



ASSOCIATION  
OF COLLEGES

**LET THEM LEARN:  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
COLLEGES'  
SUPPORT FOR THE  
UNEMPLOYED**



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# FOREWORDS



## Kathleen Henehan

Senior Research and Policy Analyst,  
Resolution Foundation

It goes without saying that the past year has brought unprecedented challenges, including for the education sector and the labour market. While the furlough scheme has been immensely effective in limiting the rise in joblessness that the pandemic would otherwise have wrought, worklessness has still been on the up: the number of 16-64-year-olds who were unemployed rose by 17 per cent between 2019 and 2020.

And of course, Covid-19's effect on unemployment was larger for some groups than for others, leaving young people and especially young people from some minority ethnic backgrounds worse off. For example, although the share of 25-64-year-olds who were unemployed rose by less than a percentage point (to 2.7 per cent) between 2019 and 2020, the share of 18-24-year-olds who were unemployed rose from 7 to nearly 9 per cent over the same timeframe. Black 18-24-year-olds were harder hit still, as the share who were unemployed grew by four points, from 12 to 16 per cent.

For many, unemployment is more than a short-term experience: as of March, the number of 18-24-year-olds who were unemployed for six months or longer reached 188,000 – up 50 per cent in a single year. Its scarring effects can last longer still: previous Resolution Foundation research found that young people with GCSE-equivalent qualifications who left education during the financial crisis (between 2008 and 2011) were 20 per cent less likely to find work than those who left school in the years before or after the crisis – and this unemployment scarring stayed with them for nearly a decade.

The easing of lockdown and the re-opening of job-rich sectors like leisure and hospitality does offer some room for optimism. Latest figures indicate that employment, among all age groups, is up on the start of this year, and the number of job vacancies in the UK as a whole are nearing pre-pandemic levels.

But reverting to a pre-Covid jobs market shouldn't be good enough: there were large inequalities in joblessness, for example by ethnicity, age and region. And even among those with a job, precarious work was on the rise.

Thankfully, this report shows that when educators, employment support providers and employers work together, they can transform peoples' lives. Colleges and jobcentres are at the heart of this: by offering careers advice and linking people directly with employers, the two have helped young people into Kickstart roles, onto apprenticeships and into new, rewarding careers. But it doesn't just happen: these outcomes are the result of a concerted, strategic effort between partners. A clear and joined-up national strategy is needed, with serious consideration given to removing unhelpful barriers that prevent people from accessing opportunities to learn and train. I hope these case studies can become a blueprint for a national pathway forward.



## David Hughes

Chief Executive,  
Association of Colleges

Whilst 'collaboration' is probably an over-used word, this report shows that it is happening for great effect in colleges as they work with Jobcentre Plus (JCP) to deliver for employers and unemployed people. At a time when unemployment is front of mind for policy makers and too many people are out of work or in insecure work as a result of the pandemic, I hope that this report fosters even more similar collaborations and programmes.

Further Education (FE) colleges have always worked with unemployed people in a range of ways, but not always directly with the local jobcentre, or strategically with JCP. What these case studies provide us with is proof that where those relationships exist, great things can happen for both learners and employers. Critically, these case studies show that there is a synergy between the skills and qualifications focus of the education sector with the work focus in JCP. They also show that good employers recognise the need to invest in training for their new recruits and so do unemployed people when the employer is part of the equation.

There are still policy challenges which AoC is pursuing nationally to help bring together skills and employment services, to build on these case studies and to help more colleges and JCP offices build similar partnerships. This is vital if we are to use current skills reform through the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill as an opportunity to support even more unemployed people into meaningful work.

The colleges named in these examples all demonstrate what can be achieved by working together to solve shared problems and realise opportunities. We need more of these trusting, collaborative relationships to develop, where there can be a shared aspiration and a realistic commitment to effectively support people back into sustainable work. What these studies also show us is that these things rarely have to start from scratch – there is usually something around that can be built upon so long as all partners can see the possibilities. I hope these case studies inspire future partnerships in communities across the country, whether you work in a college or a jobcentre, and whether you are a leader or another member of the team. I also hope that it illustrates the case for investing in colleges as vehicles for boosting employment, with a systems reform to unlock this.

# INTRODUCTION

*Further education (FE) colleges are well placed to support people into good jobs, no matter their starting point.*

## **The opportunity for change to support unemployed people to train at college**

Too many people who are unemployed are not being directed to advice and training that could get them into good jobs because of a disconnected system across skills and welfare. The current welfare system is actively discouraging people from getting the skills they need. People are held back from entering education and training because they will lose out on unemployment benefits due to the rules.

The cost of taking no action means:

- fewer people in stable and meaningful jobs;
- slower economic growth;
- reduced opportunity to meet employers' skills needs; and
- bigger tax burdens.

The Chancellor has invested in specific programmes through both the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) aimed at supporting 16 to 24-year-olds. However, these programmes do not operate in tandem to achieve real impact for them. Nor do current policies and initiatives address training and retraining needs for older adults. Taken together, this makes it hard for employers, students, unemployed people and colleges to use them effectively.

Further education (FE) colleges are well placed to support people into good jobs, no matter their starting point. They are navigating the new environment and continuing to support the needs of their local Job Centre Plus (JCP) using existing, local relationships. There are outstanding examples of FE colleges supporting unemployed people to gain skills and confidence. Many of these are where the local JCP and the local college work together to deliver meaningful progress for people, boost sought after skills for employers and help to combat the impact of the pandemic on jobs and the economy.

This report explores a number of case studies that demonstrate excellent, local work between colleges and JCPs and highlights key success factors that make these partnerships effective. These learning points are intended to support existing good practice and should be replicated across the country and expanded to include a broader range of skills and levels.

However, it is also clear that this work happens locally despite the education and welfare system, not because of it. The Government and DfE have recognised that jobs are a core part of the education and skills strategy, demonstrated in their Skills for Jobs White Paper and the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill. Reciprocal action and reform from the Government and DWP is also needed to embed the transformative role of education and skills into an employment and jobs strategy. DWP and DfE reforms must create a system that embeds, incentivises and invests in the role of colleges in supporting unemployed people on a national scale.

*The high employment rate in the 2010s should not disguise the fact that some people have moved from job to job with little chance to train or retrain for more meaningful employment.*

### **How did we get here and what is the impact of the pandemic?**

Over the period covered by the 2015 spending review, DWP spending on Employment programmes fell from £760 million (2015-6) to £107 million (2019-20). Over this period, the department replaced the work programme with a more focused work and health programme, but neither involve much (re)training or upskilling.

In 2020, in response to the impact of the pandemic on employment, DWP very quickly introduced new and large support programmes to help with job search. At the same time, they also scaled up employment support via the Kickstart and Restart programmes but these retain many of the characteristics of previous programmes. Most of the money is being directed – sensibly – towards wage support. However, employers have no obligation to provide training, the organisation has been routed via large national companies focused on throughput and there is a limited overlap with adult education or training schemes.

DfE's Adult Education Budget (AEB) supports colleges with the cost of courses for those who are unemployed, some of whom are mandated to attend by JCPs, but there are several pressures on the AEB. The funding rate per hour hasn't increased since 2013 and money can only be used for a limited list of courses. People who attend while being on universal credit have obligations

to prioritise job search conditions and take available jobs if able to do so. This means that they may be employed in the short term, but are prevented from developing skills that would allow them to get into better-quality, more stable, better paid employment over the longer term. The high employment rate in the 2010s should not disguise the fact that some people have moved from job to job with little chance to train or retrain for more meaningful and sustainable employment with prospects for progression.

In 2017, Treasury handed control of the £2 billion apprenticeship budget in England to employers, which has resulted in a shift in activity towards older, existing employees to assist them to improve skills at higher levels – including management training. There has been an 80 per cent fall in the number of under 19-year-olds starting apprenticeships between 2016 and 2020.

DfE allocated funding in one year (2020-21) to increase education support via sector-based work academies for those who are unemployed, but this stops in summer 2021 and colleges need to find funds from AEB that are fixed in cash terms. There are no specific arrangements to encourage progression from Kickstart or Restart to apprenticeships.

## Recommendation 1

### INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Every unemployed person should be encouraged to access expert careers support and have financial support for a course at college when they need it to get into good local jobs, no matter their starting point and with no impact on their benefits.



## Recommendation 2

### LOCAL LEVEL

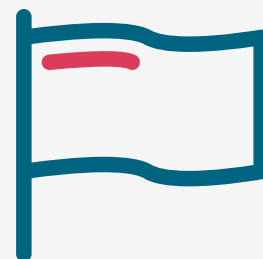
Relationships between colleges and their local jobcentre should be strengthened so they can support more people together, with Jobcentre Plus included as a key partner in developing plans to support local people and employers with skills and training.



## Recommendation 3

### NATIONAL LEVEL

Government and DWP should embed the transformative role of education and skills into an employment and jobs strategy as part of a joined up strategy with DfE.



See page 20 for further details on our recommendations

# LANCASTER & MORECAMBE COLLEGE

Lancaster & Morecambe College is a trusted provider of support for the unemployed, this is accredited to a successful hierarchy of collaboration and maintaining good relationships with their local JobCentre Plus (JCP).



Photos provided by West London College

## KICKSTART SCHEME

Lancaster & Morecambe College (LMC) is an intermediary organisation for the [Kickstart Scheme](#). They work in partnership with Lancaster & District Chamber of Commerce, Morecambe Business Improvement District (BID) and Lancaster BID. The college is embedded into local employer and community engagement opportunities.

All four organisations could see the benefits and opportunities of the Kickstart Scheme. The three business groups have strong contacts with employers in the region, and the college could take on the role of being an intermediary for Kickstart. They also developed a range of support and training for businesses around Kickstart, in the hope that employers would come on board – which they have done.

In total, there are 73 employers supporting 170 Kickstart Scheme placements. One of the benefits of Kickstart is it can apply to any work sector. This has led to the college working with new local businesses and sectors – especially smaller, creative charities, collectives and agencies. The college also has employers from the hospitality industry, marketing and business administration, children's groups and have even spread geographically into Cumbria with the scheme. This opens up opportunities for future collaborations. The relationships with these employers will be maintained by the Engagement Team and through the college's Employer Hub.

The learning pathway the college offers involves wraparound support for the individual taking up the role with the employer, and additional training and development. At the end of the six months placement, they might become a full-time employee and /or take on an [apprenticeship](#) via the college. For those who don't get a job they can be offered traineeships and apprenticeships at the college.

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*Lancaster and Morecambe Job Centres and their staff have a great working relationship with LMC and this has enabled the work coaches to build on and identify any gaps in support for their customers and to recognise how LMC can support. They are always very keen to adapt their employability offer to suit the needs and demands of the customer and the JCP and we are excited for the future in enabling our young adults to access more wraparound support when the youth hub on campus is launched in the next couple of months.*

**Helen Smith**

DWP Partnership Manager

### REAPING THE REWARDS OF PARTNERSHIP WORKING

The relationships between Lancaster & Morecambe College and the DWP are embedded at both a strategic and an operational level. The college's engagement and work-based learning team work collaboratively with the local JCP team at an operational level, with whom they have a longstanding partnership having previously worked together on sector-specific careers events and employability courses. Kickstart has reinforced these partnerships.

The close relationship has led to DWP supporting a Youth Hub to be housed on the campus at Lancaster & Morecambe College (LMC). This will be where the DWP can work with 16 - 24-year-olds on career support and functional skills, with the aim of getting young people back into employment or study.



### KHAALISA ADAM (19)

Khaalisa was referred to the Employability Skills course as she was struggling to find a job and thought this would help her on her employment journey. The course included sessions on marketing, interview skills, presenting and team working. At the end of her course, Khaalisa felt more confident about her career options and following a meeting with LMC's Employer Engagement Team to discuss Apprenticeship vacancies, she was accepted onto the Marketing Assistant Apprenticeship at The Consult Centre in Morecambe.



# PETERBOROUGH COLLEGE

Peterborough College is based in the city centre and has a satellite branch called Jobsmart that delivers courses aimed specifically at adult learners who need help to get into employment.



*SWAP Cohort Peterborough College 2021*

## STEWARDING AND SECURITY COURSE

Like most colleges, Peterborough will tailor courses and make amendments where necessary to ensure their training opportunities are as inclusive and accessible as possible, ensuring opportunities are open to all, especially to those who may be furthest away from the job market.

Jobsmart are proud of the four-week, full-time and fully funded Stewarding and Security course that they currently offer. The course consists of a package of qualifications, including conflict management, equality and diversity and safeguarding, as well as professional qualifications needed to enter the industry, such as the Door Supervisor and CCTV Operator awards.

Many participants on the security course have been unemployed and in some cases for a considerable amount of time. DWP work coaches, in partnership with the college, support the students with broader employability skills and behaviours including punctuality, reliability and how they dress for work and present

themselves effectively and appropriately. An added benefit is that by the time the learners have completed the course, the camaraderie that develops during their shared period of training creates a support group, a new network of friends and increased confidence and sense of self-esteem.

As part of the overall training programme, the college offers ongoing support with setting up an individual's Security Industry Account (SIA) and covering the cost of the Door Supervisor Licence. This support ensures that where possible and able to do so, all barriers to accessing employment are addressed.

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*DWP works with local colleges to offer our customers a wide range of courses to gain qualifications and build confidence to support them in their journey into employment. This could be through attending a sector-based work academy programme (SWAP) which can last up to six weeks and has three main components – pre-employment training, work experience and a guaranteed job interview. All students of the course have up to three guaranteed interviews at the end of the SWAP with local stewarding and security employers. This is designed to help employers meet their recruitment needs as well as to recruit a workforce with the right skills to sustain and grow their business. Customers can be referred to this by their Work Coach.*

*A great example of working in partnership with Peterborough College and local employers is through the delivery of a successful sector-based work academy programme designed at upskilling our customers to gain a security qualification and licence enabling them to take their first steps into employment in the Security Industry.*

**Donna Augustine**

Partnership Manager, DWP



### ENGLISH FOR SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES (ESOL) COURSES

ESOL is another area where the benefits of having a well-established partnership and communication process in place between a college and DWP can be seen. Whilst many JCP clients were managing to obtain low-skilled employment, they were in many cases not able to sustain it due to the levels of English speaking and reading skills held. In response to this identified need, Peterborough College provided a specific ESOL for Work course at Jobsmart, which offers both accredited and unaccredited qualifications and learning. The course has been designed specifically around this cohort of individuals, equipping them with the necessary levels of ESOL skills required in the workplace, enabling them to sustain employment. This approach is aligned to, and supports, the DWP model of ABC - 'A job, a Better job, a Career'.

### OTHER PARTNERSHIPS AT AN OPERATIONAL AND STRATEGIC LEVEL

Cross Keys Homes, a housing association in Peterborough, hosts a forum called Tackling Worklessness in Peterborough (TWIP) which has approximately 30 members locally including DWP employer advisors and local colleges. TWIP reaches out and supports other local organisations in the community that also work with and support the unemployed, ensuring that a network of community and college providers can share information, develop relationships and gain insight into the gaps in provision and / or areas of demand.

# GRIMSBY INSTITUTE OF FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

The Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education's employability team work tirelessly on a sustainable approach to reducing long-term unemployment in the local area. Their success is down to relationships with employers, Jobcentre Plus and local partners like charities and community referral groups.



Photos provided by West London College

## ADAPTING PROVISION AND BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE UNEMPLOYED

Grimsby Institute took a strategic decision to focus a larger portion of their Adult Education Budget (AEB) to address the high levels of unemployed residents in their locality. The college undertook a rebranding exercise to keep the unemployed provision separate from the college campus and to help remove and address any negative connotations or experiences that unemployed adults might have around school and college. The college established National Employer Training (NET UK) as a separate delivery arm, with its own branding and delivery locations which would prove to be more accessible for some of their unemployed adult learners than attending the central college campus.

Simultaneously, Grimsby Institute invested both time and resource to develop a more effective partnership with their local JCP. This was achieved in part by employing and deploying specialist staff who built relationships with key stakeholders including JCP, probation services and local authorities. They were able to build a tripartite relationship that worked effectively with the college's employers to create and offer employment opportunities, training and support.

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When I look at what NET does... and the life-changing impact it has, it's honestly one of the best decisions we ever made.

**Debra Gray**

Principal,  
Grimsby Institute

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*We do not see the team as part of another organisation, they feel as though they are part of our extended team. They are always on hand to offer guidance and support. They answer any questions we have, no matter what time of day that we have it. The relationships that have been built with the team by myself and other members of our organisation is second to none. We cannot thank them enough for the assistance they have offered.*

**Employer**

### **TAILORING PROVISION TO THE NEEDS OF THE EMPLOYER**

The employability team work across the Midlands and the North engaging employers to support their workforce recruitment and training needs and designing bespoke training packages for each employer. Approximately, 90 per cent of these bespoke employer training programmes are delivered through sector-based work academy programmes (SWAPs) as they engage with employers directly who are looking to fill vacancies, many often in skills shortage areas.

The college also provides wraparound support, which they credit as the key to NET's success. They receive referrals from multiple partners including JCP, local charities and community groups for learners who often present significant barriers to employment, such as ESOL needs, homelessness, learning difficulties or mental health issues. The ethos of the college is that its provision is not just about skills development, but also about investing in the person as a whole, supporting their life skills to gain confidence and achieve the skills to gain sustainable employment.

Through this kind of effective partnership working, the college has successfully placed many ex-offenders and individuals with long term mental and physical health conditions back into work.

80 per cent of employability students are offered a job after they complete their training, retention is at 98 per cent and the provision is transforming lives and enabling business to thrive.

# HARTLEPOOL COLLEGE

Hartlepool College enjoys a longstanding relationship working with JCP in Hartlepool and the surrounding towns. There is a well-established partnership and ways of working enjoyed by the college and JCP, with many JCP area managers getting involved in projects and acting as key contacts for the college. SWAPs have proven very effective for Hartlepool College and the adult learners who have enrolled.

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Employers are looking for value-added training. So, it's being able to provide something that's 'over and above' and having that flexibility to do that.

**Gary Riches**

Head of Employer Services Hartlepool College

## DIALOGUE AT A LOCAL AND OPERATIONAL LEVEL

The college is focused on getting the quality right and currently work off 70 per cent of courses progressing into work. That reputation of a high progression-to-work ratio means more people committing to courses and more employers returning, because they know the college can deliver the employees they want.

Hartlepool College has developed a good working relationship with the Local Authority Adult Education and training arm, Hartlepool Learning and Skills. Both the college and Local Authority work collaboratively ensuring that they can utilise each other's specialisms to deliver a broader and more responsive offer for employers and adults than otherwise could be offered if they were competing. Such collaborative partnership working also allows for effective and simplified communications to employers and learners. An example of this collaborative partnership could take place if an employer engages in a SWAP with the local authority, which

requires manufacturing training. The local authority would deliver English and maths, and possibly Occupational Studies, and the college would deliver sector-specific training such as engineering. This way they are in partnership, rather than competitors.

## BEING HONEST AND OPEN ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN OFFER

The quality of the provision being delivered is also a critical aspect of delivery, for both the employer and the learner. Hartlepool College ensures it is clear with their stakeholders and employers about what support or provision is being requested and what they can deliver. Honesty and integrity are important for all stakeholders and if support or provision is requested that Hartlepool are unable to deliver, they will signpost or refer to another local college or training provider who is best placed to respond. The Further Education landscape can be competitive but Hartlepool, like so many other FE colleges, continues to develop collaborative partnerships for the benefit of local employers and residents.

# SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE AND STROUD COLLEGE

The Employability and Progression department at South Gloucestershire and Stroud College has established links with employers to ensure there is a progression route and positive destination for all students.

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Our partnership has worked extremely well, and we are delighted with the positive difference the training has made for our customers.

**Carole Stubbs**

JCP Employer Advisor

## EARLY YEARS PROGRAMME - AN EXAMPLE OF EFFECTIVE PROVISION

Utilising the existing strong partnership that is in place, Kingswood JCP approached South Gloucestershire and Stroud College to advise them that they had identified a number of parents who were returning to work and who were actively seeking employment that could fit around childcare commitments. In collaboration with Kingswood JCP, South Gloucestershire and Stroud College designed the Early Years UpSkilled course to respond to the needs of those parents. The course is taught from 9.30am to 2.30pm over a period of three weeks, a time arranged so that parents can still do the school run. Learners on the Early Years UpSkilled course, are taught four qualifications: CACHE Award Level 1 in Early Years Settings; NCFE Interpersonal Skills Level 1; TQUK Certificate in Equality and Diversity Level 2 and the QA Level 3 Award in Paediatric First Aid. Learning is underpinned and complimented by industry professionals delivering talks to inspire students and offer an insight into the sector.

Whilst the college has an external facing team to actively engage with employers, the success and impact of the Early Years UpSkilled course has meant that employers will actively engage the college to recruit students from the programme.

For many adults returning to learning, it can often be the case where it has been a considerable length of time since they were last in employment. This can lead to loss of self-confidence and a degree of anxiety around returning to learning and employment after a length of unemployment or economic inactivity. The course is designed to boost self-esteem and develop self-confidence as well as developing skills and qualifications. The impact of which can be seen in the employers engaging with the college to participate in the programme.

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*Before being invited to attend the early years course I'd spend hours and hours searching for jobs which ended similarly everyday- I felt worthless, overwhelmed, and a failure. When I was asked to attend the early years course by my job coach at first, I was sceptical. Probably because I'd been so bombarded with no's I felt I wasn't good enough for anything, not even a course designed to help. As I attended, day by day I felt my confidence slowly return. I met people in similar positions who had had similar experiences. I no longer felt embarrassed and ashamed of my unemployment, I felt a new sense of drive. Our course leader Claire Hibberd was amazing, she was so patient and understanding and gave the whole class something we'd all not had in a while- hope. Attending this course not only gives you the first steppingstones to a new career it reminds you that you are not all the things you've led yourself to think. I left with my level 1 early year's course and 4 weeks later I've started an apprenticeship in a nursery on my way to achieving my level 3 whilst getting paid. 2 months ago, I wouldn't in a million years have predicted I'd be where I am. Take that leap of faith you owe yourself. No matter how low you rate yourself now it all can change in one decision.. to turn up*

### Student on Early Years UpSkilled Course



Photos provided by West London College

### KICKSTART SCHEME - COLLABORATING AT AN OPERATIONAL LEVEL

Ecotricity a local employer in Stroud, Stroud JCP and South Gloucestershire and Stroud College developed a partnership to engage with the Kickstart Scheme.

The college and employer worked closely to design a pre-training programme that would offer support, with a particular focus on employability and interview skills, preparing for job interviews and understanding the requirements of job descriptions, for anyone applying for an Ecotricity Kickstart placement. In addition, learners on the programme would achieve

two qualifications and have a presentation from Ecotricity introducing their company to the learners, outlining their culture, ethos and values. All course participants are offered a guaranteed interview at the end of the course.

The partnership and programme has been very successful to date with 10 learners from the initial cohort of 15 having subsequently been employed by Ecotricity. For those learners who did not manage to secure a position with Ecotricity, they all received ongoing post course support, to help them secure employment or a Kickstart placement with another employer.

# WEST LONDON COLLEGE

West London College already had a strong relationship with JCP however, collaborating through the Kickstart Scheme has made it even stronger.



Photos provided by West London College

## A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO PROVISION

When Kickstart was announced in the summer of 2020, the college saw this as an opportunity to collaborate for the benefit of their local community. Consultations and feedback from employers identified a need and demand for wraparound employability support. The college designed a new programme which used the [Skills Builder Universal Framework](#) at its core to ensure consistency. Employers in West London were also very familiar with the framework which supported the synergy of all parties using the same framework. Having a consistent and collaborative wraparound offer across the locality has been welcomed by employers for its simplicity and consistency.

An integral aspect of the Kickstart Scheme is the journey the young person undertakes to achieve and obtain a sustainable job. Strong relationships between the college and the employer are therefore very important to support a positive learner journey and outcome for all. To support the ongoing relationship with employers involved in the programme, the college facilitates regular conversations with both the

Kickstart employee and their line manager reflecting on what's working and what could be developed. These facilitated conversations also allow the opportunity to address effectively and appropriately any issues that might have arisen thus supporting a positive experience and successful outcome for both learner and employer.

Participants undertake a self-assessment at the beginning of their programme and throughout the programme to measure and reflect upon their journey and progress to date. For any participants who are not offered a position with an employer at the end of the programme, the college will continue to offer support including potential apprenticeships and other longer-term career and training options.

The Kickstart Scheme has further cemented the existing strong relationship between West London College and JCP.



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*DWP is constantly engaging with its key partners & stakeholders, including our local colleges. We work together to ensure that the services, provisions and programmes being delivered are tailored to the specific needs of local residents & our claimants. Especially in this current economic climate.*

**Kam Babrah** Partnership Manager DWP



*Angela Ramsay, took part in the programme, trying her hand at plumbing with H2O during her work placement. The company were so impressed they offered Angela a job.*

## PARTNERSHIPS: WOMEN INTO CONSTRUCTION

West London College works in partnership with [Women into Construction \(WiC\)](#) to offer training courses to work in the construction industry. Trainees complete the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) as well as a Level 1 certificate in Employability Skills.

## ONGOING COLLABORATION AT A STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL LEVEL

West London College is represented on the West London Employment and Skills Board (WLESB), which brings together further and higher education institutions, the DWP, the local authority and other stakeholders offering opportunities for the college to engage with partners on a sub-regional basis.

Regular communication with DWP Partnership Manager for Hammersmith and Fulham also helps the college identify needs within the borough. West London College has a good relationship with all DWP partnership managers. A good way to develop these relationships is to identify a single point of contact within each organisation and with DWP, to enable regular communication and a two-way exchange

During the Covid-19 pandemic, West London College hosted a virtual coffee morning for job brokers and work coaches from JCP, in order to continue the communication and keep those channels open.



Bianca says: “A very big thank you to Anna at WiC, and Barry Mortimer and my tutor Donna. My two-week placement with EE Smith Contracts was fast-paced and informative, and I have now been offered a permanent role on a huge project! The WiC scheme is such a great opportunity to get into a variety of construction roles - even in the middle of a pandemic.”

# ACTIVATE LEARNING

Activate Learning is an education group that consists of seven colleges across Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Surrey: The seven colleges are Banbury and Bicester College, Bracknell and Wokingham College, City of Oxford College, Farnham College, Guildford College, Merrist Wood College and Reading College. The colleges work collaboratively, with a faculty structure spanning all campuses. Their unemployed offer is funded through the Adult Education Budget and projects funded by DWP, European Social Fund (ESF) and The National Lottery.

“

It's the holistic, all-round approach that we provide project participants. When participants come to us, they can have access to a one-to-one coach... to support their job search and the coach will also encourage them to get onto training courses and upskill, and that's really key. If they're unemployed they can access a wide variety of free training in as many courses as they want.

**Rebecca Iley**

Head of Operations

## PARTNERSHIP WORKING AT A STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL LEVEL

In Oxfordshire and Berkshire, Activate Learning has a dedicated project manager who works directly with their local JCP and in partnership with the Activate Learning employability engagement specialists who in turn manage employer engagement and relationship management. Regular monthly meetings are scheduled and take place for colleges and nominated JCP colleagues to share updates and discuss what provision might be needed. In addition, the colleges also host steering group meetings with key local stakeholders including community and Third sector organisations, Local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) that supports greater collaboration, partnership working and information sharing.

Activate Learning are currently delivering a project called 'Back on Track' which supports young people who are at risk of being Not in Education or Training (NEET). Back on Track

is a collaborative project which also includes Banbury Young Homelessness Project (BYHP), South Oxfordshire Food and Education Academy (SOFEA) and motor project TRAX.

Other partnerships include working with Oxfordshire County Council's Education Employment and Training (EET) Service and with Thames Valley Police, the probation service and the mental health charity Mind. The focus of these partnerships and collaborative approaches is very much centred on supporting long-term unemployed, who face additional barriers, back into employment.

## WORK AND HEALTH PROGRAMME

Activate Learning is in addition a provider for the DWP-funded Work and Health Programme which receives direct referrals from Jobcentre Plus. Participants on the Work and Health Programme have typically been unemployed for some length of time and have been unable to work due to a long-standing health condition.



# SUCCESS FACTORS

These case studies have hopefully given you some inspiration for developing your relationships – wherever you work.

They make clear that successful partnerships take time to establish. They are built on mutual trust and respect and start with some shared goals and drivers.

Any partnership that is to stand the test of time, needs recognition and support from the senior level, as well as individuals who are tasked with making it work. All partners need to learn about each other and make sure that they are realistic about what can be achieved, that they understand the barriers that each organisation has to overcome.

Partnerships offer an opportunity to view problems from a different perspective – which can lead to new, innovative solutions. Resources can be shared and used to greater effect and possibly even provide better value for money. The success of any partnership though will strongly depend on the quality, breadth and depth of communication established between organisations. All of these case studies show what can be achieved through making a commitment to effective partnership.

They also demonstrate how local organisations working together can create solutions that work for that area. These initiatives are mostly funded through national funding streams, but each area has adapted the offer to fit the local need, and the benefits can be seen locally and nationally.



# CONCLUSIONS

FE colleges and JCPs are finding effective ways to support unemployed people in their local communities with tailored training and skills development that will help them achieve meaningful job outcomes. This report shows there is a willingness and commitment to respond to local need and identifies key factors that lead to local success. This good practice should be replicated across the country and expanded across a broader range of skills and levels.

Unfortunately, opportunities for even more unemployed people to benefit from learning and training are being hindered by national policy. This is not a new issue, but at a time when Government is rightly talking about the importance of training and retraining to support people and employers, there seems to be a mismatch between the Government's levelling up agenda and the employment and jobs strategy.

We welcome investment in programmes to support 16 - 24-year-olds but they must complement each other for employers, students, unemployed people and colleges to use them effectively. More needs to be done to support older adults to train and retrain in order to address existing skills gaps and to respond to changes in the jobs landscape, for example in green jobs. In particular, financial barriers to secure and meaningful work must be removed.

Treasury, DWP and DfE all recognise that jobs are a core part of the education and skills strategy. Reciprocal action and reform is now needed to embed the transformative role of education and skills into an employment and jobs strategy.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Recommendation 1

### INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

**Every unemployed person should be encouraged to access expert careers support and have financial support for a course at college when they need it to get into good local jobs, no matter their starting point and with no impact on their benefits at the end of sentence.**



Currently few people are pointed in the direction of college courses and training even though this might support them to be more work ready. Every part of the skills and welfare system needs to work together to ensure that people are given the right advice for them and where necessary signposted to the training that will support them, with the funding they need.

We are calling for Government to:

- a) Reform universal credit rules so that no one is prevented from being able to access training that will help them so they can progress to gain meaningful employment.
- b) Give everyone a right to lifelong learning so that each person can access the training they need, when they need it, throughout their life and career, including a fully funded additional level 3 qualification (A-level equivalent) as required by local, regional and national priorities and opportunities.
- c) Include signposting to careers information, advice and guidance as part of the JCP job coach role.

## Recommendation 2

### LOCAL LEVEL

**Relationships between colleges and their local jobcentre should be strengthened so they can support more people together, with Jobcentre Plus included as a key partner in developing plans to support local people and employers with skills and training.**



Jobcentre Plus speak to people and businesses every day and should play an increased role in planning how to support people with developing the skills they need in their locality. Whilst there are many examples FE colleges supporting unemployed people in partnerships with their local Jobcentre Plus (JCP), this happens despite the education and welfare systems, not because of it.

We are calling for colleges and their local Jobcentre Plus to:

- Build links between welfare careers advice and jobs programmes and skills initiatives so that people get the right guidance for them that assesses both training and work progression, no matter where they turn for support.
- Include Jobcentre Plus as a key stakeholders in Local Skills Improvement Plans.

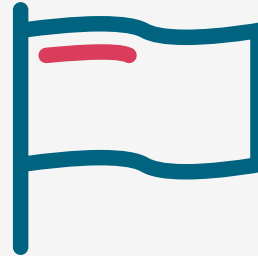
We are calling on Government to:

- Embed the role of colleges in supporting unemployed people in the Skills and Post-Education Bill through legislation for Local Skills Improvement Plans in the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill.
- Invest in colleges to provide more strategic advice to employers and their local Jobcentre Plus on interpreting skills needs to reduce the lag between supply and demand. This requires a move towards mission driven governance and accountability to deliver on outcomes for their communities instead of numerical targets for outputs.

## Recommendation 3

### NATIONAL LEVEL

**Government and DWP should embed the transformative role of education and skills into an employment and jobs strategy as part of a joined up strategy with DfE.**



The Chancellor has invested in programmes in both the Department for Education and the Department for Work and Pensions, but they do not operate in tandem and are difficult to make work for employers, for students /unemployed people and for colleges.

We are calling for the Government to:

- Set out a national strategy for the role of education and skills in supporting employment, alongside the industrial decarbonisation strategy as part of the transition to a net-zero carbon economy.
- Establish a cross-departmental ministerial taskforce, with DFE, BEIS, DWP, MHCLG and others represented, with meaningful engagement with employers, colleges, and trade and student unions.

**To discuss your engagement with our work, please get in touch with [public\\_affairs@aoc.co.uk](mailto:public_affairs@aoc.co.uk).**



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