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FE leaders launch new partnership to shape AI for the whole sector



Born from a community of leaders across more than 50 FE institutions, COMPASS is a partnership to build AI solutions for the sector, and it is open to every college that wants to join.

AI could help colleges improve outcomes, support stretched staff and make limited budgets go further. But most AI tools are built for schools, universities or businesses, not for FE. Colleges exploring AI alone end up duplicating effort and spreading investment thin. Every college that responded to a recent sector survey named AI a strategic priority, but only one in eight had a budget for it.

Over the past year, Harrow, Richmond and Uxbridge Colleges (HRUC) has brought together leaders from more than 50 colleges and FE institutions to work out how the sector can lead on AI, rather than wait for it. They agreed that AI is a leadership challenge for every college, not a technology project for a few. COMPASS is how that community moves from discussion to delivery.

A first wave of seven colleges – HRUC, East Kent Colleges Group, London South East Colleges, North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College, Runshaw College, Shrewsbury College, and West London College – has stepped forward to fund and lead the early work. They will pool their expertise, investment and experience to define what good AI looks like for FE, and make sure every solution, whether built or bought, fits the way colleges work. What they build will belong to the wider community, and more colleges can join at any stage. COMPASS will start with two areas with the potential to deliver significant impact:

1. **Learner intelligence to improve outcomes and progression.** Colleges hold rich data on their learners, but staff rarely get a timely, joined-up picture. COMPASS will explore how AI can bring that picture together, so staff can spot needs earlier, personalise support and help more learners progress.

2. **An AI-confident workforce.** Staff want to use AI but need confidence, guidance and clear safeguards. COMPASS will help signpost existing initiatives and build the skills and frameworks colleges need to use AI well and responsibly.

"AI is a leadership challenge for every college, not a technology project for a few. COMPASS grew out of a community of FE leaders, and it belongs to that community. Seven colleges are taking the first step, and the door is open to every college that wants to shape how AI serves our learners and staff."

Keith Smith, Chief Executive Officer, HRUC

What happens next

In early 2027, the partners, including any colleges that have joined by then, will decide whether each solution is best developed together, procured collectively or commissioned from specialist partners.

In January 2027, COMPASS will host an FE AI Leadership Masterclass for leaders across the sector, whether or not their college has joined COMPASS. It will cover how leaders can help their staff and learners use AI well.

COMPASS is open to every college. To register your college's interest in joining, visit Join COMPASS: register your college's interest

To register for the Masterclass, visit AI Leadership Masterclass for FE Colleges: Register your interest

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, higher education courses and apprenticeships. The College group also proudly supports over 1,000 learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), providing tailored programmes and internships to help them thrive.