

Organisational Context and Priorities

Runshaw College is a long-established and high-performing tertiary institution serving South Ribble, Chorley and the wider Lancashire region. Founded in 1974 as a small sixth-form college for two local high schools, it has grown into a strategically important college with a national reputation for excellence and in 2024 celebrated fifty years of changing lives through education. The College's mission – that exceptional education changes lives, so teaching, learning and the needs of students come first – remains at the heart of everything it does.

The College serves a broad and diverse catchment spanning eight local authority districts, including South Ribble, Chorley, Preston, Bolton, Wigan, and parts of Sefton and West Lancashire. Over a quarter of Runshaw's students come from minority ethnic backgrounds, well above the Lancashire average, and the College takes pride in the richness this brings to its community. Its provision spans academic, vocational, adult learning and apprenticeship programmes, and is shaped by close, longstanding relationships with over sixty partner high schools, employers, the two local authorities, higher education institutions and civic and business bodies including the Chamber of Commerce and the Lancashire Skills and Employment Board.

The College is currently in the third and final year of its 2024–27 Strategic Plan, built around five key priorities: Quality & Curriculum, People & Culture, Innovation & Technology, Facilities & Sustainability, and Student Recruitment & Retention. This is a period of both stability and change: Runshaw has strong foundations, sustained investment in its estate – including the recently completed Buttermere and Health Science facilities, and the Windermere building due for completion ahead of the September 2027 student cohort – and a track record of successful delivery. At the same time, it faces sector-wide pressures common across further education, including a reformed post-16 curriculum from 2027, evolving skills priorities, the ethical adoption of AI and technology, sustainability expectations and the ongoing need to embed inclusive practice.

Leadership Priorities for the Role

The Board is seeking a Principal and CEO who will give a candid and realistic assessment of the College's current position, add pace and energy where it is needed, and build genuine buy-in for the strategy across staff, governors and external partners. A central expectation is that strategy is translated into a living, long-term plan with clear milestones, while financial resilience is maintained through a period of significant capital investment.

In practical terms, the role is expected to focus on:

- Improving educational performance and quality, including further strengthening curriculum impact measures and post-pandemic recovery in areas such as A level outcomes.
- Strengthening culture, staff engagement and workforce readiness ahead of curriculum reform from 2027.
- Sustaining financial stewardship through the completion of the Windermere building and wider estates strategy.
- Maintaining and enhancing the College's external reputation and its partnerships with schools, employers, local authorities and civic bodies.
- Ensuring the curriculum and adult skills offer remain responsive to national policy change and the Local Skills Improvement Plan for Lancashire.
- Embedding the ethical and effective use of technology and AI to improve quality and reduce unnecessary workload.

The successful candidate will be expected to lead delivery of the College's current strategic aims while also shaping the next iteration of the strategy, ensuring Runshaw is ready for a reformed, future-facing curriculum model and continues to grow its position as the first-choice college for the communities it serves.

People-Centred Priorities

Staff engagement and culture are central to the College's continued success, and Runshaw is seeking a leader who is visible, approachable and genuinely present around the College. The College's values of Excellence, Dedication, Respect and Fulfilment are intended to be lived day to day, and staff and students alike describe Runshaw as a place defined by camaraderie, mentoring and a shared commitment to helping learners achieve their fullest potential.

Priorities for developing culture over the period ahead include embedding a genuine culture of continuous improvement, supported by protected time for reflection and self-assessment; ensuring role-specific CPD prepares staff across teaching, support and leadership for sector reform; and building transparent, realistic progression pathways so that staff at every stage of their career can see a future at Runshaw. The College also wants to foster a strong sense of belonging and psychological safety, informed by an evidence-based evaluation of staff experience, and to ensure effort and resource are focused on the activity that makes the most difference to learners and colleagues.



Future Organisational Risks

As with any ambitious and growing college, the Board has identified a number of risks that the new Principal and CEO will need to manage and mitigate:

- Educational performance not keeping pace with the College's strong reputation, particularly in post-pandemic recovery areas.
- Strategy being too short-term in focus, or not becoming genuinely embedded in day-to-day practice.
- The process of cultural change limiting the pace of improvement.
- Financial pressure linked to pay, staff retention and the capital commitment of the Windermere building and wider estates strategy.
- Weak reporting, governance or oversight reducing the Board's ability to provide timely challenge and support.
- Reputational risk should outcomes, quality or the student experience not continue to improve in line with expectations.

Cultural Priorities and Organisational Values

Runshaw's culture is defined by its mission that exceptional education changes lives, and by a vision built around being a great place to study, a great place to work, and a great place for partnerships. The College's values – Excellence, Dedication, Respect and Fulfilment – are intended to shape not just what Runshaw does, but how it does it: through inspirational teaching, exceptional pastoral support, an inclusive and respectful community, and highly productive collaboration with employers and partners.

Governors, employers and civic leaders alike describe Runshaw as a trusted anchor institution at the heart of its community, one that raises aspiration and helps meet local skills needs while supporting individual students to thrive. The College is looking for a leader who will protect and advance this culture: someone who is calm, honest and respectful, who leads through collaboration rather than bureaucracy, and who has the emotional intelligence and communication skills to take staff, students and partners with them through a period of continued change.

Values and Behaviours Indicators

Successful leadership at Runshaw will be characterised by clear, consistent behaviours. The Principal and CEO will need to be visible and accessible across the College, building trust through openness and by genuinely listening to, reflecting on and acting upon feedback from staff, students and partners. Integrity and transparent decision-making are essential, as is a clear focus on acting in the best interests of learners and the College rather than personal or departmental advantage.

The successful candidate will balance ambition with realism, being clear about where performance needs to improve while remaining energising and optimistic about what Runshaw can achieve. They will model the values of Excellence, Dedication, Respect and Fulfilment in their own conduct, work collaboratively across the senior team and with governors, and combine strong strategic and analytical thinking with the emotional intelligence needed to lead people through change with confidence and care.

What Success Will Look Like

Over the first twelve to twenty-four months, the Board would expect to see:

- A clear, agreed multi-year strategy with measurable milestones, genuinely embedded across the College rather than confined to planning documents.
- Improved learner outcomes and continued progress against Curriculum Impact Measures, particularly in A level and other post-pandemic recovery areas.
- Strong, streamlined quality assurance and performance monitoring, with teams able to access their own key performance data readily.
- Further enhancing staff confidence, engagement and visible alignment with the College's values.
- Continued financial resilience through completion of the Windermere building and delivery of the wider estates strategy.
- Transparent, timely reporting to governors that supports effective challenge and support.
- Growing student recruitment and market share in Chorley and South Ribble, reinforcing Runshaw's position as the first-choice college for its partner high schools.

For students, success means better achievement, progression and destinations, within a safe and inclusive experience that helps every learner reach their full potential. For staff, it means a more positive, collaborative and high-performing culture in which people feel valued, supported and able to grow. For the College as a whole, it means an institution that is financially resilient, quality-assured and strategically focused, with a reputation that continues to grow across Lancashire and beyond.

Strengthening Capability

Runshaw is a well-led college with strong foundations: effective senior and middle leadership, a supportive Board, sustained investment in its estate, and a genuinely positive relationship with its schools, employers and civic partners. The Board is not looking for major restructuring, but for a leader who can build on these strengths while bringing the strategic clarity, pace and fresh perspective needed to navigate curriculum reform, digital change and continued growth.

The ideal candidate will complement the existing team by bringing strong analytical and problem-solving skills, the ability to turn ambitious strategy into practical, well-communicated delivery, and the maturity and resilience to manage financial pressure and sector change without losing sight of the College's mission and values. Above all, Runshaw is looking for a visible, approachable and values-led Principal and CEO who can inspire confidence, build consensus across a diverse range of stakeholders, and ensure that, as the College moves into its next chapter, exceptional education continues to change lives.

