



ASSOCIATION  
OF COLLEGES

# Strategic Plan

2020-23

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# AoC Strategic Plan

## Why we exist

The Association of Colleges (AoC) is the national voice for colleges and exists to promote and support their interests. Everything AoC does is aimed at helping colleges provide the best possible experience and outcomes for students and employers and to fulfil their roles as community assets and anchor institutions.

We believe that every place needs a college offering education and training which:

- Helps people get on in life and in work, equipping students with the confidence, knowledge and skills to succeed and achieve their ambitions;
- Provides employers with the highly-skilled and productive workforces they need;
- Sustains strong local economies and vibrant, tolerant communities.

## Ambition and Mission

**Our ambition:** To be a highly respected and influential membership body, able to provide expert advice and support to help colleges succeed.

**Our mission:** To champion and support colleges by enhancing their reputation, leading thinking on policy, influencing decision-makers, providing advice, sharing good practice and offering networking and peer support opportunities.

## Values

Our values describe how we do our work and our culture. They help us attract people who will drive us forward and deliver our strategy. Unsurprisingly, our values reflect a strong passion for colleges and their students, as well as an ambition to empower staff to deliver the best possible services to our members.

### Member-focussed

Our member colleges are at the heart of everything we do. They are why we exist. We respond to the diversity of our members' aims and needs and also play a leadership role.

### Collaborative

We work collaboratively to strengthen our impact. We do this both within and across our internal teams, with members and externally with a wide range of organisations and groups.

### **Ambitious**

We are ambitious for our members, for better investment in colleges and for an environment in which colleges can thrive. We strive for ambitious outcomes for college students and the employers they work with.

### **Accountable**

We foster a culture of accountability and trust in which every member of staff takes ownership for the performance of the whole organisation and members know what we are doing.

### **Knowledgeable**

We continuously develop our knowledge and expertise to ensure that we remain credible as a reliable source of intelligence and advice. We rely on evidence and sector expertise to inform our points of view and our actions.

### **Inclusive**

We celebrate, value and actively promote fairness, respect, equality, diversity and inclusion. We strive for a better, fairer society in which everyone can succeed.

## **Looking back... looking ahead**

Much has changed since we published our previous Strategic Plan, 2017-20.

AoC itself has been through a substantial change programme in response to the challenges and opportunities which it faced itself as well as those facing its members. Our review in 2017 helped us achieve significant cost-savings whilst maintaining a simple dual-focus on supporting our members and a more concerted effort to develop a campaigning approach to our influencing. Our members were clear that they wanted to be more engaged in our policy work. Our staff wanted a stronger focus on developing a positive culture of equality, diversity and impact.

Progress has been positive, but as always, there is more work to be done. Member satisfaction with AoC is high, members are more actively engaged with our policy and campaigns work and we have very strong and productive relationships with government and its agencies. Internally, AoC has worked hard on its culture and values, as well as its systems and infrastructure and benefits from a highly-professional and motivated group of staff. Our recognition in January 2020 as 20<sup>th</sup>

in the Centre for Diversity's top 100 employers was welcome affirmation of our work on equality and diversity.

All of this has helped to make clear external impact, with a marked improvement in the profile and understanding of colleges, with influential organisations wanting to work more closely with us and colleges being spoken about positively as organisations which are vital to our communities and economy. As a result, there are promising signs that colleges will benefit from increased investment and potential for a more conducive policy and regulatory environment.

This is a great base from which to work, and to set our sights on the next few years. The shock to our economy and society of the 2020 Covid-19 crisis looks set to impact for many years. It will not divert us at AoC from our core roles, nor from our resolve to help colleges thrive. The roles of colleges for people, productivity and place are more important now than ever before – their work in the early months of the crisis has shown just how vital they are to the communities they operate in.

This plan has five overarching aims, set out below with summary delivery actions and has a five year horizon to fit in with the new Government's likely term. The AoC Board will review the Plan annually, measure progress against objectives, and continue to consider amendments as the environment changes and on the basis of performance and member needs.

## **Priorities**

Colleges remain confident and ambitious about their future prospects. By working together on co-ordinated campaigns and through consistent messages, we have shown that our voice is strong. The central priorities for this next period are therefore to secure increased investment and build a new relationship of respect and understanding with the government. That relationship will lead to new policies, regulation arrangements and accountabilities which support colleges to thrive and to have an even greater impact than they already have.

AoC will continue to provide bespoke support to colleges through any necessary changes and as they face up to their continued challenges. AoC will continue to work hard on an inclusive, open and diverse culture which supports staff to learn, work hard and deliver our strategy.

## **Strategic aim 1**

### **Lead thinking and influence policy**

#### **We will do this by:**

- Utilising the skills and experience of our staff, members and others in the sector in debating, considering and proposing policy.
- Working closely with a range of government departments and agencies and local influencers, including Metro Mayors and local enterprise partnerships.
- Strengthening relationships with business organisations, trade unions, education groups and think tanks to increase our reach and influence.
- Responding to and informing policy formulation and its implementation in government and with agencies.
- Building more research capability and capacity, within the organisation and in collaboration with others.

## **Strategic aim 2**

### **Build a high profile and strong reputation for colleges**

#### **We will do this by:**

- Developing campaigns in collaboration with members which highlight the impact colleges have.
- Using a range of spokespeople in our media and communication channels to show a diverse breadth of voices, experiences and backgrounds.
- Maintaining and promoting high profile award schemes which celebrate the successes of colleges and students, both past and present, in partnership with the AoC Charitable Trust.
- Providing opportunities for members to engage in regional, national and international projects to promote the sector.
- Supporting the independent Commission on the College of the Future and helping to implement its recommendations.

## **Strategic aim 3**

### **Deliver expert support, advice and intelligence for members**

#### **We will do this by:**

- Supporting governing bodies and management teams with strategic foresight to help them plan and prepare.
- Providing advice, support and the latest intelligence through a range of communication methods and services.
- Engaging in dialogue with national trade unions on sector industrial relations, and supporting members in their local relationships.
- Facilitating opportunities for members to be able to work together, learn from each other and share best practice with each other and AoC more widely.
- Advising colleges on new opportunities in the UK and overseas.

## **Strategic aim 4**

### **Strengthen student engagement and the student experience in colleges**

#### **We will do this by:**

- Promoting and encouraging student engagement in colleges, including through student representatives and governors.
- Researching and gathering intelligence about the impact of and best approaches to wider student enrichment and student engagement.
- Increasing opportunities for students of all abilities and backgrounds to participate in sport, physical activity and wider opportunities.
- Organising and hosting sports competitions and the AoC National Championships.
- Influencing policy thinking to include the benefits that enrichment offers to students' future learning and work prospects as well as the impact on students' mental health and wellbeing.

## **Strategic aim 5**

### **Develop AoC as an inclusive, sustainable and ambitious organisation**

#### **We will do this by:**

- Building on our commitment as an Investor in Diversity by setting ambitious goals to make further progress in creating a diverse and inclusive organisation.
- Developing our culture and embedding our values in everything we do to create a diverse workplace where everyone can be themselves.
- Being financially sustainable through effective and efficient management and working practices.

- Building and maintaining expertise through professional and skilled staff, networks, contacts and external partnerships.
- Being an employer of choice to attract, engage and retain diverse, talented people who share our values and vision.

### Success measures

These measures will form the basis of the annual report to the AoC Board and members, alongside a narrative report on progress against the strategic aims.

Success measures
<b>External Policy and Profile</b>
Monetary value of policy changes achieved
Policy and/or implementation changes achieved
Perceptions of AoC and colleges with key stakeholders
<b>Member Engagement</b>
Membership levels and member satisfaction
Member college engagement in AoC events
Member colleges engaged in using services
<b>Finance</b>
Achievement against budget
Contribution to the reserves each year
Annual audit of accounts
<b>People</b>
Employee engagement and satisfaction
Diversity of staff overall and at each seniority level

Accreditation as a National Centre for Diversity (NCFD) Top 100 Champion of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Employee turnover and staff absence