Partner a College Pilot

Final Project Report Summary

Submitted to: CITB
Submitted by: Home Builders Federation (HBF)

Project title: Partner a College Pilot
Project duration: July 2024 to August 2026
Partners: HBF, CITB, participating further education colleges, home builders, suppliers and sector stakeholders
Main contact: Catherine Bullough, Project & Relationships Manager, Home Builders Federation
Date report submitted: 8 September 2026

Project Summary

The Partner a College pilot was developed to strengthen links between further education colleges and the home building sector. With CITB funding, HBF brokered partnerships between colleges, home builders, suppliers and strategic stakeholders to improve learner access to industry insight, practical experience and progression routes into construction careers. The programme responded to persistent skills shortages in home building and the need for construction learners to gain stronger exposure to employers, live site environments, materials, methods and career pathways. The pilot engaged 14 colleges, 12 home builders, 3 suppliers and wider sector partners across England and Wales. It created nearly 1,000 learner engagement opportunities and more than 70 tutor CPD and industry engagement opportunities, including site visits, curriculum input, practical demonstrations, work placement discussions and employer-led activity. The project also developed practical products, including a digital Partner a College toolkit, case studies and branding, to support wider adoption of the model. The pilot showed that structured, locally planned partnerships can deliver greater value than one-off engagement and that dedicated coordination is essential to sustaining collaboration between education and industry.

FINAL

Introduction

The home building sector continues to face persistent skills shortages, while many further education construction learners have limited exposure to the employers, live site environments, materials, methods and progression routes that shape modern housebuilding. Colleges are keen to strengthen their links with industry, but often lack the time, contacts and structured framework needed to build sustained local partnerships. The Partner a College pilot was developed to address this gap by connecting colleges with home builders, suppliers and sector partners, creating practical opportunities for learners and tutors to engage directly with industry and better understand pathways into construction careers.

Aims and Objectives

The project aimed to create a practical and scalable model for improving collaboration between further education and the home building sector. Its objectives were to broker local partnerships, increase learner exposure to industry, support tutor CPD, encourage employer involvement in curriculum activity, capture learning from the pilot and develop resources that could help other colleges and employers adopt the approach.

Approach and Delivery

The programme engaged 14 colleges, 12 home builders, 3 suppliers and a wider group of sector partners across England and Wales. Over the course of the project, partnerships were established between colleges and a range of employers (Taylor Wimpey, Keepmoat, Ibstock, Tara Homes, Hill Group, Persimmon, Barratt Redrow, Anwyl, Davidson Homes, Wienerberger, Vistry, Walker Timber Engineering, Prospect, Untypical and Kellen Homes)

Employers supported colleges through donations of PPE and construction materials, curriculum input and the provision of industry experiences including T Level work placements and employment opportunities. Several activities, such as tutor site visits and Gatsby curriculum filming, created resources and relationships that will continue to benefit future cohorts of learners.

FINAL

CPD for Tutors

Tutor continuing professional development was an important part of the Partner a College pilot. The project created opportunities for tutors to engage directly with home builders, suppliers and live construction environments, helping them strengthen their understanding of current industry practice, materials, methods, site expectations and career routes. This was particularly valuable where tutors were delivering construction qualifications but had limited recent exposure to housebuilding sites or employer-led activity.

CPD activity included tutor site visits, supplier input, practical demonstrations, curriculum filming and discussions with employers about skills needs, work placements and progression pathways. These activities helped tutors bring more up-to-date industry examples into teaching, improve the relevance of classroom delivery and better prepare learners for the expectations of the home building sector.

Results and Outcomes

- Nearly 1,000 learner engagement opportunities were created including supported training for 36 students across the West Midlands
- Over 70 tutor CPD and industry engagement opportunities were supported.
- Employers and suppliers provided practical support, including PPE, materials, site access, curriculum input and careers guidance.
- A set of practical products was developed to support wider adoption and sustainability of the model. This included a digital Partner a College toolkit, case studies and guidance to help colleges and employers plan meaningful engagement.
  https://www.hbf.co.uk/policy/campaigns-and-initiatives/pac_toolkit/

HBF also developed its own Partner College branding, giving the initiative a clear identity that can be used to promote the programme consistently, support future rollout and strengthen recognition among colleges, employers, suppliers and learners.

NB: The opportunities created represent a conservative estimate based on the evidence available. We are aware that additional outcomes were achieved but are unable to include them due to limited data provided by colleges and employers.

FINAL

Budget and Funding

The funding enabled HBF to coordinate partnerships, co-ordinate and deliver a series of added value training sessions to students from Walsall and Moreton Morrell Colleges, plan and co-ordinate CPD training for college tutors, support activity planning, develop resources and capture learning from the pilot. HBF also contributed additional staff time and project management resource beyond the funded allocation to maintain delivery momentum and support partners effectively.

Review and Learning

Key challenges included inconsistent data collection from colleges, variable partnership readiness, employer uncertainty linked to wider market conditions and capacity constraints within further education. These issues reinforced the need for simple reporting processes, clear expectations and practical support for partners.

Recommendations

- Continue to invest in partnership coordination, as dedicated facilitation is critical to converting employer interest into sustained college activity.
- Support a phased expansion of the model, prioritising areas with strong employer demand, college readiness and clear local skills needs.
- Build simple and consistent reporting requirements into future funding agreements so outputs, learner engagement and progression outcomes can be captured more reliably.
- Provide flexible funding that allows partnerships to respond to local opportunities, including site visits, tutor CPD, learner materials, employer-led activities and supplier demonstrations.
- Encourage stronger destination tracking so funders can better understand the longer-term impact on learner progression into apprenticeships, employment and further construction training.

Products

The project developed a range of practical products to support wider adoption of the Partner a College model by colleges, employers, suppliers and sector partners. The main product is the digital Partner a College toolkit, hosted on the HBF website, which provides guidance, templates and examples to help partners plan and deliver meaningful

engagement activity. The toolkit is supported by case studies and learning gathered from the pilot, helping others understand the types of activity that can be delivered and the conditions that make partnerships successful. Content development will continue past the lifetime of the pilot

HBF also developed Partner College branding to give the initiative a clear and consistent identity. This branding can be used to promote future activity, strengthen recognition among learners and employers and support the continued rollout of the model beyond the funded pilot.

Acknowledgements

HBF would like to thank CITB for funding and supporting the Partner a College pilot, and for recognising the importance of stronger collaboration between further education and the home building sector. Thanks are also due to the participating colleges, home builders, suppliers and sector partners, (including NHBC and National CTEC,) who committed time, expertise, materials, site access and practical support to the programme. We would also like to thank Educational Insight for their support in coordinating and delivering four evaluation pieces. Their work has provided valuable evidence and insights that have helped shape the pilot and guide future developments. We would also like to thank RG Wilbrey for their help and support in designing and delivering a series of added value training to the 36 students at Moreton Morrell and Walsall Colleges, and for their work in co-designing the planned additional CPD for tutors.

Particular acknowledgement is given to the tutors, employer representatives, supplier contacts and learners who helped shape the project through their involvement in site visits, curriculum activity, work placement discussions, tutor CPD, materials donations and feedback. Their contribution was central to the learning captured through the pilot.

Sustainability

Sustainability has been built into the project through the relationships, resources and delivery model developed during the pilot. The Partner a College toolkit provides a practical framework that colleges and employers can continue to use after the funded period, reducing the need to recreate processes and helping new partnerships start from a stronger position. The case studies, guidance and branding also provide a foundation for future promotion and wider adoption.

FINAL

HBF plans to continue promoting the Partner a College approach through its relationships with colleges, home builders, suppliers and wider industry stakeholders.

Future activity will focus on embedding the model in local areas where there is strong employer demand and college readiness, encouraging partners to maintain regular contact, share opportunities, support tutor CPD and create more consistent routes for learners to engage with the home building sector.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The pilot showed that structured, sustained partnerships deliver greater value than one-off engagement activity. The strongest results emerged where colleges, employers and suppliers worked together around a clear local plan. Dedicated coordination was essential, particularly where partners had limited capacity or were new to employer-college collaboration.

The Partner a College pilot has demonstrated a practical and scalable approach to improving collaboration between construction education and industry. Future investment could build on this foundation by expanding the model to more local areas, strengthening learner destination tracking, increasing supplier involvement and supporting more flexible routes for industry professionals to contribute to further education.

FINAL