

PARENT & CARER NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2026



WELCOME FROM THE CEO

Dear Parent or Carer,

Welcome to the Summer edition of our newsletter, which highlights some of the achievements and successes from another busy year at Portland. The end of the academic year provides an opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved and look ahead to the year to come.

Our recent Graduation, Annual Awards and Prom events brought learners, families, carers and staff together to celebrate the achievements, progress and hard work of our learners throughout the year.

Portland Assessments celebrated its one-year anniversary, supporting many individuals and families through autism and ADHD assessments, developing new partnerships, and fully allocating our £51,100 Severn Trent Community Fund bursary to improve access to assessments.

Our Woodborough Road campus has also celebrated its first year, successfully supporting learners with complex needs through its highly skilled and dedicated team. We look forward to welcoming more learners in September and will continue to develop this specialist provision.

We have been working on a new, strategic five-year plan and I am grateful to the many parents and carers who responded to my survey. The plan will guide our development as the Government grapples with SEND reform local government reorganisation - lots of change but also new opportunities to develop our work.

I hope you enjoy reading about the many achievements, successes and memorable moments that our learners, citizens and staff have shared throughout another fantastic year.

With best wishes,

Mark Dale MBE
Group CEO



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REVERSE SKILLS FAIR A GREAT SUCCESS

In March we welcomed national and regional employers to Portland College for our annual Reverse Skills Fair, giving learners the opportunity to showcase their skills, interests and career ambitions.

The event received fantastic feedback from employers, with one describing it as a "10/10 - amazing event," while another said, "Loved the whole idea, especially the personal information sheets which helped start conversation."

Learners also shared that the event helped to build their confidence, communication skills and professionalism. We are incredibly proud of how they represented themselves and grateful to the employers who took the time to support them.



LEARNERS BUILD CONFIDENCE WITH BUS TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

Learners took part in a practical bus travel experience thanks to Butler Brothers Coaches of Kirkby-in-Ashfield, who brought a service bus onto campus.

The sessions gave learners the opportunity to practise using public transport, including speaking with the driver, boarding and leaving the bus independently, and taking a short journey to build confidence in real-life travel.

A huge thank you to Butler Brothers Coaches for generously giving their time and resources.



SHORT BREAKS SPRING ADVENTURES

Our Short Breaks citizens have enjoyed a fantastic range of activities throughout the spring and summer. Highlights included visits to Newstead Abbey, bowling, Cadbury World, Skegness, Magna and Yorkshire Wildlife Park, as well as canoeing and horse riding during our Summer Camp.

Our Short Breaks service is for people with disabilities aged 18+. the opportunity to enjoy meaningful activities, build independence and confidence, and make new friends, while also offering families and carers a valuable respite break.

To find out more about our Short Breaks service and how to access it [click here](#).



DAY SERVICE GETS CREATIVE WITH INSPIRE

Citizens from Portland Day Service have enjoyed taking part in an air-dried clay course in partnership with Inspire at Mansfield Library, while also developing their independent travel skills by catching the Pronto bus together.

Throughout the course, they created trinket dishes, plaques and 3D clay models before decorating them to take home. They also learnt an important lesson from tutor Jen that mistakes are simply an opportunity to start again. This message encouraged confidence and resilience throughout each session, and everyone enjoyed taking part.



CELEBRATING AWARD SUCCESS

It has been a fantastic year of recognition for Portland, with success at both the Mansfield & Ashfield Business Network Awards and the Natspec Awards.

We were proud to be named finalists in the Community Impact Award at the Mansfield & Ashfield Business Network Awards, recognising the impact of Portland Pathways, Newstart and the Woodland Adventure Zone.

Congratulations to our electrician, Ben King, who also won the Rising Star Award.

Ben said: "An absolute honour to be involved. I enjoyed the whole process, from the interviews through to winning the Rising Star Award. I couldn't be more grateful for the opportunity."

We were also delighted to receive the 2026 Natspec Award for Innovative Approach to Mental Health and Well-being in recognition of our Donkey Assisted Therapy programme and its positive impact on learners.

Click [here](#) to read the full story.

Congratulations to everyone involved in these fantastic achievements.



WORK EXPERIENCE LEARNER OF THE MONTH

A big well done to Aine for her excellent work during her security placement.

Throughout her placement, Aine demonstrated a positive attitude by arriving on time, helping to monitor vehicle speeds on campus and proactively reporting unsafe parking. Thank you, Aine, for your hard work and dedication. Congratulations on this well-deserved achievement.



LEARNER SPOTLIGHT

Ava has made fantastic progress through her Gold Travel Training, developing the confidence and skills to travel independently into Mansfield and on to the Portland campus.

Throughout the programme, Ava has shown great commitment, building her journey planning, road safety awareness, communication and problem-solving skills. She has also developed her confidence in handling real-life travel situations, recognising key landmarks and adapting to changes along the way.

We are incredibly proud of Ava's independence and achievements.



REAL INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE IN THE CLASSROOM

A big thank you to Shane Hartley from Riley & Co, who generously volunteered his time to support our second Year Demonstrate learners.

As part of their project to decorate Willow House, Shane worked alongside learners to share professional painting and decorating techniques, as well as how to safely use industry equipment.

Learners were fully engaged throughout the session, asking questions, developing new skills and gaining a valuable insight into working in the industry. The experience helped to build their confidence and practical skills as they painted the hallway and used new equipment.



VISIT FROM MANSFIELD 103.2

Our Media group recently welcomed Zoe Charles-Hawley from Mansfield 103.2 for an inspiring session exploring the world of radio and media.

Zoe gave learners a behind-the-scenes insight into how a radio station operates, sharing information about marketing, radio production and media roles, as well as her own experiences in the industry.

Learners enjoyed asking questions, learning about career opportunities and discovering the skills needed to succeed in the media sector. The visit was a fantastic opportunity to connect their studies with real-world experiences.



DAY SERVICE CITIZENS LEARN FIRST AID SKILLS

Our Nurse Practitioner, Zoe, delivered an important first aid awareness training session for our citizen gardening team and Day Service citizens at the Kingsway Hub.

The session helped citizens learn how to respond in an emergency, including using a first aid kit, caring for wounds, supporting someone who is unconscious and knowing when to get help.

Everyone followed the simple TAP, SHOUT, CALL, PRESS approach and had the opportunity to build confidence, awareness and valuable life skills.



LEARNERS HAVE A VISIT FROM TEMI

Our learners had the opportunity to explore the future of assistive technology with an interactive visit from Temi the Robot and Cory, Care Coordinator.

From communication support to promoting independence, learners discovered how technology can make a real difference in everyday life through hands-on activities and demonstrations.

It was fantastic to see everyone engaging, asking questions, and exploring the possibilities of robotics in such an inclusive and interactive way.



CELEBRATING ONE YEAR OF PORTLAND ASSESSMENTS

Portland Assessments recently celebrated its first anniversary, marking a year of supporting individuals and families through private Autism and ADHD assessments for people aged 13+.

Over the past year, we have helped many people better understand themselves, access the right support and identify adjustments that can help them thrive in education, work and everyday life. Our assessments have also supported individuals with EHCP plans and accessing appropriate support in school and the workplace.

We have developed partnerships with My Therapy Services, a private occupational therapy service, and Seen & Supported, a specialist ADHD and AuDHD coaching and consultancy service, helping us provide a more connected approach to support.

Thanks to funding from the Severn Trent Community Fund, we were able to offer a £51,100 bursary to improve access to assessments, which has now been fully allocated.

Could an assessment help you or someone you know? Our pre-diagnostic screening, from £350, can help you understand whether a full Autism or ADHD assessment is the right next step. To find out more or book an appointment on our website **[click here](#)**.



LAING O'ROURKE SUPPORT WILLOW HOUSE

As part of Mental Health Awareness Week, employees from Laing O'Rourke generously volunteered their time to support with the upkeep and development of Willow House and garden.

The day was a fantastic example of teamwork, community spirit, and a shared commitment to well-being. Volunteers took on a range of tasks including trimming bushes, mowing lawns, painting, and general tidying, helping to revitalise the space and create a more welcoming environment for everyone who uses it.

We would like to extend a huge thank you to everyone from Laing O'Rourke who gave their time and energy to support us.

If you are or know of a business who would like to give back to your community, contact Grace Turner at graceturner@portland.ac.uk



REBUILDING CONFIDENCE WITH PORTLAND PATHWAYS

After being diagnosed with Functional Neurological Disorder (FND) in 2025, Diane faced significant challenges with long-lasting seizures and reduced mobility, leaving her uncertain about her future. Through our free Rebuild Mental Health course and ongoing support from her Pathways Advisor, Cheryl, Diane has rebuilt her confidence, developed a strong support network, and is now pursuing self-employment through Nottingham Trent University's Headstart Programme.

Alongside developing her own bespoke gift business, Diane has also taken on a volunteer Administrative Support role with FND UK, helping her continue to build her skills and confidence while managing her health.

In recognition of her incredible determination and achievements, Diane was recently presented with the Pathways Award at our annual Awards Day.

If you're looking to better understand your own mental health, improve your confidence, and take positive steps towards your future, our next free Rebuild Mental Health course starts in September.

To find out more or book your place, contact the Pathways Team by calling **01623 499193** or emailing pathways@portland.ac.uk



Portland
Pathways



FROM INSPIRING FUTURES TO EMPLOYMENT

PREPARING FOR WORK

SUPPORTING EMPLOYERS

REBUILDING MENTAL HEALTH

DEVELOPING INDEPENDENCE

When Sam completed his supported internship at Portland College, securing paid employment didn't happen straight away. Rather than letting this setback hold him back, Sam remained determined to keep developing his skills and confidence.

In January 2026, Sam joined Portland Pathways' Trailblazer programme, designed to support young people who are not currently in education, employment or training (NEET). Throughout the eight-week programme, he embraced every opportunity available, taking part in employability workshops covering CV writing, interview skills and employer engagement. Alongside these practical sessions, Sam focused on improving his confidence and wellbeing, even spending time writing his own book as a creative outlet.

Sam also discovered a passion for archery during the Inspiring Futures enrichment sessions. Keen to continue developing this new skill, he signed up for weekly sessions with the Woodland Adventure Zone team at Portland College, allowing him to build on both his ability and confidence.

After successfully completing the programme, Sam secured a part-time paid role with Capita - where he had previously completed his supported internship - through a recruitment agency. He is thoroughly enjoying the role and the independence that employment has brought him.

Sam's journey is a fantastic example of how the right support, combined with determination and a willingness to embrace new opportunities, can lead to positive outcomes.

If you or someone you know could benefit from building confidence, developing employability skills and taking positive steps towards education, employment or greater independence, our Portland Progress and Inspiring Futures programmes could help.

To find out more or discuss the support available, contact the Pathways Team by calling **01623 499193** or emailing **pathways@portland.ac.uk**



WOODBOROUGH LEARNERS ATTEND AN APPOINTMENT

As part of their 'Healthy Living' sessions this term, Woodborough Road learners took part in an 'Attending Appointments' desensitisation session to help build familiarity and confidence with medical settings.

Learners explored different aspects of appointments, including having their temperature and blood pressure taken, using a hospital bed, and becoming familiar with medical uniforms. Sensory activities, puzzles and an interactive story helped make the experience fun and supportive.

Well done to all our learners for taking part so enthusiastically.



HANNAH REPRESENTS PORTLAND AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE

Learning Support Assistant Hannah Heason recently had the honour of representing Portland at a Duke of Edinburgh Garden Party at Buckingham Palace.

Hannah's dedication to supporting learners through the Duke of Edinburgh programme was truly showcased as she travelled straight from the event in London to the Peak District to support learners on their Silver assessed DofE expedition, arriving at the campsite in the dark while still dressed in her garden party attire.



LEARNERS ENJOY A FUN-FILLED DISC GOLF TRIP

As part of the Newstart enrichment programme, a group of learners, residents and community members enjoyed a trip to King George V Park to take part in a round of disc golf.

Everyone showed great enthusiasm and perseverance as they navigated the course and aimed their frisbees at the targets. Despite a few frisbees finding their way into the trees, all participants completed the course and enjoyed exploring the playground and outdoor gym afterwards.

The visit was a great success, with further trips planned to continue providing opportunities for learners to enjoy new activities within the community.

Click here and sign up to receive updates about our upcoming Newstart trips, activities and events.



E-SPORTS: PORTLAND COLLABORATES WITH SENSE COLLEGE

Learners from our Forest Road West campus recently represented Portland at an inter-college E-Sports tournament hosted by SENSE College in Loughborough.

The event brought together learners with a shared passion for gaming and technology, providing opportunities to develop teamwork, communication and confidence while competing in a range of games, including Minecraft and Rocket League.

Learners enjoyed connecting with others, sharing their interests and building friendships in a supportive and inclusive environment. The tournament was a fantastic success, with participants proudly showcasing their skills and stepping outside their comfort zones.

The event also strengthened the partnership between Portland College and SENSE College, with future online tournaments and collaborative E-Sports opportunities already being planned.



A FANTASTIC YEAR IN RESIDENTIAL LEARNING

It's been a fantastic year for Residential Learning, with learners embracing college life through enrichment activities, community outings, building friendships and enjoying themed evenings celebrating different cultures and national days outside of their college timetable.

It has been wonderful to see learners grow in confidence and independence throughout the year, with one learner even taking the initiative to organise their own train themed night for others to enjoy.

As the academic year comes to a close, we wish all of our learners who are moving on every success in the future. We look forward to welcoming back our returning learners and meeting those joining Residential Learning for the first time in September.



CELEBRATING COMMUNITY ACCESS ACHIEVEMENTS

We're incredibly proud of Brian and Holly, two learners from our Woodborough Road campus in Nottingham, who have made fantastic progress in developing their confidence and independence in the community.

After four years without accessing the community, Holly recently visited KFC, independently used a self-service kiosk with support, and enjoyed trips to the park and local shop. Meanwhile, after 12 weeks of preparation, Brian achieved the milestone of visiting McDonald's, ordering his meal with support and eating inside the restaurant.

These incredible achievements are a testament to their hard work, resilience and growing independence. Well done, Brian and Holly!



DAY SERVICES CELEBRATE COMMUNITY, CONNECTION AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES

It has been a fantastic year of activities and celebrations across Portland Day Services, with citizens enjoying opportunities to try new experiences, build confidence and spend time with friends.

At Kingsway Hub, citizens have enjoyed a range of themed activities, including Easter celebrations, Boccia, giant skittles and World Cup-inspired sessions featuring games, crafts and football singalongs.

Following the success of these sessions, we are delighted to now be offering an additional fourth day at Kingsway Hub on Thursdays. The Community Hub offer provides weekly meaningful activities, including sports and team games, music, singing and dancing, while supporting citizens to socialise, make new friends and improve their physical and mental well-being.

Spaces are currently available. To find out more about our Community Hub offer, visit our website or get in touch with the team at dayservicecoordinators@portland.ac.uk



PORTLAND LEARNERS SHINE AT NATIONAL FOOTBALL FESTIVAL

A team of Portland learners proudly represented the college at the AoC National PAN Disability Football Festival, held at St George's Park, the home of England's national football teams.

The team enjoyed an outstanding day, remaining unbeaten throughout the festival without conceding a single goal. Their performances showcased excellent teamwork, determination and sportsmanship, with every learner representing Portland with pride.



SELF-TAUGHT JACOB PLACES 3RD IN NATIONAL MANDARIN COMPETITION

Meet Jacob, one of our learners at Portland, whose passion for learning Mandarin has led to an incredible achievement.

Completely self-taught, Jacob went on to place 3rd in a Mandarin speaking competition in London, a testament to his dedication, perseverance, and love for languages.

Watch Jacob's story [here](#)



CELEBRATING OUR LEARNERS

It has been a memorable time of celebration at Portland, as learners, citizens, families, carers and staff came together for both the Portland Learner Awards and our 2026 Graduation Ceremony.

The awards recognised the achievements, progress and dedication of our learners, citizens and customers, including personal development, independence, employability and resilience. We were delighted to welcome Carrie Austin (below right), a local neurodiversity champion and advocate for inclusion, as our guest of honour.

Our 2026 Graduation Ceremony was another proud occasion, celebrating learners as they completed their Portland journey and looked ahead to exciting new opportunities.

Congratulations to all of our award winners and graduates, and thank you to our staff, families and supporters for helping make these achievements possible.



CELEBRATING OUR AMAZING VOLUNTEERS

It has been an incredible year for volunteering at Portland Charity, and we are grateful to everyone who has given their time, skills and support to our community.

Over the past year, our dedicated volunteers have contributed more than 6,480 hours, saving Portland over £80,000 while supporting learners, maintaining our grounds, helping in the coffee shop and volunteering at fundraising events.

We're also grateful to our corporate volunteers from ENSEK, National Grid, Nottingham University, Severn Trent, Alstom, Performance Health, DHL and VF Nottingham, whose time and expertise have made a lasting difference.

To everyone who has volunteered with us this year, thank you for helping us create opportunities and change lives.

We are currently looking for volunteer minibus drivers to help support our learners and wider college community.

If you have some time to spare and would like to make a difference, we would love to hear from you. For more information or to get involved, please contact Grace Turner at graceturner@portland.ac.uk



SUMMER HAF IS HERE!



Our Summer Holidays Activities and Food (HAF) programme has started this week, with sessions taking place between 28 July and 13 August at the Woodland Adventure Zone.

The programme is open to children and young people aged 5-16. Both paid and free places are available with free places for those who live in Nottinghamshire and are eligible for benefits-related free school meals.

With a fantastic range of outdoor adventures and activities on offer, it's the perfect way to enjoy the summer holidays.

If you have any family members, friends or neighbours with children who may be eligible, we'd really appreciate you helping to spread the word. Simply scan the **QR code** or **click here** to find out more and book a place.



AN EXCITING YEAR AHEAD WITH VANTOM VILLAGE

We are delighted to announce that Portland Charity has been selected as Vantom Village's Charity of the Year.

This exciting partnership marks the beginning of what we hope will be a fantastic year of fundraising, collaboration and community engagement.

Located on Oxton Road, Calverton, Vantom Village is a unique destination designed to be enjoyed throughout the day. Bringing together a restaurant, café, events venue, festival grounds, a shop, accommodation and beautiful outdoor spaces.

We would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone at Vantom Village for choosing to support a local charity.



CELEBRATING DR MARK DALE MBE

We are delighted to celebrate and congratulate our Group CEO, Dr Mark Dale, who has been awarded an MBE in the King's Birthday Honours in recognition of his services to Further Education.

Mark has dedicated nearly 40 years to creating accessible education and opportunities for people with disabilities. Since joining Portland in 2006, he has led the organisation through significant transformation, helping Portland grow into a nationally recognised charity and Ofsted Outstanding College that supports hundreds of people each year.

Dr Dawn Green, Chair of Governors at Portland Charity, said:

"Mark has made an extraordinary contribution to the lives of so many people and their families. His knowledge, kindness and unwavering commitment have not only supported learners directly and grown Portland into the wonderful place it is today, but have also helped shape the wider landscape of specialist education."

Reflecting on the award, Mark said:

"I feel very privileged to receive this honour in my 20th anniversary year at Portland Charity. For me and many who are involved with Portland, it is more than a job or an education course; it is a way of life. This honour feels like something we have achieved together, not mine alone."

Everyone at Portland would like to offer Mark our heartfelt congratulations on this very well-deserved recognition.



FUN PALACE AT NEWSTART THEATRE – FREE FAMILY EVENT!

We're delighted to welcome Fun Palace back to Portland College on Saturday 22 August, from 11am - 2pm.

This FREE, family-friendly event is open to people of all ages and abilities and promises a day packed with fun, creativity and community. Visitors can enjoy arts and crafts, 'have a go' sports, bushcraft in the Woodland Adventure Zone, music and circus workshops, a silent disco, foam party and much more.

Whether you've joined us before or are visiting for the first time, we'd love to see you there.

Activities will be delivered alongside some of our fantastic partners, including Art Station and Wired Differently, as well as supported by our amazing Portland volunteers.

Spaces are limited, so make sure you pre-register to reserve your place and join us for a day of creativity, fun and community.

Click [here](#) to register your place.



fun
palaces

SAVE
THE
DATE

PORTLAND
CHRISTMAS MARKET

Sunday 29th November
11am - 4:30pm

