

# Joint Agreement



## Joint agreement on guidance for a Just Transition Framework in Further Education Colleges

*June 2025*

# College Green Commitment

## *Just Transition Framework*

### BACKGROUND

One aspect of the 2023/24 National Pay Negotiations was a claim by the Joint Trade Unions (JTUs) for a collaborative approach to support the sector to meet the challenges and opportunities presented through a transition to net zero, “the scope of which could include sustainability, new skills, climate justice and a road map to achieving a carbon neutral sector by 2030.”

A constructive and productive series of meetings and negotiation over the last year between the Association of Colleges (AoC) and JTUs has informed the Just Transition Framework set out below. AoC and the JTUs are now asking colleges to adopt this framework.

We believe that a just transition plan is an important strategic aim for further education (FE) colleges, their staff and communities; colleges are a catalyst for change and have important roles to play in the future green economy. As anchor institutions colleges will play a key role to influence, convene, collaborate and support both existing and emerging sectors, employers and partners.

The framework will build on and further develop the good work already carried out by colleges as part of the College Green Commitment.

We believe it is important that as system leaders, colleges demonstrate a strong and visible commitment to the principles of a just transition to ensure that colleges are sustainable into the future.

We understand colleges will need time and support to develop their individual implementation plans and embed these within their policy priorities and day to day working practices.

### DEFINITION

A ‘just transition’ is the generally accepted term that means greening the economy in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned and includes the following principles:

- ➡ creating decent work opportunities, including skills development opportunities, and leaving no one behind
- ➡ maximising the social and economic opportunities of climate action
- ➡ minimising and carefully managing the challenges that may be experienced by workers and communities, particularly regarding livelihoods and wellbeing
- ➡ effective dialogue among all groups impacted and respect for fundamental labour principles and rights.

## ROLE OF FE COLLEGES

A just transition will be an important strategic aim for FE colleges, their staff and communities. Colleges are a catalyst for change and have important roles to play in the future green economy. As anchor institutions colleges can play a key role to influence, convene, collaborate and support both existing and emerging sectors, employers and partners. The framework developed in conjunction with the trade unions aims to build on and further develop the good work already carried out by colleges and the AoC.

## AOC AND JTUS

AoC and representatives of the JTUs have collaborated to develop a framework that will assist colleges develop their own just transition plans. We believe it is important that as system leaders, colleges demonstrate a strong and visible commitment to the principles of a just transition to ensure that colleges are sustainable into the future.

We are confident that colleges will welcome this initiative and adopt the principles of the framework. However, we understand colleges will need time and support to develop their individual implementation plans and embed these within their policy priorities and day to day working practices.

AoC and the JTUs have committed to the Just Transition Framework and will provide the continued to support individual colleges at a local level to work towards a just transition and to achieve a secure future for their staff in a net zero future.

AoC and the JTUs will be working together at a national level to campaign for increased funding for FE colleges to support a just transition.

## THE FRAMEWORK

The framework below is set out in three key areas: leadership, workplace, impact and opportunity. Within each section there are several guiding principles that we believe are central to achieving the aims of a just transition. In addition, within each section, we have suggested areas of good practice, which would underpin the principles, many of which colleges are already implementing.

# College Green Commitment Just Transition Framework: *Principles and Good Practice*

## 1. LEADERSHIP

Strategic commitment at all levels within a college is a fundamental prerequisite if the institution is to be successful in taking forward its sustainability and net zero aspirations. The commitment of leaders within the organisation is critical to encouraging and supporting staff at all levels to develop their skills and expertise, enhance career prospects, and provide future job security and a just transition.

### Principles

1. The college leadership demonstrates a commitment to sustainability and net zero across the whole organisation.
2. Whole-college approaches to sustainable practice inform the organisational vision, mission and values, and are embedded across all provision, policies, practice and culture.
3. The college prioritises cohesion and inclusivity of services seeking appropriate collaboration across the college community and relevant external stakeholders, including sustainable procurement processes.
4. Leaders work closely with staff and student representative groups, including recognised trade unions, to identify how to protect existing roles and secure opportunities for staff to develop green skills and expertise, as the college and local community adapts towards meeting the challenges of net zero, transitioning fairly to a green economy.
5. College governors are actively engaged and support leaders and managers in the development and implementation of a just transition.
6. The college, in consultation with staff and student representative groups and recognised trade unions, works together to develop a just transition plan (see resources for template).
7. The college provides support/direction/resources to those staff who lead, support and champion sustainable practice within college areas/teams/depts.
8. The college adopts the updated 2024 FE Climate Action Roadmap and tracking template to assess its journey to net zero.
9. The college will facilitate and encourage student voice in the development and implementation of just transition plans, recognising students' role in shaping their education and the future.

**Good Practice**

1. There is a member of the college senior team with overall oversight and responsibility for sustainability and climate change.
2. There is a nominated member of the college corporation who supports the board and take a lead on sustainability.
3. There is a just transition consultative forum and steering group that drives the Climate Action Strategy and a just transition plan and policy.
4. The college publishes its Climate Action Strategy and just transition policy and plan.
5. An annual just transition progress report is presented to the college corporation and staff to show progress.

## 2. WORKPLACE

It is crucial that the college creates an environment where colleagues feel valued and supported through this transition and the need for change to ensure a sustainable future for everyone and future job security.

The college will commit to support staff to enhance their existing skills, obtain new skills and develop expertise to equip them for the future opportunities created by the green economy.

### Principles

1. The college develops a culture and environment that supports social sustainability, including positive staff wellbeing and a welcoming workplace. An inclusive and supportive culture can ensure the college builds on values that can positively contribute to all sustainability work within the college and more widely.
2. The college equips managers with the knowledge, skills and confidence to promote sustainable practice within their teams.
3. The college recognises the role of a green/sustainability (staff and trade union) representatives and may wish to consider how it will support and offer resources in order to facilitate staff participation in a just transition plan and broader institutional work on addressing climate change at a workplace level.
4. Staff feel able to future-proof their careers through being able to discuss their own concerns over job security, receive adequate time to access continuing professional development (CPD), or to develop new activities and access sources of funding.
5. Staff receive relevant tailored training and support, that is context and role specific, are supported to develop, individually and collectively, and have the confidence and ability to promote the need for behavioural change and sustainable practice within their teams, areas of work and with the student body.
6. The college equips and support all staff to gain knowledge, skills and confidence to promote sustainable practice within their areas of work both within the college and through the college's relationships to external stakeholders or local communities.
7. Staff are able to recognise student eco-anxiety and have access to resources to support students with their concerns about the climate and ecological crisis.
8. The college just transition plan should identify future potential skills gaps and skills needs in its workforce and put in place an action plan to identify opportunities for future employment either within the college, wider FE sector and other sectors.

### Good Practice

1. College people plans or staff development plans includes sustainability and climate change training as a shared goal.
2. The college provides CPD and training opportunities for staff relevant to their role e.g. embedding climate education into the curriculum in line with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There is further subject specialist training provided for each career family, pathway, profession or curriculum area/department.
3. The college works with recognised unions and student groups in jointly developing and delivering CPD and training and where required, the college may use an external support programme for staff and utilises staff development days and weeks to promote just transition plans.
4. Sustainable practice is an integral part of the college lifecycle and all HR processes: recruitment, selection, induction, professional development reviews, one-to-ones and professional development activities.
5. The college holds an external accreditation that recognises its approach to staff e.g. Investors in People, Chartered Institution for Further Education, or Responsible Futures.
6. The college participates in networks for raising and sharing innovations in practice, such as AoC groups, regional networks. the UNESCO 'Education for Sustainable Development for 2030 Global Network', or the Greening Education Partnership.
7. The college shows a proactive commitment to staff by celebrating progress and promoting a just transition plan.

### 3. IMPACT AND OPPORTUNITIES

Transparent accountability should be provided through consistent and effective mechanisms, regular evaluation and reporting, and a partnership approach between college and staff and student representative groups.

Just transition should be seen as an opportunity in which the potential benefits will outweigh any investment costs, and that these can be best achieved through a trusted partnership approach.

Principles	
1.	The college uses both quantitative and qualitative metrics to assess and measure progress of its actions in supporting staff with a just transition.
2.	The college reviews its just transition plan in partnership with staff and student representative groups and recognised trade unions, providing feedback to all staff and students.
3.	The college reviews best practice within the sector and wider industry to inform the future development of staff.
4.	The college works with key stakeholders to identify local and regional workforce needs and opportunities to sustain local jobs, employment and economies.
5.	The college actively reduces the resource demands and environmental impact of college activities (including indirect impacts or scope 3 emissions such as student and staff travel) and move towards more sustainable employment practices.
6.	The college works in partnership with stakeholders, employers, trade union representatives, students and the wider college community to horizon scan and assess future opportunities/risks to support a just transition.
7.	The college has effective mechanisms in place to listen and respond to views of staff on opportunities for career development as the sector and local communities transition to net zero.
8.	There is a formal reporting timetable to the governing body on progress on the implementation of a just transition plan and this is a standing agenda item at governing board meetings.
9.	The college supports research into the skills economy, inspiring the development of innovative practice that informs decision making, secures new funding/areas of study, and drives continuous improvement, as the sector and local communities transition to net zero.
10.	The revised 2024 FE Climate Action Roadmap, climate action plans and other key documents are shared with staff to inform future college development.
11.	The college uses its role as a community educator to drive change and climate awareness and actions in their local communities and with local businesses and stakeholders.



### Good Practice

1. The college has completed an annual self-assessment on progress in sustainability, the benefits secured, and risks mitigated or adapted to (e.g. 2024 FE Climate Action Roadmap tracking template).
2. The college has published its progress on its just transition plan, this could be in formats such as an impact statement, annual report, or scorecard.
3. The college is working towards or has achieved 'Responsible Futures' accreditation, evidencing the practical impacts of working in partnership with staff and students.
4. The college has established an inclusive, formally recognised, just transition group. Membership is representative of the staff and student body and gives a voice to staff from all areas and roles particularly under-represented groups.
5. The college supports recognised trade unions to establish the role of green representatives and provide facilities time for this role and have received relevant TUC-accredited training via the trade union.
6. The students' union or student forum or representative group has established the role of a sustainability champion.

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## SIGNATURES OF THE PARTIES TO THIS AGREEMENT



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