



ASSOCIATION
OF COLLEGES

Mission accepted: the role of colleges across the government's five missions



Foreword



David Hughes CBE

Chief Executive,
Association of
Colleges

Colleges in England are place-based leaders, partners and stakeholders with the simple ambition to help people and employers to succeed and the community and local economy to flourish. By supporting young people and adults to realise their ambitions and talents, employers to innovate and have skilled workers, and communities to come together they contribute so much to our society and our economy.

That's why it has been so easy and yet so difficult to pull this report together. It was easy because when we sought case studies of how colleges deliver the government's five missions, we were inundated with an array of great examples of how they are already doing that. It was difficult because we wanted to keep it concise and accessible and there is so much more we could have said, and so many more case studies we could have included.

The missions-led approach to government reflects an ambition to do things differently; to join up policy and strategy across government with a focus on addressing long-standing challenges rather than delivering on here-today, gone-tomorrow initiatives. More than that, it's clear that the missions will rely heavily on local anchor institutions like colleges

to collaborate with others locally on joint goals, ambitions and approaches. This offers colleges the opportunity to be central players, with others, in place-based change and development. The potential they have and the passion for positive change is enormous.

This report shows how colleges deliver across all of the five missions. They are strategic partners to employers, galvanising inward investment and supporting innovation. They will be vital for every priority sector in the industrial strategy, and for local growth deals, as well as for the workforce needed in the transition to net zero, building infrastructure and houses, and for the NHS and social care.

They are central to public health agenda, in the shift to a health prevention strategy, supporting healthy habits for young people, addressing the rising mental health challenges, the health benefits of supporting people into good jobs, and addressing the loneliness and isolation of an ageing population.

Colleges have hundreds of thousands of young people with them at a crucial stage of their lives, making them major players in the safer streets agenda, too – offering a positive path for young people at risk of getting caught

up in crime, supporting ex-offenders to turn their lives around, and playing a central role in promoting social inclusion and community cohesion.

Taking this forward will require a great deal of work with three core dimensions. Firstly, I want to see colleges engaged as partners nationally in every mission, helping to co-create what will be prioritised, and how it will get delivered. Secondly, college leaders want to be part of a local environment where college principals, headteachers, NHS chief executives, council leaders, elected mayors, employer CEOs, vice chancellors and others can come together to plan and deliver joined-up services. And thirdly, we will be urging government to put its money behind the policies and ambitions, because colleges need the investment to be able to realise their potential too.

Colleges stand ready to deliver across all five missions. They are eager to make more of a difference for the places and people they serve. I hope that this report shines a light on the work colleges already do, and the enormous potential they offer to do more.



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Foreword



Richard Pennycook
Chair of Skills England

This is a mission-led government, one that is determined to bring about a new era of opportunity and economic growth and a fairer society for everybody.

We want to see success rewarding effort and enterprise whatever a person's background, to usher in a decade of national renewal and prosperity.

The government is focused on the missions: driving economic growth, breaking down barriers to opportunity, supporting our NHS, ensuring we have safer streets and supporting our transition to a clean energy superpower.

A mission-led government means we have clear, long-term goals that encourage collaboration between government and partners in the system. In this way we will create the conditions we need for innovation and growth to flourish.

Our Plan for Change, published earlier this month, set out the structure for the missions and what the government intend to achieve in this Parliament.

We know that colleges have an essential role to play, not only in developing the skills needed to drive our economy, but as community leaders that bring people together and help students thrive. Our missions cannot be delivered by government alone, and we welcome the commitment shown in this report for colleges to make a broad contribution across those missions.

Colleges are engines of opportunity and growth. They are responsible for 38% of disadvantaged young people progressing to higher education, and 68% progressing to sustainable employment.

Colleges understand that our opportunity and growth missions go hand in hand. Colleges empower people with the skills and confidence to take opportunities that enrich their lives and boost economic growth.

They are great at what they do with some 86% being judged good or outstanding in their most recent inspection.

At the AoC conference earlier this year, the Minister for Skills set out a vision for the skills system to underpin delivery of our missions and transform the system from one that has

sidelined too many learners, to one where everyone is supported.

Our skills system has for too long been a fragmented one, where it is unclear how learners can progress or how employers can get the skilled workforce they need. That is going to change, with clear routes for progression for learners and clarity for employers.

We will move from a system where unproductive competition has led to worse outcomes, to one where we coordinate our skills provision. I am excited to be a part of establishing Skills England, which will be at the heart of ensuring we deliver the right skills in the right areas for learners and to support our industrial strategy and housebuilding objectives.

The government is looking forward to working with all our colleges to develop our long-term post-16 education and skills strategy together. Between us, we can make our vision of renewal and growth a reality and make sure that this country is one of opportunity and reward regardless of a person's start in life.



We know that colleges have an essential role to play, not only in developing the skills needed to drive our economy, but as community leaders that bring people together and help students thrive. Our missions cannot be delivered by government alone, and we welcome the commitment shown in this report for colleges to make a broad contribution across those missions."

The government's five missions

The new government has committed to being mission led; this formed a central theme across their 2024 election manifesto and has been reaffirmed following their election win. At the heart of this approach are five key missions which operate as guiding stars to inform policy making and funding decisions.

To be successful, work on these missions will involve and require effective coordination from across different parts of national and devolved government who can empower local leaders to work together in new and different ways.



Missions provide a governing philosophy for complex times, creating new coalitions, overcoming silos and providing the long-term vision we need."

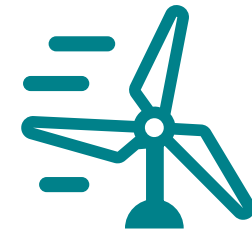
Georgia Gould
Labour MP and Cabinet Office Minister

Professor Mariana Mazzucato
Director of the UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Policy

[Blog for the Future Governance Forum](#)



Kickstart economic growth to secure the highest sustained growth in the G7 – with good jobs and productivity growth in every part of the country making everyone, not just a few, better off.



Make Britain a clean energy superpower to cut bills, create jobs and deliver security with cheaper, zero-carbon electricity by 2030, accelerating to net zero.



Take back our streets by halving serious violent crime and raising confidence in the police and criminal justice system to its highest levels.



Break down barriers to opportunity by reforming our childcare and education systems, to make sure there is no class ceiling on the ambitions of young people in Britain.



Build an NHS fit for the future that is there when people need it, with fewer lives lost to the biggest killers, in a fairer Britain, where everyone lives well for longer.

Colleges across the country have a key role to play in all five missions.

Colleges sit at the heart of our towns, cities and communities across the country. As well as providing the education and training key to delivery of the five missions, they also act as important local leaders, able to convene and coordinate stakeholders and resources to maximum effect, ultimately helping to build healthy, safe, sustainable and prosperous communities, in which everyone is able to get on in life.



.. delivering a step change in skills is fundamental to delivering across the whole of the government's programme, in particular the missions that will inform and lead the government's actions...

It is also about developing the new industrial strategy and the growth and opportunity missions in particular, but it goes beyond that. We cannot rebuild our NHS without skills; we literally cannot build the homes that we need without skills; and we cannot become a green superpower without skills."

Rt Hon Baroness Smith of Malvern
Minister for Skills

Debate on the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill, November 2024

However, colleges operate with limited resources and recognition, and within national and local systems which can hamper their ability to deliver. This means that the work they do is often poorly understood by those outside of the sector and that the impact they have often happens despite, rather than because of, the system.

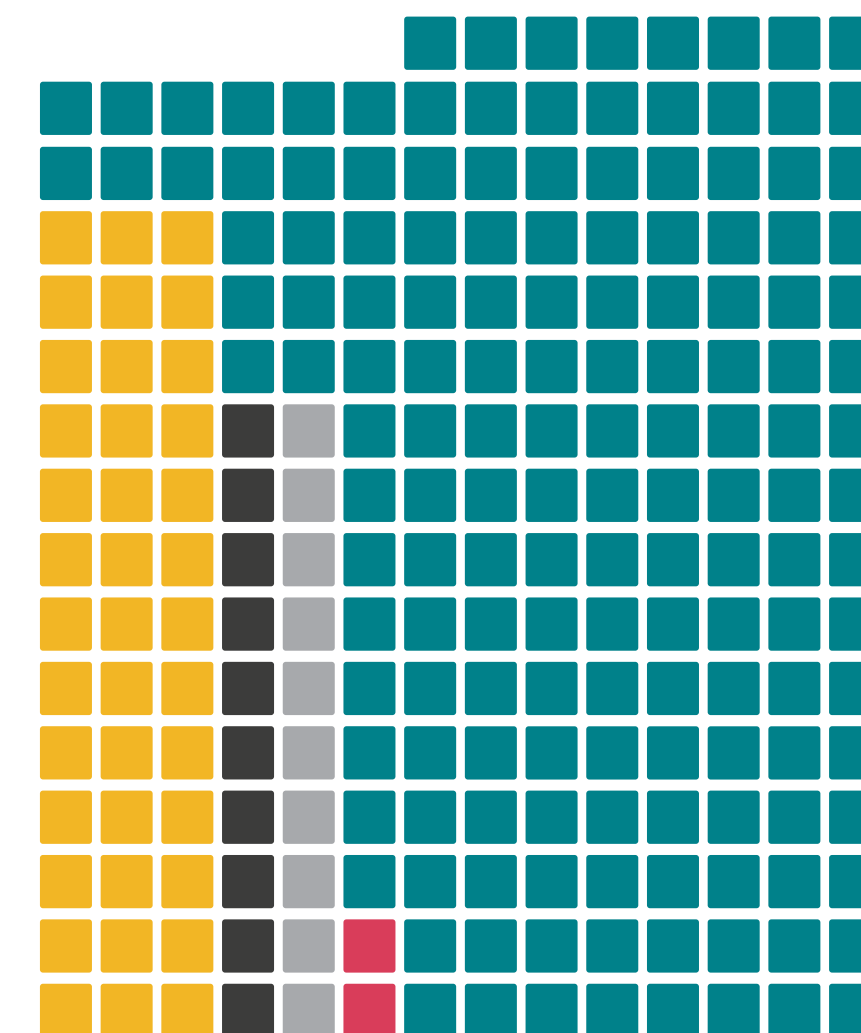
There is huge untapped opportunity for colleges to play a powerful role across all five of the government's missions, and a risk that this is left unfulfilled.

This report examines each of the five missions in turn, looking at the context within which each operates, the innovative work colleges across the country are already doing to deliver on that mission, and then what more they could do with further investment and support.

The case studies throughout are just a snapshot of the work going on across the country. They offer concrete examples of excellent practice which should be championed, celebrated and built upon.

The English college network

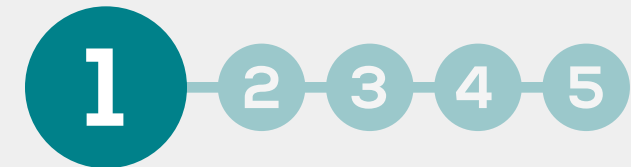
There are 218 colleges across England, providing education and training to 1.6 million students each year.



This includes:

- **157**
general further education colleges
- **39**
sixth form colleges
- **10**
land-based colleges
- **10**
specialist designated colleges / institutes of adult learning
- **2**
art, design & performing arts colleges

Mission one



Kickstart economic growth

Context

The UK is performing badly compared to other economies in terms of productivity growth. It is in the bottom half of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) rankings, well below France, Germany and the United States, and slightly ahead of Italy and Spain.

According to the [Productivity Institute](#), from 2010 to 2022, the annual average growth in UK gross domestic product (GDP) per hour worked was just 0.5 per cent, with little sign of improvement in recent years. Poor levels of productivity are one of, if not the, major barrier to our much-needed growth, and seriously affect the wider resilience of the UK economy, making it more vulnerable to economic shocks, especially at a regional level.

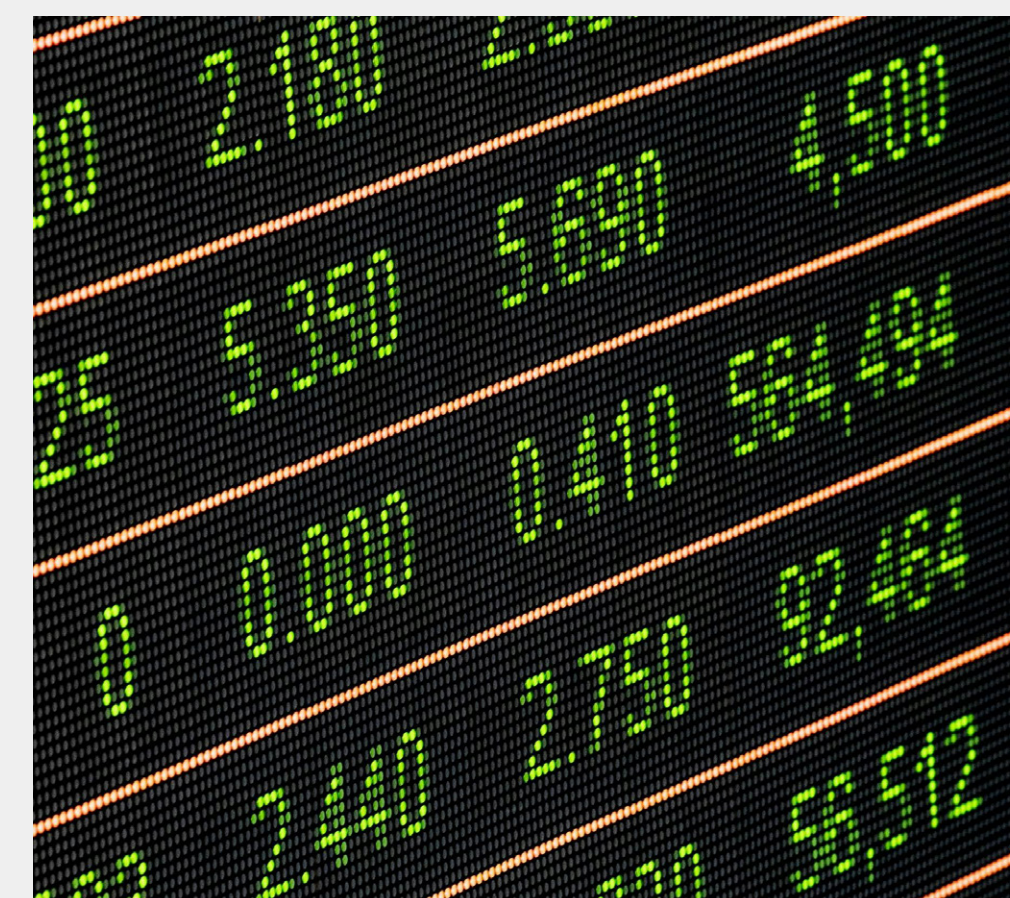
In 2022, [the Productivity Institute](#) identified five key drivers of business productivity: innovation and digital, worker skills and wellbeing, leadership and management, marketing and communication, and access to finance. Colleges have a particular role to play across worker skills and innovation, as well as a more indirect role to play in education and training the leaders and managers of the future.

The [government's employer skills survey](#) found that the number of skills shortage vacancies has risen from 22% five years ago to 36% in 2022. The survey also found that despite this, employer spending on workforce training per employee is falling – from a low base by international standards – and is skewed towards better qualified staff.

Meanwhile, [analysis published by the Learning and Work Institute in 2023](#) found that nine million people have poor literacy, numeracy and digital skills, and are therefore likely to suffer in an increasingly digital labour market.

However, there is positive news: the institute's [adult participation in learning survey published in 2023](#) found that almost one in every two adults in the UK (49 per cent) say they are either currently learning or have done so in the last three years. This is the highest recorded since the survey began. It is worth noting, though, that the uptick in learning participation rates is not evenly distributed across the adult population. Compared to 2022, people in the DE social grade (those in semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations, unemployed, and lowest grade occupations) and people furthest from the labour market show smaller increases in participation.

As well as issues with economic growth and barriers to productivity, across the UK we are particularly ineffective at transferring ground-breaking innovations in process, design and technology into routine, day-to-day use by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro businesses. SMEs make up over 95% of businesses across the UK. [Research published by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in May 2022](#) found that in 2018 to 2020, just 45% of UK businesses were innovation active, compared with 49% in 2014 to 2016 and 53% in 2012 to 2014.



Employers are crying out for more people with the right technical skills across all levels in the workplace to boost productivity and seize the opportunities of an increasingly digitalised and automated workplace, to ultimately grow the economy.

Colleges play a crucial role in this. That is why we and our members are proud to work closely with colleges across the country to ensure that the right skills and training provision is in place to support economic growth and productivity across the nation."

Sarah Howard MBE
Chair, British Chambers of Commerce

How are colleges delivering on this mission?

● Bridgwater and Taunton College, Somerset



● Trafford and Stockport College Group, Greater Manchester

The pandemic has had severe consequences for the aviation sector, creating significant skills shortages and economic inactivity. However, things at the Manchester Airport Group (MAG) are looking up, thanks to the Airport Academy.

A collaboration between the Manchester Airport Group and the Trafford and Stockport College Group (TSCG), the academy launched in 2012, offering sector-based work academy programmes (SWAPs) to equip jobseekers with skills needed for airport employment.

However, post-Covid, the academy aligned with the government's generation aviation initiative to restore airport operations and create pathways for local communities facing socio-economic challenge into meaningful employment.

By offering targeted training and skills development, the academy helps participants gain the qualifications and confidence needed to secure employment at the airport. Courses include the Level 4 aviation management apprenticeship and Level 3 team leader apprenticeship to meet MAG's needs. Adults aged 19 and over in Greater Manchester's disadvantaged communities have been a particular target, and key initiatives to attract them have included bi-annual MAG jobs fairs, community information sessions, and ongoing engagement with job centres.

There are five full-time staff working for the Airport Academy and in 2023/24, they supported nearly 2,000 individuals, achieved a 99% success rate and secured 314 job placements, a 40% increase from the previous year.

● City College Norwich, Norfolk

The data shows that nationally, young people with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) are very underrepresented in the workforce; [according to NHS data from 2021](#), just 5.1% of adults with a learning disability known to their local authority in England are in paid work.

But at City College Norwich, an innovative supported employment agency, MINT, has been opening the doors to paid employment for young people with LDD and mental health conditions for more than a decade. Established in 2010, MINT sees young people assigned an employment job coach, who then provides tailored support and training according to their individual needs. This includes a combination of one-to-one and group training, with a focus on employability skills, English and maths, together with help with applying for jobs and interviews.

MINT has a range of employer partners across Norfolk, including Norse Group, Coop East of England, and Boots, who benefit from having the financial costs of recruitment taken away and being introduced to employees who are keen to work hard and prove what they can do. Students go on a variable or fixed-term (12-week) work placement or on a six-month supported internship, often in customer service, administration, hospitality, and retail. The support from MINT is available for a further year after they have secured paid employment. Since 2017, the agency has supported, on average, 70 young people into sustainable paid employment each year, including in roles like retail assistant, catering assistant, and cleaner.

The role of colleges now and in the future

It's clear that colleges have a central role to play as key institutions at the heart of their regional economies; they deliver on our national and regional skills needs, and they support innovation and business change, particularly in SMEs and micro businesses. There are exemplary practices from colleges across the country, as demonstrated above, where their vital role has been well embedded.

However, this is an area where the existing systems fail to fully utilise or recognise the potential of colleges. The current approach to funding, accountability and oversight constrains what colleges can offer, whether because they can't recruit the teaching staff to delivery courses in areas where we face key skills gaps, or because their wider role as a partner to employers, supporting innovation and business change, is largely unfunded and unrecognised. Moreover, there is insufficient alignment between national and regional strategies across skills and economic growth, which drives a range of inefficiencies across our post-16 education and skills system.

To deliver on the government's mission to kickstart economic growth, colleges can and must be central in convening, coordinating and providing high-quality strategic support on innovation and knowledge transfer to employers, whilst also equipping employees with opportunities to develop new skills. This must become recognised as a core part of what a college network delivers, in close partnership with universities, local authorities,

sector skills bodies, business chambers, trade unions and others.

A better resourced and more expansive strategic service for employers could provide a mechanism for stimulating demand from employers, coordinating strategic engagement and building new deeper relationships between employers and the education and skills system. This is vital as part of a skills-led economic recovery, as we redress longstanding regional and social inequalities and move towards a sustainable, net-zero carbon economy supported by a green technology revolution.

Ultimately, the government will struggle to grow the economy without the skilled workforce required to do that. The government's ambition to build 1.5m new homes, for example, is a key part of its plans to boost economic growth across the country. But [research undertaken by Home Builders Federation's Home Building Skills Partnership](#) has found that for every 10,000 new homes the industry builds, 30,000 new recruits are needed, including 2,500 bricklayers, 2,500 groundwork and plant operatives and 1,000 carpenters. A significant number of these future workers will need to be trained in colleges, but AoC research found that a third (34%) of colleges have waiting lists for full-time construction courses. Unless colleges are able to run these courses, the government will be unable deliver their house building commitments.



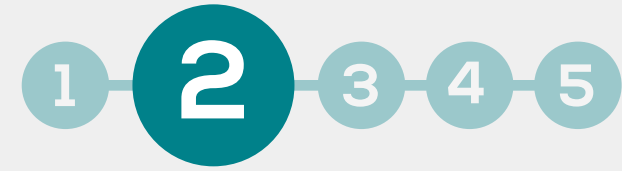
Colleges have a critical role to play in kickstarting sustainable, inclusive economic growth across all parts of the country. Further education colleges are not only essential for meeting current and emerging skills gaps we face across many key sectors. They can be key social partners alongside unions, employers and government to equip people as the world of work changes.

At the heart of this are the people working within colleges who continue to do incredible work every day - despite the considerable constraints they and their institutions face. We need to make sure they are fairly rewarded and valued. There's so much more they can do, with the right investment and right support."

Paul Nowak
General Secretary, Trades Union Congress



Mission two



Make Britain a clean energy superpower

Context

We face a climate emergency, the impacts of which are already causing significant social and economic costs, both across the UK and internationally.

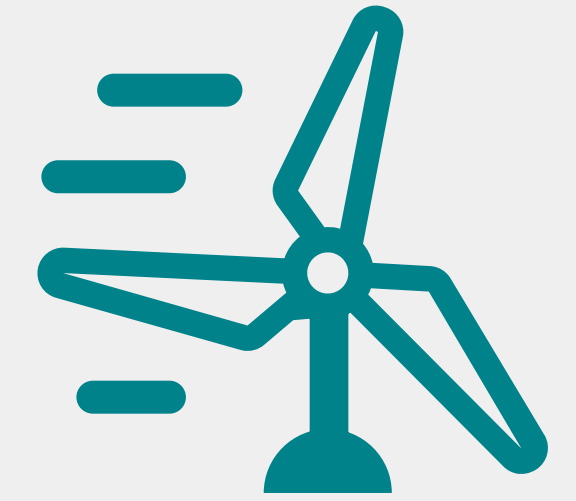
The Climate Change Committee has [highlighted the growing impacts of climate risks on business and industry in the UK](#). This includes flooding and other extreme weather events damaging assets and disrupting operations, the likelihood of more routine deficits in the availability of water across parts of the UK, and the wider impact of climate change impacting on international supply chains.

Internationally, we are seeing a rise in climate-change related events. [The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction \(UNDRR\)](#) found that we have seen an 80% increase in the number of people affected by disasters since 2005, and argue that without action, by 2030 the global number of disasters per year is expected to hit around 560 per year, or 1.5 medium to large-scale disasters per day.

The UK Government has set out a commitment to lead on climate action, which is restated in Labour's commitment for Britain

to become a clean energy superpower. The shift from high carbon to low carbon energy and transport will create big changes in the workforce. A [report commissioned by the Climate Change Committee](#) anticipates between 135,000 and 725,000 new jobs by 2030 in low carbon sectors such as buildings retrofit, renewable energy generation and the manufacture of electric vehicles. For example, [UK innovation agency Nesta, estimates](#) that the UK will need 27,000 heat pump engineers in the next six years, but currently, there are 3,000.

Meanwhile, people whose skills are no longer in demand will need retraining and upskilling, and the right careers advice to recognise and use skills they already have differently. Modelling from the [Place-based Climate Action Network's Just Transition Jobs Tracker](#) suggests that one in five jobs in the UK require skills that could experience demand growth or reduction. This shift comes at a time when due to mega-trends affecting the labour market, nine in 10 people (over 30 million) will need to be reskilled by 2030, according to the [Confederation of British Industry](#).



At Hinkley Point C we know that further education colleges are absolutely key in providing the skilled workforce we need to help Britain achieve net-zero. Hinkley Point C will produce reliable low carbon electricity for six million homes and is also helping thousands of people gain new skills and higher-paid jobs and our partnership with Bridgwater & Taunton College has been vital in supporting project.

This green investment is also a catalyst for much longer-term regional growth, which will leave a legacy of a more skilled and productive workforce."

Stuart Crooks CBE
Managing Director of Hinkley Point C

How are colleges delivering on this mission?

● Newcastle College, Tyne and Wear



● Loughborough College, Leicestershire

Through the East Midlands Institute of Technology (EMIoT), Loughborough College, the University of Derby, Loughborough University, and Derby College Group (DCG) are spearheading a £13 million initiative to develop the advanced skills required to address the grand engineering challenges associated with clean growth. By focussing on engineering, manufacturing, digital technologies, and sustainable construction, the EMIoT is equipping students with the expertise needed to excel in a rapidly evolving, data-driven economy.

The EMIoT offers tailored programmes in engineering and manufacturing technologies, information and communication technology, science and mathematics, and construction. These specialised courses are designed to meet the demands of industry 4.0 and support the transition to a net zero carbon economy. The institute has industry collaboration at its heart and works closely with leading global employers like Rolls-Royce, Toyota, National Grid ESO, Alstom, Fujitsu, Uniper, and Bloc Digital. These partnerships ensure that students gain the precise skills required by the industry to tackle clean growth challenges, positioning them at the forefront of the green economy. Students benefit from world-class training environments with state-of-the-art facilities across all four partner sites, ensuring they are equipped with the practical skills and experience needed to contribute to the UK's clean energy future.

The EMIoT is a prime example of how educational institutions can directly contribute to Labour's clean energy mission by fostering a new generation of skilled professionals who will drive the green economy forward and play a critical role in supporting the UK's journey to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

● Myerscough College, Lancashire

Farmers in Lancashire are developing more efficient and sustainable production methods thanks to support from Myerscough College.

In 2023, the college became early members of the Sustainable Farmer Network, a collaboration of land-based colleges supporting farmers to achieve net zero. The network meets regularly to share new technology and innovation, and works with farmers to achieve four things: increase efficiencies and improve productivity by making better use of on-farm nutrients, reduce purchased feed and fertilizer to produce more food with less inputs in a smarter way, maintain and improve soils, hedgerows and trees, and offset grid energy with solar, wind, methane power or anaerobic digestion.

To further support with this, the Myerscough College Ag Net Zero Challenge, funded by the skills development fund, undertook 10 carbon audits on 10 different Lancashire farm types, and then delivered events across the county to support farmers to take steps to reduce farm emissions and improve business resilience.

The college farm is on its way to being net-zero through the use of good nutrient management practices, soil testing all of the farmed estate to establish nutrient reserves and plan for subsequent cropping using these results. The farm is able to variable rate slurry spread and use precision technology to spread purchased fertilizer. Self-propelled diet feeding utilises near infra-red spectrometry to measure forage dry matter, by load, enabling precision feeding therefore reducing purchased feed. Robotics and automation have enabled dairy staff to focus on the cows, and target setting includes waste minimization, reducing waste to landfill and reducing antibiotic use.

The role of colleges now and in the future

Colleges are uniquely placed at the heart of communities to support a fair transition to a green economy for people and employers. They educate and train people of all ages for key low carbon sectors, upskill and retrain those transitioning into other jobs, and act as a stepping stone to progress into higher education and other training relevant for the green economy from construction and energy to agriculture and transport.

Close partnerships with industry see colleges work with employers in their areas to identify skills gaps, create courses and qualifications which not only train learners on the skills needed, but on the workplace behaviours and attitudes needed for success.

These could be employers already in an established green sector that is growing, an emerging green sector that is predicted to grow throughout the transition, or a sector experiencing significant transformation or decline.



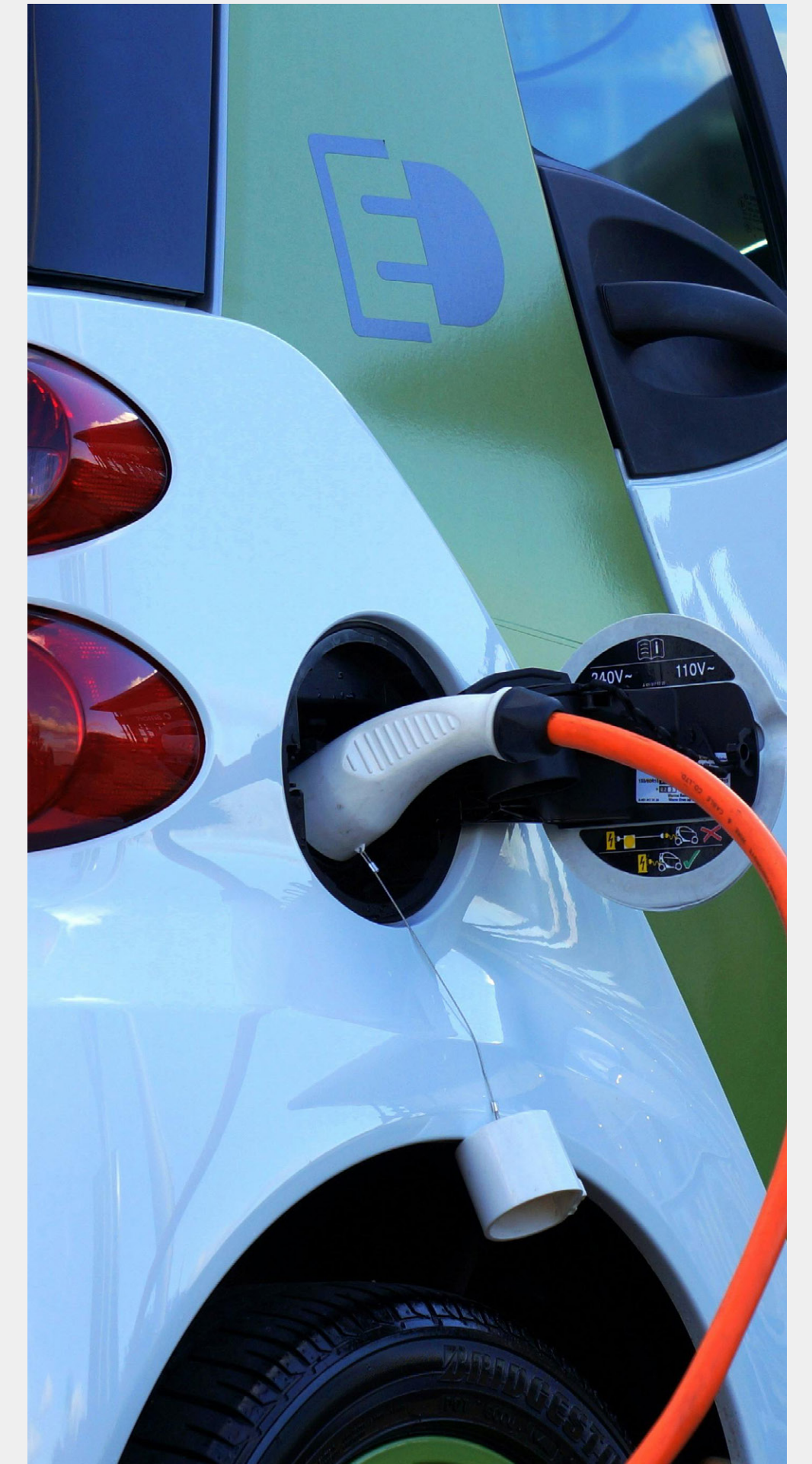
It's right that government have put the drive to net zero at the heart of their missions. Embedding net zero and nature considerations into our skills and education framework is fundamental to achieving the UK's climate and biodiversity commitments, while also contributing to a successful economic future and employment opportunities across the country.

The role of further education colleges here should not be underestimated; they will be crucial in providing the skilled workforce needed to deliver net zero and a just and fair transition by reskilling those shifting from high carbon sectors, so it's vital this is well understood across government."

Rt Hon Baroness Hayman GBE
Crossbench Peer, Chair of Peers for the Planet

However, as AoC set out in the [2021 Green College Commitment](#) report, this excellent practice could be much further spread across the country if colleges were all properly invested in and empowered to play their role in the journey to net zero, and businesses were encouraged to seek out their local further education college for support. SMEs, in particular, are not always sufficiently aware of how to adapt to be more sustainable, what skills are needed, and therefore their investment in green training is often limited. As strategic partners, colleges can support local businesses with these changes, to build partnerships that can share knowledge and work together to support the right skills development and innovation.

The role of colleges in this space has been recognised by the Energy Futures Lab at Imperial College London. In their report, [Net Zero Skills : Jobs, skills and training for the Net-Zero energy transition](#), the authors call for current public financing mechanisms for skills, including the apprenticeship levy, the national skills fund, and the adult education budget, to be reviewed to see how funding can be better directed towards the development of training for green jobs. The report also urges the government to leverage additional public funding to support long-term development of skills for net-zero, specifically for FE colleges and training providers to be able to develop new, high-quality green courses and overcome low participation rates.



Mission three



Take back our streets

Context

As a country, we are facing a number of complex and interrelated societal challenges. Ultimately, these are key drivers of crime, marginalisation and social disorder, making our streets less safe and our communities less cohesive.

Recent data shows that we have extremely high levels of young people and those who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). ONS data published in February 2024 found that an 851,000 16 to 24-year-olds in the UK were NEET in October to December 2023, which represents 12% of that age group. In particular, young men who are NEET increased by 37,000. Analysis from CEDFOD published in 2023 underscores the long-term consequences for an individual of being out of work, education or training as a young person, with a negative effect on future employment outcomes and earnings as well as on physical and mental health. These can also include difficult relationships, drug and substance abuse, involvement in criminal activities and social exclusion. The negative consequences extend well beyond individuals who face being NEET themselves and can have significant impact also on their family, community and on society as a whole.

Meanwhile, we have major challenges in our criminal justice system, including with the high rates of re-offending. [Data from the Office for National Statistics \(ONS\)](#) published in 2024 for example shows that the overall proven reoffending rate has fluctuated between 23.1% and 31.8%, while adult offenders had a proven reoffending rate of 25.1%. This comes at a time where trust in policing is low, with YouGov surveys indicating a loss of public confidence in the police. YouGov's monthly tracker "[Are the police doing a good job](#)" shows a steady decline of respondents who think the police are doing a good job from 70% in July 2019 to 54% in October 2024. Similarly, the proportion of people who had [not very much confidence or no confidence](#) was at 55% in September 2024.

We also suffer from poor levels of social cohesion and integration across the UK. Analysis published in 2019 by [The Challenge](#) has found that we have a lack of integration when it comes to ethnicity, age and class. It found that:

when excluding family interactions, the average Briton has 48% fewer interactions with people of different ethnicities than would be expected if ethnicity was irrelevant.

Apart from the mixed ethnic group, all ethnic groups have around 40% to 50% fewer social interactions with others than would occur if there was no segregation.

the average Briton has 42% fewer interactions with people of different ages than would be expected if there was no social segregation. And if you exclude interactions with nuclear family, the average Briton has 54% less interaction with other age groups than would be expected if there was no social segregation and 56% fewer interactions if you also exclude extended family.

the average person living in Britain has 14% fewer interactions with people of different social grades than would be expected if there was no social segregation.

[Analysis from the Social Integration Commission published in 2019](#) argued that poor social integration has an impact on long-term unemployment (with those unemployed and without relationships with employed people being far less likely to get into work), recruitment and community health and wellbeing, and to cost the UK economy over £6 billion a year.



Throughout my career, including both working in criminal justice and during my time as chair of the board of governors of a fantastic college, I've witnessed the important role that colleges play in building safe, cohesive local communities. At a time when some individuals and groups seek to stoke divisions in society, I've seen how colleges bring all parts of the community together with a common purpose and sense of belonging.

As the new government undertakes a missions led approach, there is a real opportunity to build on this role colleges play within their communities, to unlock their full potential as a key part of the safer streets agenda."

Nazir Afzal OBE

Former Chief Crown Prosecutor for North West England, and former Chair of Hopwood Hall College

How are colleges delivering on this mission?

● New City College, Greater London



● Greater Manchester colleges

In late 2023, an innovative partnership emerged between the Greater Manchester Violence Reduction Unit (GMVRU) and several Greater Manchester colleges to dismantle cycles of isolation and build a culture of inclusion, with a focus on strengthening peer-on-peer relationships. Taster fortnights, a two-week immersion programme led by welfare, safeguarding, and teaching staff—all trained in small-group and one-to-one support skills—were introduced. Many students attending these sessions had not attended school or felt uncomfortable outdoors, and were gently reintroduced to the rhythms of college life, with opportunities for social connection in a familiar setting. For these students, it's been the difference between hesitating on the threshold and feeling safe enough to step in.

College mentors have been trained as 'trusted adults', providing consistent guidance, cultivating trust, and nurturing a real sense of belonging and safety. This has helped create more welcoming college campuses, reducing anxieties and reinforcing a sense of belonging both at college and on the journey there. For many, this sort of support has often felt out of reach, especially for those hesitant to ask for help, worn down by the need to repeat their stories to multiple professionals.

Recognising this strain, GMVRU has also invested in dedicated Navigators, initially set up to support young people with injuries related to violent incidents but now expanded to take direct referrals from community members concerned about youth at risk. These community and youth-based workers meet students on campus or out in the community providing one-to-one support.

● Boston College, Lincolnshire

At Boston College, thanks to a pioneering partnership with Lincolnshire Police, students have been regularly contributing to police stop and search review panels since 2019. By reviewing and providing feedback on actual stop and search cases, students are both improving police-public relations and playing an active role in community safety and policy transparency.

To date, 300 students have participated in the panels, and while it was the uniformed public services students who benefited initially, this is now being extended to A Level students and those studying access to HE courses. As well as providing valuable real-world insight into law enforcement and the importance of accountability, the experience offers students a deeper understanding of legal frameworks, policing practices, and civil rights, while also developing critical thinking and analytical skills.

The impact on the wider community is also significant. By fostering transparency, these panels have helped to build trust between the police and local residents, particularly among younger and more diverse communities, and demonstrates that the police are open to constructive criticism and committed to fair, accountable policing practices. This model is now being rolled out nationally across the country.

The relationship with Lincolnshire Police is also extending to other projects, and discussions are currently ongoing about how the college can support the new Operation Plotting, which is targeted at reducing crime and anti-social behaviour in the area.

The role of colleges now and in the future

Colleges are well placed to contribute to the safer streets mission. More than half of all 16 to 18-year-olds in public education study in a further education college, and across the country there is proactive and innovative work happening on anti-violence, anti-misogyny, anti-racism and counter extremism as well as youth safety, youth engagement, relationships education and youth social action. Often colleges work with other agencies and stakeholders, and have local partnerships with violence reduction units and youth offending teams.

Colleges are also engaged in offender learning including prison education and are active in offender rehabilitation working closely with youth justice teams.

However, the role that colleges play in deepening social inclusion, cohesion and tackling discrimination needs to be given greater prominence and government support. For example, Individualised Learner Records (ILR) data reveals a higher representation of college students from diverse ethnic backgrounds (28%) compared to the general population (19%), indicating the key role colleges play in community cohesion.

Colleges run NEET intervention and 14 to 16 programmes, catering to a varied profile of learners. Giving young people who may have previously slipped through the net the opportunity to gain qualifications, taking part in enrichment activity and gaining part-time work is a key action all colleges take to engage those who are hard-to-reach. This was more common under the key stage 4 (KS4) [Increased Flexibility programme](#), and there was considerable evidence of the success of the programme in improving motivation and engagement and promoting achievement and progression. Developing 14 to 16 partnerships much more expansively, so that young people have options available to them which best support their learning and development, would be a positive active step towards achieving this mission.

The government is committed to rolling out a [network of Young Futures Hubs](#) which aim to bring together services to help improve the way young people can access the support they need. In this work, the government plans to engage with local communities, the police, charities, and other key partners, and is currently considering where these hubs could be located. As demonstrated in the case studies above, colleges are natural partners in this and would be a good fit for their location.



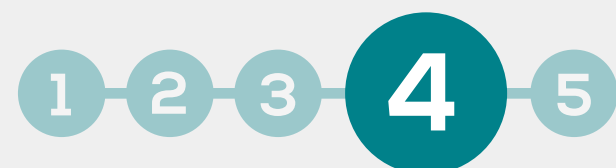
Here in Kirklees and throughout West Yorkshire, the police have long valued the important partnership we have with colleges – and they have to be at the heart of the safer streets agenda.

The fact is that people who have access to education and training are far less likely to become involved in crime, and colleges also do a huge amount of work in interventions with people at risk of becoming either perpetrators or victims of crime too – which is impactful, unrecognised and could and should be better supported as part of the safer streets mission going forwards.”

James Griffiths

Chief Superintendent and Kirklees District Commander, West Yorkshire Police

Mission four



Breaking down barriers to opportunity

Context

The changes that we are facing as a country mean that people need to be able to engage with education and training throughout their lives to have the skills and opportunities they need for good jobs and to live well.

There are several moving parts which highlight just how crucial this is: we need people to adapt to technological changes and to changing practices, and we must ensure that people in low-skilled, low-pay sectors, and disadvantaged groups do not suffer from limited opportunities to get into good quality jobs and progress within them. We also need to move urgently towards a carbon-neutral, green economy, and respond to changes in the labour market and economic shocks. In the context of ongoing technological advances, a flexible, personalised lifetime service must crucially include a radical expansion of the online and blended offer colleges deliver to people.

However, as highlighted in AoC's report, [100% Opportunity: the case for a tertiary education system](#), published in April 2024, our education system currently reflects and reinforces a range of structural inequalities, making it impossible for 100% of the population to have access to quality education and training.

In the report, we argued that the current education system faces three fundamental barriers: it's ineffective, unfair, and inefficient.

It's ineffective because while the majority of young people are in education and training, and almost two-thirds reach Level 3 by the age of 19, opportunities for those who drop out or miss out on that benchmark are diminishing.

For those students who secure GCSE grade 4s in English and maths at the age of 16, there is a well-trodden, understood and successful route, from GCSE via A Levels to university, with government support for living costs and tuition to avoid upfront spending. However, for the many young people who don't get those grades, opportunities can be limited. [A report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies published in 2023](#) on adult education and skills spending found that total spending on classroom-based adult education in 2021-22 was more than two-thirds lower in real terms than in 2003-04 and just over 50% lower than in 2009-10.

It's unfair because the fact remains that the household and place you grow up in has a major impact on your chances of progressing and achieving in our education system.

Increasingly, apprenticeships are only accessible with a Level 3 qualification and evening classes are almost non-existent outside of London and the major cities. [Research from London Economics](#), commissioned by AoC, found that since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, we have seen fewer opportunities for young people below the age of 24, at Levels 2 and 3, in regions outside of London and the South East, in small and medium-sized businesses, for labour market new entrants and in skills shortage subjects. Higher and degree level apprenticeships are more likely to be taken by people already in work with good jobs and access to them from Level 3 apprenticeships is very weak. So even those fortunate enough to work for an employer with an apprenticeship programme are unlikely to be supported if they are in lower-paid jobs.

There is a decline in adult education courses, while demand for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision is rising. According to [the Bell Foundation](#), for example, the number of ESOL learners jumped by 17% from 2021/22, with many facing a "postcode lottery". For learners in some areas, suitable or sufficient ESOL provision is often out of reach.

It's inefficient because education funding is distributed very unevenly, with the largest proportion of money funding higher education. The Department for Education (DfE) reduces funding once students enter 16 to 18 education by around 20% and cuts it by a further 17.5% when they reach the age of 18. Teaching hours in post-16 education average at about 16 per week, which compares unfavourably with 25+ hours in most OECD countries.



How are colleges delivering on this mission?

● Chelmsford College, Essex



● Brighton, Hove & Sussex Sixth Form College, East Sussex

In September 2023, at Brighton, Hove & Sussex Sixth Form College (BHASVIC), one in four students from low-income backgrounds did not make it to the end of their study programme compared with one in 20 from the whole cohort. If they did manage to get to the end of their programme, the value-added outcomes for these students were -0.32 of a grade behind their peers.

A year later, the retention of students from low-income backgrounds has increased from 76.2% to 90.4%, with value-added outcomes now 0.08 of a grade's difference between these students and others.

This progress is thanks to a simple but effective whole-college project, 'Closing the gap'. Starting with all staff training on outcomes for students from low-income backgrounds, guidance on how to best work with them and an inspiring speaker from grassroots campaign Class Divide, the project has enhanced the work staff were already doing to maximum effect. For example, a flagging function was added to the register system and staff were encouraged to pin targeted students to the top of Microsoft Teams chats. Staff now actively check in early, with positivity and kindness, on students from low-income backgrounds, and prioritise them for support where appropriate. Targeted recruitment to the college's well-established Flourish mentoring programme, in which students receive regular mentoring sessions is also encouraged.

The strategy is discussed at whole-staff meetings and is kept as a live topic in department meetings, and BHASVIC plans to sustain and improve outcomes for students from low-income backgrounds further, through partnership work with feeder schools and a local university.

● Petty Pool College, Cheshire

"Empowering young people to discover a world of opportunity and possibility": that's the vision at Petty Pool College in Cheshire, and it's one which staff and learners live out every single day. The college provides specialist vocational education for 16 to 19-year-olds with a range of learning difficulties and disabilities, with a curriculum specifically designed to give every young person the best chance of securing employment at the end of their studies.

In the North West, around 4.5% of young people with SEND go into employment each year, but in 2024, at Petty Pool, 28% of leavers secured paid employment. Developing partnerships with employers is a key focus for Petty Pool. A partnership with fashion brand BEPO (be positive), for example, saw learners design and develop their own line of clothing, called 'All Inclusive' which is now retailed by BEPO online and in stores. And most recently, 'The Ground Up Project' CIC has been launched, as a modern coffee shop and training facility, designed to provide supported internships, employment and upskilling opportunities for learners, and 'brew' the next generation of baristas.

The focus, however, is not only to open doors for supported internships, but to break the stereotypes around employment of neurodiverse individuals. The college educates organisations around the benefits that having a diverse workforce can offer, shaping the landscape for the upcoming generation of young people with SEND. An inaugural 'Neurodiversity in Work Conference' this year, saw around 150 delegates pledged to take steps to become more neurodiversity aware or offer work-placements to neurodiverse people.

The role of colleges now and in the future

// **The Independent Commission on the College of the Future, which I had the pleasure of chairing, was clear that colleges have a role not only as a locally accessible touchpoint for people to access opportunities throughout their lives to study, train and upskill as and when they need it, but also as a central partner to employers – supporting innovation and business change, and driving regional economic growth. This combined remit, across both skills and innovation, is incredibly exciting, and will be key to this government's commitment to both kickstart economic growth and to break down barriers to opportunity.**

I'm convinced this represents a significant untapped potential – and that with the right support, the potential role of colleges is very significant."

Professor Sir Ian Diamond

UK's National Statistician, Office for National Statistics

Colleges have a central role to play in breaking down the barriers to opportunity for people of all ages. As anchor institutions in their communities, they provide education and training for people of all ages, training [1.6 million people every year](#).

The most common destination for disadvantaged students at the end of KS4 is a further education college, with 43% of secondary students who receive free school meals progressing to one. ILR data shows that a higher percentage of college learners (29%) are in the most deprived quintile than that of the general population (20%) which suggests that colleges are supporting both the most deprived learners, and learners from the most deprived areas.

ILR data also shows that in 2022/23, 29.9% of students with 16 to 18 funding had learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD), which is much higher than the corresponding figure in schools (17.3%). It also shows that around 18% of adult college students have LDD. Colleges enable positive destinations for this diverse group of students, where nearly three-quarters (73.5%) of students completing 16 to 18 study in 2022/23 sustained education, apprenticeship, or employment.

To ensure colleges can break down the barriers to opportunity, there must be serious investment in digital infrastructure, resources and college staff expertise and capacity. Alongside an increasingly blended offer, colleges' physical estates and resources will remain critical. The role that colleges must play in place-making will only become more important in addressing social and regional inequalities and supporting the vulnerable communities at risk of being hit hardest by changes in the world of work, climate change and technology.

This will have to be supported through funding and student finance that ensures that cost is not a barrier to engagement with lifetime learning opportunities, and that pathways across all aspects of the education and skills system are equally valued and supported.

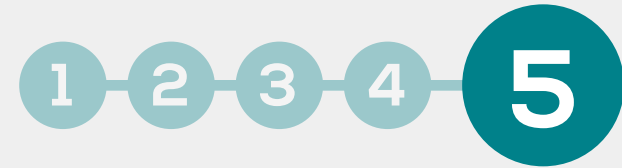
// **The King's Trust works with colleges throughout England, whose inspirational staff run our Team Programme with dedication and passion. They inspire 16 to 25-year-olds who face multiple and complex challenges, developing their confidence and skills, and supporting them into employment, or further education and training. We expect many more young people to need this support over the coming years, not least due to trends in young people's mental health and wellbeing.**

This makes colleges absolutely critical for delivering the government's 'opportunity mission', and they must be supported and funded to play their full role."

Jonathan Townsend

Chief Executive, King's Trust

Mission five



Build an NHS fit for the future

Context

Meeting existing and future workforce needs is one of the biggest challenges facing NHS leaders. The [NHS long term workforce plan](#), published in 2023, identified an expected shortfall (with no new action) of between 260,000 and 360,000 staff by 2036. Some of the expansion will take place in university medical and nursing schools, with colleges and schools as part of the pipeline, but the plan also requires growth of higher education in colleges, a major apprenticeship expansion and more young people and adults to access FE to fill technical and wider job roles.

More generally, with an ageing population and significant growing pressures on the health and social care budgets, there will have to be significant focus on 'prevention' rather than 'cure', with investment on public health and wellbeing. The scale of this challenge is vast: for example, in their annual Active Lives Children and Young People survey, [Sport England](#) found that only 47% of children are meeting the Chief Medical Officers' guidelines of taking part in an average of 60 minutes or more of sport and physical activity a day. It's clear that improving the population's health and preventing illness and disease is key to reducing health inequalities and is at the heart of the plan.



Good health goes beyond being physically healthy, we need our population to be mentally healthy, too. According to [mental health charity, Mind](#), one in four people will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year in England, and one in six people report experiencing a common mental health problem (like anxiety and depression) in any given week in England. The mental health crisis facing our young people, in particular, is well documented. New research published by AoC in [September 2024](#), for example, found that almost a third of colleges reported at least one death by suicide within the previous year. Around 82% of colleges cited home circumstances as the joint-highest influence on student mental health with social media, and 75% cited the cost-of-living crisis and the energy crisis.



Colleges are central to improving public health by helping students gain the skills and knowledge to support them into fairly paid, secure work that we know can be integral to supporting people's health and wellbeing. This is particularly important in areas with the highest levels of deprivation, where health outcomes are typically worse than in areas that are more affluent.

Colleges provide a number of routes into health and social care work which is critical to training the workforce of the future – particularly as the NHS stares down the barrel of the possibility of a 250,000 staff shortfall by 2030. The mission approach of the new government has the potential to truly build the health of the nation, in which colleges have an important role to play."

Matthew Taylor CBE
Chief Executive, NHS Confederation

How are colleges delivering on this mission?

● Burton and South Derbyshire College, Staffordshire and Derbyshire



● Heart of Worcestershire College, Worcestershire

In May 2023, to address the Worcestershire's growing need for skilled professionals in health and social care, the Heart of Worcestershire College (HoW College) opened the Smart Living Academy, a pioneering space with technology enhanced care (TEC) at its heart.

TEC has the potential to enhance independent living and is at the future of care in the NHS. In collaboration with Community Housing and Worcestershire County Council, the college transformed an underutilised city-centre space into two fully furnished, mock domestic flats. Community Housing contributed a range of assistive technology solutions so learners, local employers and community members can engage with innovations that are reactive, preventative, and newly available on the market.

Since its launch, professionals from across the health and social care sectors have utilised the space, and in September 2023, students began accessing it for hands-on learning to prepare them for their future careers. The college has also launched a new Level 2 Certificate in Understanding Technology Enabled Care, which will be partly delivered within the Academy, equipping future health professionals with the knowledge and skills to leverage technology in care settings.

Looking ahead, the Academy will scale up its offerings in 2024/25, and offer TEC providers, care teams, and families training sessions. The space also hosts sessions for families of young people with special education needs and disabilities (SEND), allowing them to explore how TEC can support independent living.

● Northern College, Yorkshire

Good mental health across the nation is crucial when building an NHS fit for the future. At Northern College, an adult residential setting in Yorkshire, learners are not only learning to foster their own good mental health but gaining qualifications linked to existing roles in support work, mental health advocacy, as well as learning support assistant and mentor roles.

The college sits within the National Trust Wentworth Castle Gardens site and provides a unique and safe space for students to share and use their own experiences to take positive steps towards further learning, voluntary work or paid employment.

The college offers a range of introductory courses covering an introduction to mental health and wellbeing, management techniques for stress and anxiety, and supporting children and young people's mental health.

Students can then progress on to accredited Level 1 and 2 qualifications, which then sets them on the path to employment or further training in mental health, support and recovery services, like the Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling also offered by the college.

Progression into further study or employment is a key focus, and the courses include input from guest speakers who work in mental health and related services to provide opportunities for students to become involved in local organisations as volunteers, or to understand the range of services that can offer support. As a result, in 2023/24, there was a 97% average positive progression from the introductory courses, and 73% positive progression from the accredited courses.

The role of colleges now and in the future

By better embedding colleges into core NHS workforce development, and using their local recruitment and training power, we can help to ensure a sustainable, agile and innovative future health and care workforce.

In many ways, colleges are the main link for the NHS to recruit in the communities it serves, opening up opportunity to a much greater and diverse pool of talent and increasing the ability to retain and further develop its workforce. Alongside their role in progression towards university, colleges offer a breadth of qualifications from Level 1 to foundation degrees that lead to a range of NHS and social care career pathways, including roles from healthcare assistants and lab technicians to catering staff. Data from the ILR shows that in 2023/24 there are more than 150,000 enrolments in colleges, not including apprenticeships, on courses related to the health and social care sector.

Colleges must be seen as key recruitment partners. There is an opportunity to jointly promote the health and social care sectors as a career to communities, which could be enhanced through honing health and social care career paths through careers education, information advice and guidance (CEIAG). This requires collaboration with other partners, such as schools, to engage young people. A national, college-led campaign could help to celebrate NHS careers and achievements through the college sector, with recognition of the workforce's significant contribution in

response to Covid-19. Apprenticeships provide a key opportunity to put this into practice, as do T Levels which include industry placements that will require a clear and consistent strategy for delivery at scale.

Beyond this, colleges have a key role in public health and can be a key element of proactive health prevention strategies. Health outcomes can be improved through collaborating on the development of college courses that lead to pre-prepared and tangible entry points into job roles. This is important for those found furthest from the labour market, such as those with special education needs and disabilities (SEND), low education attainment, homelessness, care leavers, carers, a criminal record and low aspirations. As we look to future health and care roles, college courses should increasingly focus on innovative health and wellbeing services strongly aligned with the NHS long term plan and local growth plans, including social prescribing and new tech-driven approaches to health and social care.

Colleges also have a key role to play in helping communities develop a positive relationship with physical activity; they have overrepresentation of the demographic groups most likely to be inactive and face the greatest barriers to activity, so therefore are ideally placed to target this group, and support them to lead fitter and healthier lives.



Further education colleges have an important role to play in implementing recommendations in the Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy for England, and ensuring the new government can deliver on its ambitions to transform the NHS and social care sector.

Colleges across the country are already doing fantastic work in training and developing the social care workforce but could be doing so much more if the systems and funding issues they face were addressed."

Professor Oonagh Smyth
Chief Executive, Skills for Care

Conclusion

It's clear that this will require a radical new way of working; Professor Mariana Mazzucato argues in [Mission Critical 01: Statecraft for the 21st Century](#), that for a mission-driven approach to government to succeed, the relationship between central government and civil society must "stretch beyond a conception of civil society organisations as delivery partners to engage with civil society actors as true partners with unique expertise and levers for change."

As demonstrated through the case studies above, colleges across the country are stand ready with the expertise and capability to be central partners in the delivery of all five missions.

To do this successfully, and unlock colleges' full potential, we need government to:



Think proactively and creatively about the role colleges can play across all five missions



Empower colleges in communities across the country to work in partnership with other local leaders across the public, third and private sector



Ensure they have the resource to deliver on this



Mission-driven government means raising our sights as a nation and focusing on ambitious, measurable, long-term objectives that provide a driving sense of purpose for the country. It means a new way of doing government that is more joined up, pushes power out to communities and harnesses new technology, all with one aim in mind – to put the country back in the service of working people."

Labour Party Manifesto 2024