



Association  
of Colleges

Promoting. Representing. Supporting.



# Manifesto 2017



Over  
**300,000**  
apprentices  
in training

for young people,  
adults and employers

**1.9 million**  
adults in  
colleges

Colleges are an essential part of this  
country's education system

Over  
**150,000**  
people studying  
higher education

Academic, technical and  
professional education

Nearly  
**750,000**  
16 to 18-year-  
olds in colleges

# OUR RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE NEXT GOVERNMENT

## Sustaining economic growth

- 1** A skills strategy with increased investment - for every part of the country
- 2** A period of stability to build quality apprenticeships
- 3** A fair funding formula for schools and colleges

## A fair and effective education system

- 4** Building strong colleges and institutions
- 5** Personal learning accounts to boost adult skills
- 6** Support for people to access education and training

# Foreword

Politicians will tell us all that this General Election is the most important for a generation; that we are at a crossroads as a country and that our future prosperity is in the hands of the electorate. We agree. The UK's exit from the European Union (EU) will have profound consequences. Some we can forecast, many we will have to respond to as they arise. What's clear is that the UK will be a very different country by the end of the next Parliament.

Education is, and always will be, about growth, development and opportunity. Lifelong learning is a vital driver of a tolerant, fair, democratic and engaged society. This is why colleges are so vital – they are anchor institutions, embedded into local communities, delivering education and training to people of all ages, boosting productivity and strengthening the economy.

For all of us in education, Brexit poses challenges but also offers great opportunities. Many companies and organisations have relied for too long on recruiting people from the EU (and beyond) rather than training and developing the current workforce. That reliance has to end. As a country, we need to be outward looking and welcoming to people from all backgrounds, but we must do this from a position of strength where we are self-sufficient in skills.

This fundamental challenge should not result in us forgetting the importance of education at all ages. Education improves social mobility, enhances life chances and increases productivity, particularly in sectors where we lag behind international competitors. A post-Brexit UK needs a new culture of lifelong learning to become the norm in all communities, for all people.

To achieve this, we need a number of ambitious and urgent policies, supported by adequate investment. The next Government must protect public spending on younger generations while building a system for adults that encourages lifelong learning and tackles basic skills. We need to build on what works and develop long-term plans for an education system fit for the future:

- The apprenticeship reforms need time to work, and more flexibility must be built in, with a new focus on outcomes for apprentices and employers.
- The new GCSE and A Level qualifications need to be evaluated and refined, but the focus should be on stability.
- Skills devolution must be introduced carefully in a way that supports long-term investment and finds a new balance between national and local priorities.
- The technical education reforms started in 2016 and the £500 million of additional funding announced in March 2017 need to be implemented in partnership with colleges over a sensible timespan.
- The Government must be clear about how it will invest in colleges as anchor institutions in a more ambitious skills and education system, which supports all young people and adults throughout their lives.

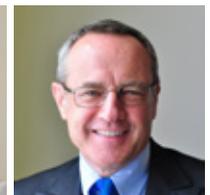
The Association of Colleges has developed six recommendations for the next Government. If implemented, these will increase opportunities for young people, boost life chances for adults and allow the country to prosper.



David Hughes  
*Chief Executive*



Carole Stott MBE  
*Chair*



Ian Ashman  
*President*

# Sustaining economic growth

## Recommendation 1

A skills strategy with increased investment - for every part of the country

The economic success of our country in the coming years depends on maximising the talents and developing the ability of everyone. This requires long-term investment as well as a culture change at all ages. Young people must be well prepared for a very different world, while adults need to have opportunities to continue learning throughout their working lives to fill gaps in their basic skills, retrain or upskill.

Colleges are inclusive, reaching out to all parts of society and offer opportunities for learning across all levels and ages. A national skills strategy would reinforce and set out a vision for the vital role colleges play.



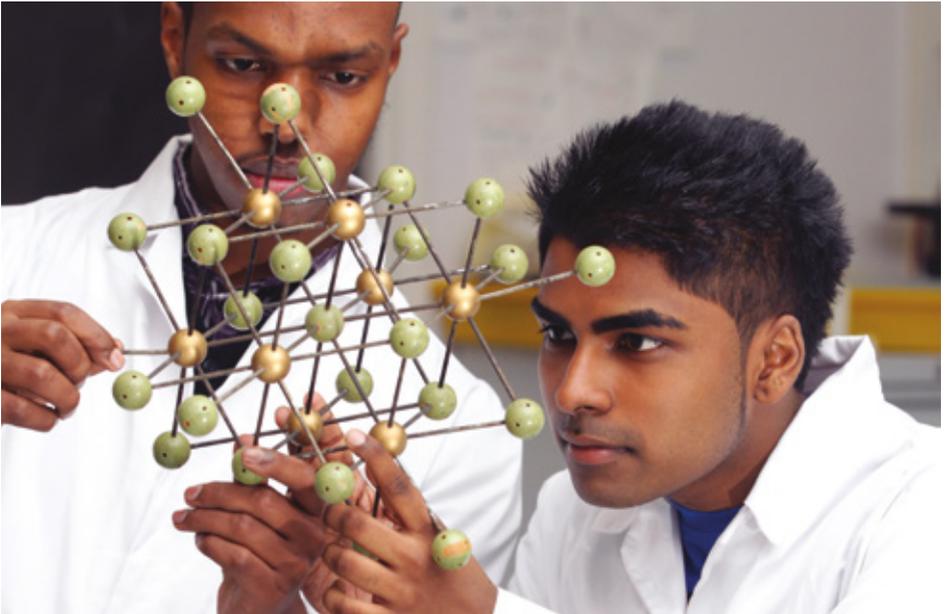
## *The next Government should:*

- Recognise the positive economic case for higher investment in education and training – both for individuals and employers<sup>1</sup>.
- Ring-fence 16 to 18 education funding at £7 billion in 2017, rising to £7.5 billion in 2022, to bring it in line with the Raising the Participation Age legislation.
- Secure the full implementation of the reforms set out in Lord Sainsbury's 2016 review to create high-quality technical education routes.
- Replace the European Social Fund with a new, more flexible investment focused on retraining and improving the skills of people in areas with high unemployment and low productivity.
- Provide for transparent, impartial and high-quality careers advice at all ages.
- Encourage changes in how employers recruit and develop their workforces. At present, the non-UK EU workforce in some sectors is more than 20% and therefore vulnerable to any changes to migration patterns.
- Help to change employer and individual behaviours to shift the economy towards higher skills. This should include raising the prestige of apprenticeships and technical education by continuing to invest in skills competitions.
- Engage employers, public authorities and colleges locally in skills devolution.

## Recommendation 2

A period of stability to build quality apprenticeships

Apprenticeships provide a key link between employers and the education and training system. All political parties have shown strong support for apprenticeships, including the new levy, and it is right for that to continue. However, we need to move away from a simple numerical target for apprenticeship starts. Instead, the focus should be on job and career outcomes for apprentices and improvements in productivity and retention for employers. More work is needed to ensure that apprenticeships complement college-based education and to incentivise employers to invest in other forms of training and learning.



## *The next Government should:*

- Allow time for the widespread reforms to bed in, whilst working in partnership with colleges and training providers to ensure that the system meets employer and apprentice needs.
- Introduce new flexibilities for large employers in how they use the levy to support access, other workplace training and better progression to higher levels.
- Reduce the proportion of the levy available to employers to 75%. The available resources should tackle challenges such as improving quality, incentivising progression and addressing disparities in regional and sectoral spread.
- Ensure that there is a commitment to equality of access, in particular addressing gender, disability and BME inequalities.
- Encourage employers and incentivise colleges to support more apprenticeships at Level 3 as a minimum end point and ensure they commit to 20% off-the-job training for apprentices.
- Guarantee total apprenticeship funding for the next three years, while the levy becomes established, so SMEs and potential apprentices do not miss out.
- Have a clear delivery-side strategy that supports colleges to make long-term investments in equipment, facilities, teaching staff and employer relationships.
- Review the impact of the 3 million apprenticeship target. This should include examining issues of access, achievements, job outcomes and progression to higher level skills and jobs. In the long-term, this should be replaced with outcome targets which include increasing the number of Level 3 and 4 apprentices.

## Recommendation 3

### A fair funding formula for schools and colleges

The current Government introduced a national funding formula from 2019 for young people up to the age of 16. For 16 to 19-year-olds this drops by around 25%. This is unacceptable and short-changes our young people compared with our international competitors<sup>2</sup>.

The Spring Budget in 2017 recognised the issue and promised to address this in future years by investing an additional £500 million for young people studying the new T Levels, as part of the Sainsbury Review implementation. However, this failed to recognise the impact of the funding cuts on young people's progress in education and on opportunities for adults which have been severely cut over the last decade<sup>3</sup>.



## *The next Government should:*

- Ring-fence 16 to 18 education funding at £7 billion in 2017, rising to £7.5 billion in 2022, to bring it in line with the Raising of the Participation Age legislation.
- Increase the 16 to 18 rate to match the Key Stage 4 rate and extend the pupil premium above the age of 16<sup>4</sup>. This investment should be used to extend the teaching hours, enrichment and support of all young people studying A Levels, applied general qualifications, T Levels and apprenticeships.
- Take a new approach to increase English and maths skills for 16 to 18-year-olds which supports a more personalised approach for every young person, rather than the current mechanistic condition of funding.
- Ensure that young people of the same age in different institutions are funded on the same basis, for example by funding 14 to 16-year-olds in colleges via the school funding formula.
- Provide for inflation increases in allocations to schools, colleges and for adult education in the same way that it is being allowed for universities.
- Simplify the overly complex high needs funding system.

# A fair and effective education system

## Recommendation 4

### Building strong colleges and institutions

For more than 20 years, successive ministers have spent time creating and developing new institutions. The next Government needs a new provider/delivery-side strategy, which focuses on developing the range of strong institutions in a locality which meet the needs of all young people and adults. This does not mean any loss of competition or efficiency, but rather a renewed focus on providing opportunities for all.

The new approach should support long-term investment, incentives to work together and a focus on the breadth, quality and flexibility across all providers. This would support every young person and offer more opportunities to adults – as many colleges already do.



## *The next Government should:*

- Review rules and regulations that hinder innovation and long-term stable investment by colleges. This would harness the optimism, capacity and capabilities of colleges to improve their local communities and economies.
- Carry out targeted reviews of school sixth forms and university technical colleges to ensure they are financially sustainable and offer quality and breadth for young people.
- Incentivise local collaboration between colleges and schools to ensure a comprehensive offer, which spans A Levels, applied general qualifications, apprenticeships, T Levels and transition and access provision.
- Allocate capital funding to repurpose the college estate, as well as supporting the use of new learning technologies.
- Develop a network of college-based Institutes of Technology across the country to support progression and access to higher skills relevant to every labour market.
- Invest with colleges to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of teachers to deliver across the range of post-16 options. This should include people with industry experience; part-time 'dual professional' teachers; and English and maths specialists.
- Establish a sensible approach to immigration to ensure that the thousands of EU teachers in colleges are able to continue to work here.
- Ensure any changes to international student recruitment include schools and colleges as well as universities to recognise the contribution they make to our education system and local economies.
- Recognise the significant role colleges play in offering higher education programmes in their own right and in partnership with universities.

## Recommendation 5

### Personal learning accounts to boost adult skills

Increases in life expectancy will mean longer working lives. At the same time, job markets are becoming far more volatile and unpredictable as a result of technological change. Therefore education and training must become a significant part of more adults' lives. For many, though, it is difficult to know what, how and where to learn, and it is unclear what funding and support is available to them.

Individuals need opportunities to keep their skills up-to-date and have support from the Government, families and employers to do so. We must find new ways to encourage lifelong learning and promote the opportunities available.



## *The next Government should:*

- Establish a new system of personal learning accounts, which give individuals a single budget at age 18 with flexibility over courses, levels, modes (including part-time and distance learning) and length of learning, with more choice about the qualifications they can achieve.
- Encourage a new culture of people having more control over the learning they do over their lifetime. Learning accounts can be a significant impetus to increasing participation, which has stayed stubbornly low for too long.
- Use accounts to target additional support in a variety of ways: to support local skills needs; for adults with low-level qualifications; for people in insecure employment; for people at risk of redundancy or being made redundant and so on.
- Work with the Student Loans Company scheme to develop a new account where people can make payments into the scheme that are separate from loan repayments and employers can invest as well.
- Reform the National Careers Service to support young people and adults to make informed choices about the learning and training that they access through their accounts.
- Invest in innovative ways to encourage people back into learning.

## Recommendation 6

### Support for people to access education and training

Educational achievement in England is heavily influenced by socio-economic background. Many people on low incomes or in receipt of welfare face barriers that hinder progress. In recent years, school-age children from disadvantaged families have been supported through the pupil premium, but this finishes at age 16 and there are many barriers faced by young people and adults. These should be addressed to ensure that everyone, irrespective of background, can access education and training to improve their life chances, strengthen the economy and boost productivity.



## *The next Government should:*

- Extend child benefit and other social security payments to teenagers on apprenticeships, in line with those who stay in other forms of education.
- Support local authorities to invest in support for transport up to age 18 rather than the current pre-16 emphasis in many areas.
- Review how well the Raising of the Participation Age legislation is operating and agree a plan for how to support every young person to make progress up to the age of 18.
- Extend Child Adolescent Mental Health Services and strategies up to the age of 25 and include colleges as a key part of the system.
- Offer maintenance support for those over the age of 18 who to take technical courses, like they do for those taking degree level courses.
- Guarantee funding for continued UK participation in the Erasmus+ programme, which provides invaluable work placement and global citizenship opportunities for college students.

## Endnote

- 1 Estimation of the labour market returns to qualifications gained in English Further Education, December 2014" Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), Research Paper 195).
- 2 The Government's Industrial Strategy Green Paper published in January 2017 noted that further education students receive 17 hours tuition a week compared to an average of 27 in school and more than this in high performing countries. The funding made available in the Spring 2017 Budget will only rectify this for 25% of the age group.
- 3 One million adult education and training places have been lost in the 10 years from 2006 to 2016 with total numbers outside apprenticeships falling from 2.7 million to 1.6 million. Over the same period the numbers on apprenticeships have risen by half a million from 0.2 million to 0.7 million but the population in England has risen by 4 million (8%) from 53 million to 57 million. Calculations available on AoC website.
- 4 The cost of increasing the national base rate in this way would be around £300 million, while the Pupil Premium extension would cost an estimated £150 million.





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[www.aoc.co.uk](http://www.aoc.co.uk)

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2 - 5 Stedham Place, London WC1A 1HU

T: 020 7034 9900

E: [publicaffairs@aoc.co.uk](mailto:publicaffairs@aoc.co.uk)

 @AoC\_info  Association-of-Colleges