



Colleges supporting Colleges

THE COLLEGE COLLECTIVE SENIOR LEAD GUIDANCE

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The College Collective is a unique approach to sector-led consultancy with the aim of retaining and developing consultant talent and expertise within colleges for the benefit of the sector at large and their communities.

Colleges join the Collective to give college managers the opportunity to develop their capabilities as AoC Associate Experts who can support partner colleges and other institutions in the development of learning and skills.

Objectives

- 1 To create a pool of AoC Associate Experts- practising sector managers with recognised and valuable 'pragmatic and practical' skills and expertise.
- 2 To deploy the AoC Associate Experts to support peers in partner colleges as well as other 'client' organisations such as Chambers of Commerce
- 3 To create collaboration between colleges: a self-reliant alliance for improvement to support colleges, our students, and communities.
- 4 To provide cost-effective support via AoC Associate Experts
- 5 To promote colleges and their people as experts in the spaces of skills policy.

This Handbook sets out the guidelines for support and engagement for both Experts, Partner Colleges and colleagues working with the College Collective programme in 2026-2027.

2. THE COLLEGE COLLECTIVE 2026-2027

The College Collective is a unique, sector-led consultancy network for further education professionals, developed by KWP Ltd in partnership with the Association of Colleges (AoC). It's designed to retain and develop consultant talent within colleges, for the benefit of the sector and the wider community.

The College Collective brings together more partner colleges who contribute their expertise, insight and collaboration to strengthen the sector. Through this peer-led model, individuals gain practitioner accreditation as AoC Associate Experts, supported by ongoing development, aligned networks, and opportunities to both give and receive sector-wide expertise.

2.1 What the Programme Entails

The Collective comprises forward thinking colleges who are working in collaboration, sharing managers and insights to share practice and thinking on a wide range of self-identified needs and expertise.

- The Collective pools insights and knowledge through recognising and sharing talented practitioners who are trained and accredited as AoC Associate Experts.
- Your college will receive training for selected managers to become AoC Associate Experts.
- AoC Associate Experts gain a Certificate of Achievement, and an automatic upgrade to Professional Member of the Institute of Leadership and Management – with digital credential & membership post-nominals to showcase their commitment to delivering great leadership.
- A detailed Needs & Expertise Analysis (Form 1) for each college will gather together headline information on the strengths and areas for development in our Collective.
- An Expertise Analysis (Form 2) for each Expert will identify strengths and weaknesses so Experts can be matched to the areas of need identified in Form 1. Where Experts have strengths not identified in Form one we will create a 'Prospectus of Experts' to share across our Collective and allow partner colleges to request support from available Experts. The support allocated will be confirmed back to you (Form 3).
- Each Expert will be invited to support a person, people or project in a partner organisation for up to 5 days each, primarily through remote means.
- In return, your college will benefit from excellent support from AoC Associate Experts from partner organisations in the Collective who have been matched to suit your college's needs and requirements.

3. ROLE OF THE SENIOR LEAD

Thank you for agreeing to be the Senior Lead for your college.

In summary, your role is:

- To liaise with Nat Allan as a first point of contact
- To submit timely responses to required information (for example the College Needs and Expertise analysis)
- To nominate your college AoC Associate Experts
- To nominate and help communications with AoC Associate Experts and nominated colleagues matched with Experts for support
- To flag any delays or issues to the Project Lead as soon as possible

4. RECRUITING AOC ASSOCIATE EXPERTS

The flyer (attached to your on-boarding email) is useful to brief your AoC Associate Experts. Proper briefing is essential to ensure that they understand what they are committing to.

In summary, once recruited, each of your Experts will be invited to complete Institute of Leadership (IoL) modules to become accredited, and will be matched to a person, people or project in a partner organisation to offer support and expertise.

The Project lead will also meet with them separately to ensure they are briefed.

5. IDENTIFYING CONTACTS FOR MATCHED SUPPORT

In return, your college will be offered the expertise and support of other AoC Associate Experts from partner organisations. You will be asked to provide contacts for these matches.

It is important that the contacts for these matches are also properly briefed to ensure they understand the purpose of the support activity.

In addition, being identified as a contact is not intended to be a stigmatising process. The College Collective approach emphasises that every college has something of value to offer, and something of value to learn. During the pilot, it was identified that both parties - Experts and matched contacts - benefitted from the mutual relationship.

One of our previous Experts, Steve Hyland from Mid-Kent College has probably articulated this the best:

I'm a trained business coach, and thought that the project aligned well with my personal aims to support peer learning and development of marcomms in the Further Education space. Since the pandemic, my professional world has shrunk. The College Collective has given me the opportunity to start building my network again, and to interact with my opposite numbers in Colleges around the country.

I'm working with some fantastic leaders who are clearly very skilled and passionate about their work, and about the value that FE brings to their local communities. We're of the same mind, in that we all want to make sure our student recruitment activity is right for students - not just that it meets our own needs.

We've got a lot of talent working in Colleges, and the ability to collaborate to share best practice and solve our own problems is something that you just can't put a price on.

*It's really important that participating Colleges help their nominated leads to understand the programme, and their role. Involvement is a really positive thing, and not something that's being done *to* leaders because of a perception that their service is deficient.*

Each member brings a different USP. I'm working with people who've collectively run comms for the House of Lords, Universities, and Colleges for decades. Each brings their own experience and unique perspective.

The programme gives Colleges the opportunity to gain an insight into the experience and collective wisdom of others, and to develop their current leaders as coaches.

Please use the flyer and the Impact Report to help brief your identified contacts for matches as well. We also advise that the matched contact's line manager is briefed.