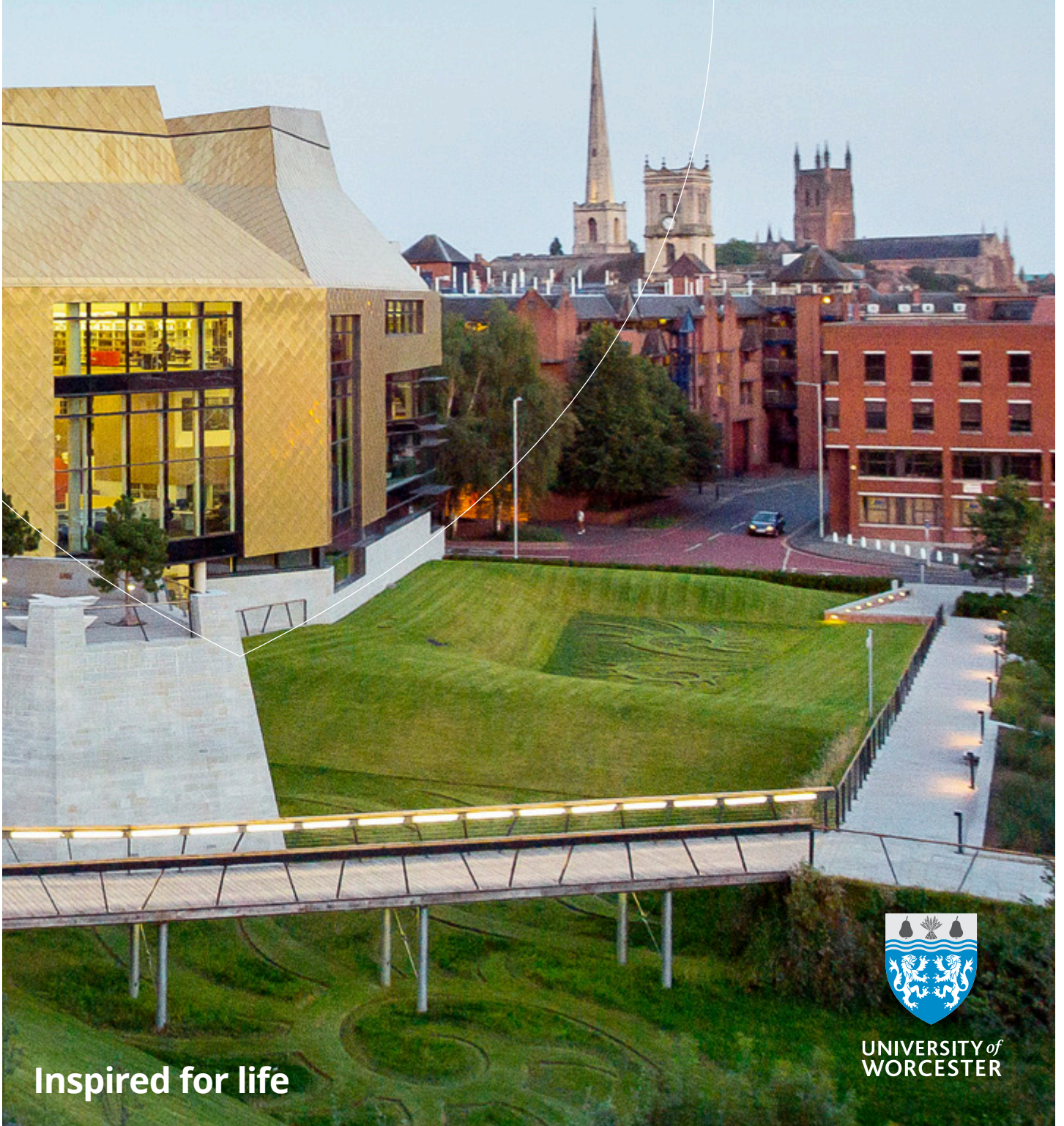


# VALUES & VISION

STRATEGIC PLAN 2026—2030



Inspired for life



UNIVERSITY of  
WORCESTER



### St John's Campus

Where our inclusive and transformative mission began — shaping graduates who make a lasting impact

## Inspired for life

**The University of Worcester has an enduring mission: to be a university where education is inclusive, transformative and excellent.**

The work of the University and its graduates has a profound impact for the good of the city, county, country and wider world. 🍷

As we look towards the 2030s, this Strategic Plan reaffirms this mission while setting out a bold, practical route forward. It is a plan shaped by our students, staff, partners, Fellows and friends, and grounded in a shared commitment to exceptional education, graduate success and beneficial, inclusive impact for the whole community.

**This is a roadmap for real progress.** It outlines how we will respond to the demands of a changing world by expanding participation and increasing the number of students studying at Worcester, delivering outstanding outcomes for graduates, remaining 'top for jobs' and enabling our region to flourish as a centre of economic dynamism and social progress.

# Our values

**Founded in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War to ‘win the peace through education’, the University of Worcester has, from its first day, been a force for personal flourishing and social good.** Today, as the UK faces heightened geopolitical instability, rapid technological change and increasing pressures on social cohesion, this founding mission carries renewed significance.

Worcester strengthens the country’s resilience by educating professionals who uphold essential public services, advancing research that supports community wellbeing and environmental security, and championing the democratic, inclusive values that underpin a stable and prosperous society. At a time when the country depends on capable graduates, principled leadership, and institutions that sustain public trust, Worcester plays a vital role in serving the wider national interest.

Our core beliefs define our purpose and guide every decision.

**We uphold intellectual openness and a love of learning. We promote educational and social inclusion, equality and fairness. We act with kindness and respect, maintain the highest ethical and professional standards, and embrace our responsibility for environmental sustainability and social progress.** ♥

These principles shape our culture, ‘inspired for life’, and make Worcester a beacon of inclusion. They underpin our evidence-based teaching, commitment to mental wellbeing, and amplification of the student voice.

The way we have developed our facilities reflects this civic mission. The Hive, Europe’s first integrated university and public library, and our inclusive sports Arena, exemplify our commitment to community: opening doors, raising aspirations and embedding shared practice at the heart of university life.

These values will continue to guide our ethos and approach throughout the period covered by this Strategic Plan and beyond.

## Aspiring to inspire

Continuing our founding mission to educate professionals who strengthen communities and uphold public services



# Context

## Challenges and resilience at the University of Worcester

The past decade has seen higher education tested as never before: a global pandemic, political volatility, economic uncertainty, rapid technological transformation and destabilising legislation. These events have reshaped student expectations and disrupted long-standing models of education and research.

The Covid-19 pandemic profoundly impacted the University's core strengths, including personal engagement and close partnership working, which have long been central to our success. The restrictions and uncertainties of the pandemic disrupted collaborative initiatives and strained the sense of community that underpins the institution's ethos.

Changes to the national framework for higher education in England between 2012 and 2017 damaged what had previously been a stable, dynamic and high-quality system, creating a turbulent and unpredictable environment for universities.

At the beginning of these reforms, Government funding for higher education fell by a fifth. For Worcester, this translated into a financially challenging period from 2022 to 2025.

Despite these headwinds, the University of Worcester has demonstrated remarkable resilience.

**Worcester was shortlisted for the highly prestigious Times Higher Education 'University of the Year' award four times between 2015 and 2025. ♥**

Worcester achieved a series of notable successes by following a distinctive, purposeful, values-led approach:

## Educational excellence and student success

### Graduate employment:

Ranked as the best university in the UK for sustained graduate employment 2017–25, affirming the value and relevance of our academic programmes.

### International student growth:

First university to attract a significant, high-calibre cohort of international nursing students.

### Medical School launch:

Successfully established a new Medical School with funded places, expanding the University's contribution to healthcare education, with first students to graduate in 2027.

## Outstanding social impact

### Severn Campus development:

Created a campus for health, wellbeing and inclusive sport, featuring state-of-the-art simulation education facilities. Transformed the former Worcester News building.

### Outstanding Ofsted report:

Secured an exceptional Ofsted evaluation in 2023 for primary and secondary teacher training, highlighting the quality and impact of our provision.

### Health professional education growth:

Introduced programmes in Diagnostic Radiography, Nutrition and Dietetics, and Operating Department Practice, significantly broadening our health education portfolio.

### Academic freedom:

Took a balanced, respectful, tolerant approach to the discussion of contentious issues, while nurturing expression, liberty and democratic values.

## Institutional sustainability

### Financial recovery:

Reversed the decline in home student numbers in 2025 and resumed growth in income, laying the base for future growth.

### Values-led approach:

We navigated sector-wide challenges with integrity and courage, maintaining a decent and measured stance that upheld staff morale and our inclusive ethos. Worcester's approach meant we were unaffected by the marking and assessment boycott of 2024, ensuring continuity for our students. We safeguarded vital humanities subjects, championing their role in a democratic society, and spoke truth unto power when it mattered most — advocating for fairness and sustainability across the sector.

### These achievements provide a strong foundation for the next phase of strategic planning and institutional growth.

Real-term declines in public funding, major demographic shifts and intensifying competition will continue to challenge the higher education sector. This Strategic Plan is our dynamic response to that complexity. At its heart is a single, unifying priority: to create meaningful impact.



**Severn Campus for Health and Wellbeing**

Home to the Three Counties Medical School and state-of-the-art facilities for sport and health education

# Our vision

**Our ambition is to be even stronger as an engine of opportunity, a springboard for our students and a powerhouse for society.**

We will realise this ambition by increasing our impact across three strategic areas, each defined by a bold **aim** and driven by practical **transformation priorities**. Together, these provide a coherent framework for action that ensures clarity, accountability and momentum, while remaining flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances.

We will achieve our vision by:

## Expanding our reach

*Reach is the number and diversity of people and communities we engage and support*

## Delivering outstanding quality

*Quality is the excellence of our teaching, research and knowledge exchange*

## Deepening social relevance

*Social relevance is the significance of our work to society*

### The University of Worcester Arena

Combining high-quality facilities with social purpose to reach and inspire diverse communities



# Expanding reach

## Two-thirds of young people in our region participating in higher level education

### Our aim in action: pathways into learning

Working in partnership with multi-academy trusts, further education colleges, employers and other institutions, the University is creating new and inclusive pathways into learning.

Nursing student Temitope returned to higher education as a mature student: 'Studying as a parent has definitely been a challenge at times, but it has also been incredibly rewarding. I've had fantastic support from the University, my lecturers and the placement team, who really understand that family life doesn't stop when you're studying. Knowing there is flexibility and encouragement when things come up has made it possible for me to balance my degree with my family.'

The University Business School's *Help to Grow* Programme has supported learners at a different stage in life, accelerating the growth of more than 120 SMEs through a blend of online and in-person learning and mentoring. Richard, who founded his business during the pandemic, reflects: 'I joined the programme three years into building the business, and it really helped me pull together a clear strategy and grow the business profitably.'

Adapting flexibly to the needs of the modern workforce is a vital ingredient in the University's contribution to fostering greater regional economic growth.

#### A supportive learning environment

Developing life-saving skills safely in specialist facilities and simulated scenarios



# Expanding our reach

## Aim: Two-thirds of young people in our region participating in higher level education

We reaffirm our founding principle of ‘winning the peace through education’ by tackling social inequalities and enabling success through learning and skills. **This plan sets out a bold vision: to widen access to higher education, champion lifelong learning and ensure every student has the opportunity to flourish.** It will actively seek to deliver the Government target of two-thirds of young people participating in higher level learning.

### A resilient and values-led expansion

Despite national declines in home student numbers, Worcester has shown remarkable resilience. In 2025, UK applications to Worcester rose by **14%**, far exceeding the national increase of 1.4%. This defining moment marked a pivotal point for Worcester and provides a strong foundation for future growth.

Our commitment to inclusive recruitment has created a more diverse student body, with widening participation at the heart of our admissions strategy. But, we must do more.

In London, **64% of 19-year-olds enter higher education**, more than **16 percentage points above the West Midlands** average. London also leads in progression for students eligible for Free School Meals.

### Higher education progression rate

| Region        | Free School Meal | Non-Free School Meal |
|---------------|------------------|----------------------|
| London        | 48.3%            | 63.6%                |
| West Midlands | 30.2%            | 47.8%                |
| South West    | 19.3%            | 42.4%                |

*DfE Dataset: Widening participation in higher education 2023/24*

For many London students, university feels like a logical next step — a reflection of a deeply rooted culture of ambition. Students are more likely to apply when their peers do the same. High aspirations are reinforced by targeted outreach, strong school—university partnerships and clear employment prospects after graduation. Education is seen as a powerful route to success and social mobility.

These elements create an environment where progression to university is both encouraged and achievable.

Learning from London’s success, we aim to deepen our partnerships with schools, colleges, multi-academy trusts and employers.

**Our goal is to raise participation rates in Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Shropshire, Gloucestershire and the Black Country to match those in London.**

To achieve this, we must embrace inclusivity and strengthen collaboration with our partners. Together, we will expand access to higher education, particularly for those historically underrepresented. We will drive skills development and contribute to economic growth by fostering a more educated, empowered and prosperous society.

## Transformation priorities

### A educational alliance for the region

Achieving London-level success demands imaginative initiatives and deeper collaboration — and Worcester is uniquely positioned to help lead this transformation. As one of the UK’s largest providers of teacher training, our network of schools and multi-academy trusts is unparalleled. As the only university in Worcestershire, we enjoy strong relationships with local authorities, businesses and community partners.

Our strengthened approach to partnership will seek to **establish a collaborative, educational group**, bringing together multi-academy trusts, further education colleges and other institutions. Each partner will align with local skills priorities while benefiting from Worcester’s academic quality and student experience standards. Shared curricula, blended-learning platforms and ‘associate student’ access to university resources will ensure consistency across the network — while allowing each institution to showcase its unique strengths.

Together, we will create a regional ecosystem of higher education that raises attainment, retains talent and drives economic growth across the wider West Midlands.

### Flexible learning for a modern workforce

We will expand and enhance our **professional and lifelong learning offer** to meet evolving labour market needs and widen access to flexible, high-quality education. Working with employers and sector bodies, we will deliver **short courses, micro credentials, modular degrees, apprenticeships and postgraduate programmes** aligned with regional and national skills priorities in areas such as health, education, digital security and leadership. This will boost workforce development, career progression and regional innovation.

New and streamlined enrolment processes will improve access for self funded and employer-sponsored learners. Using opportunities created by the **Lifelong Learning Entitlement**, learners will be able to build qualifications at their own pace through nationally recognised, portable credits. Flexibility will be enhanced through evening and weekend teaching, hybrid delivery and multiple entry points across the year.

**Hybrid and online learning** will play a central role in widening participation. Programmes will be designed for dual and fully online delivery, enabling seamless movement between campus, workplace and home. To deliver this, we will invest in **digital infrastructure** — including virtual labs, AI-enabled tools and advanced digital assessment — as well as staff development. Our colleagues will be supported to adopt innovative digital pedagogy and deliver high-quality hybrid learning across all programmes.

### International growth and diversity

Worcester has already taken major strides in growing its international student community, welcoming learners from more than 100 countries.

This momentum provides a powerful platform for the next phase of growth and for strengthening our ability to diversify at scale. Our vision is to extend international enrolment across a broader range of courses, with a particular opportunity to rebuild and grow student numbers from across the European Union, alongside continued development in other priority regions. By **widening the portfolio of programmes** that attract international and EU learners, developing high-quality online and blended learning, and working proactively in new and existing markets, we will strengthen the University’s global reach and resilience. This approach will support the creation of a vibrant, successful and globally inclusive academic community, while increasing opportunities for cultural exchange, collaboration and shared learning on campus and beyond.

# Outstanding quality

## Be the best university for graduate outcomes

### Our aim in action: meaningful placements

History student Emma exemplifies how transformative a University of Worcester placement can be. During her time at the Museum of Royal Worcester, Emma didn't just apply her learning, she discovered new strengths, built professional confidence, and uncovered a passion for the heritage sector she hadn't fully imagined before.

Thrown into real responsibility from day one, Emma helped update public-facing exhibition catalogues, reviewed the Museum's audio guide for international audiences, and worked with archival collections. Each task pushed her to grow.

She describes gaining 'a lot of resilience' and developing research skills that 'you can only learn by doing'.

Crucially, the placement helped Emma clarify her future. Inspired by the work and the trust placed in her, she now plans to return voluntarily to complete her project.

Emma's experience shows how placements empower students to stretch themselves, explore new pathways, and make meaningful contributions.

#### Learning beyond the classroom

Meaningful placements help learners discover strengths, gain experience and shape future careers



# Delivering outstanding quality

## Aim: Be the best university for graduate outcomes

We will strengthen our position as a leading provider of outstanding, professional education — education that unlocks potential and equips individuals, regardless of background, to flourish.

At the heart of this vision is a commitment to **high-quality teaching that is inclusive, inspiring, socially purposeful**, and grounded in pedagogically and developmentally sound practice. By continually raising teaching standards, enhancing curriculum design and valuing every student as an individual, we will maximise the second element of our impact formula: **quality**.

We will empower students to reflect on how they learn, fostering the understanding that **the ultimate goal is to learn how to learn — a skill that lasts a lifetime**.

Building on our record of innovation, we will lead in the ethical application of AI for education and professional practice, combining technology with positive human values. We will embrace AI as a tool for quality, efficiency and equity, ensuring it enhances learning rather than replaces the human connection at the heart of education.

### Equipping students for long, fulfilling and adaptable careers

Preparing students for adaptable, rewarding careers is central to our mission. Worcester has consistently ranked as the UK's leading university for sustained graduate employment. Since the launch of the Government's **Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO)** data in 2017, **Worcester has averaged the top position among multi-subject universities for graduates in sustained employment, further study or both, measured at one, three and five years after graduation.**

This achievement is all the more remarkable given that, throughout the 21st century, at least 97% of the University's students have come from state-educated backgrounds, and the University's rural location offers limited direct access to major industrial and professional hubs. It reflects our strong commitment to practical, career-focused education and the partnerships that help open doors for our graduates.

We will continue to aim to be outstanding and consistently one of the very best universities in the UK for graduate outcomes across all subjects.

### The golden triangle of professional education

Our success is built on a powerful combination: curriculum innovation, 'earn-as-you-learn' opportunities, additional qualifications, work placements and strong partnerships with employers.

At the heart of this approach is **the golden triangle of professional education — an integrated model that brings together the expert professional practitioner, the inspiring academic educator and the ambitious student**. This distinctive blend defines Worcester and ensures that learning is both academically rigorous and professionally relevant.

This model was highlighted in Worcester's TEF 2023 report, which described it as 'an engine of opportunity — supporting its students to benefit from an educational experience that is personally transformative and allows them to succeed in their chosen career'.

Looking ahead, we aim to grow the number of graduates who thrive in the workplace, contribute to their communities and continue learning throughout life, positioning Worcester as a leading university for professional development. By increasing participation and supporting every student to succeed, regardless of background, we extend our impact exponentially.

When delivered at scale and with relevance to society, **quality education becomes a transformative force for social mobility and economic growth**.

## Transformation priorities

### Academic breadth as a strategic strength

Our vision places Worcester's broad academic portfolio at the heart of our identity and future success. We will sustain and strengthen this breadth, spanning the arts, humanities, sciences, health, education, business and sport, because it enriches student choice, fosters interdisciplinary thinking and underpins the University's civic mission. To ensure that specialist and emerging disciplines continue to thrive, we will develop innovative models for shared modules, collaborative teaching and flexible delivery. At postgraduate level, we will broaden opportunity through integrated programmes, specialist pathways and conversion routes that enable graduates from any background to enter high-demand fields such as data analytics, education and mental health practice.

Across all levels, our programmes will remain academically rigorous, industry connected and responsive to student ambition. By protecting our breadth while innovating boldly, we will maintain a sustainable, future-ready curriculum that equips learners with the adaptability and insight needed for a rapidly changing world.

### Experiential learning pledge

Every Worcester programme will aim to offer high-quality placements or hands-on learning that build on our golden triangle of professional education, ensuring graduates have employer-valued practical skills. By leveraging our strong employer and community partnerships, these experiences will enrich academic study, boost employability and deepen our civic impact.

Supported by an integrated careers and alumni ecosystem, students will map and develop their skills throughout their studies, with continued access to careers advice, CPD and start-up support after graduation. A revitalised Alumni Network will further expand opportunities through mentoring, practitioner input and industry engagement, creating a powerful cycle of support that connects students, graduates and employers.

### Digital capabilities to enhance student success

By bringing together human insight and technological innovation, Worcester will create a learning community where every individual can thrive.

Building on our distinctive ethos, where every student is known, supported and encouraged, we will use technology to unlock new forms of insight, creativity and possibility across the whole institution.

AI-supported learning will offer each student a unique, adaptive journey: intelligent tutoring that understands how they learn best; immediate, constructive feedback that strengthens understanding; and personalised coaching that anticipates challenges before they arise. Our rapidly evolving 360-degree student insight platform will allow colleagues to offer support with unprecedented precision and care, ensuring no learner is left behind.

Immersive environments and advanced simulation will prepare students for the professions of tomorrow. Whether diagnosing a virtual patient, resolving a simulated safeguarding scenario or navigating a cyber breach, learners will develop confidence through safe, authentic practice that accelerates their readiness for the world beyond university.

We will embed AI literacy across every discipline, empower staff through professional development and uphold the highest ethical standards. Our digital transformation will free colleagues to focus on what matters most: building meaningful relationships with students and nurturing their talents.

# Social relevance

## Be a true civic university for the region

### Our aim in action: civic impact

The Hive is Europe's first fully integrated university and public library. It welcomes more than one million visitors each year and offers 94 hours of weekly access, exceptional for a public library.

At its centre is one of the UK's largest children's libraries, supporting reading and literacy, and raising aspirations from the earliest years. The Hive's *Learning Outside the Classroom* programme supports over 30,000 young people each year, while digital inclusion initiatives have helped more than 150,000 users access technology.

Through shared study spaces, cultural programming, research engagement and inclusive services, The Hive plays a sustained role in supporting social mobility, community cohesion and lifelong learning across the city and wider region.

#### The Hive

A shared space in the heart of Worcester, supporting learning, culture and community connection



# Deepening social relevance

## Aim: Be a true civic university for the region

Worcester is a university deeply rooted in place, playing a vital role in shaping the health, wellbeing and prosperity of our city and region. Our civic mission is expressed through partnerships, research, public engagement and an inclusive culture that ensures our work remains relevant and transformative.

The Hive, Europe's first university and public library, is an outstanding resource for the people of Worcestershire and our students. The University Arena, the first facility purpose-designed to include wheelchair athletes, stands as a national and international beacon of inclusion.

We anticipated the acute shortage in the health workforce and acted early, creating new provision long before most institutions. Worcester achieved the **largest increase in nursing and midwifery** numbers of any UK university following the pandemic, led the national campaign to reverse the 2011 cuts to nurse training numbers and advocated for increased medical student places.

Our long-standing excellence in teacher education and school leadership was confirmed by the **2023 Ofsted report**, one of the best inspection reports of the 21st century. Its opening sentence captured the inspectors' view of our 'outstanding' provision: **'Trainees benefit from an exceptional learning experience at the University of Worcester'**.

Other successes include our responsible leadership during the pandemic and our continuing record in gender equality. Sustainability is embedded in our curriculum and student life, driven by strong student engagement and institutional leadership that ensures continuous progress.

## Transformation priorities

### Innovation for healthier lives

Across teaching, research and civic partnerships, we will promote healthier lives and a more sustainable regional health and care system.

The further development of the Severn Campus for Health & Wellbeing will form an important part of this ambition, providing a hub for innovative teaching, research and community-focused health activity. Working with NHS trusts, local authorities and industry partners, we will explore securing university hospital status as well as wider opportunities to create integrated services that bring diagnostics, rehabilitation, prevention and wellbeing support closer to local people.

Aligned with the NHS Long-Term Plan, our work will support key shifts from hospital-based to community care, analogue to digital and sickness to prevention. The continued growth of the Medical School and new programmes such as Pharmacy and an expanded professional development programme will expand the region's skilled health workforce.

Our research will address health inequalities, especially in rural and underserved communities, with priorities including mental health across the lifespan, healthy ageing and supporting people living with long-term conditions.

Alongside this, we will expand community health and wellbeing initiatives that increase activity levels, reduce preventable admissions and demonstrate the University's impact on longer, healthier lives across the region.

### A national leader in education and early years

Expanding and further developing Worcester's outstanding teacher-training provision is central to our social mission. With an extensive network of schools and multi-academy trusts, we are well positioned to grow primary, secondary and early years cohorts while embedding inclusive practice and evidence-based pedagogy across classrooms in the region.

Research will focus on developing resilient, healthy and socially responsible learners — from early years settings through to higher education. Priority research areas will include infant mental health, play and early development, teacher efficacy, pupil and teacher wellbeing, and critical thinking skills.

Working closely with schools, multi-academy trusts and other partners, we will ensure our research is practice-informed, market-relevant and capable of driving real change in educational settings.

### Renewal through creativity and sustainability

The University of Worcester will drive a shared cultural and environmental ambition for Worcestershire, Herefordshire and the Black Country, strengthening regional identity, boosting economic renewal and enhancing social inclusion.

Through the Worcester Cultural Compact, we will integrate our teaching, research and student placements with the city's cultural calendar, turning events into living classrooms that build skills and expand participation. The Hive library will anchor this work, extending cultural engagement across communities and reinforcing Worcester's reputation as a vibrant, creative city.

Environmental sustainability remains one of our core strengths. We will deepen sustainability across curriculum, operations and partnerships, while maintaining transparent reporting and supporting student-led initiatives. The development of the Lakeside Campus as a 50-acre outdoor learning centre will provide hands-on experience in ecology, conservation and nature-based education, advancing environmental responsibility across the region.

Together, these cultural and environmental commitments position the University of Worcester as a catalyst for regional renewal — championing creativity, wellbeing and sustainability as drivers of long-term prosperity.

# Implementation

## A programme for sustained growth, transformation and long-term resilience

Securing the University's long-term financial strength is essential to achieving our ambitions for students, staff, partners and our region. Financial sustainability underpins our capacity to invest, innovate and adapt, while strong governance ensures effective oversight, accountability and risk management. Through a purposeful programme of growth, reform and disciplined decision-making, this plan positions the University to thrive in a changing landscape.

### Our growth will be fuelled by:

- **Expanding our student numbers**, particularly through the growth of health-related disciplines, professional development pathways, postgraduate study and the flexible learning opportunities enabled by the Lifelong Learning Entitlement.
- **Increasing our research and consultancy income**, building on our strong foundations to further intensify our research activity and external engagement.
- **Diversifying and strengthening income streams**, including establishing a highly professional development function, embracing a more ambitious fundraising culture, and actively securing philanthropic and grant funding that aligns with our mission and values.

### Our efficiencies and reforms will be driven through:

- **Embracing technology and AI to transform how we work** — freeing colleagues to focus on high-value activity, improving services and building a more agile, responsive organisation.
- **Strengthening our educational and sector partnerships** to enhance the student experience and ensure value for money.
- **Good governance** with clear accountability, robust oversight and proactive risk management, ensuring that decision-making supports financial sustainability, academic integrity and our public responsibilities.

### Our work will remain grounded in our values and guided by three core principles:

- **Investing in people**  
We are a collaborative community, united in improving outcomes for students, strengthening wellbeing locally and nationally, and supporting each other to thrive.
- **Digital empowerment**  
We embrace modern technology and data to achieve our goals — even when it challenges traditional ways of working. Innovation drives us forward.
- **Focus on beneficial outcomes**  
We work with clarity and structure, tracking progress, reporting regularly and celebrating success. Accountability and momentum keep us on course.



To find out more about our strategic approach, including governance documents and high-level policies, visit [worchester.ac.uk/strategic-plan](https://worchester.ac.uk/strategic-plan)

### City Campus

Combining a proud heritage with a clear vision for the future – focused on quality, reach and lasting impact





**A modern education  
seated in tradition**

Worcester is now truly a  
University and Cathedral City

# Inspired for life



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