

Santander Foundation

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Further Education plays a vital role in our education system. It shapes young people's futures, supports the skills our economy needs and opens doors to careers and opportunities, helping them make the most important decisions of their lives. Yet the experiences and support available to young people are far from equal.

For too long, the challenges young people face while in Further Education have received less attention than they deserve. We believe that needs to change.

At Santander UK Foundation, we want to play a part in changing the conversation and, more importantly, changing what happens as a result.

Our 2025–2030 strategy sets out how we will do this. We have a clear focus on young people aged 16–19 who face severe challenges while making their way through Further Education and three interconnected thematic areas: attainment and achievement, transition and progression, and enrichment.

But this is not simply about what we support. It is about how we work. We want to bring fresh thinking to persistent challenges, give young people a meaningful voice in shaping the decisions that affect them, and connect organisations with the insight, ideas and ambition to do things differently.

We recognise that we cannot shift these challenges alone. Our ambition is to be a thoughtful, active and collaborative Foundation – one that learns, challenges, convenes and helps build momentum around the changes Further Education deserves.

This strategy is our commitment to that ambition. It sets out where we will focus, what we want to contribute and the difference we hope to make over the next five years.

Joel Buchanan
Executive Director, Santander Foundation



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WHO WE ARE: OUR VISION AND MISSION



We are Santander UK Foundation, a charitable foundation working to make Further Education fairer, so every young person has the chance to reach their potential. We focus on 16-19-year-olds in Further Education who face the greatest barriers to opportunity.

Our work covers three key areas: attainment and achievement, transition and progression and enrichment. We champion ideas and create opportunities that help young people move forward and succeed, starting in England.

OUR VISION

A fair UK education system that provides all young people with equality of opportunity and where no young person is left behind.

OUR MISSION

Young people aged 16-19 in Further Education facing the most disadvantage are supported to succeed in their education, pursue their career aspirations, and have an enriching experience that prepares them for adulthood.

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WHY FURTHER EDUCATION, AND WHY NOW?

Further Education (FE) plays a vital role in shaping young people's futures. It provides routes into further learning, training and employment, helping young people build the knowledge, skills and confidence to take their next steps.

Yet the opportunities available to young people in FE are not always equal. Colleges support many young people facing significant barriers, but do not receive the financial support needed in all areas, such as pupil premium funding, creating a gap in the additional resources available to support them. Young people facing the greatest barriers can have less access to the support, enrichment and wider experiences that help them succeed.



MORE THAN QUALIFICATIONS

Education is about more than what happens in the classroom. Belonging, confidence, wellbeing and opportunities to explore new interests all matter.

A CRITICAL STAGE IN LIFE

16–19-year-olds are making some of the most important decisions in their life. The experiences and opportunities young people have can shape their future choices, aspirations and pathways.

WHY NOW?

We see an opportunity to bring greater attention, investment and collaboration to Further Education. By working together, we can help create a system where young people have access to the support and opportunities they need.

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WHO WE ARE HERE FOR



Young People aged 16-19 in Further Edcuation experiencing the most disadvantage.

Young people aged 16-19 are making some of the most important decisions as they navigate Further Education. We exist to help create a fairer education system, where every young person has the opportunity to succeed and no one is left behind.

Our focus is on 16–19-year-olds studying in Further Education colleges and Sixth Form Colleges in England. We recognise that the FE sector is broad, so we are starting by focusing on these settings, particularly the young people experiencing the greatest barriers to opportunity, achievement and progression.

We know these barriers are often shaped by circumstances beyond a young person's control.Their access to support, enrichment and opportunities should never be determined by their background or where they study.

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WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE: OUR THREE AIMS



TRANSFORM LIVES OF 16-19-YEAR-OLDS

Every young person deserves a fair chance to succeed. But not everyone has the same opportunities or support. We want to help make Further Education a place where every young person feels they belong, enjoys their learning and has the chance to try new things, build confidence and shape their future.

HELP TELL THE SECTOR STORY

We want more people to understand why Further Education matters and help raise the profile of the sector. By sharing the voices and experiences of young people, colleges and partners, we will shine a light on the difference being made, celebrate success and build greater recognition and support for a fairer future.

BEST-IN-CLASS FUNDER

We want to do more than provide grants. We want to help grow investment in Further Education and build the evidence base of what works best for young people. By listening, learning and working closely with the organisations we support, we will take a fair and flexible approach, sharing insight and adding value to the sector to make the biggest difference to young people.

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OUR THREE AREAS OF FOCUS

Our work focuses on creating better opportunities for 16–19-year-olds in Further Education who face the greatest challenges. We do this through three key areas:

ATTAINMENT & ACHIEVEMENT

Every young person should have a fair chance to succeed. We support work that helps remove barriers to learning, improve achievement and give young people the tools and support to reach their goals.

TRANSITION & PROGRESSION

The move from education into employment or further study should open doors, not create new barriers. We support young people to explore their options, build skills and take confident steps towards their future.

ENRICHMENT

We believe education should be about more than what happens in the classroom. We support opportunities that help young people build confidence, find belonging, discover new interests and enjoy their time in Further Education.



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PARTNERSHIP AT THE HEART OF OUR WORK

We know we cannot create a fairer Further Education experience alone. Lasting change takes collaboration, shared ambition and the involvement of those closest to the issues.

We work with charities, Further Education colleges, funders and sector organisations, bringing together expertise, ideas and resources to achieve more together.

Young people shape our work. We believe they should have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect them. From designing and delivering our funds to assessing applications and making decisions, young people will be involved at every stage of our grant-making. Their experiences, ideas and perspectives will also shape how we tell our stories and share the impact of our work.

We connect people and ideas. We bring organisations together to share knowledge, build relationships and explore opportunities to work differently.

We champion collective action. Through our funding, partnerships and voice, we want to strengthen the FE sector, encourage wider investment and help create lasting change.

Our ambition is to be a trusted partner and catalyst, bringing people, ideas and resources together to create better opportunities for young people.



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RESEARCH, LEARNING AND EVIDENCE

We believe better decisions start with better understanding. Research, evidence and learning will shape how we work, where we invest and how we contribute to change across Further Education.

We build understanding. We commission and use research to better understand the barriers facing young people in Further Education, bringing together existing evidence, data and lived experience.

We learn as we go. We listen to young people, grant holders and partners to understand what is working, what isn't and what could be done differently. We value learning as much as success.

We put evidence into action. We commission research to understand what works, share what we learn and be clear about what we will do as a result. We use this evidence to shape our funding, improve our programmes and guide our future decisions.

We share what we learn. We make insight accessible, share good practice and bring people together to learn from one another. We want our evidence to encourage wider investment, raise the profile of Further Education and influence change.



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How we work: our funding approach

We believe funding should do more than support individual projects. It should help create better opportunities for young people and drive wider change across Further Education. We're excited to launch our first fund in 2027.

Our approach is built around four principles:

We fund what matters.
We invest in initiatives that address barriers facing young people and improve their experience and outcomes in Further Education.

We put young people's voices at the centre.
Their experiences and ideas help shape our priorities, programmes and decisions.

We work in partnership.
We bring charities, colleges, employers and other funders together to help increase the funding available to the Further Education sector.

We believe lasting change takes collective effort, and that by working together, we can achieve more for young people.

We learn and share.
We build evidence, share what works and help organisations tell their stories, raising the profile of the Further Education sector and championing the difference it makes to young people.



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How we will achieve our goals over the next five years

End 2025 — End 2026 (Review Point 1) — End 2027 — End 2029 (Review Point 2) — End 2030

Set Up & Pilot

Launch our first partnership grants.

Test our approach through participation grants.

Put our strategy into action.

Phase One 2026

Consolidation

Publish our research findings.

Share what we have learned and how we will respond.

Put our updated strategy into action.

Phase Two 2026-27

Delivery

Begin field-building

Start delivering grants increasing in scale

Increase storytelling in FE and collaborating with more new funders in the sector

Phase Three 2027-29

Review & Next Phase

Evaluate our progress and impact.

Share what we have learned.

Establish FE legacy partnerships for data retention and plan the Foundation's next phase.

Phase Four 2029-30

**We will regularly review our progress, learn from what works and adapt our approach to ensure we remain focused, responsive and make the greatest possible difference over the next five years.*

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THE CHANGE WE WANT TO SEE

We want to see a fairer education system where every young person has the opportunity to succeed no matter their experiences and ensuring no one is left behind.

We want to see:

More equal opportunities. Young people's access to enrichment, support and opportunities is not determined by their background or circumstances.

Better experiences in education. More young people feel a sense of belonging, enjoy their education and are supported to succeed.

Stronger outcomes and brighter pathways. More young people achieve, progress into further learning, training and employment, and feel confident about their futures.

A stronger, more connected sector. Organisations work together, share learning and have the resources and recognition needed to support young people.

A greater focus on Further Education. The barriers facing young people are better understood, evidence informs decisions and more investment reaches the sector.

OUR AMBITION

We want to help create a future where young people, whatever their circumstances, have the opportunity to achieve their goals in Further Education and take their next steps with confidence.

We know we cannot achieve this alone. Our role is to invest, connect and champion the people and organisations making this change possible.



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THANK YOU

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the development of Santander Foundation's 2025–2030 strategy. Developed through in-depth consultation and collaboration with young people, individuals and organisations from across the Further Education sector, independent consultants, and the Santander Foundation board and team, this strategy reflects a wide range of experiences, insights and perspectives.

We are particularly grateful to everyone who gave their time to take part in consultation and workshop sessions, share their expertise and challenge our thinking. Your contributions have helped shape our shared vision and an ambitious roadmap towards a fairer education system, where every young person has the opportunity to succeed and no one is left behind.

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Registered Charity No: 803655 | Company Registration No: 02509711