



2009–10
Impact review

Who we are

The 157 Group is a membership organisation that represents 28 large, highly successful and regionally influential further education colleges in England. Committed to excellence and achieving success for the sector, all our members are key strategic leaders in their locality who take seriously the role of leading policy, improvement and reputation. As a national strategic and policy voice for large, mostly urban colleges in England, we are a major force for driving change for the benefit of our members and the sector as a whole.

By bringing together our members' knowledge, capability, experience and commitment, we leverage a breadth and depth of expertise across 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 driving 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 social and economic well-being of the nation and its global success.

Together, 157 Group colleges:

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

Our approach

We strive to be ambitious, influential, flexible and responsive; acting quickly and decisively for the benefit of our members and the FE and skills sector as a whole. Dedicated to excellence and instrumental in resolving sector debates and issues, we adopt a pragmatic approach to delivering positive solutions and achieving success for the sector.

Our members are bound by a strong and unanimous commitment to using their collective knowledge, capability and experience. We aim to play a vital role in leading policy, improvement and reputation not only for members but also for the sector as a whole. We have a crucial role acting as critical friends and advisers to the government and shadow government, local communities and in the sector itself to achieve positive outcomes for communities, employers, businesses and individuals.

Our success depends on member colleges within the 157 Group working closely together as valued peers, openly sharing expertise, ideas and resources. By engaging our staff, being committed to their professionalism and development as leaders and practitioners and providing the opportunities to learn from each other, we believe we can all improve and succeed together, raising the game for all.

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Foreword

This first impact review from the 157 Group assesses our progress against the goals and themes set out in our *2010–12 strategic plan*, developed in consultation with our members and published earlier this year. Using real examples from our 28 member colleges, it offers evidence of our impact, and reviews the crucial work being done by our central leadership team in facilitating and co-ordinating our group-wide activities.



I am delighted with the progress we have made, and that we can demonstrate the extent to which our work over the last 12 months has contributed towards achieving our goals.

Despite the unprecedented challenges that we as a nation and as a sector face, including the enormous impacts of economic turmoil and immense social change, we are optimistic about the future of further education and skills in England. Challenges bring opportunities.

Working on behalf of our member colleges and the whole sector, the 157 Group has developed a powerful voice and a wealth of expertise over the past four years. 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. Since then, we have built a strong relationship with the new ministers based on an open, honest and trusting dialogue, and have responded formally and informally to requests for our expertise.

In August, we were delighted to be chosen as one of 12 pathfinders for the Cabinet Office's mutuals initiative. We plan to set up a new qualification-awarding organisation, to secure significant financial efficiencies and deliver a better service for learners, colleges and employers.

I feel confident about our ability to continue offering solutions for more efficient and effective ways of organising the funding of FE and skills.

There are important discussions and debates still to be had, and we welcome in particular the recent announcement of the review of vocational education and 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.

With regard to the future funding of higher education, we have vigorously demonstrated the increasingly pivotal role of further education in addressing the challenges: greater demand for local and flexible higher education and higher-level skills, and insufficient public money to fund this.

Over the last 12 months, the 157 Group has succeeded in reaching new levels of member engagement and commitment, as exemplified by the proactive involvement of member principals in group-wide activities, extensive peer support and the continued development and expansion of our group networks.

As you will read in this review, the value realised by participants from these exchanges is immense. It is also evidenced by the growing interest, both formal and informal, in this work.

There are many opportunities for us to develop and expand our activities in this area, with the aim of improving quality and efficiency, and of sharing effective practice across the 157 Group and the wider sector. I am particularly pleased about the expansion of the 157 Group networks and the extent to which second-tier college leaders are engaging themselves in our work.

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking 157 Group members' staff, as well as the many and varied partners who work with us as sector representative bodies or as organisations that share our passion, commitment and belief in the future of FE and are prepared to support our aims.

Our special thanks go to our patrons, for hosting and attending 157 Group events, speaking about further education in the House of Lords, and acting as advocates for the 157 Group to key influencers.



This review is a powerful record of the 157 Group's impact over the last 12 months on member colleges, further education and skills policy and the wider sector. It begins with an overview of two key documents that we developed to articulate our core propositions and aims:

- *Our proposition to the government*, which we drew up for the new coalition government after the general election in May 2010.
- *2010–12 strategic plan*, which articulates our vision, core purpose and five key aims.

These two frameworks provide a baseline for reporting our achievements throughout the review document, and we summarise them for ease of reference on the following two pages. Our impact is then presented under headings relating to the five key aims:

- Policy
- Reputation
- Self-improvement
- Efficiencies
- Employment and skills.

Our executive director, Lynne Sedgmore, and I hope you enjoy reading this review, and welcome any comments you may have.

With best wishes

Frank McLoughlin CBE
157 Group Chair

Highlights of the year

- Contributed timely, thought-provoking and influential policy papers on key policy issues.
- Presented our proposition to the new government, outlining our vision of the role we could play in supporting the country's economic, skills and social aspirations.
- Engaged many more members in debates and consultations, on national committees, and as policy leads.
- Published our *2010–12 strategic plan*, developed in consultation with our members.
- Raised our profile with ministers and senior civil servants and engaged in confidential debates with key influencers.
- Increased peer review amongst members.
- Developed our member networks as thriving, ambitious and engaging professional forums.
- Chosen as one of 12 pathfinders for the Cabinet Office's mutuals initiative.
- Continued to build our strategic partnerships to extend our reach and increase our impact.
- In partnership, won three LSIS regional contracts for skills and employer responsiveness.
- Established the British Colleges Consortium (BCC) as a brand representing our members internationally.
- Obtained significant sponsorship and contract income to supplement membership fees.

Our proposition to the government

After the general election in May 2010, 157 Group principals met to develop a proposition for the new coalition government, one that would draw attention to further education's success and the contribution it makes, clearly stating our requirements for successful delivery of the proposition, and creating a vision for the future role of further education in supporting the country's economic, skills and social aspirations.



The following is an excerpt from the two-page proposition document, which is available to download from our website.

We want our new ministers to work with us on the basis of a realistic, positive perception and informed understanding of the successes, impact and potential of further education colleges. 157 Group colleges can:

1. Reduce unemployment even more effectively by raising our ability to get people into jobs, integrating skills development with employability and responding to employers' skills requirements.
2. Raise the standard of leadership and governance, and the quality of all FE colleges, through transforming colleges "at risk".
3. Offer greater stability and excellence by maximising the benefits of scale and efficiency through mergers, federations and collaboration.
4. Achieve significant additional efficiencies across the sector, on top of our current highly competitive value-for-money proposition, while generating effective, high-quality provision.
5. Provide a cost-effective and flexible skills escalator for learners and employers from entry level through to levels 1 to 4.
6. Develop high-quality, value-for-money, locally based higher education and a higher technician curriculum to ensure the delivery of HE targets in a time of cutbacks.
7. Lead regional and sub-regional groupings and federations for improved skills commissioning, radical reconfiguration of colleges and improved efficiencies across all aspects of skills and employment.

8. Contribute to a unified society, community cohesion, Total Place and the development of more motivated citizens, in our role as leaders of major community assets in our localities.

To do this, we request from ministers:

- Simplification and levelling of funding for schools, universities and FE colleges.
- More autonomy and flexibility to be entrepreneurial, free from unnecessary bureaucratic burdens.
- Changes to legislation and college governance to develop and implement more sophisticated merger, management buyout, collaboration, federation and shared service models.
- The abolition of quangos, retaining only the essential regional and national functions in a simplified and minimal structure.
- Expansion of a flexible, employer-responsive national skills qualification system that accredits smaller chunks of learning and generates more flexible and personalised learner pathways.
- Ministers' encouragement of mergers between successful and failing, weak or smaller colleges.

With real freedoms, 157 Group members could:

- Offer the Exchequer better value for money than anyone else in FE, schools and universities.
- Be proactive in implementing shared services, workforce reform and innovative ways of working.
- Offer proposals to carry out critical functions such as self-regulation, accreditation, awarding body functions, peer review and quality improvement for the sector.

2010–12 strategic plan

In July 2010, we published our *2010–12 strategic plan*, which was developed in consultation with our members, 28 large and successful further education colleges in England. As a national strategic and policy voice for large urban colleges in England, we are a major force in the transformation of the UK employment and skills system. In our first strategic plan, we outlined how we would play an important and influential role at a time when the further education and skills sector faced unprecedented challenges and upheaval in our external environments.

Our vision

Our vision is to transform the skills system and lead a new confidence in FE through:

- 157 Group principals being powerful contributors and thought leaders in the wider skills and sustainable growth agendas.
- Our colleges playing a vital role in taking the country out of economic recession, reducing unemployment and building a sustainable economy
- Leading the drive for self-improvement, capacity building and efficiencies by setting an example of effective leadership and continuous improvement, working with other providers in an open and collaborative manner.
- Our members working together, inspired, motivated and proud to be part of an influential and highly respected membership group.

Our ambition is to:

- be forward-thinking, influential agents for change
- work for the greater good of the sector
- be challenging, dynamic and innovative
- be dedicated to learners and learning
- be exemplars in equality and diversity
- be outstanding in all we do
- be part of the solution.

Our voice

Adding our important voice to those of other sector membership bodies helps ensure that messages about the complexities and advantages of large urban colleges are heard and understood, and that they add value to policy and sector developments.

157 Group aims and outcomes

The 157 Group operates in a complex and dynamic environment, so our five key aims extend beyond our members and the FE and skills sector to encompass wider ambitions for a coherent, sector-responsive and employer-led skills system:

Aim 1	To ensure that 157 Group members exercise powerful influence and, as thought leaders, impact on critical policy priorities.
Aim 2	To raise the national reputation of further education colleges and respect for the work they do.
Aim 3	To lead self-improvement and capacity building in colleges and the simplification of the whole sector, within a sector-led and sector-owned future.
Aim 4	To achieve significant additional efficiencies across the 157 Group and the sector, whilst retaining value for money and generating effective, high-quality provision for learners.
Aim 5	To position the 157 Group and the FE and skills sector centre-stage in the strategy and delivery of raising employment and returning the British economy to strong and sustainable growth, through our ability to respond to businesses and get people into jobs.

We are working with the new coalition government to deliver its priorities and strategies for economic growth and individual prosperity.

The following pages summarise our impact in relation to each of the five key aims.

Aim 1: Policy

Improving national representation and contributing to the development and implementation of policy for the FE and skills sector have been top priorities from the outset. The challenging funding and economic environment now makes it vital for the 157 Group to be focused and clear in our policy activities. Over the last 12 months, we have been active on many fronts to articulate a set of ambitious and cohesive policies.



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Working together to develop political thought leadership

157 Group principals meet regularly to debate and share critical thinking with each other, and with invited leaders at events and seminars.

We articulate our thinking on key topics for wider distribution through regular policy papers that address the areas of greatest concern for our members. These papers represent the collective voice of our members – college principals as expert practitioners.

Through these policy papers, we contribute a fresh and relevant perspective, seeking to influence national policy by offering practical policy ideas and recommending workable solutions and improvements that can be made by colleges themselves and the sector.

This year, we have published the following policy papers:

- *Protect services to students, by targeting cuts and embracing efficiency*
- *Real choices for 14 to 19-year-olds*
- *Preparing colleges for the future*
- *Learning and skills needs local leadership*
- *Strong colleges build strong communities*
- *Colleges' international contribution*
- *Rising to the challenge: how FE colleges are key to the future of HE.*

Immediately after the May 2010 general election, the 157 Group principals convened for two days to assess the position of the further education and skills sector and to develop a proposition for the new coalition government (as outlined on page 6).

Influencing national policy and working with the government

As leaders and representatives of some of the largest and most successful urban colleges in England, we are regularly invited to participate in policy debates. An important aspect of our policy role is being able to respond quickly and effectively to requests from the government and ministers for informal opinions and advice, which gives us an opportunity to influence policymaking. We are also invited to give our views at policy thinktank sessions.

We sit on various national panels, boards and councils of sector agencies, including the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA), Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), National Improvement Partnership Board (NIPB), Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), as well as member representative bodies such as the Association of Colleges (AoC).

We respond to national consultations, seeking input from our members to develop our responses, sharing expertise and opinion and providing a valuable sounding board for new ideas. Over the past year, we have responded to consultations on:

- Skills for Sustainable Growth
- A Simplified Further Education and Skills Funding System and Methodology
- Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
- Skills Funding Agency and Government policy in respect of Further Education funding
- New Opportunities: Fair Chances for the Future
- Inquiry into young people not in education, employment or training
- Government response to the IUSS Committee's Seventh report of Session 2008–09.



“The 157 Group has an important role to play in developing the further education sector.”

The Rt Hon Dr Vince Cable MP, secretary of state for business, innovation and skills, in his 6 July 2010 letter to Lynne Sedgmore CBE

“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.”

John Hayes MP, minister of state for further education, skills and lifelong learning, in a 157 Group newsletter

Raising the government’s awareness of the role and impact of further education is a vital part of our policy work.

Many 157 Group principals participate as chairs and members of various government and ministerial advisory groups. We also give verbal evidence to select committees and act as specialist advisers on a range of critical topics, formally and informally. Select committees are key agents for influencing the government and ministers, and our members play a critical role in these discussions and debates.

We are working with the Local Government Association (LGA) and British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) to look at how we can most effectively collaborate to promote economic growth and provide the most cost-effective local solutions to meet skills needs, against a background of spending cuts.

Local and regional influence

157 Group principals are key players in the strategic leadership of local and regional matters, influencing policy on education and skills, employment, local communities and the planning of public services. Colleges represent the largest concentration of frontline professional expertise in further education, and are well placed to help shape provision to meet the needs of individuals, local employers and all sections of the community.

As a result, 157 Group principals regularly participate as leading members of chambers of commerce, local partnerships, regional skills and employment boards and Confederation of British Industry (CBI) regional councils. They are also committed to working with the newly forming local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) to promote effective, demand-led local and regional economic growth.

- The Manchester College is working with 10 borough and city councils in a pilot project to enhance collaboration across the city region, with a view to delivering more effective health provision, libraries, Sure Start and young people’s health centres at lower cost. This included the college acting as a major catalyst in bringing together £400m in capital grants and funding.

“We are actively engaged with all the city’s regeneration companies and sit on their boards, as well as those of all the housing associations. We are involved in joint strategic planning and where we have had inward capital investment into the city, we have tried to create best value.”

Jack Carney, vice-principal, The Manchester College

- City of Sunderland College’s delivery of sixth-form provision, in partnership with the local authorities and 14 secondary schools, has led to a significant increase in the proportion of young people entering full-time education and an improvement in achievement from 67 to 94 per cent.
- West Nottinghamshire College is working with Connexions, youth offending teams, drug and alcohol services and childhood and adolescent mental health services to provide support for young people who are not in employment, education or training (Neet) in Mansfield and Ashfield.
- As part of its role to help drive up standards in schools across the city, Birmingham Metropolitan College is sponsoring the Harborne Academy, which specialises in health and sciences, and caters for 800 students.

Aim 2: Reputation

Raising the national reputation of further education colleges and respect for the work they do is one of the 157 Group's core aims. How we as a sector are perceived by the government, business, media, members of the public and learners themselves is the responsibility of every institution, and part of our role is to offer strategic leadership of the collective effort to boost the sector's profile and reputation.



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Understanding our stakeholders

Over the last two years, the 157 Group has evolved rapidly. Faced with another year of challenge, complexity and turbulence, we wanted to understand how the 157 Group is perceived by our partners, members, the sector and the government. 360 Education was commissioned to carry out a research programme for us, across the year, looking at different stakeholder groups.

While the project is not yet complete, it has given us some valuable insights into how we are building the reputation of the 157 Group and the FE college sector. Key findings so far show that:

- There is a widespread and positive view of the 157 Group and our leadership.
- Our work and successes on policy and policy development are most noted and admired.
- We are seen to have played a major role raising the awareness and reputation of FE.
- The 157 Group is perceived to be very focused on its members and supporting them.

Building our reputation

Raising awareness of the 157 Group, our member colleges and what we do has always been a crucial part of our work, and we have expanded our activities and influence greatly over the last two years.

In raising the profile of the 157 Group, we also raise the profile of further education in the wider context by increasing awareness and promoting the value of vocational education to learners, careers advisers and business in particular. Our focus this year has been on developing media relations, enhancing our work with sponsors through events and receptions and supporting our members to play a role in their regions and nationally.

Press activity and media relations

Continuing to establish good relationships with key media outlets has helped us gain good coverage in newspapers, journals and broadcast media covering education, professional development, policy and the public sector. This is a vital part of our quest to raise awareness of the value of further education and the profile of the 157 Group, as well as disseminating details of our key publications.

157 Group leaders and principals have been interviewed for articles in the *FE Focus* section of the *Times Educational Supplement*, the *Guardian Policy Review* and *Adults Learning*, among others.

Events and receptions

Meetings and receptions hosted by the 157 Group in the last 12 months have all been sponsored by key partners, including Barclays Corporate, City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development, Edexcel, Eversheds LLP, the *Guardian*, JISC, KPMG, LLUK, Martineau, Microsoft, Odgers Berndtson, SSAT and TES Prime, which means that membership fees can be used for other activities. The receptions provide an ideal platform for the 157 Group to influence and build relationships with opinion-formers from the wider skills system and existing contacts and partners.

157 Group principals and colleges

Our member principals are regularly invited to take key platform roles as speakers and chairs at national events and seminars to share their experience and perspectives. Many principals have become known as key leaders and spokespeople in their region, and recognised as national experts. Government ministers frequently choose our colleges as venues for making important announcements that reinforce their commitment to the further education and skills sector.



“The 157 Group has had a huge impact, far beyond its numbers. In key issues on further education, the influence of the 157 Group can be seen in emerging government policy on higher education. The 157 Group highlights to policymakers the quality, competence and innovation available in FE.”

Neil Stewart, chief executive, Neil Stewart Associates

“Retail is very developed in the UK, so I wanted to learn it here and also to gain experience.”

Vietnamese postgraduate diploma student at Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College

Publications

As our activity levels and reputation have grown, so has the demand for us to communicate with an increasingly diverse and sizeable audience. In the last 12 months, we have published our first annual review, our first strategic plan and our proposition for the new coalition government, as well as:

- Case studies about apprenticeships; working with Jobcentre Plus; equality and diversity; leadership of locality; Neets; and international work.
- *One in eight: The voice of higher education students in FE colleges*
- *Expanding choice: College pathways for 14 to 16-year-olds*
- *World-class choice: The voice of international students in FE colleges*
- Seven policy papers (listed on page 8)
- *Making the QCF work for learners*
- Two newsletters, including a special autumn 2010 edition featuring John Hayes MP.

Working with others

The 157 Group is an active member of the FE Reputation Steering Group (FERSG), which was set up to build the national reputation of further education outside the sector, primarily with employers, learners, the government, the media and other stakeholders.

The FERSG is chaired by 157 Group member Dr Alison Birkinshaw, who is principal and chief executive of York College. Two other 157 Group members are represented on the FERSG, and our members also support national events such as VQ Day, the AoC conference, Colleges Week, Adult Learners Week, Apprenticeships Week and the FE Reputation and Excellence Conference.

International reputation for FE

The 157 Group is the sister organisation to RC-2020 Inc, USA, which was founded in 1989 to create an open exchange of ideas among leaders of large community colleges in the US and elsewhere.

In November 2010, we are hosting a Global Conversation event in London to bring together college principals and presidents from England, USA, Australia and Canada for high-level, strategic discussions. They will share best practice and solutions on the most topical issues facing colleges and their countries today.



Creating an international brand

The British Colleges Consortium (BCC) brand has been created to promote 157 Group colleges internationally. Led by City of Sunderland College, a number of 157 Group colleges have been involved in a project to promote UK vocational education in China and to develop in-country delivery.

A number of 157 Group colleges have recently attended a national college conference in Beijing, China, to launch and promote the BCC brand.

Angela O'Donoghue, principal at City of Sunderland College said, “Our international work enhances the UK's reputation, raises our profile as a knowledge-based economy, and helps us develop the experience and expertise necessary for our nation to operate successfully on a global stage. It is also a valuable source of income for colleges, for local communities and for UK plc.”

Aim 3: Self-improvement

The 157 Group is a vital contributor to the sector's self-improvement strategy and its implementation. Realising the vision of a world-class skills system that meets the needs of businesses and learners is a goal we share with other sector agencies, and we are working with the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) and others to help simplify and improve the college system and build capacity for self-improvement.



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Members working together

Over the last two years, we have set up several 157 Group member networks, which have developed into well-organised, productive and highly supportive groups. The curriculum, HR, finance, international, IT, marketing, principals' PAs and policy networks are well established, and the business development directors network will have its first meeting in November 2010.

Operating independently, the networks meet termly, enabling them to learn from each other's experiences and effective practice, carry out benchmarking, support each other with problems, share resources and work collaboratively on projects. Some network meetings are sponsored by companies with expertise in the area who can contribute specialist knowledge.

In our recent stakeholder research, the networks expressed a strong enthusiasm to develop and influence further, contributing more widely in the 157 Group and discovering ways to share practice with other colleges across the sector.

Improvement through collaboration

Skills and employer responsiveness

The 157 Group and the Association of Learning Providers (ALP) have been jointly appointed by LSIS as lead contractor for its Skills and Employer Responsiveness programme and are working with the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (Niace) and the Association of Colleges (AoC) to deliver the programme in three regions.

KPMG ran the previous support programme under the name of World Class Skills, and is a key support partner to ensure that effective learning is carried forward into the current programme.

In collaboration with the Association of Colleges in the Eastern Region (ACER), Bedford College is the 157 Group lead in the East of England region; Birmingham Metropolitan College is the 157 Group lead in the West Midlands; and West Nottinghamshire College is the 157 Group lead in the East Midlands.

The programme supports all providers across the FE and skills sector, to improve their delivery of employer-responsive, apprenticeship and pre-employment (getting people into work) provision. The three regional programmes offer a range of activities, including business improvement groups, webinars, exchange events and tailored consultancy support.

Wider sector improvements

Many 157 Group college principals play a national role on improvement panels, receiving feedback from the wider sector and providing a representative voice for the larger urban colleges. Some of the areas in which they have been influential include:

- Involvement in research to assess the potential for a 'course labelling information system', as part of the National Improvement Partnership Board (NIPB)
- Information, advice and guidance (IAG) for 14 to 19-year-olds
- Individual learner record (ILR) system review
- Access to employment groups (AEGs)
- Quality assurance of HE provision across universities and FE colleges.

Some of our colleges are now becoming sponsors of the new academies, contributing their expertise to regional education strategies and priorities.



"I was delighted that LSIS could contract with a successful partnership of two member-led sector organisations: the 157 Group and ALP. This is very much part of our sector-led strategy, and we hope to do more with the 157 Group on a strategic level in the future."

Dr David Collins CBE, chief executive, LSIS

"Our experience of leading a Merseyside peer review group, working with three other colleges, has been invaluable in terms of improved quality, higher standards and professional development."

Pat Bacon, principal, St Helens College

157 Group college case studies

Producing case studies about key areas of challenge for 157 Group member colleges has proved an invaluable way of sharing ideas with the sector. This year we have published case studies about apprenticeships; working with Jobcentre Plus; equality and diversity; leadership of locality; Neets; and international work.

Each series typically comprises six college case studies, featuring in-depth views of what has been achieved and how, and offering the perspectives of college leaders and staff, various stakeholders, partners and learners.

Peer review

Lewisham College has a long history of offering peer support and peer review to other colleges in London, including those in the London Capital Colleges Group, and to those further afield, as part of the Beacon Colleges programme. It is now also involved in the new LSIS Quality Improvement Service. Colleges, adult learning providers and sixth-form colleges visit Lewisham College to hear about quality improvement in the areas of inspection, learning support, finance, data and teaching and learning.

City of Sunderland College has been leading a number of 157 Group colleges to improve their connections and ability to do business in China. Its peer support of British Colleges Consortium (BCC) members has included joint visits to China, introductions, help with awareness of culture and doing business in China, validation processes and models for in-country delivery. In October 2010, BCC representatives attended a Chinese college conference, with a view to offering a range of jointly delivered education services to Chinese colleges.

City of Sunderland College's experience of attaining an Ofsted grade 1 for equality and diversity and for safeguarding has proved invaluable to the 10 colleges that are taking its advice and expertise on improving quality in these areas.

In December 2009, Barnet College was one of the first large colleges to undergo assessment under the new inspection regime. Marilyn Hawkins, principal at the college, felt that this experience could be invaluable to other 157 Group colleges facing inspection. During visits to Cornwall College, The Sheffield College, Sussex Downs College, Lewisham College and Birmingham Metropolitan College, she shared very practical ideas with senior and middle managers as to how they could prepare for inspection and achieve improved outcomes.

"The greatest value in this exercise was the immediacy of the need; there is nothing like an impending and significant occasion to focus the mind of the whole organisation around achieving a common goal. These colleges already had good and outstanding inspection grades, so just needed to be able to demonstrate this continued high level of quality, but within the new framework."

Hull College has been involved in a peer review group for over three years, working with Stoke on Trent College, York College, Warwickshire College and BMW as a private sector member. Deputy principal Gary Warke said:

"We have an excellent relationship and have used our colleagues for validation of self-assessment reports, quality assurance projects, and sharing best practice in governance, widening participation and employer engagement. Working with BMW was really valuable; they had a great deal of expertise to help us in branding and new modes of quality assurance, and they wanted our help on supporting equality and diversity."

Aim 4: Efficiencies

The 157 Group supports the quest to achieve significant additional efficiencies across the further education and skills sector and is committed to demonstrating, through its own leadership, how to offer high-quality, effective and value-for-money provision for learners, within tight budgetary constraints.



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The 157 Group is active in the sector debate on how to increase efficiency and reduce bureaucracy so that cuts in public expenditure do not have a negative impact on frontline teaching and learning.

In our policy paper, *Protect services to students, by targeting cuts and embracing efficiency*, we concluded that it was possible to find significant savings in the education and training system without damaging the service to learners and employers, by cutting out waste and doing things more efficiently. Specific suggestions included:

- Making radical changes to the way our FE and skills system is organised, streamlining quangos and other intermediary bodies.
- Challenging the assumption that sixth-form study requires radically smaller group sizes than any other phase of education, when in fact larger institutions such as FE or sixth-form colleges tend to produce better exam results.
- Recognising that colleges are well placed to help control the cost of vocational programmes in schools by acting as procurement hubs; using their technical expertise to help local schools will ensure that they get value for money.

We also said that colleges must be given the scope to manage reductions in funding so that the resources needed to drive recovery are protected.

Preparing colleges for the future, a policy paper written for us by Eversheds LLP, looked at how the squeeze on public spending meant that colleges would need to think radically about their legal structures, business models and innovative forms of collaboration and governance. Mergers, including cross-sector mergers, federal structures and collaborative models, could become common features of the sector.

Efficiencies through networks and shared services

Several 157 Group colleges are leading consortia in their regions to improve shared services. Our 157 Group networks have identified opportunities for better collaboration through sharing resources and expertise. They are also now starting to look at combining their purchasing power to negotiate better deals from suppliers.

- The marketing network is discussing opportunities for benchmarking marketing activities and group media buying.
- The HR network has shared HR practice and is keen to develop this exchange further; it is also considering joint procurement possibilities.
- The IT network is considering joint procurement to negotiate lower costs for IT services.

Efficiency in the sector

The 157 Group's executive director, Lynne Sedgmore CBE, is a member of the Strategic Shared Services Steering Group and chairs the innovation and efficiency strand to fund college-led projects to the tune of nearly £2.5m. This ensures that the 157 Group influences the strategic debate and is kept up to date on sector-wide efficiency and shared services developments.

“We ran a successful pilot with learners on our level 1 bricklaying diploma course, which showed that increased efficiencies can be delivered in vocational and workplace assessments by using mobile technology to record evidence that is subsequently stored in e-portfolios, ready for tutors and assessors to validate online.”

Heather MacDonald, chief executive, The Sheffield College



“With freedom comes a fresh challenge; as the cost of compliance is reduced, I will be looking for colleges to find efficiencies. This may be, for example, through the use of shared services and a new approach to procurement. And colleges freed from constraints will also find new, better and more efficient ways of responding to local needs.”

John Hayes MP, minister of state for further education, skills and lifelong learning, at City and Islington College on 17 June 2010

Collaboration with partners

In collaboration with JISC, the 157 Group’s IT network has been looking at the opportunities for cloud computing, whereby shared resources, software, and information are provided to computers and other devices on demand, like the electricity grid.

A survey has been undertaken to assess the current usage of cloud computing services among 157 Group colleges, and colleges are now working together to examine the cloud in more detail and identify how they can make better use of the potential benefits to achieve greater efficiencies.

Simplifying the awarding system

The 157 Group has been chosen as one of just 12 pathfinders for the Cabinet Office’s mutuals initiative, which is part of the government’s aim to decentralise power and support entrepreneurial public sector staff who want to take control of and improve the quality and value of their services.

The 157 Group has agreed a vision to form a new qualification-awarding body for the FE and skills sector, to make a radical intervention into the operations of the awarding body market.

Adopting a new paradigm and approach to awarding qualifications, which is led by a collective of colleges, will offer significant financial efficiencies for colleges through shared services, including examinations and verification, and by keeping public sector funds within the FE sector, rather than feeding surpluses into private stakeholder profits. It will also enable colleges to expand the provision of higher education in FE, develop international awards and accreditation, and meet the needs of employers and learners more closely.

Creating value for money locally

A number of our colleges have taken part in a series of pilots looking at how efficiencies can be gained by better planning and integration of public services. The alignment of services goes beyond the integration of 14–19 services to include health, planning, police and housing. Examples include:

- With Manchester Libraries, The Manchester College hosts integrated college and public library services on two of its main campuses.
- Lewisham College is working with other agencies to streamline support for unemployed people, who are often pushed from one agency to another, and to give them more personalised support and advice.

Efficiency through sustainability

The Sheffield College is playing a major part in Yorkshire Forward’s ‘efficiency through sustainability’ initiative. Sustainable aspects of the new £60m site it has developed include:

- Wind turbines saving £30,000 in electricity
- 260m² of photovoltaic cells for solar power
- Rainwater recycling system
- Green sedum roofs to encourage biodiversity
- Natural ventilation
- High-efficiency light fittings
- Energy saving features in the building: low-power lighting, monitors and computers that switch themselves off.

The college plans to be a centre for advanced manufacturing and engineering, which would include sustainability in the curriculum, as it already does in other subject areas.

Aim 5: Employment and skills

With more than 700,000 learners and over 32,000 employer relationships between them, 157 Group colleges have a major role to play in achieving national skills and employment goals. This broad and complex role means developing strong links with employers and their representative bodies, such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), and the sector skills councils, as well as with learners, to ensure that more learners are equipped with the skills that employers need.

An increasing percentage of college revenue comes from employer training. In any year, each of our member colleges typically works with between 2,000 and 3,000 employers, ranging from small local employers to large national organisations. They are also involved in large, publicly funded back-to-work programmes.

Working at the strategic level

In its 2009 report, *Towards Ambition 2020: skills, jobs, growth*, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) clearly acknowledged the pivotal role of colleges in the skills strategy.

This year, we have focused on working with other membership bodies in further education and with 157 Group members to ensure that our objectives are clearly aligned with those of employers. In particular, we have highlighted the need for the expansion of a flexible, employer-responsive national skills qualification system that accredits smaller chunks of learning and creates more adaptable and personalised learner pathways.

We recently held a roundtable event with the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) and Local Government Association (LGA), to bring key influencers together from business, local authorities and colleges for a discussion on providing the most cost-effective local solutions to meet skills needs against the background of funding cuts.

Working at the regional level

Many 157 Group colleges operate in challenging urban environments where there is a critical need to work with learners, support agencies and local employers to align local and regional skills requirements with the provision of skills training, to maximise the employability of new learners and unemployed people.

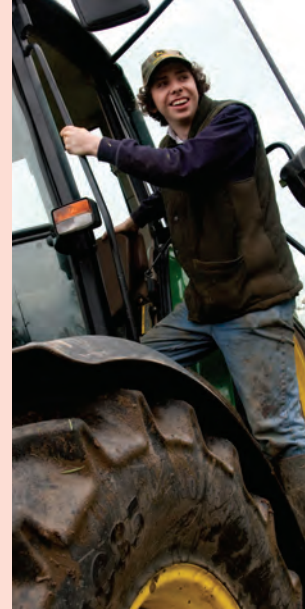
Our principals are actively involved in various regional and local planning and partnership bodies with a remit for employment, skills and training, as well as in the 14–19 regional consortia and Get Set, the official London 2012 education programme. We are committed to supporting and working with the new local enterprise partnerships (LEPs), which will replace the regional development agencies. They are designed to be practical and proactive, tying council and business interests together, and creating the conditions for businesses to thrive.

Working directly with employers

157 Group member colleges work with local employers to identify existing and future skills needs, matching these with learners and offering learners effective information, advice and guidance (IAG) to help them get work.

Our strong focus on offering apprenticeships demonstrates our ability to work with employers and learners, aligning skills development with employers' needs.

- Construction apprentices at the College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London have been working on Olympic stadiums at the London 2012 site.
- Chichester College itself employs 57 apprentices in a variety of areas, from nursery staff learning childcare, to ground staff working in painting and decorating and amenity horticulture.
- The Sheffield College has developed a health and social care academy for employees of the Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and the local authority social services, aimed at tackling skills gaps and boosting employee retention rates.



- The Bournemouth and Poole College offers programme-led apprenticeships for learners to train full time at the college before starting work with an employer.

Several 157 Group colleges have attained the Training Quality Standard (TQS), which recognises the best organisations delivering training and development solutions to employers. An important criterion for TQS is a provider's ability to deliver consistently high-quality training to employers that relates directly back to employer outcomes.

“When we provide training for a business, we make sure we are measuring success at the same time. We look at business objectives, which may be increasing profitability, reducing staff turnover, increasing productivity, or reducing complaints. We actually prove the impact of the services we provide later down the line.”

Mark Cook, director of business development, Lewisham College

Improving employer responsiveness

The 157 Group and ALP are jointly leading the delivery of the LSIS Skills and Employer Responsiveness programme in the West Midlands, East Midlands and East of England regions. The programme aims to improve the service offered to employers by equipping providers with the skills and expertise to tailor learning to employers' current needs.

Thanks to strong links between the programme partners – the 157 Group, ALP, AoC and Niace – and their regional and local networks, most of the programme will be delivered by the sector, using staff currently employed by providers.

Getting people back into work

The recession has had an enormous impact on the FE and skills sector. 157 Group member colleges have worked extensively with Jobcentre Plus, funding agencies and employers to develop a range of flexible back-to-work programmes, and to engage the hardest-to-reach young people who are not in employment, education or training (Neet) and are building excellent skills in making these programmes effective.

- Lambeth College works closely with Jobcentre Plus, employers and a private recruitment company to deliver new programmes to help people back to work across south London.
- Through its job training subsidiary, Intraining, Newcastle College will support the Department for Work and Pensions by delivering £25 million of business on Welfare to Work programmes.
- Routeway is one of several projects developed by St Helens College to help people back into employment; this provides jobseekers with the specific skills that local employers with vacancies require.
- City and Islington College provides training for redundant workers who have lost their jobs in sectors such as logistics and retail.
- City of Bristol College's introduction of an innovative initiative that uses performing arts has contributed to a 27 per cent reduction in the city's Neet rate in 2010.
- The Derby College Retail Academy has helped Neet groups achieve success through its retail courses, which it runs four times a year.

Working in partnership

Our partners are critical to the 157 Group's success and achievements. Although we represent a strong and powerful group of colleges, our aim to access and engage with all parts of the sector and to fund and execute all our ambitious plans can be realised only with the support of our partners. Working collaboratively with our partners enables us to maximise the use of our resources and expertise.



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In identifying and developing our partnerships, we seek organisations that share our commitment and ambition for FE, and can contribute to our aims through the addition of resources and expertise.

Over the last 12 months, we have continued to develop our close strategic partnerships with sector and representative bodies, collaborating with them in joint working groups and on sector-wide projects. Collaboration with partners has led to significant changes in the further education and skills sector, including all providers being offered more opportunity to take part in the move towards greater sector involvement in the delivery of its own improvement programmes.

Working with representative bodies

Skills and employer responsiveness

The 157 Group and ALP are working with AoC and Niace to lead the delivery of the LSIS-funded Skills and Employer Responsiveness programmes in three English regions (see pages 12 and 17). The partnership is helping to ensure that sector capacity is being enhanced, not just for delivery, but more critically for sector management of such initiatives, which we strongly support.

Survey of employer engagement

As part of our LSIS-funded Flexibility and Innovation Fund project, we instigated a survey of employer engagement activity. This was implemented in partnership with LSN's Centre for Innovation in Learning, in collaboration with ALP and AoC. The survey identified the challenges and barriers that prevent providers from developing their employer engagement services, the innovative practice they have already developed to create improvements and the way that they envision better support being delivered in the future.

Enterprise education

The Enterprise Network, which is funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and managed by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT), aims to improve the quality and quantity of enterprise education for 5 to 19-year-olds.

The 157 Group and AoC are jointly leading the further education strand of the programme, which includes:

- An audit to assess what is being done in colleges; identifying areas of challenge and where colleges would like further support.
- Organising training for sector colleagues, based on the good practice already occurring in many colleges.
- Supporting capacity building, through the development of enterprise coaches.

College workforce strategy

The 157 Group is working with AoC and SFCF, on behalf of LLUK, to consult their respective members about the LLUK workforce strategy for the FE sector in England.

An action plan will be developed for the college sector, with clearly identified actions to be taken by the three representative bodies to support their members to develop the college workforce.

Practitioner-led performance measures

The 157 Group, AoC, ALP and the Talent Foundation are working closely with City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development in a sector dialogue to identify appropriate practitioner-led performance measures for the sector.



“Strong partnerships are essential to achieving 157 Group aims and objectives. This year, we have successfully strengthened our strategic relationships with other membership organisations and key sector bodies.”

Kate Green, director of partnerships and employer engagement, 157 Group

Working through our networks

QCF project

The 157 Group curriculum network successfully bid for funding from LSIS to develop effective models for making the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) an operational reality.

The project was undertaken by 18 member colleges, and resulted in a discussion paper, *Making the QCF work for learners*; and a report on the work undertaken and case studies of good practice, which are available from the LSIS Excellence Gateway.

The practitioner network that was established as a result of the project provided an invaluable opportunity for shared learning, which has also been disseminated by 157 Group college representatives at regional and national events.

Cloud computing project

The 157 Group IT network has secured JISC funding to look at the complex issues surrounding cloud computing. It is hoped that, as a result of this project, the 157 Group will lead the way in exploring the opportunities for cloud computing to drive efficiencies and improve services for learners in the FE sector.

Learner engagement project

With Blackboard and the NUS, the 157 Group and its curriculum network carried out a research project aimed at identifying and promoting the most cost-effective forms of learner engagement. *Making the most of the student voice in further education* describes how learners are involved in helping maintain and improve the quality of their educational experience in 157 Group colleges.

Working with commercial partners

This year, commercial partners have worked with us to support collaborative action research; fund and add expertise to our 157 Group member networks; help develop leading edge thinking; and host events designed to bring members together and raise our profile.

Through our partnerships, member colleges also benefit from access to experts outside the sector, so that innovative thinking within FE is complemented by creative thinking from the private sector.

For example, Eversheds LLP developed a policy paper to stimulate debate about the likely development of further education in the UK. Other examples include Microsoft and JISC input to the IT network; the *Guardian* and TES Prime contribution to the HR network; and Barclays Corporate input to the finance network.

This year, our commercial partners have included:

- Barclays Corporate
- City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development
- Edexcel
- Eversheds LLP
- The *Guardian*
- JISC
- KPMG
- Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK)
- Martineau
- Microsoft
- Odgers Berndtson
- Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT)
- TES Prime.

Learner stories

Our colleges want the quality of the learner experience and the journey from school to FE to HE and into employment to be of a consistently high standard, uncomplicated and with transparency of opportunity. Here, six learners tell their stories about learning in an FE college.



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Kaya Shrewsbury

With no qualifications, no job, no prospects and no confidence, Kaya Shrewsbury was facing a bleak future – until she discovered an innovative project run by West Nottinghamshire College.

The teenager's school days had been marked by poor attendance, poor behaviour and frequent exclusions. That changed when she was signposted to the Ashfield Project, a centre dedicated to re-engaging and supporting young people not in employment, education or training (Neet). Kaya was one of 63 students who walked through the doors when the Ashfield Project opened in 2007. She enrolled on a level 1 fashion and design course, and in a few weeks was exceeding all expectations.

She progressed to mainstream provision at the college's site in Mansfield, where she studied a level 2 clothing and textiles course. She is now on a level 3 fashion and design course.

"I arrived at Ashfield with nothing," she said, "and left with qualifications, confidence and self-esteem."

Abdul Alhari

Abdul Alhari is working towards the higher diploma in engineering at Birmingham Metropolitan College.

"When I was offered the opportunity to spend a day a week at college, doing the new 14–19 diploma qualification in engineering, I was really excited," he said. "I liked the idea of trying a new qualification, and the hands-on, practical elements of the course really appealed to me. I'm quite academic, but I enjoy working with my hands, so it seemed ideal."

"I'm now into the second term of the course and, amongst other things, we've covered components, circuit boards, maintenance and soldering. The facilities and equipment at college are a lot better than we have at school."

"There are about eight of us from my school doing the diploma. The rest of the class is made up of students from other schools in the area, so it's a good opportunity to meet new people."

"What's also good is that they've got industry experience. A couple of my tutors have worked at Landrover and Jaguar, which means they can use real-life examples that bring the classwork to life. When I finish this course, I'm hoping to move on to a specialist diploma in civil engineering and then I'll do A levels. After that, I'm hoping to do a degree in software engineering."

Markus Wernitznig

Markus Wernitznig is an international student from Austria. Having completed a BTEC first diploma in art and design (fashion), he is now doing a foundation degree in fashion interpretation and practice at New College Nottingham.

"The highlight of my time in the UK has to be the fashion show I did at the end of my foundation degree," he said. "The weeks leading up to the show were very stressful. As well as designing and making all the clothes, I had to source my own models, make-up artists and hair stylists. But my collection turned out to be a big showstopper, so it was worth all the effort in the end."

"As well as having industry knowledge and experience, the tutors are determined to help students achieve their very best and are happy to give one-to-one support when it's needed."



Sarah-Jane Butt

Sarah-Jane Butt completed a City & Guilds diploma in construction with a distinction and is now doing a national diploma in construction at Highbury College Portsmouth.

“School was difficult for me,” she said. “I tried hard, but never seemed to get the results I wanted. I was 14 when I found out I had dyslexia. Then everything made sense. I started having extra classes at school, twice a week, and gradually began to improve.”

“At the end of year 9, I was given the option of going to college one day a week to do a vocational course. I decided to try the City & Guilds diploma in construction. Over a two-year period, I covered a variety of areas, including plumbing, tiling, painting and decorating, and bricklaying. All the lecturers had current or recent industry experience, so I felt I was getting top-quality tuition.”

Maher Alwafi Ali

Maher Alwafi Ali is on the international foundation year in business at Sussex Downs College.

“I’m really enjoying the course, but it can be hard sometimes, especially studying subjects like accounting in English,” he said. “My language skills have really improved, and most of the time I can understand the tutors.”

“Other times it is more difficult. I don’t like it when I have to say I haven’t understood, or ask them to slow down, but it is the only way to get better. Luckily, the tutors are happy to help if we don’t understand. Living in the UK and having conversations with people from all over the world in English is a real dream come true.”

Tristan McTaggart

Tristan McTaggart studied GCSEs and A levels at Chichester College, West Sussex.

“By the time I was 10, I’d been expelled from two schools for hitting out at teachers and other pupils,” he said. “From an early age, I knew I had Asperger’s syndrome, a form of autism that affects how a person makes sense of the world, but I didn’t fully understand how it influenced my life. I just remember feeling angry all the time.”

“At 11, I was sent to a special school for boys who had been excluded from school. When I finished year 9, I was sent to a mainstream secondary school, but I lasted only a few weeks.”

“After that, I was placed in the 14–16 unit at Chichester College, and at 16 I joined the mainstream college to do A2 courses in chemistry, physics and further maths. I was much happier in the mainstream college, where the students were more mature and the teachers more engaging. The work was a lot more challenging, which kept me motivated. I’ve achieved an A grade in all my A-level exams so far.”

“I was delighted when I was offered a place to study a degree in molecular and cellular biochemistry at St Catherine’s College, Oxford.”

“If I hadn’t gone to college at 14, I’m not sure if I’d have applied for Oxford, or even taken A levels at all. In the long term, I’d like to continue studying. I’d like to get a PhD and do academic research in the field of biochemistry. I’d love to discover something new.”

The year in focus

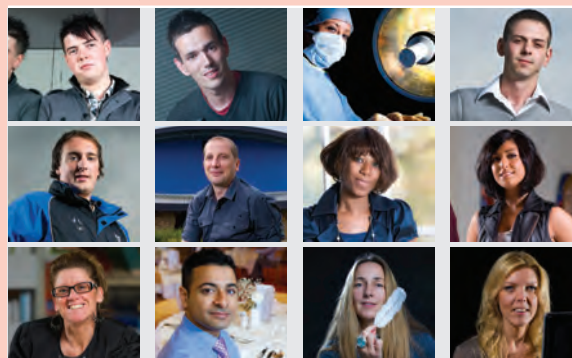
November

Welcoming the publication of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills report, *Towards Ambition 2020: skills, jobs, growth*, 157 Group chair Frank McLoughlin says, "We welcome the shift in leadership thinking from central control and top-down measurement and accountability to a sector-led and sector-designed approach."



Terry Anslow, contracts manager at Telford College of Arts and Technology, receives the 2009 LSIS STAR Award for employer engagement, sponsored by the 157 Group.

The 157 Group launches its first annual review at a reception hosted by Lord Morris of Handsworth and attended by over 170 people, including ministers and shadow ministers, parliamentarians, members of the House of Lords, further education sector leaders and representatives from partner organisations.



157 Group publishes *One in eight: the voice of higher education students in FE colleges*, a compilation of stories about 12 learners studying for higher education qualifications in an FE setting.

Two sets of case studies are published, which illustrate the important contribution being made by 157 Group colleges through apprenticeships across a variety of sectors and their work with Jobcentre Plus to help long-term and newly unemployed people back into work.

Derby College joins the 157 Group.

December

Three FE staff from 157 Group colleges are recognised in the 2010 New Year honours list. Clare Wright, personal assistant to Ioan Morgan, former principal of Warwickshire College, Terence Nelson, a security officer at Leeds City College, and Faruk Miah, a programme manager at the same college, are all appointed MBE.

January

The Sheffield College, which is a federation of Sheffield City College (formerly Castle College), Hillsborough College and Norton College joins the 157 Group.

February

Ben Summerskill, chief executive of Stonewall, visits Newham College, which ranks 32nd on the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index 2010. The college is the only FE institution to appear on the index, which showcases Britain's top employers for lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) staff.

March

The 157 Group publishes a set of case studies highlighting successful approaches to embedding equality and diversity in six of its member colleges. The case studies are launched at the LSIS Innovations in Inclusion event in London.

April

In *Expanding choice: college pathways for 14 to 16-year-olds*, a compilation of case studies about eight young learners who have benefited from starting part-time or full-time college courses between the ages of 14 and 16, the 157 Group advocates offering young people a wider choice of flexible learning routes.

May

The 157 Group policy paper, *Learning and skills needs local leadership*, offers powerful arguments for decentralising the planning arrangements for FE and increasing accountability to local communities. Large urban colleges are well placed to play a leading role in bringing together providers and key bodies to determine the pattern of education and training in an area.

A further 157 Group paper, *Strong colleges build strong communities*, examines the role of large urban colleges in helping build stronger communities, bringing together a diverse mix of learners, engaging with all sectors of the community and providing a range of support to help individuals enter and reconnect with the labour market.

157 Group principals meet to discuss and develop a proposition for the new coalition government.

June

The 157 Group welcomes the new government's decision to protect funding for 16 to 19-year-old education and training, invest in 50,000 extra apprenticeships and allocate £50m to help fund capital investment for those further education colleges most in need.

Four FE leaders from 157 Group colleges are recognised in the 2010 Queen's birthday honours list. Jackie Fisher, principal of Newcastle College is appointed DBE; Martin Tolhurst, former principal of Newham College is appointed CBE; and Alexandra Henderson, former chair of governors at Hull College, and Neil Middleton, chair of governors at City of Bristol College, are both appointed MBE.



John Hayes MP, the new minister for further education, skills and lifelong learning, makes his first major speech to the FE sector at City and Islington College.



The Rt Hon Dr Vince Cable MP, the business secretary, visits Birmingham Metropolitan College to meet the first students at its new hi-tech Samsung Digital Service Academy. The partnership between Samsung and the college is the first of its kind between a further education provider and a global leader in digital technologies.

July

The 157 Group publishes its *2010-12 strategic plan*, developed in consultation with its members.

July

157 Group principals meet in Manchester for their summer conference, sponsored by Martineau and TES Prime.

John Hayes MP visits the College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London to launch the *Skills for Sustainable Growth* consultation and outline the government's vision for skills that will shape the future of skills training across the country.

August



John Hayes MP, the FE and skills minister, visits Newcastle College to see how one of the UK's largest further and higher education colleges is helping meet national skills objectives and supporting employers through education, training and skills.

The 157 Group is chosen as a pathfinder for the Cabinet Office's mutuals initiative, based on its plans to form a new qualification-awarding body for the FE and skills sector, which will be owned collectively by 157 Group members and operated in partnership with an existing awarding body.

September

Lynne Sedgmore CBE, executive director of the 157 Group, is one of four sector leaders invited to the Palace of Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh to meet the Queen and welcome the Pope on his first visit to the UK.

The 157 Group welcomes a Department for Education (DfE) announcement that Professor Alison Wolf is to lead a review of vocational education for 14 to 19-year-olds.

City of Bristol College is awarded European funding to advance the South West Composites Gateway, which will help to boost the income of engineering companies in the south-west region by supporting them in adapting to new advanced engineering techniques.

October

City of Sunderland College and other members of the British Colleges Consortium (BCC) visit China to attend a conference at which they promote 157 Group colleges.

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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