilities, infrastructure and extensive employer partnerships to maximise opportunities for learners across our group.

Through strategic alliances and influential policy engagements, we will strengthen our position as a national leader in education innovation, helping to influence educational reform and expand our capacity to deliver extraordinary learning outcomes.



## Organisational goals - our priorities for the 2025-26 academic year

Activate Learning wants the Extraordinary Learning Strategy to be something that grows and evolves over its five-year cycle. Which is why we have made the commitment to update this section of the strategy on an annual basis, to reflect the progress we've made on our annual goals and objectives into the next year. Here are our objectives for the academic year 2025-26:



**Activate Learning**

Oxpens Road  
Oxford  
OX1 1SA

0800 612 6008  
[enquiries@activatelearning.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@activatelearning.ac.uk)  
[activatelearning.ac.uk](http://activatelearning.ac.uk)

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