



# CITYLIT

INSPIRING PASSIONS · REALISING AMBITIONS

## Strategy 2024



# Our Purpose

## “Bringing people together to enrich lives through learning”

City Lit enriches the lives of individuals and communities in London and beyond. The highest quality learning is the core of what we do, and we deliver more than just knowledge and skills, we also build communities and enhance physical and mental wellbeing.



Our values demonstrate who we are collectively and individually which are:

### Ambitious, imaginative and open hearted.

Our overarching promise to our students is ‘Inspiring Passions and Realising Ambitions’.

For over a hundred years, City Lit has been where doctors learn new languages; people in recovery gain vital employment skills; engineers explore their musical talents; retirees navigate the internet and connect through social media; deaf refugees master British Sign Language; counsellors and fitness professionals enhance their expertise; adults with learning disabilities form an orchestra with top musicians; and young adults discover a rare craft to kickstart their own business.

Whilst adult education in its many forms has declined dramatically nationally in recent decades, at City Lit we have continued to make it relevant and attractive to as wide an audience as possible, both in London and nationally. Ensuring a large and varied curriculum which attracts adults of all ages and backgrounds has been key to this. Through working with our Fellows, such as Sir Grayson Perry, Gillian Anderson, Dame Mary Beard, Lulu and HRH The Princess Royal; partnering with charities like MIND, AgeUK, Samaritans, RNID and Macmillan Cancer Support; producing events with the British Museum, National Gallery and Royal Opera House; we have shown our commitment to the importance of adult education for the intellectual, social and cultural life of London and beyond.

City Lit embraces the diversity of London and caters for the needs of everyone, whatever their background, whatever their ambition.

Across Britain, the need to re-skill and re-educate is becoming the norm for people who need to stay in employment

throughout their lives, we must accept that adults with years of work experience need a learning environment that allows them to flourish and develop.

London’s existing population of 8.5 million is estimated to reach 10 million within 20 years. The government’s own studies predict a huge rise across the southeast of over 65s in the next ten years. As our population ages and we continue to live longer, it means that individuals will be expected to work and contribute to society well beyond the historical age for retirement. Living a full, active and productive life is at the core of City Lit.

The incidence of anxiety, loneliness and depression is on the rise. It is acknowledged that we are currently in a loneliness crisis primarily because we don’t mix with other people as much as we did in the past. This is the result of under-funding in social infrastructure and the convenience of technology that has meant we have become disconnected from society. When people do mix they tend to mix with people like themselves, leading to society becoming more divided. City Lit is committed to bringing people together: to learn, and also to meet, work and socialise with others from diverse backgrounds, encouraging everyone to feel that they belong to a community and our students tell us how important this is to their wellbeing.

For these reasons City Lit remains, not just relevant, but essential to London, Londoners and Britain as a stable and trusted friend who is there to support adults throughout their lives.



# Who We Are!



**Teaching is what we do** and is our top priority, ensuring that we always find a way to deliver for our students. This was never more evident than during the pandemic when we moved online and then carefully implemented social distancing in a way that made our students feel secure in coming back to the college.

**“Putting people at the heart of everything we do”** is one of our core values and proved to stand us in good stead when making decisions during the pandemic. We have worked hard to earn the loyalty of our students and that has paid great dividends when we have faced difficult times.

We are strong believers of **“strategic opportunism.”** Having a clear set of priorities for the medium and long term, combined with the opportunism to take advantage of circumstances that come about has moved us forward in a big way. This flexibility has helped us apply for capital grants, take advantage of relationships to further the college, and weave our way around policy challenges and opportunities. Most importantly it enabled us to turn from an in-person college to an online one in a matter of weeks.

**We run ourselves like a business but with a social conscience and educational purpose.** Our model, which isn't always easy to implement on a daily basis in crisis mode, has helped us deliver consistently during the most difficult of times. Having excellent finance, marketing, HR, technology, enrolment and course delivery is a key driver for success.

With thrive through **strong governance**, which has been a true blend of challenge and support that has enabled an overstretched Executive to have additional support, guidance and capacity during the pandemic and since then. This has been recognised repeatedly by the FE Commissioner, and also Ofsted with our Outstanding grading across the board..

We **experiment and change**. We don't always get everything right, but we learn and adapt as an organisation in the same way we encourage our students to explore and push out their boundaries.

Most notably, it is the **resilience and perseverance** of everyone involved in City Lit, which helped us survive and prosper. We call it the Chumbawumba Factor - “we get knocked down and we get up again.” Being able to pull together and be flexible in times of huge difficulty and stress at an individual, departmental and college level has made the difference in surviving and prospering during the last four years.

# Goal 1: Our students at the heart of everything we do

Enriching individuals, communities and society by contributing to skills, belonging and wellbeing.

Enabling adults to realise their potential by giving them the skills, knowledge and understanding to navigate and contribute to today's world and prepare for tomorrow.

Sustainable growth of student numbers to ensure more people benefit from our offer.

By putting our students at the heart of everything we do, we ensure that we are responsive to their needs and aspirations. A truly responsive organisation is one that caters for a diverse student base and an equally diverse set of needs and desires.

Everyone has experienced their own learning journey and has had their own educational experience. We should be there to fix what hasn't worked in the past, build on what has worked, and provide new opportunities and horizons that might not have been accessible before.

City Lit is proud of its heritage of serving communities for over 100 years; being a place where all adults can come to learn throughout their lives regardless of personal motivation, circumstances or life stage. City Lit is made up of multiple communities whether they be common interests in the course they share, or specific communities which have a common understanding or heritage, such as the Deaf and hard of hearing communities; adults with learning difficulties; and adults with a stammer or other form of dysfluency.

The majority of our students are driven by their personal motivations which include following an interest and deepening

knowledge within one or more areas, developing skills in a subject through structured curriculum or improving and maintaining wellbeing and cognitive health, all whilst being part of a community. We need to ensure that we understand the ever-changing external landscape to help us design and develop opportunities to support and develop our students. In addition, we must actively listen to our students and seek understanding about what drives them so that we can be responsive to their needs and aspirations.

Our curriculum is diverse, extensive and responsive; the range of courses at different levels means that students are offered a flexible, modular and responsive curriculum.

We need to ensure that we have a sustainable growth of student numbers; to build the communities, provide a richer learning experience and to continue to contribute to society. By growing student numbers, we will also ensure that we are more financially stable and that we can make long term decisions about investment in curriculum, student support, our facilities and staff.



## Goal 2: Our commitment to excellence

Diverse, broad, inclusive and accessible curriculum which enables our students to contribute to society in a myriad of ways.

Excellent quality of teaching and learning delivered by subject experts and practitioners who know how to bring out the best in adults.

Our students' experience should be of the highest quality with our facilities and technology supporting the delivery of excellence.

For over 100 years, we have brought people together to enrich their lives through inspirational learning. We have built on the work of our predecessors to create a world class adult education college.

Flexibility and agility are at the heart of how we operate. We are open to students seven days a week throughout the daytime and evenings. We intentionally create ways for people to start or continue their learning journey at City Lit throughout the year with flexible entry points and options to switch from time of day or from in person to online.

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*The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs. Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the skills needs they meet. They work very effectively with stakeholders, who value the role that the college plays in offering flexible, accessible and relevant courses that meet a varied range of needs within the capital and beyond. Leaders, managers and staff ensure that the curriculum remains focused on both the skills that employers need most, and the skills that individuals need to gain and remain in employment.*

**Ofsted 2023**

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Embracing the success of our online courses has been a significant feature of curriculum delivery since the pandemic. By continually improving technology and pedagogy, we have ensured that City Lit online delivers exceptional high-quality learning and student outcomes. Online course delivery has now become a part of what we do and who we are and enables us to reach students outside London who have restricted access to adult education where they live, as well as supporting those who are unable to leave their homes to come to the college.

Our major offer in arts and languages supports London's aspiration to ensure the creative industries and international business are at its core. We are proud to champion provision and excellence in heritage crafts such as bookbinding and basketry. Our tutors are passionate about their subject and

bring their considerable expertise and sector insight into the classroom which students recognise and value. The renowned expertise City Lit embodies in areas such as Lipreading, Speech Therapy and British Sign Language are cherished because of their life changing benefits to individuals.

Our expert tutors have a proven track record of highly effective teaching that delivers exceptional achievement for students which was acknowledged in our Outstanding Ofsted result in 2023. We have an established culture of collective responsibility for quality, and processes to drive and monitor improvement through our current Quality Strategy. Supporting this will be opportunities for Continual Professional Learning that underpin excellence in teaching, learning and student experience.

We actively listen and respond to student feedback, and this informs our improvement objectives. We will continue building our positive improvement culture so that it encourages risk-taking and creates an environment where our expert tutors collaborate, have space to learn from one another and experiment in their practice.

We believe that students should be taught in high quality space which is comfortable and welcoming and enhances the great teaching and learning they receive. We will continue to enhance our physical space through applications for government capital funding at both a national and local level.

Our online environment should be equally easy to navigate and enhance the learning experience. Investment and constant innovation will be needed to ensure that our technology landscape is first class.

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*Ofsted's acknowledgement of your strong contribution to meeting London's skills needs and your focus on opening up adult education provision, for example through your offer to deaf and hard-of-hearing Londoners demonstrates our shared commitment to delivering on my ambition.*

**Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London**

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# Goal 3: Delivering social and community value

Being the leading advocate for the importance of lifelong learning and being a beacon for adult education.

Working with: our Fellows; other educational institutions; charities; professional bodies; cultural institutions; businesses; the Mayor and government, to deliver our Purpose.

Ensuring that there is equitable access and benefit from our courses.

Lifelong learning has been under-valued and neglected nationally in recent decades. City Lit has been committed to reversing that trend and our students have continued to benefit from our extensive offer, and we believe that many more should do so. We will continue to passionately advocate for lifelong learning and how individuals and society benefit from it.

Working with the Government, Mayor and the GLA, we believe that London and the country as a whole can benefit socially and economically from a vibrant adult education sector which supports all the life-stages from 19 years to well beyond retirement.

We believe that devolution, and working closely with the Mayor since 2019, has been a positive development enabling more Londoners to benefit from what we do. We will continue to partner with the Mayor and the government nationally to ensure more adults to benefit from lifelong learning.

Flexibility is crucial for us to grow and prosper. That means our offer should respond to the needs of society. We will continue to invest, renew and update our curriculum offer but we need Government and GLA to provide the funding flexibility to plan and serve society. After years of austerity and lack of national funding growth, more investment is needed, now more than ever. Lifelong learning and dedicated Adult Education Colleges should be given the parity with the wider FE and HE sectors.



Lifelong learning is no longer a choice, it is a necessity in a changing and evolving environment with complex drivers that include technology, ways of working, personal finances, and wellbeing.

The college needs to continue its work to ensure that we reflect the constantly changing nature of London and its citizens. Equity, diversity and inclusion should be at the core of what we do and reflected in our curriculum, teaching, students and staff.

Lifelong learning should be delivered in a wider context of wellbeing and community, and we should continue to partner with organisations that enhance and amplify what we are doing and who we serve.

We will continue to grow relationships with our partners and stakeholders. We will strive to be a partner of choice with those individuals and organisations who can help us deliver our Purpose. Some of our most important events, Classics Day, Mental Wealth Festival and Deaf Day are all delivered with multiple partners, and we continue to develop our partnership models so we can create new and vibrant events which will attract more adults to engage with the college.



# Supporting City Lit's Ambitions

We will support our Strategy by having efficient, effective, timely and compliant support services that enhance the effectiveness of the organisation, improve business efficiency and provide the best services for our staff and students. We will be ambitious and forward-thinking in everything we do, continuously improving to deliver greater benefits for students, staff and society.



## Our People

We need to continue to attract the best people who are engaged and motivated by our Purpose and live and breathe our values. We aim to attract and retain talent across City Lit, offering first class staff development, tutor support and career opportunities in a relaxed and professional working culture. We will nurture and facilitate an inclusive and supportive culture where we live our Purpose and values. We will build a people strategy that nurtures talent, rewards staff and ensures we have a succession plan for future success.

## Our Finances

We can only achieve our ambitions if we are healthy financially. The pandemic challenged us financially, but our strategy and financial rigour has meant we have turned the corner. Building back student fee income to the pre-pandemic trajectory by increasing our student numbers, and increasing course profitability, is key to our financial recovery. Maximising the potential of any new government funding streams will be key to our ambition to enhance our offer in skills and employability.

## Our Engagement

Continued innovation and investment in our marketing capability, to create a customised user experience, is key for our success. The world of communications, especially across the digital sphere, is developing at an increasingly rapid pace. We recognise this and must ensure that our profile across all the appropriate channels is visible to our key stakeholders. Whatever channels we utilise, it is essential to be consistently clear about what City Lit stands for, who we must appeal to and how we can deliver our overarching Purpose 'To bring people together to enrich lives through learning'.

## Our Environment

The environment is as much a part of creating the City Lit community, as the courses we deliver. It is important that the spaces where we deliver our learning and other services are engaging, functional and reflect the experience that we want our students and staff to have. We will continue to seek funding opportunities to enhance the physical space, building on the success we have had through the Department for Education and London Mayor capital funding opportunities.

## Our Technology

We will empower learning through technology. We will achieve this by revolutionising City Lit's technology landscape to enhance the learning journey for our students; streamline and simplify business processes; and to fortify our security posture.

## Our Processes

Students should find it easy and efficient to interact with City Lit at all points of contact. Having effective processes in place will also help us to operate more efficiently. They should act as a catalyst to everything we do. How we make decisions, how we implement them, how we continuously improve and, above all, how we enable our people to perform at their very best. With these processes as a day-to-day enabler, this will then give all of us more time to innovate and focus on our core Purpose.

## Our Sustainability

Operating sustainably and limiting our impact on the environment is an integral part of our culture. From recycling to green travel to carbon reduction, we continue to find ways to contribute to London's 2030 net zero target.