



ASSOCIATION
OF COLLEGES
BEACON AWARDS

AoC Beacon Awards 2018/19

Guide for applicants

June 2018

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Introduction

The Beacon Awards programme is governed by the AoC Charitable Trust which is a registered charity, administered by the Association of Colleges (AoC). The awards celebrate the best and most innovative practice among UK further education (FE) colleges.

The AoC Charitable Trust Board and Trustees provides advice and guidance on the delivery and development of the programme, and is made up of representatives from colleges, partners and sponsoring organisations. The Charitable Trust Awards Panel, a sub group of the AoC Charitable Trust Board, makes the final decisions about award winners in the light of recommendations from the team of assessors and the Chief Assessor.

The purpose of this handbook is to provide guidance to colleges on how to apply for an AoC Beacon Award, how their applications will be assessed and details of the different stages of the Award's process. It also provides details of the conditions attached to the submission of the awards.

Contacts

Please contact Ian Munro, AoC Charitable Trust Director or Rachel Costello, AoC Charitable Trust Officer with any enquiries relating to the assessment process by email: awards@aac.co.uk

Aim of awards

The aim of the AoC Beacon Awards programme is to demonstrate and promote the far-reaching impact of colleges on their students and the communities they serve throughout the UK. The commended and winning case studies will be used to increase understanding of colleges' contribution to educational skills policy and economic and social development.

From 2018 several changes have been made to the application and assessment and these are explained in the Beacon Awards prospectus. These changes will provide colleges with more opportunities to tell us about their outstanding practice and be recognised for their innovation and support for students. The new partnership with Tes will help us promote college examples much more effectively throughout the year.

The aim of the Beacon awards will be:

- recognise imaginative and exemplary teaching and learning practice in colleges;
- draw attention to provision which encourages and supports students to approach challenges positively and creatively;
- support learning and continuous improvement through sharing best practice; and
- promote and celebrate the FE College sector's commitment to pioneering approaches to equality and diversity.

The 2018 programme represents partnership in action by providing significant benefits:

- AoC and Tes will work together to promote the awards, case studies and impact of colleges
- Case studies will be used to inform AoC policy Groups and work with DFE
- A series of one-day workshops at winning colleges to showcase and share best practice.
- Promoting the business needs and interests of the award sponsor in its partnership with the FE college sector.

Project profiles of 'Commended' and 'Winning' colleges are promoted and shared after their announcement. This information is available via the website [AoC Beacon Awards](#)

General criteria for Beacon Awards and the structure of applications

Award Criteria

The awards recognise exemplary initiatives that are truly innovative, can demonstrate impact and are sustainable. The awards will highlight and promote outstanding practice of further education colleges and the resulting positive impact on students and the communities they serve.

As well as the sponsor's criteria for each award, to be eligible, all initiatives must show evidence of imaginative yet sustainable teaching and learning practice or other relevant practice. An application can relate to a programme, course, project or other form of teaching, learning, advice, guidance or support. The application process will be in two stages.

The initial application although not formulaic (see following guidance), needs to be mindful of the following general criteria:

- take account of the specific requirements set out by the sponsors of the award to which the submission relates.
- have regard to the promotion of equality and diversity in the delivery of the programme
- be subject to bespoke evaluation/ quality assurance to influence the continuing development of the initiative
- have been running for at least one academic year by end of July 2018
- have features which actively promote exemplary teaching and learning
- be of benefit to one or more groups of students, recipients or trainees who are identified and described in the application
- have wider relevance and applicability which would make it of significant value to other colleges as an example of outstanding practice or innovation.

Sponsorship

For 2018/19 there are eight awards, each is designed to enable very different types of college provision to apply. All awards have a specific focus as defined and agreed with individual sponsors. The awards prospectus gives full details of the awards on offer and links to the individual award criteria.

Applications for one or more awards are welcomed from UK colleges. **Applicants**

should note that winners will be required to host a one-day best practice workshop at their college between March and June 2019 and a grant will be made available to help support the day. This grant is awarded on the understanding that the college will use the fund to support the event to share best practice with the sector.

It is also a condition of entry that each college gaining an award informs its local community about its achievement and about the support and interest provided by the sponsor.

Structure of the application process and how to apply

Application Process

The awards seek to celebrate the very best that UK colleges offer their learners. The awards are designed to identify examples of excellent practice within FE colleges and their impact on students and their communities. Applications are welcome from all types of colleges, whether AoC affiliated or not.

None of the awards are confined by age, gender or other groupings, particular size, or category of provision. For example, an exceptional example of governance, leadership and management' might be applied to any one of the award categories.

Note: This year we have introduced a two-stage application and assessment process culminating in stage 3, a college visit for finalists. We hope these new arrangements will encourage more colleges and their teams to apply for these prestigious awards.

Key dates

8 June - Stage 1 application open

20 July - Stage 1 applications close

12 October – Stage 2 applications close

Stage 1

Application will be via online application form on AoC website [AoC Beacon Awards page](#).

Stage 2

Application will be via electronic submission to awards@aoc.co.uk. No paper copies will be accepted.

Please note that application for stage 1 & 2 must have the Principal's approval before submission. For stage 1, online application forms cannot be saved or edited prior to submission. By submitting your online application, you agree to the terms and conditions in the AoC privacy notice which can be found on the [AoC Beacon Awards page](#).

Stage 1 (new for 2018) *Deadline 12 noon 20 July 2018*

Assessors will be particularly interested in short applications (maximum of 1,000 words), that provide a succinct overview of a college project, clearly identifying why it 'fits' a chosen award category. Whilst the format is 'free text' and the guidance provided is not prescriptive (except for the applicant information details), colleges' are strongly encouraged to structure their text using the three dimensions identified below. After the assessment of first stage applications, all colleges submitting initiatives (deemed to meet the AoC Beacon Award Standard), will receive public acknowledgement for their achievement.

When scoring Stage 1 applications assessors will be particularly interested and score highly those projects that provide compelling evidence within each of the three dimensions: **Innovation, Impact and Sustainability**.

Note: At this stage it is not necessary for colleges to address the generic Beacon Criteria in detail, for example how each project: actively promotes equality and diversity; was subject to evaluation/quality assurance; had run for at least one academic year; impacts positively on the development of exemplary teaching and learning; clearly benefits one or more groups of learners or trainees; and has wider relevance and applicability. However, colleges are advised that they need to weave in, with appropriate referencing, all of these at the first stage. **Failure to do so will greatly inhibit an application's likelihood of recognition and/or progression.**

Scoring Descriptors for Dimensions:

For each Award there is a separate scoring descriptor – for each dimension. The three dimensions are Innovation, Impact and Sustainability. Assessors are advised that when coming to a judgement/score they must find the 'best fit'. Although not a perfect science when cross referencing several criteria, it provides a robust methodology for criterion-based assessment – a requirement for Stage 1. Each award will be fully moderated before individual scores are agreed and the boundaries set.

At the end of Stage 1 (post assessment), submissions will be placed into three categories:

1. Meeting and exceeding the 'AoC Beacon Award Standard': **Move to Stage 2**
2. Meeting the 'AoC Beacon Award Standard': '**Commended**' - **public acknowledgement**
3. Not meeting the 'AoC Beacon Award Standard'.

Note: College applications placed in the 'Move to Stage 2' category will also be acknowledged as 'Commended' i.e. before the finalists are announced in November 2018.

Stage 2 (as in previous years) *Deadline 12 noon 12 October 2018*

Usually a maximum of six colleges (in each award category) that exceed the AoC Beacon Standard (Commended) will be invited to submit a full project application; building on the content outlined in their short application. Note: Final applications must address in full detail both the Sponsor's and AoC Beacon criteria. Note: The Charitable Trust Awards Panel may decide to increase or decrease the number of applications to stage 2 for each award.

Full Project Applications:

Stage 2 submissions should address both the general criteria for the AoC Beacon Awards and any specific criteria highlighted by the sponsor. The submission has three parts, and must be counter signed by the College principal and should be submitted by a senior member of staff who has had close contact with the initiative:

- **Part 1** is essentially a cover sheet, giving the college's details and the principal/chief executive approval for the submission. It also requires a summary of the project. Note: Very similar to the front the Stage 2 application's front sheet.
- **Part 2** is anonymous and should be used to clarify the scope of the project. It will also help consistency and sets out how the submission addresses the general AoC Beacon Award criteria. This requirement is common to all awards.
- **Part 3** is anonymous and has a 3,000-word limit. This section is essentially about the project itself. This should focus strongly on meeting all or the

relevant key elements of the sponsor's criteria. However, all submissions should also make reference to the more general Beacon criteria, where appropriate. Part 3 should be structured under the following headings:

- **Project summary** – a brief overview of the initiative including a clear description of target group.
- **Aims and objectives** – how they were established and how they have resulted in the promotion of exemplary teaching and learning.
- **How the project meets all or part of the criteria** – a section which clearly addresses each of the relevant sponsor's criteria.
- **Project management** – a description of how the project is managed including how quality assurance is used to improve the initiative, and how the project meets equality and diversity standards.
- **Outcomes and benefits to students** – how the initiative has benefited students and others involved with the project – this should be supported by written evidence from beneficiaries who may be students, trainees, employers or, in some cases, parents. This section should also include data on enrolment, retention, achievement, progression and how this project shows a commitment to equality and diversity.
- **Dissemination and the future** – key features of the project should be highlighted demonstrating how it can benefit other colleges and how it will develop in the future

Written evidence from beneficiaries should be included in the word limit. Reference can be made to other materials (i.e. multimedia material, college documents etc.) which the assessors can request, should they wish to do so. Whilst details of the college must be supplied on the application form the main body of the submission should be **anonymous** e.g. it should not be possible for the reader to guess the identity of the college. Submissions may be returned to the college to remove any references if they can be identified.

The submission must be accompanied by a completed application form signed by the principal/ chief executive of the college and provide a single person and point of contact for all communications.

When all the invited submissions have been fully assessed and moderated, the final short list of outstanding projects (in each Award category), will be announced at the AoC Conference in Birmingham (20 November 2018). These will be known as the **AoC Beacon Award Finalists**.

Stage 3 Assessor Visits to Finalists

All short-listed applications from colleges (finalists) will be sent a standard letter **Appendix 2**. and by agreement, each finalist will be visited by a team of assessors during December 2018 or January 2019, to gain a better understanding of individual submissions. Finally, post the assessment and moderation of these visits, the AoC Beacon Award Winners (in each category) will be announced at the “ Tes FE Awards in association with the AoC Beacon Awards” national Award Ceremony (22 February 2019).

General information:

Initiatives which have previously won a Beacon Award are not eligible for consideration for the same or a very similar award, within a period of three years. A college may apply for as many awards as it wishes, but only one application per award. A college which has a project which falls into two or more categories may only submit that project for only one award.

Applications from two or more colleges working in partnership or submissions from consortia of colleges should be treated as any other application, although one college must agree to be the main point of contact to avoid confusion and must make it clear that the application is part of a partnership or consortium.

All applications are treated as strictly confidential. Material from any application is made public only with the express approval of the college concerned. **All Stage 1 (Short) applications must be received by Friday 12 noon 20 July 2018**

- The AoC's Beacon Awards Office will automatically acknowledge the receipt of on-line applications.
- Subsequently colleges who reached the Beacon Standard and invited to stage 2 will be contacted in late August/early September.
- Colleges meeting the Beacon standard and not invited to stage 2 will be informed in late August/ early September
- Finalists will be announced on 20 November 2018 and contacted immediately after the AoC Annual Conference regarding their stage 3 visit.

Award winning colleges are permitted to use the Beacon Awards logo on any promotional material, but only during the full year following the announcement of their award (Feb 2019).

Winning colleges will need to set a date between March and June 2019 for their local best practice workshop. This day must also include the Beacon Award local presentation ceremony. The event should be arranged in consultation with the

award sponsor and we would expect the college to invite local MPs, stakeholders and AoC Area Director. The AoC's aim is to ensure that we achieve maximum media coverage of the best practice at the college working in conjunction with our media partner Tes. The Beacon Awards team at the AoC must be informed of all arrangements.

In addition and if requested, AoC Beacon Award winners will be expected to contribute to the AoC's Annual Conference in the autumn of the year they receive the award (2019).

Overview of Assessment

The assessment AoC Beacon Award applications are carried out by specialist assessors, co-ordinated by the AoC Beacon Award office and supported by the Chief Assessor. The assessor team have varied backgrounds, but the vast majority are a mixture of retired: Principals, Senior College Managers and Ofsted Inspectors. Integral and invaluable to the assessment team are Sponsor assessors. Collectively they bring a wealth of external knowledge and experience, helping to enrich the Awards.

Note: Detailed assessors guidance on the assessment and moderation process is not included here. However, if any college wishes to read the detail and see all the forms that are used, the guidance manual can be supplied on request.

An overview of the assessment process and moderation process can be summarised as follows:

Stage 1 – Assessment of 'Short' Project Submission

Assessors consider each project submission (max 1,000 words) and evaluate whether, in the first instance, it meets a predetermined 'Beacon Award' Standard. Each submission will be scored against set criteria. Applications with the highest scores in each award category (maximum of 30), will be invited to submit a 'full' application (within a predetermined time constraint). Where the number of applications to proceed to Stage 2 are not considered clear cut, the Chief and Deputy Chief Assessor will adjudicate.

Note: All colleges achieving the 'Beacon Award' Standard, along with those invited to submit a full application, will be awarded '**Commended**' status, with their project outline shared on the AoC good practice database and promoted leading up to the AoC Conference in 2018.

Stage 2 – Short listing 'Full' applications

When submitted, assessors will consider all the anonymous 'full' applications sent in by colleges and make recommendations in each award category i.e. for those to short list as finalists and visit. These are then considered carefully, before being quality assured by the Chief and Deputy Chief Assessor. When the finalists list for each award is agreed, colleges to be visited will be announced at the AoC Annual Conference.

Following confirmation from the AoC team, arrangements will be made for assessors to conduct an assessment visit - on a mutually convenient date. Colleges not shortlisted may contact the Director, after the winners have been announced for feedback on their submission.

Stage 3a – Assessment Visits

College assessment visits will take place in December 2018 and January 2019 and are intended to match the 'evidence on the ground' with the information contained in the 'full' application. Assessors will be interested in exploring with the college, its staff, students and stakeholders, the benefits of the project to students and the wider college community.

Assessors will provide brief feedback to the college at the end of the visit. However, no indication of the outcome or decisions for the award can or should be made at this time.

Stage 3b – Final Decisions

The Chief Assessor presents the assessors' reports and recommendations to the Charitable Trust Awards Panel, who then ratify the final decision and agree the award winners.

Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Assessment

The Chief Assessor is responsible to the AoC Charitable Trust Board for the quality assurance of the assessment of the awards. All assessors are required to attend annual training and new assessors are supported by a mentor. The Chief Assessor and/or the Deputy Chief Assessor review the assessors' Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3 reports to ensure the reliability and consistency of assessment and parity between awards. Colleges complete an evaluation form following an assessment visit. The college evaluations are used as a basis for identification of training needs and for further development and improvement in the assessment of awards. An overview of the arrangements for quality assurance is given below:

Moderation and quality assurance of assessment

The Chief Assessor and/or the Deputy Chief Assessor review all reports by assessors to

ensure:

- Assessment forms and reports for Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3 are appropriately completed with clear identification of strengths and weaknesses in relation to 'Innovation, Impact and Sustainability' (Stage 1) and for all the stages, the Beacon and sponsor's criteria.
- The shortlist of submissions at Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3 (winners) are appropriate and supported by clear analysis in the relevant assessment forms.
- Recommendations for submissions to be published in the 'Commended' category after Stage 1, are based on sound analysis and consistent scoring
- Recommendations for the winners of an AoC Beacon Award are well supported by evidence and assessment recorded in the visit report.
- The final overview report provides a clear summary analysis of strengths and weaknesses of submissions (Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage3), identifies areas for improvement in submissions and gives a clear rationale for the recommendation for the award.
- Assessment is consistent between submissions and is comparable in standard across all awards.

Moderation is carried out in three stages:

- End of Stage 1 assessment** – moderation of applications at stage will include reviewing and agreeing the scoring boundaries for each award. Submissions will then be placed into one of three categories 'Meeting and Exceeding', 'Meeting' and 'Not Meeting' the AoC Beacon award Standard. To ensure consistency and the correct application of the criteria, the Chief assessor and Deputy Chief Assessor, will sample a range of applications within each award. In particular the Chief Assessor will consider the appropriateness of the completion of the **Stage 1 Analysis Forms** and of the rationale for placing submissions in each category. The assessors' 'Overview report' (Part 1) is also reviewed. The outcomes of the moderation/review are fed back to assessors and reported to the Steering Group as part of Chief Assessor's report.
- End of Stage 2 assessment** - moderation of the assessment of invited applications (short listing for visits): For each award a sample of invited submissions are read and the assessors' overview report (Part 2) reviewed. The Chief Assessor considers the appropriateness of the completion of **Stage 2 Analysis Forms** and of the rationale for the final shortlist. The outcomes of the moderation/review are fed back to assessors and reported to the Steering Group as part of the annual Chief Assessor's report.
- End of Stage 3 assessment** - review of assessors' final recommendations for likely winners: For each award the assessors' college visit reports and overview reports are read. Where there is a lack of clarity in the visit

reports the submissions are reviewed and in cases where the reports for the winning college(s) are found to be insufficiently detailed assessors will be contacted for further information or clarification. The review considers the appropriateness of the visit report, and of the assessors' justification of the award. The outcomes of the review are reported to the Charitable Trust Board as part of the annual Chief Assessor's report. In cases where the Chief Assessor finds the reports anomalous the final decision on the award will be referred for review by the Board. Feedback is provided to assessors at each stage of moderation and all assessors receive a copy of the Chief Assessor's annual report.

Evaluation

To further support improvement and development of assessment, colleges shortlisted for a visit have the opportunity to evaluate and comment on the arrangements for assessment. The evaluation form is available online.

The form should be completed by the college by the end of the week commencing **25 January 2019**. These are reviewed by the Chief Assessor, and a summary included in his annual report. This forms the basis of recommendations for changes and improvements to assessment.

The forms will be copied to the Beacon Assessors for the award they assessed but otherwise treated as confidential. Where evaluation consistently gives rise to concerns over assessment for an award or regarding the conduct of specific assessors the Chief Assessor will conduct a review of the arrangements for assessment and recommend suitable actions to the AoC Director.

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