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## Foreword

At a time when we as a nation and as a sector face unprecedented challenges, including the enormous impacts of an economy in crisis and immense social change, one could argue that there is little scope for optimism. But challenges bring opportunities, and we believe there are many reasons to feel confident about the future of further education and skills in England.

Over the past four years, the 157 Group has developed a powerful voice and a wealth of expertise. In May, we made a bold offer to work with the new government ministers responsible for our sector, acting as critical advisers and change agents to help the coalition government implement strategic, long-term efficiencies while ensuring high-quality services and employment success.

Of the many suggestions we made, one has already come to fruition. On 12 August 2010, the Cabinet Office announced that the 157 Group had been chosen as one of just 12 pathfinders for its employee-led mutuals initiative. We intend to set up a new qualification awarding body, which will enable significant financial efficiencies for the sector and lead to a better service for learners, colleges and employers.

We welcome the government's plans to free up colleges, simplify funding, reduce bureaucracy and let colleges focus on meeting the demands of employers and learners in their areas. We urge our members and all FE and skills providers to take part in the two consultations outlined by John Hayes on page 2.

This newsletter is a celebration of our FE and skills sector, and a tribute to all those who work so hard to make it successful.

With best wishes

**Lynne Sedgmore CBE**  
Executive Director, 157 Group

**Frank McLoughlin CBE,**  
Chairman, 157 Group

# Once-in-a-generation chance

*John Hayes MP, minister of state for further education, skills and lifelong learning*

It has been nearly two millennia since Plutarch wrote that “The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled”, the most concise description of what real education is for that I know.

But I sometimes wonder whether, in his day-job as a priest at the Delphic oracle, Plutarch ever foresaw just how often his great principle would be overlooked when, in the future, education systems came to be created or reformed.

I know that it is always tempting for those who organise education to focus their attention on structures rather than results, on what is being taught rather than what is being learned. But I don't believe that any system is necessarily the right one just because you can draw a diagram of it.

That is the sort of thinking that led to the compartmentalisation and bureaucratisation of adult learning in this country over the past decade and more.

But further education in this country was not created on PowerPoint™ at some brainstorming meeting of anonymous administrators. It was born of a passionate desire for the fruits of learning among ordinary people.

The fire of adult learning may have burned brighter at some moments than at others, but it has never entirely gone out. The latent desire to learn is to be found in every one of us, given the right encouragement and opportunities.

So I believe that the real test of whether further education

is really working is not how well one part of the system or another meets transient economic and social needs or responds to prevailing political fashions. It lies instead in how effectively the system as a whole inspires in adults the desire to learn and to keep on learning.

From that perspective, the primary aim of further education is to respond to those who depend on it to provide an outlet for their need or desire to learn.

Today, the advent of a new government and the urgency of its efforts to reduce spending in the public sector while increasing efficiency offer a once-in-a-generation chance to take a fundamental look at how further education should meet its primary objectives.

That is why, on 22 July 2010, I launched parallel consultations on the government's future strategy for skills and the funding of adult learning. The outcome of the consultations will inform this autumn's Spending Review.

Our proposals focus on six key areas:

**1. Helping people and employers to choose the learning that best satisfies their aspirations.** We want to build an effective learning market that is more responsive to individuals and employers. That will mean that employers can help

lead and shape the system, investing where their money will bring the best returns, while individuals can get good advice about what different learning options can do for them.

**2. Giving colleges and training organisations the freedom to respond to what their customers want.** We have already started to free colleges and training organisations from unnecessary bureaucracy, but we want to go further in simplifying the system. Their primary accountability must be not to distant central government, but to local customers. That also implies creating a fairer funding system. In a much tighter spending environment, colleges and training organisations must be able to focus on their customers without the distractions of a complicated funding system. The funding consultation therefore seeks views on all the main aspects of the system.

**3. Developing a credible vocational training offer.** In place of the multiplicity of wasteful schemes that we have seen in recent years, we want to develop a clear and credible vocational route that leads people on unemployment and other benefits into sustainable jobs. Those already in work also need help to get on.

This should be based on a streamlined workplace training offer in which apprenticeships will play a central part, and on vocational qualifications that command the confidence of employers.

#### 4. **Reinvigorating adult and community learning.**

Without a strong non-vocational education offer for adults, there can be no true system of lifelong learning. So we propose to help strengthen the relationships between colleges, local authorities, charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises to support the delivery of adult education and community learning.

#### 5. **Incentives to train in priority areas.**

An efficient and effective skills system must be able to respond quickly and effectively to new skills needs. We are considering how best to promote growth and innovation in rapidly changing or wholly new areas of the economy, such as low carbon, where employers are unable to access the provision they need.

#### 6. **Encouraging a more productive workforce.**

Investment in skills is a crucial component in creating a workforce able to help companies benefit from the upturn. But it is of value only if those skills are used well. A wide range of factors, including employee engagement and the quality of leadership and management, have a bearing on how well skills are used.

I hope that as many members of the 157 Group as possible will send me their reactions to these proposals. I value the informed and clear advice I have received from the 157 Group since May and it is vital that I now hear your views on how, together, we can make further education even more responsive. I want any issues that are preventing you, as some of the largest colleges, from operating as effectively as possible, to be quickly reported into me.

The more responses we receive, the better our prospects of genuinely freeing those who work at the front line of further education and skills to light the fire of learning among adults and keep it burning.



The full consultation documents are available at [www.bis.gov.uk/skills-consultation](http://www.bis.gov.uk/skills-consultation) and [www.bis.gov.uk/FE-funding-consultation](http://www.bis.gov.uk/FE-funding-consultation). The consultation closes on 14 October 2010.

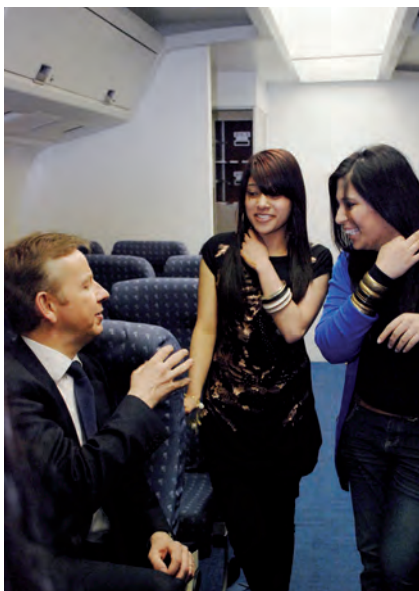


“Over the past five years, I have held countless meetings with college principals, their representative bodies and others from the sector. I visited innumerable colleges across the country. Everything I said in opposition, and everything I say now in government, has been informed by the relationship I have built with FE. I’ve listened to what you have had to say. Which is why we came into government with the promise to set colleges free.

“... Today, we take the first step towards a better, freer, more empowered further education system. Today we start to unchain the immense human capital in FE. Today, with the changes I have announced, we have made a new beginning. But tomorrow we must strive together to bring the process of rebuilding to fruition. Let us make sure that looking back we will be able to say that rebuilding started here, today, with us.”

John Hayes MP at City and Islington College, 17 June 2010.





“Education is not just about qualifying for university, because there needs to be a range of facilities that allow youngsters to take on the challenges of more practical skills, which are not valued enough, yet they are important to our economy.”

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, secretary of state for education.

“It is crucial to the national interest that we develop a technician class in Britain, the skilled workers without whom we can’t succeed in such fields as clean tech, nanotech or advanced manufacturing; without whom the new technology businesses in the West Midlands, which are steering this region towards a brighter economic future, are unable to grow.”

Rt Hon David Willetts MP, minister for universities and science, at the University of Birmingham, 20 May 2010.

Left: Michael Gove MP with learners and principal, Peter Roberts, at Leeds City College. Right: David Willetts MP with culinary students at Newcastle College, and with Gregg Smith, director of the lifestyle academy, and Bev Robinson, principal.





Top left: John Hayes MP with apprentices and Paul Head, principal at the College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London; VQ Day at the college, June 2010. Bottom: with students at City and Islington College, June 2010.





“Education and learning are of course desirable in their own right. Education for education’s sake – learning how to learn – benefits the economy in the long term. Philistinism is bad economics. It is also fundamentally unacceptable.

“A story from my own life makes the point. My mother and father left school at 15 to work in factories. My father eventually taught building trades in the local technical college: we need more people like him. My mother was a housewife and, when I was 10, she had a major nervous breakdown and spent time in a mental hospital. When she recovered, she saved her mind through adult education – learning for the first time about history, literature, philosophy and art. We need more people like her too.”

Rt Hon Dr Vince Cable MP, secretary of state for business, innovation and skills, at CASS Business School.



Top and middle: Dr Vince Cable MP with principal Christine Braddock CBE and students at Birmingham Metropolitan College.  
Bottom: Deputy prime minister Nick Clegg MP with principal Frank McLoughlin CBE and learners at City and Islington College.





Top row: The prime minister, David Cameron MP, at Cornwall College. Deputy prime minister Nick Clegg MP with learners and Ron Beadle MP at Newcastle Aviation Academy. Bottom: With learners at The Bournemouth and Poole College.



# Autumn 2010

# Newsletter



## The 157 Group

The 157 Group is a membership organisation that represents 28 large, highly successful and regionally influential further education colleges in England. All our members are key strategic leaders in their locality, who take seriously the role of leading policy development and improving the quality and reputation of further education.

Providing a national voice on strategy and policy for large, mostly urban colleges in England, we aim to promote change for the benefit of our members and the sector as a whole. Our members' knowledge, capability, experience and commitment brings a valuable breadth and depth of expertise

to every aspect of further education and skills. We also work together as a peer support network, and are committed to equality and diversity.

We are actively promoting the development of a strong and world-class college sector that not only has a transformative impact on individuals, employers and their local communities, but also makes a real difference to the economic and social well-being of the nation and its global success. Together, 157 Group colleges:

- turn over £1.6 billion a year
- serve 700,000 learners
- engage with 32,000 employers
- employ 39,000 staff.

## 157 Group members

- Barnet College
- Bedford College
- Birmingham Metropolitan College
- Bournemouth and Poole College
- Chichester College
- City and Islington College
- City of Bristol College
- City of Sunderland College
- College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London
- Cornwall College
- Derby College
- Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College
- Highbury College Portsmouth
- Hull College
- Lambeth College
- Leeds City College
- Lewisham College
- Newcastle College
- Newham College
- New College Nottingham
- St Helens College
- Stoke on Trent College
- Sussex Downs College
- The Manchester College
- The Sheffield College
- Warwickshire College
- West Nottinghamshire College
- York College

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