BDC IN THE COMMUNITY

SPRING 2026



THE KING & QUEEN VISIT BDC, ALONG WITH ALUMNI, ACTOR SIR IDRIS ELBA

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Barking & Dagenham College



A COLLEGE COMMUNITY DEFINED BY GENEROSITY

Barking & Dagenham College is about more than qualifications and classrooms - it is about community. Over the past year, students and staff have once again shown extraordinary generosity, supporting causes locally and globally and demonstrating that the college stands for something bigger.

Take the Protective Services students, for example. Once again, they committed themselves to the annual Poppy Appeal, raising over £9,000 for the Royal British Legion. This is not a one-off effort; it has become a yearly tradition they have embraced for many years.

The Childcare students also stepped up, raising money for BBC Children in Need. Their efforts demonstrate that charity begins with empathy and these students are already showing the compassion that will define their future careers.
It is not just the students who have made a difference. Staff have also been committed, donating to the local foodbank to support families facing the pressures of the cost-of-living crisis. Both staff and students also responded to the urgent appeal for Hurricane Melissa relief in Jamaica, showing that the college's sense of community extends far beyond its local borough.

What makes this generosity even more significant is the context in which it has taken place. Despite the challenges many are facing, students and staff have continued to support others, demonstrating the compassion that runs throughout the college.

Barking & Dagenham College is proud to play an active role in the local community and the dedication of its staff and students continues to make a positive impact.

In BDC In The Community, discover the wide range of initiatives happening across the College, from hands-on environmental efforts such as litter-picking to the charity and ceremonial events that help shape and support our wider community.

TRANSFORMING LIVES — EMPOWERING FUTURES

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) HELP GROW A GREENER DAGENHAM





While developing valuable workplace skills, community engagement, independence, and confidence, the students joined London Borough of Barking & Dagenham's environmental team at The Chase Nature Reserve in Dagenham to plant new trees, supporting the Council's ambitious plan to double tree canopy coverage by 2040. The initiative improves air quality, increases biodiversity, and enhances green spaces for the local community.

Barking & Dagenham College's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision delivers programmes for students aged between 16–24 (Educational Health & Care Plan holders) and focus on four pathways, Independence, Pathways to Mainstream, Employment and Community.

Christina Hebron, Project Manager for Supported Internships & Outdoor Work Experience, said: "This was a fantastic opportunity for our students to be part of something meaningful in their local area. Projects like this help them develop teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills while building confidence and contributing to an important environmental cause."

Krishana Kaur, Head of Department – Horizons, added: "Seeing our learners out in the community, contributing to a project that benefits everyone, really shows the difference these programmes make in fostering independence and employability."

The College plans to continue supporting community-linked projects that combine sustainability, skills development, and real-world work experience.



THE KING AND QUEEN VISIT BDC, ALONG WITH ALUMNI, ACTOR SIR IDRIS ELBA

18 FEBURARY 2026

The King and Queen were joined by the college's alumni, actor Sir Idris Elba on a visit to Barking & Dagenham College to hear about the technical and professional education courses they provide.

Their Majesties The King and Queen joined students in a range of workshops to hear about the learning opportunities provided by the College.

In the fashion, art and design, hospitality, plumbing and healthcare workshops, Their Majesties viewed the skills that students are learning to help them develop and succeed.

In Fashion, they showcased design illustrations and garment construction. Plumbing students presented competition models built for the College's Skills Show, which took place the week prior, explained what judges were looking for, and demonstrated copper pipe bending.

Art & Design students led creative drawing exercises using different techniques and mediums.

In the College's high-tech Healthcare suite, guests were shown the specialist training facilities. This includes CPR mannequins, clinical equipment, and advanced patient simulators, such as lifelike mannequins and a maternal-neonatal simulator, allowing students to practise emergency response, clinical procedures and patient care in a realistic hospital environment.

Hospitality students prepared French fruit tartlets to high-end patisserie standards, similar to those served at a luxury afternoon tea.

"This visit reinforces the vital role that colleges play as anchor institutions — driving economic growth, supporting our community and creating life-changing opportunities for thousands of students every year."

NATALIE DAVISON
PRINCIPAL & CEO

During the visit, Their Majesties were greeted by Barking & Dagenham College and King's Trust alumni, Sir Idris Elba.

A highlight of the visit was the College's flagship creative facility, the Idris Elba Studio. Opened in 2021 in honour of distinguished alumnus Idris Elba, the studio offers professional-standard TV and film production facilities.

The state-of-the-art space includes multi-camera production studios, a virtual production wall (LED screen), industry-level edit suites and a fully equipped Foley room — providing rising local talent with hands-on experience in a real-world creative environment.

Here, Their Majesties saw demonstrations by students on the range of skills acquired at the college. Five film and media students showcased a virtual production set where their special guests were immersed within a fantasy garden environment created in real time. The experience was run and facilitated by students, controlling the environment, lighting, camera setup, and live production workflow.

Elom Baka, who is studying a Film and Media BTEC said: "It was an amazing opportunity. The facilities here are brilliant and the teachers and technicians are so helpful. The digital production screen is incredible and it's a great opportunity for us students to be able to learn with equipment that's actually used in the film industry.

"It was such a thrill to be able to demonstrate our amazing studio to our very special guests"

Natalie Davison, Principal and CEO, Barking & Dagenham College said: "Our College exists to transform lives through belief, opportunity and skills. It was a privilege to welcome Their Majesties The King and Queen and Sir Idris Elba to showcase the extraordinary talent and ambition of our students.

"At Barking & Dagenham College, we are proud to deliver high-quality technical and professional education that responds directly to employer needs whilst championing inclusion and social mobility. From apprenticeships to higher-level qualifications, and through facilities such as our Idris Elba Studio, we are equipping students with the confidence and capability to succeed in their chosen careers."

During their visit, The King and Queen unveiled a plaque to mark the visit and the 65th anniversary of Barking & Dagenham College.





BOOK CLUB VISITED BY ACTOR AND AUTHOR ANDI OSHO

Andi, a proud Barking & Dagenham College alumnus, studied Performing Arts when she did A-levels between 1989 and 1991.

She has since built an impressive acting career, while also writing two novels and, for a time, was a comedian. Visiting the BDC Book Club and English learners, Andi read a short excerpt from her latest book 'Tough Crowd' in a special event hosted in the College's library.



We're a public library and free to join, so pop in to sign up and find out more.

EMPOWERING FUTURES — TRANSFORMING LIVES

"Andi is a brilliant person. We discussed her book Tough Crowd, and I was impressed by her knowledge and that she has so much expertise as an author, comedian and actor. It was a pleasure chatting with her."

OLUWATOBI ADEBONA
STUDENT

Students got the chance to ask Andi questions about her book and her creative journey so far. Many were especially interested in her acting career and the variety of projects she has worked on over the years, including roles in Line of Duty, Blue Lights, and I May Destroy You. She spoke about her experiences across television and theatre, offering insight and encouragement to students hoping to pursue careers in the creative industries.

Andi's first TV work was in Eastenders, acting as a nurse, where she had some scenes with Eastenders veteran Sonia and met original cast member Wendy Richard. A student asked what her character's name was: "It was nurse 1, I didn't have a name!", Andi mused, "I actually played a nurse four times in Eastenders, I even delivered Honey's baby, so you could say I'm qualified, haha!"

She was asked lots of questions, for example, about how to achieve success. Andi explained "It requires discipline and tenacity. Having a growth mindset and acknowledging that 'I don't know, but I can learn' is important."

On her favourite show, she found it hard to choose, as each has own merits, although when pressed she said, "A Sky show called Curfew as it had A-listers, such as Sean Bean and Billy Zane, stunts and zombies in it. That was really fun."

Claire Cockburn, Learning Resource Centre & Community Coordinator said: "A huge thank you to Andi for coming to visit our learners – it was a lovely event!"



GRADUATION

“Learning should be a lifelong endeavor, and you’ve demonstrated just how powerful that can be.”

ANDY FORBES
CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF CORPORATION

On Thursday 29 January, we were proud to celebrate our Higher Education graduates at a special ceremony held at St Bride’s Church. The historic setting provided a fitting backdrop for an occasion dedicated to recognising academic success and personal achievement.

The ceremony marked an important milestone for our students, celebrating the hard work, commitment and determination they have shown throughout their studies.

Graduates were joined by family members, friends and staff, who came together to share in this memorable moment and reflect on the journeys that led to this achievement.

We were delighted to welcome Councillor Princess Bright, Mayor of Barking & Dagenham and a proud alumna of Barking & Dagenham College, as our guest speaker. She shared her inspiring personal journey and spoke passionately about the transformative power of education and the positive impact it can have within our local community.

We extend our warmest congratulations to all our graduates and wish them every success as they take the next steps in their careers and futures.



BDC MINDS MATTER: CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH EVENT

As part of the BDC Minds Matter initiative, Health and Social Care students delivered a children’s mental health event for Year 6 pupils from Rush Green Primary School on Tuesday, 10 February.

Our students planned and ran a range of engaging activities designed to help younger learners explore their feelings in a fun, supportive and age-appropriate way. Activities included crafts, biscuit icing, face painting, hair braiding and colouring, as well as an interactive maze challenge to find a hidden treasure chest.

The event was a fantastic opportunity for our Health and Social Care students to apply their learning in a real-world setting, while promoting positive mental health, creativity and confidence among the visiting pupils. Well done to everyone involved for creating such a thoughtful and impactful experience.

STUDENTS CREATE A MAGICAL ICE CASTLE FOR CHRISTMAS LAND



Barking & Dagenham College students brought a festive touch to life with their latest project, designing and building a dazzling Ice Castle for the popular Christmas attraction. The installation created a magical space for children and families to enjoy.

BBC News attended the event on Tuesday 9 December, which was thrilling for all involved, not least the students.

The project began several months before, with all Level 3 Art & Design students competing to conceptualise and design the best Ice Castle. Students produced detailed storyboards to develop their ideas. At the start of November, the Havering Mind team visited the College to judge the designs. After careful deliberation, one winning design was chosen, which guided the final creation of the Ice Castle, including additional elements such as a throne and extra ice features.

The winning students then led their peers to bring the design to life. Over several weeks, they worked in the College’s art studio, transforming the concept into a full-scale Ice Castle. The frame was built by Havering Mind, while students and College technicians, Jake and Claire, completed the decoration and finishing touches.

Once finished, the Ice Castle was transported and installed at its final location in Christmas Land, alongside a Polar Express train and an igloo, both organised by Havering Mind.

Students also visited the venue to help dress the Ice Castle ahead of Christmas Land’s grand opening on Friday 28 November.

YOUNGEST MAYOR RETURNS TO COLLEGE TO INSPIRE STUDENTS





BDC was proud to welcome back one of its most inspiring alumni, Councillor Princess Bright - the borough's youngest ever Mayor.

Cllr Bright, who made history when she was inaugurated as Civic Mayor of Barking and Dagenham in May 2025, studied at the College before embarking on a career rooted in public service and community leadership. The 29-year-old is also the UK's second youngest mayor.

Princess studied for her AAT accountancy qualification at the College between 2014 and 2016, taking evening classes while studying full-time at university during the day. Reflecting on her time, she said: "Barking & Dagenham College laid the foundation for me to graduate from university with first-class honours and qualify as a chartered accountant

My experience here was fantastic - one of the best I've ever had. The tutors were so hands-on and supportive and gaining an industry qualification alongside my degree gave me a real competitive edge."

She had such a positive experience that she is now keen to encourage others to do the same: "Being able to study in the evenings alongside my university course was invaluable. I absolutely loved my time at the College; it was such a supportive, nurturing and friendly environment. We were all rooting for each other to succeed and that made the journey even more special." In June, she joined staff, students and special guest Idris Elba OBE for the unveiling of a commemorative paving stone outside the College. She has also returned numerous times this year to support college events, including the graduation ceremony, the launch of the Green Skills Hub, and the BDC Skills Show.

Since first being elected as a councillor in 2018 at just 22 years old, Cllr Bright has gone from strength to strength - serving as a school governor, board member of a non-governmental organisation and mentor for young people aspiring to leadership roles. In her current role as Civic Mayor, she champions inclusivity, community pride and connection and is supporting two charities close to her heart: Ab Phab Youth Club and Crohn's & Colitis UK. Reflecting on her journey, Zoe Richardson, Skills Events & Development Manager said: "Cllr Princess Bright is a leader, role model and history maker. Dedicated, driven and community-focused from the start, she laid the foundations of her journey with us before going on to make history. Her story proves that leadership starts with believing in yourself - and never forgetting where you came from."

Principal and CEO Natalie Davison added: "We are delighted to welcome Princess back to Barking & Dagenham College. She is a shining example of ambition, resilience and service and we know her story will inspire our students to believe in their own potential."

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OPENING TIMES

Mon - Thurs: 7:30am - 8:45pm

Friday: 7:30am - 8pm

GYM MEMBERSHIP

Pay as you go: £5/session (£4 students)

Monthly: £15 (£12.50 NHS/ Emergency Services & 60+)

Annual: £150



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