



THE COLLEGE COLLECTIVE

IMPACT REPORT



2025



Foreword



Gerry McDonald
CBE

Chair of The College Collective and Group Principal and CEO, New City College

Behind the data are stories of real transformation, of professionals who have grown into leaders, influenced policy, and improved provision for students.

Since its inception in 2021, The College Collective has grown from a bold idea into a thriving movement – one that is reshaping how colleges collaborate, develop talent, and drive sector-wide improvement.

Established by The KWP Ltd and the Association of Colleges (AoC), the programme was built on a simple but powerful premise: every college has something valuable to offer, and something valuable to learn. By connecting colleges through peer-led consultancy and professional development, across every aspect of college business- curriculum and non-curriculum. The College Collective enables colleges to grow their own expert talent while benefiting from the insights and innovation of others.

This impact report captures the journey so far. It highlights how 42 partner colleges have come together to share strengths, challenge thinking, and build a UK-wide community of forward-looking leaders and practitioners. At the heart of this network are 319 AoC associate experts, trained and accredited to deliver high-quality, tailored support to peers across the country. Their work has reached almost a thousand staff through coaching, action learning sets, and webinars, creating ripples of change that extend far beyond individual engagements.

The results are compelling. Experts report significant growth in confidence and self-belief, while participants consistently rate their experience as excellent. But behind the data are stories of real transformation, of professionals who have grown into leaders, influenced policy, and improved provision for students.

The stories in this report reflect our intended purpose: The College Collective is not just a consultancy model, it is a culture of collaboration. It empowers professionals to lead with confidence, share with purpose, and learn with humility. It fosters distributed leadership, strategic thinking, and innovation. And most importantly, it strengthens the student experience by improving the people, practices, and policies that shape it.

As we look to the future, our ambition is to grow this movement further. We invite more colleges to join us – bringing their strengths, learning from others, and shaping a more resilient, collaborative sector together.

Foreword



Dr Kate Webb

**Managing Director
The KWP Ltd**

I proposed The College Collective because I saw that, as a sector, we were not good at truly sharing practice. We talked about “good practice”, but we rarely shared the full picture, including what did not work. We often punished failure instead of learning from it, even though that is exactly how our students learn best: by trying, failing, and trying again. I was also concerned that, with flatter management structures, the traditional routes for career progression and middle management development had disappeared. And too often, when facing challenges, we turned to external consultants instead of trusting the expertise already within our own sector.

The College Collective changes that. It connects college professionals across all disciplines, teaching, and non-teaching alike, with peers in partner colleges to work on people, projects, or problems as a genuine, sector-led consultancy. It is confident, collaborative, and built on the belief that our sector can help itself.



Natalie Gee

**Director of Workforce
Policy & Services
Association of Colleges**

The College Collective is a dynamic, sector-led initiative designed to bring professionals together to share expertise, learn from one another, and lead with confidence. It plays a vital role in shaping a more resilient, innovative, and empowered further education workforce. Members of the programme consistently recognise the value of peer-led consultancy in unlocking the sector’s own expertise, resulting in noticeable growth in confidence, leadership capability, and creative thinking across each cohort.

Joining this award-winning programme demonstrates a shared commitment to investing in the development, collaboration, and progression of our workforce. It’s also a powerful way to showcase the rich opportunities and rewarding career pathways available within further education.

Introduction

The College Collective was established in 2021 by The KWP Ltd and the Association of Colleges with a clear and compelling vision: to foster a culture of collaboration among colleges, where strengths are shared rather than siloed, and where innovative practices and leadership expertise can flow freely across institutions.



What is The College Collective?

The College Collective

The College Collective helps colleges grow their own expert talent while sharing knowledge and best practice across the UK. It brings together forward-thinking colleges that collaborate to provide a peer-led consultancy and professional development model.

Becoming an AoC associate expert

Partner colleges nominate staff to become AoC associate experts, who then complete structured training in coaching and mentoring.

If they choose, they can also gain professional membership of the Institute of Leadership (IOL) and complete digital credentials and post-nominals to reflect their commitment to excellence at the Chartered Institution of Further Education (CIFE). Experts benefit from training, increased confidence and insights in others' practice.

A simple idea

At the heart of the model is a simple idea: every college has something of value to offer, and something of value to learn.



How it works

Each AoC associate expert is carefully matched to another college based on a clear analysis of needs and expertise. They provide tailored support, mainly delivered remotely to their peers through one-to-one coaching, action learning sets or peer-led webinars. Partner colleges benefit from fresh thinking and proven approaches from peers with relevant experience.

A professional network

Beyond the consultancy work, AoC Associate Experts join a lively professional network.

They are also invited to exclusive networking events, including free access to the AoC Annual Conference and Exhibition, and can continue to engage through The College Collective Alumni Network.

Quality and impact

The programme is underpinned by a strong quality assurance process, including regular check-ins and a final impact report to assess outcomes.

Key benefits

- Staff develop as AoC Associate Experts through accredited training and real consultancy experience.
- Colleges gain from the ideas, knowledge, and innovation of professionals from other institutions.
- Working across colleges brings new confidence, broader thinking, and shared solutions.
- The College Collective builds a UK-wide community of connected, forward-looking college leaders and practitioners.



Impact

The College Collective today

Today, The College Collective represents a dynamic and growing network of partner colleges.

Since 2021, 42 colleges have participated, representing 25% of the sector.

The colleges are united in their commitment to mutual support and sector-wide improvement. Through this partnership, colleges benefit not only from shared knowledge but from the active development of internal expertise.

Developing expertise

A cornerstone of the Collective's approach has been the training and development of a cohort of 319 AoC Associate Experts.

These experts provide:

- peer-to-peer consultancy
- tailored professional development.

Since 2021, 985 staff have engaged in targeted support programmes, including one-to-one coaching, action learning sets and webinars.

Looking ahead

The College Collective continues to demonstrate the transformative power of sector-led consultancy and collaboration.

As we look to the future, we invite more colleges to join us bringing their strengths, learning from others, and shaping a more connected and resilient sector together.

The College Collective in numbers

The College Collective today

Colleges connected since 2021

42 colleges
representing **25%**
of the sector.

Staff engagements

985 staff engaged since 2021

Activities have included:

- one-to-one coaching
- action learning sets
- webinars.

Growth in confidence of experts

Coaching and mentoring confidence



Career planning confidence



Belief that their knowledge is valuable



Experts developed



319

AoC Associate Experts trained and developed



110

Experts achieved Institute of Leadership accreditation



48

Experts recognised by the Chartered Institution for Further Education



THE CHARTERED INSTITUTION
FOR FURTHER EDUCATION

Areas of impact



Curriculum and learning improvement



Marketing and communications



Data and systems



People and culture



Professional enrichment



Digital innovation and artificial intelligence (AI)

Participant satisfaction

96%

satisfied or very satisfied after receiving support.

Net Promoter Score (NPS) from people receiving support:

70

(Excellent)

Case studies: stories of impact

Behind the numbers are real stories of individuals who have grown in confidence, colleges that have changed their approach, and ideas that have spread from one college to many.

The following case studies highlight how The College Collective's model of peer-led development is making a tangible difference on the ground.

From leadership transformation to curriculum innovation, these examples demonstrate the breadth and depth of impact across a diverse range of colleges and roles.

Each story reflects the power of sector-led collaboration in action.



Lee Mandley

Suffolk New College
Career and Leadership Development

Lee Mandley is the Director of Service Industries and Science at Suffolk New College. He participated in The College Collective programme and later mentored others through it.

Lee joined the first cohort of the programme in 2021 as a new head of department. Through targeted sessions, particularly on how to conduct challenging conversations, he grew in confidence and leadership.

Lee progressed to a senior leadership role and supported colleagues by mentoring and improving team development. He has fostered cross-college collaboration and embedded best practice sharing. His leadership growth has cascaded benefits across departments.



Stronger leadership has led to better-supported teams, which in turn has improved student experience. Therefore, the structured development of staff indirectly benefits learners through improved provision.

“

It certainly was the catalyst for my growth.



Suffolk
New
College

Chris Hare

MidKent College

Strategic Leadership and Organisational Development

Chris Hare is the strategic lead for The College Collective at MidKent College, who have been a partner college since 2021. He coordinates involvement across departments and champions the programme within the senior leadership team.

Chris has facilitated expert participation across his team and encouraged wider engagement, including in national conferences. His strategic leadership has embedded the programme as a long-term development tool rather than a short-term initiative.

The programme has empowered hidden talent within the college, enabling staff to gain confidence and benchmark their practice. Staff members have grown significantly, contributing more visibly to college leadership.



Chris ensures institutional backing through funding, logistical support, and internal promotion of the programme.

The growth in staff confidence and collaboration has positively influenced organisational performance, which ultimately has benefited student outcomes.



*It's more than just a consortium...
it's what you give but also what
you take from it.*



Louisa Hubbard

Suffolk New College

Leadership Development and Policy Influence

Louisa Hubbard is Director of English, Maths at Suffolk New College. She has been both an expert and a recipient in The College Collective.

Louisa first participated as a middle leader expert and now receives mentorship as part of the senior lead pilot. The programme supported her transition into a senior leadership role by boosting confidence and strategic thinking.

She introduced new perspectives, particularly around English and maths delivery, after networking with leaders from other colleges. Using case studies and alternative practices, she successfully influenced internal policies, such as increasing November resit entries. Her participation has supported more reflective, evidence-based decision-making.



Her professional growth and changes in policy directly enhanced opportunities for learners, especially those needing early GCSE resits. Students now benefit from more informed and timely interventions.



It's just an opportunity to share best practice... it impacts your confidence, self-belief, and contributes to FE as a whole.



Suffolk
New
College

Kerry Heathcote

College of West Anglia

Strategic and Distributed Leadership Improving Ofsted Grades

Kerry Heathcote is Deputy Principal and Vice Principal at the College of West Anglia. She oversees her college's strategic involvement with The College Collective.

Kerry champions collaboration as a leadership value and has used the programme to support colleagues' professional development and cross-college engagement.

She facilitates broad participation with the programme across departments, including management information systems (MIS), sustainability, apprenticeships, and marketing. Through partnerships and action learning sets, her team improved internal practices, including upgrading an Ofsted grade in apprenticeships and shaping adult provision collaboratively.



The College
of West Anglia



I chose to spend the membership money on rejoining The College Collective... it's a conscious choice to work like that. It's fairer.

John Rafferty

Glasgow Clyde College
Innovation and Sector-Wide Learning

John Rafferty is a senior leader at Glasgow Clyde College. He joined The College Collective to bring fresh perspectives into the Scottish FE sector.

John has taken part in events, action learning sets, and one-on-one collaborations, particularly in the area of AI. These experiences have broadened his outlook and deepened his understanding of how FE operates outside Scotland.

John has brought valuable AI insights from Middlesbrough College back to his team, helping shape their own policy and practice. He initiated collaborations and internal showcases, spreading innovation across departments. His college also shared expertise in areas like e-learning and marketing with others.



Using AI more effectively and comparing strategies with other colleges has made their operations smoother and their policies clearer. This has helped create a more supportive environment for learners.



You don't know what you don't know until you've spoken to other people.



Karen Milne

New College Durham
Improving maths and digital skills

Karen Milne is the senior lead for The College Collective at New College Durham. She also provides expert support, making her involvement both strategic and practical.

Karen joined The College Collective to broaden perspectives beyond local networks and to target improvement areas like maths, AI, and digital skills.

Karen helped integrate insights from The College Collective into development plans for maths and digital skills. She facilitated honest evaluation of internal practices and encouraged her team to both give and receive support through the network. She has also enabled staff to take on new leadership and collaboration opportunities.

Karen is also running a staff learning and development action learning set. Members meet online termly and share approaches, good practice, challenges and solutions on staff development.



This structured approach to sharing across partner colleges helps those leading their staff training to better focus their programmes and approaches for maximum impact and value for money.

Although early days, student-facing improvements are anticipated in maths delivery and behaviour management. These changes are based on shared practices and strategic planning initiated through The College Collective involvement.



You're not kind of saying you're an expert... just that evidence and impact show you're doing something right.

Fiona Matthews

New City College
Strategic and Practical Leadership

Fiona Matthews is a leader in English at New City College. She facilitates the English and maths action learning set (ALS) and mentors others across The College Collective.

Leading the action learning set for over two years has strengthened Fiona's ability to reflect on and articulate effective leadership. She found the Institute of Leadership modules particularly useful in building a deeper understanding of leadership development and frameworks.

Fiona's involvement in the action learning set helped raise the profile of New City College's English provision and created opportunities for her team to benchmark their success. It also enabled her to build relationships that connect colleagues with similar challenges, fostering collaboration and professional growth.



Through stronger leadership and collaboration across colleges, her action learning set facilitation has helped improve English provision, leading to more consistent and effective learning experiences for students.



It's made me a more knowledgeable leader in terms of leadership development of my own team.

Lynne McInnes

Glasgow Clyde College
Action Learning Set in Marketing

Lynne McInnes is Head of Marketing and Communications at Glasgow Clyde College and serves as Chair of the marketing action learning set. She collaborates with peers across the UK through The College Collective.

Since October 2024, Lynne has served as a marketing expert within The College Collective. She also leads structured peer learning sessions and recently delivered one-to-one support to a colleague at Coleg Cambria.

Lynne has brought fresh perspectives and shared best practice into her college's marketing function. Through action learning sets, she has helped build a trusted national network of marketers, contributing ideas, tools and strategies that feed into Glasgow Clyde's own approach.



Improved marketing strategies and collaborative problem-solving have supported more targeted communication and engagement with students.



It's been great to engage with other marketers across the UK. Just hearing what people are doing is hugely important and so beneficial.

Miranda Gay

New City College Safeguarding

Miranda Gay works in safeguarding within further education and took part in The College Collective as a mentor expert. She was paired with a mentee in a similar field to share best practice and professional insights.

Participating in the programme helped Miranda reflect on and recognise her 20 years of experience. The Institute of Leadership modules challenged and refreshed her understanding of leadership, underpinning her confidence as a mentor and expert.

Miranda shared safeguarding expertise, including reviewing and refining learner safety models through collaborative reflection. Her involvement raised the profile of safeguarding within the college and led to wider recognition particularly through celebration of her Chartered Institution for Further Education status.



Her participation also demonstrated the value of continued professional learning and staff development.

The improved safeguarding models and practice-sharing directly contributed to safer learning environments. Her mentoring role supported better policy decisions and reflective approaches that benefit learners' wellbeing.



It reminded me that learning is a lifelong experience and it's something we should continue to do, especially if you work in education.

Feedback from a recipient of support

Being part of this programme has been a really valuable experience. It's created space to share ideas, explore different approaches to common challenges, and hear fresh perspectives I may not have considered on my own.

The input has really helped me rethink how I approach teamwork and leadership. I've taken some of what I've learned and introduced new ways of working into my team, which has made a real difference in how we collaborate and manage our workload. Very timely, some of our discussions have also made an impact on how I approach my upcoming dissertation for the final part of my leadership and management course.

It's been a really positive and useful experience, thanks!

**Jamie Webb, Group Marketing Manager
at New City College**



Appendix 1

Evaluation methodology

This impact report draws on a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of The College Collective's reach and effectiveness.

Quantitative data was collected from participation records across the full range of activities delivered by The College Collective, including one-to-one coaching, action learning groups, expert-led webinars, and internal consultancy provided by AoC Associate Experts. These records enabled an accurate account of engagement levels and the breadth of involvement across member colleges.

In addition, participation and contribution data were gathered from internal documentation detailing the number and roles of those actively involved in delivering support through the collective: most notably the 319 Associate Experts.



To assess individual development, a structured survey was administered to participants at the beginning and end of their involvement in key programmes. These surveys focused on self-reported confidence levels, particularly in areas such as leadership, peer support, and professional competence. Comparative analysis of the pre- and post-experience responses enabled a clearer understanding of the personal growth experienced by participants over time.

To further enrich these findings and gain deeper insight into the qualitative impact of the programme, interviews were conducted with key individuals across the network. These included senior leaders, such as college principals and department heads, as well as staff who participated as AoC Associate Experts. The interviews explored individual experiences, perceived benefits, professional development outcomes, and the broader cultural influence of participation within their institutions.

Together, these data sources provide a robust and nuanced picture of The College Collective's activities and their influence across the sector.



Conclusion

Over the past four years, The College Collective has evolved from a simple idea into a thriving, sector-led movement grounded in trust, collaboration and shared expertise. By connecting staff across colleges and empowering them to lead from within, the Collective has demonstrated what is possible when colleges work together not in competition, but in common purpose.

The outcomes speak for themselves: hundreds of staff supported, growing confidence and leadership at every level, and a culture that values the knowledge and potential already within the sector. Whether through one-to-one coaching, expert consultancy, or collaborative learning events, the impact is lasting and meaningful.



Yet the true strength of the Collective lies in its people – their commitment, insight, and willingness to share and grow together.

This is more than a programme; it is a blueprint for how the further education sector can lead its own development.

**Real people. Real impact.
Real change across the sector.**

As we look ahead, we invite more colleges to join us – contributing their expertise and learning from others.

Every college has something of value to offer, and something of value to learn.



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