

## FE White Paper - AoC's response

"This is an ambitious package of measures which can deliver a significant shift in how we support the lifelong education and skills needs of more than half the population and ensure that employers have the skilled people they need. With funding over the coming years to match the welcome policy shifts, this should rebalance the education and skills system to make it work for everyone.

I'm delighted that this puts skills at the heart of the pandemic build back, and recognises the vital role that colleges and further education will play in levelling up for people and places whilst tackling long standing concerns about stagnating productivity. Colleges have shown throughout the pandemic an unerring focus on the students, employers and communities they serve – this package shows that the government trusts them to deliver an ambitious and much-needed boost to skills which are vital for our changing economy and labour markets.

These are concrete plans which can deliver the government's levelling up commitments. Colleges have been calling for this, after years of being overlooked and underutilised, but government has to not only recognise the vital college role, it also needs to increase funding. Colleges have shown during the pandemic that they are the vehicle to transforming lives, and supporting communities and employers, and we need the spending review this year to invest more in them. Today's white paper will stimulate demand from people and employers and unshackle colleges from unhelpful policy and bureaucracy, ready for Treasury to show that it recognises that spending on skills is an investment with a strong return.

The reforms build on what colleges already do well so it's not about taking a wrecking ball to existing infrastructure or making colleges start from scratch, but investing in them to play a bigger part in supporting local businesses and local communities. Colleges share the ambition of a skills system which helps people on their journey to good work and supports their progression to higher-paid jobs. Achieving that will require stronger collaboration with more employers including through Chambers of Commerce and business groups but also directly through new College Business Centres. This has the potential to engage thousands more SMEs to help them build their businesses, whilst supporting more people in a shifting economy and labour market."

The new lifelong loan entitlement, offering flexible student finance, will make it easier for more adults to retrain as the labour market and jobs change. This drive to widen access to skills for all is exciting, but it is vital that students have personal financial support while training and studying to ensure that everybody can participate at all levels of learning.

The white paper sets out a big and positive agenda for colleges to help co-design with government and with employers and there are many details to fill in. As we successfully build a better post-18 system, we will urge the government to work with us on similar co-design of the 14 to 19 education phase and on how higher education needs to change to work more collaboratively with colleges.

As a sector, colleges recognise the need to step into this challenge so it is heartening to see the commitment to streamline the accountability and funding systems that currently constrain them. With more local autonomy and funding, colleges will be central to the rebuild and to the government's ambitions for levelling up people and places and improving productivity. Ultimately our test on this will be whether the reforms deliver for the people, places and employers who all want the same things – more inclusive economic growth, stronger communities and opportunities for all adults to realise their talents and ambitions.”