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**News Release:** 18 November 2025

## **Bigger, Bolder, Better: Konnie Huq launches 2026 NIC**

### **Konnie Huq launches 2026 National Innovation Challenge for students at AOC conference**

The 2026 National Innovation Challenge was officially launched today (18 November) at the Association of Colleges (AoC) Conference at the ICC, Birmingham.

Designed to inspire the next generation of thinkers, creators, and changemakers, the Challenge is a groundbreaking initiative led by Harrow, Richmond, and Uxbridge Colleges (HRUC) in collaboration with the world-renowned Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

#### **Take up the challenge!**

[https://youtu.be/YZlhk\\_SF0H4](https://youtu.be/YZlhk_SF0H4)

Now in its second year, the Challenge offers students across the UK the chance to develop real-world solutions to global issues, expand their technical and creative skills, and collaborate with peers on an international stage. Winners will be rewarded with a life-changing educational and cultural visit to the USA, where they will work alongside leading experts in science, technology, engineering, and innovation.

This year's theme — **Sustainability and AI** — encourages participants not only to generate innovative ideas but to design practical solutions capable of shaping a better, more sustainable future.

#### **Capturing imaginations**

Launching the Challenge former Blue Peter TV presenter, and STEM ambassador Konnie Huq, "This initiative has already captured imaginations across the nation — giving young people the platform to tackle real-world problems through creativity, collaboration, and innovation. And this year, we're taking it even further. Bigger, bolder, and better, our ambition is to expand the competition so that colleges and schools right across the UK can take part.

Speaking at the launch, HRUC CEO Keith Smith said: "The National Innovation Challenge is a platform for the brightest young minds across the UK to develop

solutions for real-world challenges. It fosters international collaboration and aims to spark a revolution in sustainable innovation.”

The 2025 Challenge winners, students Valentina Vicario, Emily Cheesman, Matthew Rawcliffe, Robert O’Callaghan and Sean Carlyle, have recently returned from their visit to MIT, where they gained hands-on experience, built global networks, and explored how innovation can drive social and environmental change.

The AoC Conference — the UK’s largest annual gathering for the further education sector — provided a fitting venue for the launch. The event brings together educators, industry leaders, and policymakers to share best practice, discuss challenges, and celebrate success across the sector.

The National Innovation Challenge showcases the power of education to drive global progress through creativity, collaboration, and sustainability.

[Register your school or college’s interest](#) in the Challenge or explore sponsorship opportunities [here](#).

[Read more about the National Innovation Challenge here](#)

For full story: [News](#)

**Note to editors:** Following a merger in 2023, HRUC (Harrow, Richmond and Uxbridge Colleges) has rapidly evolved into a thriving educational hub with three colleges and a strong apprenticeship provision.

The diverse and aspiring college group now serves nearly 15,000 learners across west and south London, offering a range of courses, including A-Levels vocational programmes, T-Levels, and apprenticeships. The College group also proudly supports over 850 learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), providing tailored programmes and internships to help them thrive.