

RNN Group

Employer and Community

Newsletter

Edition 17

September / October 2026

Welcome

Welcome to our bi-monthly RNN Group E-Newsletter. This newsletter aims to ensure we communicate key information that is happening within the Group to employers and local partners so that you are up to date with all our latest news and activities.

As you will know, RNN Group works in partnership with schools, employers and local organisations to continually ensure we are leading and delivering on innovation and skills in our communities. It includes four campuses of career-focused further and higher education in South Yorkshire and North Nottinghamshire alongside our partner organisation, the National Fluid Power Centre and outdoor centre at Idle Valley. We educate school leavers, undergraduates, employees and those re-joining the workforce with a focus on ensuring learners leave equipped with the necessary skills to join or re-join the workforce.

Our focus is on skills development through vocational courses up to Level 7 including T Levels, Apprenticeships, HN Flex, HNCs and HND, HTQs, traditional degrees and others - both on campus and through distance learning - to ensure we support the LSIPs, employers and the needs of our local economy to develop a better and more prosperous future for our communities.

Jason Austin
CEO & Principal
RNN Group



In this edition, there are bite-size pieces of information on each section with more detailed information included in links if you would like more information.

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RNN Group hold DTEC Conference

RNN Group has brought together defence employers, education providers and industry partners to help shape the future of technical skills and training through the Defence Technical Excellence College (DTEC).

The initial engagement and workshop, held on **22 September 2026**, brought together Tier 1-3 defence employers, delivery partners and higher education representatives to explore the skills the sector needs now and in the years ahead.

At the heart of the event was a commitment to ensuring that education and training respond directly to the changing needs of the defence industry.

RNN Group is leading a regional DTEC hub, supported by a wider **£175 million government investment** in the Technical Excellence College initiative. Nationally, the programme aims to train more than **65,000 specialists**, while the RNN Group hub will focus on strengthening defence skills across Yorkshire, the Humber and the North East and Yorkshire region, working alongside further education and higher education partners.

Industry shaping the skills of tomorrow

A key message from the event was that employers must have a direct role in shaping the curriculum.

During the first workshop, participants examined their organisations' current and future skills requirements. The discussions highlighted growing demand for expertise in areas including **Digital Twin modelling, CAD/CAM, artificial intelligence integration, cyber resilience, robotics and automation maintenance.**

Alongside these technical capabilities, employers identified the importance of workforce standards, including security clearance readiness, nuclear and defence quality standards, and technical compliance.

One proposed response is the development of a detailed skills-mapping exercise involving Tier 1-3 employers. The event also identified the potential for security clearance protocols and defence-related behaviours to be incorporated into further and higher education technical courses.

The approach reflects DTEC's wider ambition to establish a sustainable relationship between employers and education providers, rather than simply developing training in isolation from industry.

New approaches to technical training

The second workshop focused on whether existing training provision is meeting employers' needs and what new approaches may be required.

Participants identified demand for more **flexible, modular and accredited training**, including Level 4-6 micro-credentials and short courses that can respond more quickly to changing technical requirements.

The discussions also highlighted the importance of access to specialist facilities. Proposed areas include shared access to advanced robotics, drone testing and advanced fabrication facilities, allowing employers and learners to work with equipment and technologies relevant to modern defence manufacturing and operations.



[continued on next page](#)

The RNN Group DTEC hub is being developed around several specialist facilities. At University Centre Rotherham, plans include digital and cyber training, autonomous systems activity, a dedicated cyber laboratory and an esports facility designed to support progression into defence-relevant drone and unmanned systems operations.

At the Rotherham campus, an Advanced Manufacturing Lab is planned around an Industry 4.0 training environment, with facilities covering automation and mechatronics, CAD/CAM, additive manufacturing, advanced composites, welding and non-destructive testing.

A dedicated Drone Hub at Dearne Valley Campus will provide training using unmanned aerial vehicle technology and simulators, with learners able to develop skills in flight operations, logistics, surveillance and flight planning.

Tackling the barriers to upskilling

The event also provided an opportunity for employers and partners to discuss the practical barriers that can prevent organisations from developing new skills.

Among the issues identified were **staff release time for training, the speed at which defence technology is changing compared with existing qualifications, and the challenge of retaining specialist talent.**

The proposed responses include flexible hybrid and online delivery, employer-led guest lecturing and exploring co-funded apprenticeship levy transfer opportunities.

These discussions will help inform the next stage of DTEC's development and the design of training that can be delivered around the realities of the defence sector.



Ambitious targets for 2030

The event forms part of a wider programme of activity designed to establish DTEC as a nationally recognised centre of excellence for defence and dual-use technology skills.

By 2030, the programme aims to support more than **2,500 learners and employees, engage more than 200 employers, create over 500 industry placements, live projects and work-based learning opportunities**, and expand higher technical provision across Levels 2-6.

For the first phase in 2026-27, DTEC has set targets including engaging at least **350 learners**, involving **40 employers**, delivering **50 industrial placements** and securing or realising **£100,000 in employer co-investment**.

From discussion to delivery

The September event marks the beginning of a programme of curriculum development and employer engagement.

The proposed roadmap sees initial mobilisation taking place during September and October, followed by the start of curriculum co-design workstreams in November. A strategy group review is planned for January 2027, with the full DTEC hub rollout and employer progress review scheduled for April 2027.

The next sector workstream meeting is proposed for **mid-November 2026**, when partners will continue the curriculum co-design process. Employers are also being invited to participate in the Strategic Review Group and sector workstreams.

The message from today's event was clear: developing the defence workforce of the future will require close collaboration between industry, further education and higher education.

For RNN Group, DTEC provides an opportunity to bring that collaboration together through specialist facilities, employer-led curriculum development and practical pathways into the technical careers that will support the UK's future defence capability.

For more information:
[**email dtec@rnnngroup.ac.uk**](mailto:dtec@rnnngroup.ac.uk)

Employer Academies

We have been bringing more companies into the RNN Group family as employer academies in the last few months.

Our Employer Academies bring together learners, educators and employers to establish long term partnerships that will inspire the next generation into your industry.

As part of this dedicated approach, Employer Academies are the result of our investment toward consistently improving skills and job opportunities for learners and employers. By involving employers in the design and delivery of our curriculums, we are further aligning our strategy with employer needs by ensuring our learners develop modern and sector specific skills for success.

[Click for more information - and to join us](#)



RNN Group

Leaders

RNN Group has extended its Leadership in recent months with new Directors of Campus for Rotherham and Dearne Valley as well as Inclusive education, Estates and IT.

[Click to find out more about who is leading the RNN Group](#)

Useful Publications for Businesses

We have a number of publications that businesses might find interesting and helpful especially in these areas:

- Commercial Lets and Office Space
- Adult Training Courses
- Apprenticeship Information
- RNN Group Information

[Click to read more from our publications.](#)



[Click to read more RNN Group Prospectus](#)



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Employer Partners

Our Students

Need You!

Careers Support October 2026 and March 2027

Twice a year, the RNN Group holds Careers and Skills weeks for its learners as part of their induction programme in October and National Careers Week in March.

We hold workshops, fairs, sessions, mock interviews and guest speaker slots for learners to find out more about the world of work and engage them in their next step.

If you would like to support with hosting a short workshop on your business, have a stall at our March event, engage learners in some short sessions on power skills or do some mock interviews, please contact

lucy.barnwell@rnnngroup.ac.uk

RNN Group FREE Webinars

RNN Group runs a monthly lunchtime and evening webinar series which is totally free.

These webinars are for adults, employers, partner organisations, school's careers leads, Headteachers, prospective and current learners and parents who might be interested in some or all of the topics that we will be running.

Sessions have been run on Apprenticeships, T Levels, Higher Technical Qualifications, Distance Learning, Community Courses and Adult Skills Courses to name a few!

We have launched our 2025/2026 programme.

[Catch up on our free lunchtime webinars here.](#)

Adult Courses for All

RNN Group offers a variety of courses for all employers and employees to take advantage of including:

Adult Skills Courses

Adult skills courses are flexible training programmes designed for individuals aged 19+ to gain qualifications, retrain or improve their employability.

[Click for more information about our adult skills courses.](#)

Commercial training courses

The RNN Group has created strong relationships with local employers and has listened to the needs of these local employers with regard to training courses that employers would like to see offered for their staff.

[Click for more information about our commercial training courses](#)



Skills for Employment

Skills for Employment is an innovative new learning approach to Power Skills / transferable skills to our learners and employers.

This is an employer backed and driven initiative for learners to gain the transferable skills they need to succeed in employment and for employers to recruit learners with these vital employability skills.

[Click to read more information about skills for employment and how you can get involved as a business](#)

Distance learning courses

Study a distance learning course with the RNN Group. Distance learning allows you to do just that – study on a course and complete, in many cases *free online courses and *free online training, in the comfort of your own home.

[**Click to take a look at our distance learning courses**](#)

[Click for more information about our distance learning courses.](#)

Employment support courses

RNN Group offers Employment Support Courses which can benefit unemployed individuals – including you – in a multitude of different ways.

[Click for more information about employment support course.](#)



Latest News and Blog

New Employer Academy: Willmott Dixon

Representatives from [RNN Group](#) and [Willmott Dixon](#) launched a dedicated Employer Academy at [North Notts College](#) last week, introducing exciting new industry opportunities in construction. Through the partnership, students will gain practical insight into major regional developments, supported by work placements, mentoring, site visits, and employer-led workshops.

Founded in 1852, Tier One contractor [Willmott Dixon](#) generates approximately £1 billion in annual turnover across England and Wales. Still a family-run business, the firm delivers commercial and civic projects valued up to £300 million. Previous clients include local councils, universities, emergency services, and the Ministry of Defence.

Connecting Education with Industry

By linking college coursework with live commercial developments, the academy ensures training aligns directly with modern industry requirements. Employers actively shape curriculum delivery, instilling workplace habits such as punctuality, teamwork, and initiative alongside technical construction qualifications.

Starting from October 2026, students will gain practical access to Willmott Dixon's £20 million town centre [regeneration project](#) in Ollerton. The major scheme features a multi-screen cinema, modern retail units, residential housing, and public realm spaces.

[Simon Hartley, Skills Consultant at RNN Group, explained how the programme accelerates student progress:](#)

"The partnership acts as a bridge between the curriculum and the business world. Rather than completing a course in isolation, students integrate directly with active businesses to launch their careers."



WILLMOTT DIXON

SINCE 1852

Routes into Construction

Modern construction encompasses diverse technical roles beyond traditional trades, including project management, quantity surveying, digital engineering, IT, sustainability, and social value. Pathways across the sector range from subcontractor Level 2 trade apprenticeships to fully funded Level 6 management degrees.

[After working as a carer and earning a history degree, Emma Jones joined Willmott Dixon's management trainee scheme in 2024. Now an Assistant Social Value Manager, she emphasised how academic skills apply right across the industry:](#)

"I really do think there is a job for anybody in construction. When we go into schools, there's not one subject that I can't relate back to construction in some way."

Tackling the Skills Gap

Severe industry labour shortages, driven by an ageing workforce and shifting technology, make this initiative vital locally. To tackle this challenge, Willmott Dixon offers North Notts College students internal management traineeships while facilitating subcontractor trade apprenticeships. Varied entry requirements accommodate different qualifications, ensuring accessible routes into professional site management and technical trades.

[Having entered the sector 26 years ago as a local council tenant liaison officer, Marie Wilkes is now Head of Social Value for the Midlands at Willmott Dixon. With extensive industry experience, she emphasized the urgency of inspiring the next generation:](#)

"We are losing tradespeople. It's an aging industry. People have been in the sector a long time and are retiring, leaving a significant skills gap to fill."

Interested?

Discover how a career in construction can open doors to professional management, sustainability, and technical trades.

[Click to find out more about Construction courses at North Notts College](#)

[Click to find out more about Employer Academies at RNN Group](#)

Latest News and Blog

RNN Group Signs the Armed Forces Covenant, Strengthening Support for the Armed Forces Community

RNN Group is proud to announce that it has officially signed the Armed Forces Covenant, reaffirming its commitment to supporting serving personnel, reservists, veterans and military families across the communities it serves.

The [Armed Forces Covenant](#) is a national pledge that recognises the contribution made by members of the Armed Forces community and ensures they are treated fairly and with respect. By signing the Covenant, [RNN Group](#) joins thousands of organisations across the UK in demonstrating its commitment to creating opportunities and removing barriers for those who have served, or continue to serve, in the Armed Forces.

As one of the region's leading education and skills providers, RNN Group is committed to fostering an inclusive environment where the experience, dedication and transferable skills of the Armed Forces community are recognised and valued.

Through this commitment, the Group will continue to promote employment opportunities, support staff who are reservists, encourage engagement with the Armed Forces community and raise awareness of the valuable contribution that service personnel, veterans and military families make to society.



**PROUDLY
SUPPORTING
THOSE WHO
SERVE.**

Jason Austin, CEO and Principal of RNN Group, said:

"On behalf of RNN Group and as a Defence Technical Excellence College, we are delighted to become a signatory of the Armed Forces Covenant."

"At RNN Group, we believe in creating opportunities for everyone and recognise the immense value that serving personnel, veterans, reservists and military families bring to our communities, workplaces and classrooms."

"By signing the Covenant, we are reinforcing our commitment to ensuring members of the Armed Forces community are supported, respected and given every opportunity to thrive."

"We are proud to stand alongside organisations across the UK in recognising their service and contribution."

Signing the Covenant builds on RNN Group's wider commitment to supporting its local communities through education, skills development and employer partnerships. The Group looks forward to developing further initiatives that strengthen links with the Armed Forces community and help individuals achieve their educational and career aspirations.

Recently, RNN Group successfully secured a major national defence technology bid, in partnership with the UK Government, to establish a new Defence Technical Excellence College (DTEC) in collaboration with the Ministry of Defence and the Department for Education.

[Click For more information on the RNN Group secures major DTEC bid in partnership with the UK Government.](#)

[Click to find out more about RNN Group's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant.](#)

Latest News and Blog

T Level Triumph at RNN Group

T Level students are celebrating at RNN Group after achieving an excellent set of T Level results following results day on Thursday 13th August.

[Rotherham College](#), [North Notts College](#) and [Dearne Valley College](#) part of the [RNN Group](#) have gained results including 13 Distinctions, 85 Merits and 75 Passes.

RNN Group started doing T Levels in September 2023 with [Digital, Construction](#) (Onsite Construction for Bricklaying and Joinery), Early Years and Education, and Health, and then expanded a year later with Animal Care and Management, Business (Management and Administration), Engineering (Building Services Engineering for Construction [Plumbing and Heating and Electrical Installation] and Maintenance Installation and Repair [Mechatronics and Processing and Control]), and the Foundation T Level too in September 2024.

Each T Level is equal to three A Levels and is a more practical journey into the working world with 4 days in the classroom and one day in the relevant industry building up skills for employment which employers are finding invaluable.

A distinction equals 3 A's at A Level, a merit 3 B's and a Pass 3 C's so our learners have achieved so much as the first learners within the Group to complete the new two year programme.



Mark Ryan, Vice Principal - Curriculum, of the RNN Group said,

"I am incredibly proud of our T Level learners across all of our campuses; their hard work, commitment and determination have resulted in some fantastic achievements and they should be rightly proud of what they have accomplished."

"Our staff have worked tirelessly to support and develop our learners, fully embracing the opportunities that T Levels provide; and their dedication to delivering quality teaching, industry-relevant learning and meaningful support has played a vital role in these successes."

"T Levels offer learners an exceptional opportunity to develop their technical knowledge and skills alongside meaningful industry placements, allowing them to apply their learning in real-world settings."

"This not only prepares our students for successful careers, but also gives employers early access to the talented individuals who could become the next generation of their workforce. "It is a true win-win for our learners, employers, RNN Group and the wider local economy."

[Click for more information about T Levels](#)

What's

Happening?

To keep up to date with all that is happening across the Group and the Colleges, click on the relevant news pages below.

RNN Group News and Events

[Click to read more RNN Group News](#)

[Click to read more RNN Group Blog](#)

Recommend

Us

Why not recommend friend / employer who might benefit from the RNN Group and the information included in this as well as the courses and programmes we have to offer.

Email: enquiries@rnnngroup.ac.uk

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Don't forget to follow our social media platforms



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**Rotherham College
North Notts College
Dearne Valley College
University Centre Rotherham
and
National Fluid Power Centre**

Part of

RNN GROUP

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University Centre Rotherham

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