



“Recruiting overseas students to our colleges and delivering a wide range of UK-accredited qualifications abroad is of enormous value to the UK, contributing to the economy, boosting local economies, raising the UK’s profile as a knowledge-based economy, and bolstering our universities’ recruitment of overseas students.”

Frank McLoughlin CBE
Chair, 157 Group

Contact us

The 157 Group Limited
P O Box 58147
London
SW8 9AF
www.157group.co.uk
info@157group.co.uk

Chair

Frank McLoughlin CBE
Principal, City and Islington College

Executive director

Lynne Sedgmore CBE

Our patrons

Sir Andrew Foster
Sir David Melville
Baroness Sharp of Guildford
Baroness Perry of Southwark
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College plays its trump card in the competition for international students

The agents’ office was in New Delhi and Mike James, part of the executive team at City of Bristol College, was perturbed the minute he walked in.

Adorning the wall behind the large mahogany desk were dozens of plaques, each representing a different college from around the world with which the student recruitment agency did business.

It was a clarifying moment for Mike, who had travelled to India to drum up international student business for his college. He realised then that a different course of action would be needed if City of Bristol College were to become a major player in the rapidly expanding and highly competitive student market in India.

His response was to set up the college’s own recruitment office with its own staff. The office is scheduled to open in November 2010 and City of Bristol College is set to become the first college in the UK to establish its own recruitment office in India.

“I knew that if that agency had 50 new students on its books, we would be offered five, as it had to service all those other colleges with their plaques on the wall too,” he said. “I reckon we can recruit 200 students from India by setting up our own operation.”

A report by the global financial services firm Morgan Stanley forecasts that India will overtake China as the fastest growing economy in the world by 2015, but only around 12 per cent of India’s population currently benefits from further or higher education.

There has already been a steady increase in the numbers of Indian students coming to the UK to study in further education colleges over the past decade, with numbers more than doubling in the past five years.

Mike believes that growth will continue apace. “The middle class is growing so fast in India that the numbers of people who can afford to study in the UK will more than triple over the next 10 years, from around one million households to more than three million,” he said.

“India is one of the few countries in the world in which consumer expenditure on education far outstrips government expenditure. This reflects Indian families’ strong desire to invest in their children’s education, and this presents great opportunities for overseas education providers like us.”

The revenue potential from this market is huge, but the competition is also fierce. The USA is the largest host country for Indian students and the US government is taking steps to increase its share. It has eased US visa restrictions and increased the overall budget for educational and cultural exchanges.

Another challenge is from Australia, which continues to market aggressively in India, emphasising the relatively low cost of its degrees. And the UK, currently in third place for recruiting Indian students, faces two new threats.



Singapore and Malaysia have both developed strategies to improve international student recruitment, and these are expected to have a big impact on the student market in their neighbouring countries, particularly India.

Yet Mike has a trump card to play against his rivals. His college is in partnership with the University of the West of England, which is based in Bristol, and he believes this will give him the edge in the competition.

He explained, “What students and their parents want is to come to a college and be given guaranteed progression to a university, providing they pass their exams. Our partnership offers that. Even students with first degrees from Indian universities who want to study for postgraduate degrees in Britain sometimes want to spend time in UK further education colleges improving their language and study skills.

“It is about working together with a higher education institution on student recruitment. We want to place ourselves where we can listen to what students and their parents say and make offers immediately.

“It is about moving the value chain 5,000 miles across to the other side of the world in India. Together with the University of the West of England, we have employed two local women, who have a wealth of experience and a good network of contacts in the business.

“One will focus on further education and the other on higher education, but they will be working together to bring business to both. They will also be on hand to support students with their visas and other documentation, and to work with the British Embassy to see their applications through.”



CITY *of* BRISTOL
COLLEGE

CASE STUDY

International



Kath Tudor, City of Bristol College's head of international business, travelled to New Delhi in September 2010 to set up the office and recruit the staff to run it.

She said students seeking to study in UK colleges generally fall into two categories. "There are those with a genuine desire to undertake technological or vocational education and training," she explained. "There are also those who need to strengthen entrance qualifications in order to get into university."

She said the most popular courses are technical and vocational courses, which lead to BTEC awards, and include information technology, mechanics, aircraft maintenance, business, and hotel or tourism studies.

"There is a real need for technical-level staff in these disciplines in India," she said.

"Also popular are foundation or access courses. Not all UK universities accept the Indian Level XII qualification, so some students need to top up their qualifications.

"This means that pre-university, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are particularly popular, as they allow students to qualify for the university and course of their choice while getting used to studying and living in the UK."

More than 100 students from around the world already come to City of Bristol College to study aeronautical engineering and aircraft maintenance.

"We have a worldwide reputation for expertise in running these programmes," said Ram Naidoo, who heads the international business side of the aeronautical department. "Our students go on to get jobs in airlines all over the world."

Ram is a former aeronautical engineering student of the college. He completed his studies in 1973 and went on to gain 30 years' experience working for airlines across the globe before returning to the college.

"I maintained the connections with people I studied with, and many are now senior executives with major airlines who send their trainees here to learn," he added.



Keith Elliott CBE

"We work with airlines in the UK and overseas and we have students from the Middle East, the Far East, Africa, India and Pakistan."

Keith Elliott, principal of City of Bristol College, said, "We believe our operation in India is an innovative way of driving our international student business forward.

"It has the potential, not only to double our international student numbers, but to provide a delivery model that is sustainable and will work anywhere – in Brazil, Vietnam, United Arab Emirates and elsewhere. The potential is unlimited.

"It provides a seamless platform to enable students to progress from college programmes to university programmes, while sharing costs and expertise with the University of the West of England. Together we can expand the Bristol brand."

The international market

UK education has an excellent, well-established reputation across the globe. UK qualifications are recognised all over the world and are highly valued by individuals and employers.

For UK plc, the advantages of FE colleges developing international work are that it:

- Makes a contribution to UK's international economic and social development
- Reduces colleges' reliance on state funding
- Boosts local economies through the additional income from international students living in the area
- Helps develop good relations between nations
- Raises the UK's profile as a knowledge-based economy
- Encourages progression to higher skills levels, including master's degrees and doctorates, which in turn contribute to the UK's research base.

Thus far, the overseas market has been dominated by the university sector, feeding the demand for graduate qualifications. The focus has changed in recent years though; developing and growing economies are now looking for support and training in the technician-level skills needed to maintain their industries.

The UK college sector has a significant amount of knowledge and expertise in this area of education, providing people with technical and other

skills required by employers, including problem-solving, team-working, and the ability to undertake independent research and apply initiative.

This places UK colleges in an excellent position to sell their expertise to other countries, either through recruitment of students to UK colleges or, increasingly, by offering in-country provision, which promotes knowledge-transfer and development, assisting sustainable delivery of the required skills and qualifications.

To meet the demands from a wide range of countries, colleges need more support and to be recognised as legitimate providers of education for international students, alongside universities, which would remove some of the present barriers to students accessing college provision.

Members of the 157 Group have agreed to share their expertise in working internationally and to support each other through the joint development of an overseas brand, the British Colleges Consortium (BCC).

This case study is one of a set highlighting the international dimension of 157 Group member colleges' work.

About the 157 Group

The 157 Group was formed in 2006 in response to paragraph 157 of Sir Andrew Foster's report on the future of further education colleges, in which he argued that principals of large successful colleges should play a greater role in policymaking.

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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Keith Elliott CBE, principal,
City of Bristol College