



5-YEAR PLAN 2026-2031



A LIFETIME OF OPPORTUNITY

WHO WE ARE

Portland Charity is home to one of Britain's leading specialist colleges for young disabled people. The College offers further education study programmes for around 320 young people. The College is currently rated Ofsted Outstanding and is externally recognised as a centre of excellence for autism provision.

Portland Freedom, our adult social care provision, offers fully en-suite residential facilities for further education and independent living and a dedicated respite care/short breaks suite. Additionally we have a thriving enablement and opportunity day service.

Our Portland Pathways service offers a growing range of adult education courses focusing on mental health and well-being, employability and independence skills. These adult education programmes are all delivered in partnership with the Inspire Trust Adult Learning Service and Academy Transformation Trust Further Education.

We operate an Independent Specialist School (recently graded by Ofsted as meeting all Expected Standards) at our main campus, specialising in learners with autism and social and emotional mental health issues and a registered Alternative Provision offering motor vehicle maintenance and construction trades courses.

Our main 32-acre woodland campus in historic Sherwood Forest is a beacon of innovation for disability accessibility. We have a number of award-winning facilities including our Birches teaching building, the Woodland Adventure Zone, the Newstart Theatre and sports centre, a smart bungalow for teaching independence skills and the ever-popular Donkey Assisted Therapy suite.

We have two satellite centres in Nottingham City and our multi-award-winning adult education hubs in Sutton-in-Ashfield, Mansfield, Worksop, Newark and Kirkby-in-Ashfield.



WHY FOCUS ON DISABLED PEOPLE?

An estimated **28%**
of disabled people live
in relative poverty.

This is **40%** higher than for
non-disabled people.¹

Around **52.8%**
of disabled people of
typical working age were
classed by the government
as economically active.

Compared with
82.5%
of their non-
disabled peers.²

Disabled people
in the UK score
significantly lower
than non-disabled
people on all
key well-being
measures collected
by the Office for
National Statistics.⁴

For adults with learning disabilities the
employment rate is estimated at around **26%**³

The Ashfield and Mansfield districts,
local to Portland Charity, have the
highest percentage of disabled
people in the East Midlands.

Approximately
5% higher than the
English average.⁵

1 Joseph Rowntree Foundation UK Poverty 2026 January 2026

2 Department of Work and Pensions The Employment of Disabled People 24 March 2026

3 Mencap Employment - research and statistics December 2024

4 House of Commons Library Research Briefing UK disability statistics: prevalence and life experiences 17 November 2025

5 Office for National Statistics/Department of Work and Pensions Various data sets from 2021 census to latest benefit claimant counts

OUR VISION

All disabled people
will have a lifetime of
opportunity.

OUR MISSION

We deliver excellent
programmes to
inspire and empower
disabled people to
live more independent
and fulfilling lives.

THE HEART OF OUR CHARITY

People are at the heart of our charity.

Our committed, skilled staff and volunteers work with disabled people and those with mental health difficulties every day of the year to support their ambitions and open up opportunities for fuller participation in everyday life.

After a period of significant facilities development and expansion, the focus of this plan is looking after our people by investing in training and development and continuing to work on well-being and reward and recognition for our staff and volunteers.

We will also invest significantly in digital technology, including artificial intelligence, to give our people better tools to do their work. We want to remove much of the chore of paperwork and recording so they can spend more time with the people we work with and for.

For the people our charity serves, learners and resident citizens, we will seek to build on our well-established core themes of developing skills for Independence, Employability and Health & Well-being. Fundamentally we want them to feel secure in their identity and empowered to take their place in society.

Our plan is framed in the context of impending major reform to the Special Education Needs and Disability system in England and Local Government Reorganisation that will change key administrative boundaries in 2028.

Major changes like these will create challenges for us, but the statistics on the previous page clearly show that disabled people in the UK are at a significant disadvantage in life. We can't retreat from continuing to invest in excellence to provide our learners and citizens with the best possible skills development for adult life.

There will be opportunities arising from these changes. We don't know what all those opportunities will be yet but we do know the Special Education Needs and Disability system in England is in crisis. We must continue to work on achieving efficiencies to support commissioners to balance challenging budgets.

Portland is the leading specialist SEND organisation in the region and we will need to support the Government and local authorities as they seek to build the capacity and capability of mainstream education providers to support more disabled children and young people in mainstream education and to do it more effectively.



PRIORITIES FOR INVESTMENT

INDEPENDENCE

All our learners and resident citizens will get better learning outcomes from an individualised, independence learning plan, that will use a Portland designed AI system to assist tutors, learning support assistants and care support workers. The system will create learning plans with the young person and record their progress, adapting and updating these as they develop.

We are currently seeking planning permission and then funding for our 29-apartment complex at the main campus. There is a real shortage locally of affordable, specialist housing to rent.

We will increase the range and quantity of independent travel training. For example, local coach company Butler Brothers generously provide off-peak buses for simulated bus travel lessons as a precursor to using public buses.

We have undertaken initial research and pilot testing of using non-human support (dogs and robots) to facilitate greater independence by enabling the learner or resident citizen to have more direct control of the support they receive.



HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

We made great progress with this theme in our last plan including winning a Natspec Innovation Award for donkey-assisted therapy and substantial beneficiary impacts in our Portland Pathways service, Newstart Community Outreach programmes and inclusive, enrichment activities in our Woodland Adventure Zone.

It is now time to renew and build on the earlier success of our Be Healthy, Active and Courageous™ programme to train our staff to teach Skills for Happiness and extend that approach beyond the FE College to our other services.

Our ambitions to generate benefit for learners and resident citizens must be accompanied by further improvements in well-being for staff; moving from a largely reactive approach to one that is more progressive and pro-active: recognising employee voice, addressing workload issues and working on improved leadership practice, communication, psychological safety and consistency in decision-making.



EMPLOYABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT

Our community-based Portland Pathways programme, has performed very strongly over the previous plan period and all the planned expansion was achieved. Our intention is to consolidate this expansion, and support the Pathways team to further develop our Portland Progress programme aimed at supporting young people after their Education, Health and Care Plan has ended but open to all adults including those with a Plan.

We have invested heavily in creating industry level training facilities: an e-sports & games development suite in Nottingham and a coffee shop, construction trades, farm and hair & beauty salon on the main campus. Some more capital is needed to complete the farm, hair and beauty salon and a new project for hospitality training at our Forest Road West, Nottingham campus.

We did not achieve the desired growth in the number of Supported Internships over the last plan period and there were significant barriers to making gains. We are committed to ensuring that all learners and citizens who want to work are supported to achieve their goals. This will require a more focused approach to the way we prepare learners and citizens for employment. We will develop an employment pathway, indicating intent to learners and citizens, parents, staff and employers. We will establish a strengthened Employment Team under new leadership who will work with staff to ensure more consistent working practices, and engage and extend our employer network.



DIGITAL INCLUSION

We believe significantly improving our use of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, will provide our staff with superior tools for their day job. This will translate directly into improving outcomes for learners and citizens, more joined-up communications with parents/carers and commissioners and better management information to inform decision making and assurance reporting.

We will create a digital teaching lab in the FE College that can be used by all departments outside core hours. We will provide plentiful training opportunities for staff and volunteers and continue to support digital skills development and digital inclusion for all learners and citizens who will receive a minimum of 1½-3 hours per week of digital engagement and 8 new assistive technology apps. We anticipate a 15% increase in learners and citizens accessing work experience, internships or external training opportunities based on improved digital literacy.

We will work actively to develop centralised data warehousing for key learner and citizen data, prioritising Databridge™ to house all key data and better automation of standard reporting and communications to drive improvement to the learner/citizen experience and outcomes.



SUSTAINABILITY

We have already made significant gains on efficient energy use during the last 5-year plan and ambitious designs have created two carbon negative buildings (one a refurbishment). We have also renewed the water main on the main campus and some of the key electrical infrastructure.

In the absence of grant aid, or a clear national strategy, we will focus on generating and using meaningful energy consumption data to manage our estate as efficiently as possible and to look for pragmatic opportunities to reduce carbon emissions as we undertake planned maintenance and refurbishments. We will also seek low cost solutions to improve the climate resilience of our buildings (e.g. sun shading and rainwater management).

Our vocational training programmes, such as Duke of Edinburgh, are developing sustainability action plans and we will harness the enthusiasm of many young people to champion environmental causes and the role all people can actively play in their own consumption choices.

We are also actively managing the risks to our core programmes from changes to Government policy and local commissioning priorities, including the lack of statutory protection for special transport funding for the over 16s partnerships. We will continue to work closely with local commissioners to identify opportunities to reduce costs, improve efficiency and promote greater independence through Independent Travel Training (ITT).



PARTNERSHIPS

Too many disabled adults in Britain are faced with multiple barriers to achieving full participation in our society. The work of Portland Charity cannot just end when full-time education has finished or at the boundary of our campus. We are a large charity by all standard definitions but we are not a national organisation with large resources. We need to focus on the lives of disabled people in our region and work collaboratively with partners and local disabled people themselves to tackle these barriers.

We have wonderful, productive partnerships with trusted partners who understand our vision. Inspire Adult Learning and Academy Transformation Trust FE do amazing work in their own right but we also work together on creating meaningful opportunities for participation, community and learning.

The young people we support who could progress into paid employment need receptive employers who can see their potential which goes far beyond the disability. We have very deep roots in our work with innovative Mansfield company Linney, successful Nottinghamshire family firm County Battery and a burgeoning partnership with the UK's largest construction company Laing O'Rourke and IT services provider Capita who have supported the development of the Digital Lab. There are dozens of other commercial and charity organisations who help us to deliver the employment mission.

We have a strong relationship with the University of Derby who have one of the best SEND teaching and research programmes in the country and who also support our Portland Pathways programme and the well-being of our staff through their Work Health Hub.

No one denies the SEND system in England is in crisis just now and it is important that we continue to actively support our colleagues in local authorities who strive every day to make the system work. We see this as far more than a commercial transaction and we want to use Portland's resources to help keep that system functioning and to support the changes and improvements we all desire.

And finally, we should never forget the families and carers of disabled people. In our planning, development and delivery we must look to nurture those relationships and ask ourselves is there more we could offer to help them?



5-YEAR PLAN IN NUMBERS

Programme area	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028	2028-2029	2029-2030	2030-2031
FE Study Programmes, non-residential	280	290	300	300	300	300
FE Study Programme, residential	17	18	21	24	27	30
Progress Adult Education	18	18	24	30	30	30
FE Supported Internships	8	12	14	14	14	14
Freedom Day Service number of beneficiaries	113	120	120	120	120	120
Freedom Independent living residents	32	32	32	32	32	32
Freedom Short Break clients	100	100	100	100	100	100
Freedom Supported Living	0	0	3	3	3	3
Pathways participants (all programmes)	300	300	300	300	300	300
School on roll number	13	20	27	32	35	40
Alternative provision number (School & Jumpstart combined)	80	80	70	60	55	50
Woodland Adventure Zone users (not included above)	800	800	800	800	800	800
Newstart Community Outreach	3,600	3,800	4,000	4,150	4,300	4,300
Holiday Activities and Food	1,200	1,200	1,200	Subject to continuation funding		





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