Leadership Success Profile
South Devon College
Principal and Chief Executive Officer

South Devon College

The Organisation

Organisational Context and Priorities

South Devon College is a values-driven, mission-led organisation with a strong culture of learning at its heart. Its mission is ***Inspiring our community through learning*** and its curriculum vision is a purposeful approach with credibility and a focus on personal development, empowering students to develop the edge they need to succeed. As a key local anchor institution for Torbay and South Devon, the College delivers transformational education, skills and training for individuals and employers, with strategy and performance framed through four core elements of success: Quality, Leadership, People and Resources.

People-Centred Priorities

South Devon College is a people-focused, community-connected college with a strong emphasis on ambition, accountability and care. Staff describe it as warm, friendly, welcoming and strongly learner centred, with a positive culture of continuous improvement and a strong sense of community. New starters reportedly experience the College as notably friendly and welcoming, and leaders describe a real passion for the area and the students the College serves.
The College has recently come through a challenging period and places high importance on stability, trust, communication and collaboration. The leadership approaches that work best are visible, authentic, approachable and collaborative, with change led in a way that keeps staff on board and sustains morale. The new Principal and Chief Executive Officer will therefore be expected to build trust, maintain stability, support retention and strengthen a culture of openness, collective responsibility and evidence-based accountability.



Key Prioirities for the College

The Principal and Chief Executive Officer leads South Devon College and is accountable to the Governing Body for its educational, financial, operational and reputational performance. The postholder reports to the Governing Body through the Chair, serves as Accounting Officer and is a member of the Governing Body and all committees except the Audit Committee. At executive level, the role provides whole-college leadership across strategy, curriculum, quality, finance, people and external influence.

A central priority is to lead development of a College strategy to 2035 in the first year in post, ensuring that it reflects the College's mission and values, is deliverable and supports growth. The postholder will set College-wide KPIs and financial targets, design the operating model needed to deliver the strategy and keep strategic options, including partnerships, under review in a competitive market.

The role carries major responsibility for curriculum, quality and learner outcomes across 14 to 16 direct entry, 16 to 18, adult learning, apprenticeships and higher education. The postholder will be expected to keep learner outcomes improving at or above national averages, maintain readiness for the next Ofsted inspection, ensure that quality assurance and self-assessment drive improvement and lead the College through qualification reform including V Levels, T Levels and level 2 pathways.

The College's context is distinctive and community rooted. The College serves a coastal community with levels of deprivation, a high proportion of lower-level learners and substantial work with young people who are not in education, employment or training. Widening participation, tackling social exclusion, championing social mobility, providing excellent student support and strong links with employers, industry and commerce are among the College's key strategic priorities. The incoming leader will need to support growth and innovation in ways that are realistic for the College's learner base, local economy and geography.

Externally, the Principal and Chief Executive Officer will build strong relationships with the Department for Education, the Further Education Commissioner, employers, schools, universities and local and regional political structures. The role includes leading in a devolved landscape shaped by the move to a mayoral authority, the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority and the Local Skills Improvement Plan, while growing the College's reach beyond Torbay into Teignbridge and the South Hams. The current direct reports are the Vice Principal, Curriculum, Quality and Performance, the Vice Principal, Corporate Services and Deputy CEO, the Director of Finance, the Head of Marketing, PR and Communications and the Executive Assistant to the Principal and CEO.

Finance and risk are equally central. The postholder will need to secure value for money and diversify income through commercial, enterprise and employer-funded activity. The College now has stronger foundations following intervention, and the next phase is to ensure financial resilience alongside growth, curriculum development, staff confidence and continued improvement in outcomes.

Success indicators for the postholder

Success in the first year will be seen in a clear strategy to 2035 agreed with the Governing Body, secure and well-managed relationships with staff, governors and key external stakeholders and continued progress in learner outcomes, quality and financial performance. It will also be reflected in effective leadership of qualification reform, confident operation in the devolved skills landscape, sustained staff morale and retention and a culture in which accountability, evidence-based decision making and care are visible in practice.



The Person

Cultural Priorities

The College's core values are Ambitious, Inclusive and Respectful, and these underpin the drive and behaviours through which the College delivers its mission. The Principal and Chief Executive Officer will need to embody and advance an inclusive, ambitious and caring culture, with visible commitment to safeguarding, equality, diversity, inclusion and equity.

Leaders, governors and staff value strong community connections, close engagement with employers and a rounded educational offer rather than a narrow focus on outcomes alone. The leadership style that best fits this context is open, consultative and grounded in evidence, while still able to set clear expectations and lead improvement. Staff feedback also points to the importance of authenticity, approachability, credibility and collaboration, with leadership that is visible across the College and respectful of existing expertise. The successful candidate will need to work in partnership with the Governing Body and stakeholders to shape the College's future direction while protecting its pastoral and community-focused ethos.

Values and Behaviours

Essential behaviours of the new Principal and Chief Executive Officer include openness with the board, sound judgement, the ability to balance risk and opportunity realistically and a consultative approach that still delivers outcomes. Because the College is seeking to combine growth, accountability and care, the postholder must be able to use data and evidence well, hold others to account and make decisions that are principled and practical.

Behaviours which strengthen trust and engagement across the College will be critical. These include the ability to inspire staff and students, sustain morale during change, recognise staff contribution and build credibility locally, regionally and nationally. Feedback suggests that an autocratic approach would not be effective in this setting, whereas collaborative leadership that listens to expertise and supports communication and stability is more likely to succeed. A strong commitment to inclusion, safeguarding and staff wellbeing is essential, alongside the ability to represent the College confidently with employers, regulators, political stakeholders and partners.

Strengthening Capability

This appointment will strengthen the College's capacity to lead the next phase of strategic development, growth and improvement. The new Principal and Chief Executive Officer will need to be able to bring together whole-college financial accountability, curriculum development, quality improvement, external influence and delivery of a long-term strategy to 2035.

The person specification for this role places emphasis on proven success in delivering outstanding outcomes for students, alongside meeting KPIs, achieving financial performance and delivering growth in a complex organisation, together with senior strategic leadership experience in further education or a closely related setting. Strong understanding of financial management, experience of curriculum development and quality improvement, success in leading change while keeping staff engaged and a track record of partnership building and income generation are all essential. Experience of working with the Department for Education, the Further Education Commissioner, combined or mayoral authorities, LSIPs and external boards would complement the existing leadership context and support the College's next stage of development.

