



2010–11  
**Impact review**

# Who we are

The 157 Group is a membership organisation that represents 27 large, 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.

- 2 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 £1.5 billion a year
- serve 670,000 learners
- employ 37,000 staff
- engage with 31,000 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

In this, our second impact review, we demonstrate the wide range of initiatives the 157 Group has led and been involved with over the past 12 months. Since the publication of our *Strategic plan 2010–12* in November 2010, we have worked hard to deliver above and beyond our stated aims.



As chair of the 157 Group for the last two years, it still pleases and impresses me that, during a time of such radical change and huge challenges facing the FE sector, colleges continue to deliver first-class education and skills in a way that responds to individuals' and employers' needs, while also contributing to local communities, in the spirit of the coalition government's "Big Society", and to regional and national economic growth.

At a time when our country faces unprecedented economic and social difficulty, colleges maintain their place as a beacon of hope, fostering growth and social mobility, offering consistent lifelines to those who need them, while also enabling new government policies to succeed.

The 157 Group has worked hard on behalf of its members and has also focused on ensuring that the further education college and sector-wide voice resonates powerfully to influence ministers, civil servants, employers and key stakeholders. Our main focus has been to steer innovative debate, influence policy and shape the future direction and effectiveness of further education and higher education.

A highlight in November 2010 was our collaboration with leading international colleges from six different countries at a roundtable event, hosted by the 157 Group, to articulate common difficulties and to propose innovative solutions affecting skills and vocational agendas all around the world. In February, we launched our resultant thinkpiece – *Doing more for less*,<sup>1</sup> which we hope exemplifies the 157 Group's proactive approach to being forward-thinking, and part of the solution.

We have consistently offered effective advice that shapes and influences government policy and leads to better results that impact directly and positively on learners. Our research and lobbying in the educational maintenance allowance (EMA) debate – with the contributions of other membership bodies – led to the allocation of additional funding to that originally proposed by ministers.

In May 2011, the Skills Funding Agency awarded the 157 Group £2.6m to lead on collaboration and shared services projects. On behalf of the whole sector, we are working closely with the Association of Colleges (AoC) to ensure maximum effectiveness and impact for the fund.

We are also pleased to have engaged with a wide range of organisations, through a number of formal and informal partnership arrangements, and have benefited from considerable commercial support and sponsorship throughout the year.

We continue to raise the reputation of colleges; share good practice; support 157 Group colleges to engage more fully and responsively with employers; and give our members advice about policy changes.

We offer our impact review as a reflection and summary of the work of the 157 Group over the last year, hoping to demonstrate our contribution to the success of learners, colleges and the sector.

To conclude our review, we have articulated our strategic focus for the future of the 157 Group.

1 [www.157group.co.uk/files/doing\\_more\\_for\\_less.pdf](http://www.157group.co.uk/files/doing_more_for_less.pdf)





I would like to take this opportunity to thank the 157 Group staff team, our college members, patrons, delivery partners and sponsoring organisations. All our members, staff and stakeholders have evidenced their shared commitment, expertise and enthusiasm and continue to support our work and the wider sector; for this we are deeply grateful, as partnership is key to everything we do.

Our patrons have supported us tremendously this year, by hosting events and by continuing to be powerful advocates and influential opinion formers for FE colleges as well as for the 157 Group.

Our executive director Lynne Sedgmore and I hope you enjoy reading this review, and welcome any comments you may have on how we can further improve our work and contribution to the sector.

**Frank McLoughlin CBE**  
157 Group Chair

Further education colleges are seen as a crucial pillar of our education system by ministers, and the 157 Group has worked hard to be considered as a valued contributor at the highest levels.

**“One of the best ways of opening the doors of our universities and recruiting for degree students from all backgrounds in this country is by ensuring that FE colleges are recognised in every community as the further education service for all the community, fully integrated with schools on the one hand and with university and the world of work on the other.**

**“These colleges should be the convenient local doorways through which everybody feels comfortable to go. I have seen some brilliant examples of these colleges around the country, and pay tribute to their energy, effectiveness, enthusiasm and success.”**

Simon Hughes MP, Advocate for Access to Education

**“The 157 Group ... your views are, and continue to be, important.”**

Nick Clegg MP, Deputy Prime Minister.



## Highlights of the year





## November 2010

New 157 Group directors are appointed at the annual general meeting.

The 157 Group annual reception at House of Commons is attended by many leaders in the FE sector, private sector and the government.

An international roundtable event with RC-2020 members (from across the globe) informs our *Doing more for less* publication.

Following the roundtable event, Baroness Wall hosts a dinner at the House of Lords for 157 Group patrons and college principals and RC-2020 leaders to continue discussions about issues affecting FE globally.

The 157 Group publishes:

- *2009–10 Impact review* (our first)
- *Rising to the challenge: how FE colleges are key to the future of HE* policy paper
- Six international case studies
- *Learning accounts that count* policy paper
- Seven case studies about learners not in employment, education or training (Neet).

**City of Bristol College** welcomes over 70 employers to celebrate the opening of its new £33m South Bristol Skills Academy, which will provide routes to learning and employment in a socially deprived area of Bristol.

Asha Khemka OBE, principal and chief executive of **West Nottinghamshire College** (now called Vision West Notts), gives evidence to the education select committee on the role and performance of Ofsted.



**New College Nottingham** celebrates a double triumph after being named an Association of Colleges Beacon Award winner for exemplary engagement with employers and being highly commended for its effectiveness in widening student participation.



**Sussex Downs College** student Katie Tullett, who works at the Seaford office of Swindells & Gentry, achieves the joint highest mark worldwide for tax paper F6 in her June exams for the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA).

Renowned stylist Patrick Cameron opens the new hair and beauty wing at **The Sheffield College's** Sheffield City College, with around 80 employers, students and staff in attendance.

## December 2010

Outstanding 157 Group college staff are recognised in the New Year honours list:

- Pat Bacon, principal of **St Helens College**, appointed DBE
- Richard Parker, recently retired principal of **Chichester College**, appointed CBE
- Teresa Esan, director of employability and employer engagement at **City and Islington College**, appointed MBE
- Helen Sage, former programme coordinator at **City of Bristol College**, appointed MBE.



Lord Victor Adebawale CBE, chief executive of Turning Point, becomes a 157 Group patron.

The 157 Group publishes *Making the Most of the Student Voice in Further Education*, produced in partnership with Blackboard.

## January 2011

Learners from 157 Group colleges take part in a parliamentary panel with Andy Burnham MP, the shadow secretary of state for education, looking at new learner support policies, especially replacement schemes for the education maintenance allowance (EMA).



**Bedford College** achieves an educational gold medal by winning the right to use the prestigious Olympic logo and nominates two of its students to be Olympic torch-bearers when the torch passes through Bedfordshire in 2012.

**Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College** becomes the first FE college in London to be awarded an outstanding grade by Ofsted for safeguarding. Its provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD) is also rated outstanding, and described as the best the inspector has ever seen in a general further education college.

**Stoke on Trent College** is one of the first in the UK to secure the government-backed Healthy Further Education College standard, for its pioneering work to promote the health and well-being of its staff and students.

## February 2011

Niace's Colleges in their Communities Inquiry holds its first meeting, chaired by 157 Group patron Baroness Sharp. The executive director of the 157 Group, Lynne Sedgmore CBE, and four member principals are appointed as commissioners.

157 Group representatives attend the launch of Apprenticeships Week 2011 with Dr Vince Cable, the business secretary; John Hayes MP, the FE and skills minister; and Boris Johnson, the mayor of London. It is estimated that 157 Group member colleges account for around 27,000 apprenticeships in England.

The 157 Group decides to investigate the possibility of forming an awarding body to improve efficiency and quality in the sector.

The 157 Group publishes *Doing more for less: An international dialogue about the challenges facing vocational and community colleges*, the product of a roundtable discussion in November 2010 between 157 Group and RC-2020 colleges about the common challenge of doing more with fewer resources.



**Lewisham College** is named a Young Enterprise Centre of Excellence. Its Posyganza Young Enterprise project, which entails students with learning difficulties and disabilities running a fresh flower business, receives particular recognition.

The 157 Group sponsors an Helena Kennedy Foundation bursary to help a member college student progress to higher education.



## March 2011

The 157 Group is awarded £2.6m funding from the Skills Funding Agency to work on a shared services and collaboration project for the FE sector.

Frank McLoughlin CBE, chair of the 157 Group, gives evidence to the education bill committee.

157 Group representatives meet shadow ministers to look at the issues surrounding the changes to student visas for international learners studying in FE institutions.

On behalf of Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) and in partnership with the Association of Colleges (AoC) and the Sixth Form Colleges' Forum (SFCF), the 157 Group publishes the *Implementation of the FE Workforce Strategy in FE* report.

The Skills and Employer Responsive Programme in the East Midlands, West Midlands and East of England project is completed successfully and extended to August 2011.

Following its inspection of Newham Adult Learning Service in June 2010, Ofsted identifies the partnership of Newham Council and **Newham College** as an example of good practice.

His Royal Highness The Duke of Gloucester formally opens **Barnet College's** new £50m High Barnet campus.



Her Majesty The Queen visits **City and Islington College** and bestows the New Engineering Foundation (NEF) Assured standard for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects.

## April 2011

Lynne Sedgmore CBE, 157 Group executive director, gives a keynote address at Belfast Metropolitan College.

**New College Nottingham** construction trainee Dean Howitt is crowned best in his field after achieving first place in the carpentry category at the East Midlands regional heat of Britain's biggest construction skills competition – SkillBuild 2011.

**Lambeth College** launches the London Programme, an initiative developed in response to employer demand for young people with work skills as well as academic success.



The business secretary, Dr Vince Cable MP, opens the Caterpillar Skills Development Academy with **Birmingham Metropolitan College** apprentices, principal and chief executive Dr Christine Braddock CBE, Robert Droogleever, general manager, and Mary Bell, vice-president of Caterpillar's Building Construction Products division.

## May 2011

The 157 Group and CfBT Education Trust launch their joint thinkpiece, *Leading learning in further education*, at the Future of Further Education Conference in London.

The 157 Group publishes its apprenticeships case studies and policy paper.



The new £60m town centre redevelopment at **St Helens College** is officially opened by Dave Watts MP and the Rt Hon Shaun Woodward MP at a ceremony attended by dignitaries, partnership colleagues, staff and students. A skills event organised in tandem showcases a range of student work, and offers the local community a chance to see various demonstrations and practical activities.

Peter Roberts, principal of **Leeds City College**, gives oral evidence to the Future of FE Inquiry for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

**Blackpool and The Fylde College** becomes a member of the 157 Group.

**Leeds City College** wins two Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) Pro-Yorkshire awards for its new Keighley Campus, in the community benefit and the leisure and tourism categories. The college also has a highly successful Integrated Quality Enhancement Review (IQER) of its HE provision, with the subsequent report identifying eight areas of good practice for dissemination.



**The Manchester College** wins the RICS (North West) design and innovation award for the refurbishment of a 1970s building that provides an excellent learning environment and an example of affordable retrofit, which reflects the college's sustainability strategy. Judges comment that "the college should be commended for utilising an existing asset where many would have chosen a new building".

## June 2011

The first meeting takes place of the 157 Group Modernisation Fund, a project group to coordinate and supervise the grant scheme on shared services and collaboration.

The Queen's birthday honours list acknowledges staff from 157 Group colleges:

- Ian Pryce, principal of **Bedford College**, appointed CBE
- Joyce Amato, European coordinator at **Newham College**, appointed MBE
- Jean Hardy, chair of governors at **West Nottinghamshire College**, appointed MBE
- John Marston, chairman of the estates and capital projects committee at **Ealing Hammersmith and West London College**, appointed MBE.

John Hayes MP delivers a keynote speech on the Future of FE at **Warwickshire College**, at which the 157 Group has significant representation.

**Highbury College Portsmouth** receives outstanding grades from Ofsted for the overall effectiveness of its provision; capacity to improve; outcomes for learners; quality of provision; leadership and management; and equality and diversity. It also receives grade ones for three of the four subject areas inspected.

As part of the LSIS-funded Supporting FE and Skills in Difficult Times project, 157 Group network representatives meet to discuss the key challenges and opportunities facing the sector, and develop a draft framework that is then refined further by member principals at the annual conference in July.

## July 2011

The 157 Group's annual general meeting is held in Leeds.

The executive director of the 157 Group attends a skills summit meeting with the business secretary, Dr Vince Cable MP, and the minister for universities and science, David Willetts MP.

The 157 Group publishes:

- *The role of local enterprise partnerships in tackling skills needs* report, produced in partnership with the Local Government Association (LGA) and the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC)
- *Adult further education – the unfinished revolution*, setting out proposals for a truly market-driven further education sector.

The 157 Group and the Association of Colleges (AoC) receive 69 applications from 64 different lead organisations in response to the shared services and collaboration grant programme prospectus published in June. The total value of the applicants' bid requests exceeds £20m. The evaluation process is agreed by senior representatives from the Skills Funding Agency, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), AoC, the 157 Group and two independent evaluators recruited through an open advertisement.



York MPs Hugh Bayley and Julian Sturdy visit **York College** to meet apprentice hairdressers and support the 100 in 100 Apprenticeship Challenge, aimed at generating commitments from local employers to offer at least 100 new apprenticeship places within 100 days. The college worked with City of York Council to support the campaign, which led to more than 150 employer pledges.

The **College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London** is the first college in the country to achieve the coveted Business Excellence in Education (BEE) endorsement from the Institute of Travel and Tourism (ITT).



**Derby College** performing arts student Lewis Daws gains triple distinction grades – equivalent to top A-level results.

**Chichester College** student Chris Wallis is chosen to be one of the 42-strong team representing the UK at WorldSkills London 2011 in cabinetmaking. This is the second time in a row that the cabinetmaker chosen to represent the UK in the WorldSkills competition has come from Chichester College.



## August 2011

Bids for the shared services and collaboration grant scheme are scored, collated and analysed. Reviewing the work done so far, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) expresses strong support for the innovative and comprehensive nature of the 157 Group's analysis and member insight, and is using the results to influence strategic leadership developments for the sector.

Negotiations begin on setting up a 157 Group awarding body and securing improved efficiencies from key awarding bodies.

The second phase of the Skills and Employer Responsive Programme project is completed successfully.

Hull Kingston Rovers football team and **Hull College** launch a new partnership to enhance the education of young students. Hull College will feature on the reverse of the club's 2012 shirts and will have an advertising presence on boards around the stadium, on the official club website and in the *Red Red Robin* match day magazine.



At **West Nottinghamshire College**, there are jubilant scenes when Cate Kendall becomes its first-ever student to secure a place at the University of Cambridge, after achieving four A\* grades in her A levels. The college records its best-ever overall A-level pass rate: 99 per cent.

In recognition of its commitment and hard work in the area of social inclusion, the Human Rights Group at **City of Sunderland College** – now called Sunderland College – wins the national Leading the Learner Voice Award sponsored by LSIS.

## September 2011

Successful bids for the shared services and collaboration grant scheme are awarded and work starts. They comprise a joint venture company of colleges in the north-east; a services collaboration between geographically connected colleges in Sussex and Surrey; and a collaborative curriculum development and delivery project.



Budding young entrepreneurs receive a kick-start to their career as the Peter Jones Enterprise Academy courses start at **Cornwall College**.



**Warwickshire College** blacksmithing tutor, Michelle Parker, wins the individual women's world forging championships in Stia, Italy.

The 157 Group publishes *Expanding apprenticeships – colleges are key to employability*, a policy paper about promoting the distinctive role of colleges at the heart of the government's apprenticeship strategy.

## October 2011

The 157 Group hosts a fringe event with John Hayes MP, Million+ and the Open University at the Conservative party conference: Should Further Go Higher? Where next for the world of Higher Education in Further Education?

WorldSkills London 2011 takes place at ExCeL, with more than 1,000 young people from 51 nations taking part in the four-day competition. As well as fielding contestants in Team UK, 157 Group colleges participate as exhibitors and many organise Have a Go areas for visitors to try their hand at a wide range of skills.



Rachael Carr, a part-time engineering student at **Blackpool and The Fylde College** and an employee of BAE Systems, is a member of the three-person team representing the UK in the manufacturing team challenge.



Chris Wallis, a student at **Chichester College**, represents the UK in cabinetmaking.



Her Royal Highness Princess Anne, Princess Royal, is given an impromptu lesson in bricklaying by **Lambeth College** brickwork tutor John Duffy in the college's Have a Go area at WorldSkills London 2011.



**Barnet College** tutors demonstrate skills and encourage WorldSkills visitors to try their hand at a range of activities, from hairdressing and construction to catering and beauty therapy.



# What others think about the 157 Group

It is five years since the founding of the 157 Group, and this year we decided to commission a comprehensive research project into our stakeholders' perceptions of the relevance and impact of everything we do.



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We structured the research around our five aims, as stated in our *2010–12 Strategic plan*. The research was carried out by 360 Education and targeted all our different stakeholder groups, including national bodies and agencies, policymakers, commercial organisations, our own networks and others in the FE sector.

The findings show that we are perceived as being well on our way to maximising our collective, positive impact on the sector and have gained a reputation as a focused, energetic, responsive organisation that represents the interests of its members at all times.

Chiefly, stakeholders see us as strong opinion formers and influencers of the government, raising the reputation of the sector through the development of policy and disseminating best practice.

The findings evidenced that we are considered successful in:

- Influencing the government and key opinion-formers
- Raising the status, reputation and profile of the further education and skills sector
- Developing effective and innovative policy propositions.

Feedback from the 360-degree perception research shows that stakeholders believe the 157 Group is “an organisation the government listens to” and one that demonstrates “leadership of the FE sector”.

As well as helping us to understand our successes, the research is invaluable in showing us where key stakeholders believe we have more work to do.

**Aim 1:** To ensure that 157 Group members exercise powerful influence and, as thought leaders, impact on critical **policy** priorities.

## Successes

- 157 Group communications are seen as clear, helpful, knowledgeable and prominent throughout the sector.
- Influence is recognised through strength of voice, which is high quality and professional.
- There is overwhelming support for 157 Group positioning as a key “lobbying group for FE sector”.
- The government is seen to seek out the 157 Group’s views for the key role it plays in FE sector leadership.

## Areas to improve

- Development of additional partnerships and business opportunities with stakeholders in and beyond the FE sector.



**Aim 2:** To raise the national **reputation** of further education colleges and respect for the work they do.

#### Successes

- 157 Group communications, including member college case studies, have led to increased profile and reputation for members and for the sector.
- Member principals have a strong reputation, individually, as well as collectively throughout the wider FE sector.

#### Areas to improve

- Further development of peer review for the sector.
- Further promotion of the benefits of FE.

**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.

#### Successes

- 157 Group networks are considered to be working well, with extensive sharing of expertise and peer support.
- Commercial partners are happy with the strong relationships forged.
- Agencies enjoy effective collaboration with the 157 Group on self-improvement.

#### Areas to improve

- Further development of commercial partnerships and sponsorship opportunities.
- Finding ways to impact more directly on the experience and success of learners.

**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.

#### Successes

- Expertise acknowledged with management responsibility for shared services grants.
- Commercial partnerships excelling in driving forward additional efficiencies.
- Peer-to-peer networks working well to create efficiencies from benchmarking, joint procurement and the sharing of expertise.

#### Areas to improve

- Further development of the use of technology to achieve efficiencies.

**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.

#### Successes

- Seen to be an organisation that works powerfully to deliver on learning outcomes leading to employment.
- Reputation-enhancing for UK plc, especially through international work abroad.
- Policy work and lobbying excels in helping to bolster strong education and skills leading to employment.

#### Areas to improve

- Attention to learner expectations of education and skills to enhance job readiness.

Our work is well regarded in the sector and by key partners, who perceive that we have achieved most of what we set out to do in our *2010–12 Strategic plan*.

They also help us to define and refine our approach and agenda for the coming months and years, as we increasingly focus on commercial partnerships, on peer support and on reinforcing our already strong reputation in the media and in the government.

## Aim 1: Policy

The core purpose of the 157 Group is to inform, influence and shape FE and skills policy. Our key policy priorities are determined by our members and reflect the pressing concerns and innovative ideas across 157 Group colleges. In the last 12 months, we have published an influential set of policy papers, thinkpieces and research reports on important issues affecting the sector.



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### Influence through policy papers, research reports and thinkpieces

By seeking out the views of our members as expert practitioners, we have been able to influence policymakers in the government. Our principals and network members are invaluable in stimulating debate and discussion as the basis for our policy papers and enable us to gain direct insight from practitioners, leading to policy that is pragmatic, well-informed and practitioner-focused.

Over the course of the year, our policy papers have been championed by a range of key influencers in the sector, leading to real and significant impact for further education and its learners.

- **Apprenticeships and work-based provision**<sup>2</sup> proposed a way forward for apprenticeships as one of the core deliverables in future FE provision. Our recommendations included the need for the government to articulate the distinctiveness of the FE offer for apprenticeships, to encourage the development of apprenticeship training agencies, and to fund integrated apprenticeship plans.
- **Adult further education – the unfinished revolution**<sup>3</sup> set out clear proposals to create a truly demand-led sector enabling real choice and flexibility for adult learners, and included a foreword from Professor Alison Wolf. Our radical and strongly evidenced propositions played a significant role in changing ministerial decisions on entitlements for learners and on colleges being given more local discretion.
- **The role of local enterprise partnerships in tackling skills needs**<sup>4</sup> was the report of a collaborative research project undertaken with the Local Government Association (LGA) and British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) to consider the role that local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) will play in articulating and addressing local skills challenges. With the aim of stimulating debate and discussion about the way forward for LEPs, the paper proposed a set of principles, including effective partnership working; clear governance and representation arrangements; and effective use of labour market information.
- **Leading learning in further education**,<sup>5</sup> written in collaboration with CfBT Education Trust and using evidence from the Institute for Learning (IfL), showed the effective contribution of excellent leadership in teaching and learning in further education. The need to encourage innovation in FE to support the development of an innovative teaching and learning pedagogy was highlighted in the recommendations for the government. Our findings have been welcomed by the sector and have led to discussions with the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), IfL, the Forum of Sector Chief Officers (FoSCO) and others about how we might take this forward to support others in the sector.
- **Doing more for less**<sup>6</sup> was developed in collaboration with RC-2020 college leaders from across the globe and key stakeholders, to scope possibilities for efficiencies and propose innovative solutions for vocational colleges all over the world, not just the UK.

2 [www.157group.co.uk/files/expanding\\_apprenticeships.pdf](http://www.157group.co.uk/files/expanding_apprenticeships.pdf)

3 [www.157group.co.uk/files/adult\\_further\\_education\\_the\\_unfinished\\_revolution2.pdf](http://www.157group.co.uk/files/adult_further_education_the_unfinished_revolution2.pdf)

4 [www.157group.co.uk/files/lep\\_report\\_-\\_full.pdf](http://www.157group.co.uk/files/lep_report_-_full.pdf)

5 [www.157group.co.uk/files/leading\\_learning\\_in\\_further\\_education\\_think\\_piece.pdf](http://www.157group.co.uk/files/leading_learning_in_further_education_think_piece.pdf)

6 [www.157group.co.uk/files/doing\\_more\\_for\\_less.pdf](http://www.157group.co.uk/files/doing_more_for_less.pdf)



“Working with the 157 Group ensures strategic input and insight into issues affecting the FE sector. Our collaboration with the 157 Group last year on the importance of HE in FE was mutually beneficial and we will continue to collaborate closely on behalf of the whole sector in this critical period after the publication of the HE white paper.”

John Widdowson, Chair of Mixed Economy Group

## 157 Group influences government plans for the EMA replacement

When it was announced that the education maintenance allowance (EMA) was to be scrapped, the 157 Group collaborated with key stakeholders to lobby the government and put forward alternative proposals that were intelligent, realistic and pragmatic.

A series of papers – *EMA Briefing to Ministers*, *EMA Here is the Real Evidence* and *College Bursaries as an Alternative* – had real impact and led to the government adopting some of our proposals in June 2011, with the new bursaries and additional provisions offering more monies than originally proposed.

## Enabling further education to go higher

Higher education in further education has been a top policy priority for the 157 Group. We have drawn attention to the particular role FE colleges play in providing accessible, work-related and cost-effective HE provision. We have engaged in robust dialogue with ministers, providing them with a number of challenging and insightful briefing papers.

*Broadening the Horizon* outlined barriers for FE colleges delivering HE provision, and solutions to overcome these challenges. It is clear that the government listened to us, and to other sector bodies, in placing much more emphasis on the ability of FE colleges to deliver cost-effective, high-quality HE provision. Our members were called upon as experts to give oral evidence at the Business, Innovation and Skills committee's inquiry into the future of higher education, where we provided insights on key issues.

Following the release of the *Students at the heart of the system*<sup>7</sup> white paper, we responded swiftly to a call for evidence from BIS, supplying informative evidence from our practitioners to further influence the future of HE in FE, and were pleased that the government's HE white paper included reference to our points about degree-awarding powers, for example.

The 157 Group's joint event with the Open University and Million+ at the Conservative party conference – *Should Further Go Higher? Where next for the world of Higher Education in Further Education?* – gave us the chance to set out our views on the potential role of HE in FE colleges to an audience that we do not usually reach.

Over the next few months, we plan to develop a number of policy papers and thinkpieces, on topics including:

- Career information, advice and guidance (IAG)
- FE student loans
- Gatsby science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) research
- Adult literacy learner voices
- Tensions in the sector, drawing on the LSIS project, Supporting FE and Skills in Difficult Times
- Teaching and learning
- Continuing professional development (CPD) in the further education and skills sector.

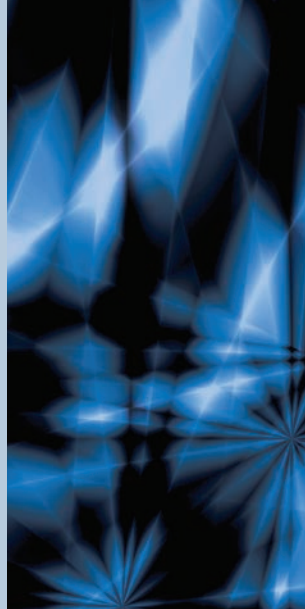
We will develop a further suite of papers as the year progresses, dependent on key issues and priorities for our members and the sector.

7 [www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/h/11-944-higher-education-students-at-heart-of-system.pdf](http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/h/11-944-higher-education-students-at-heart-of-system.pdf)



## Aim 2: Reputation

Raising the regional, national and international reputation of FE colleges and the wider sector is central to all that we do at the 157 Group. The way in which colleges are perceived by stakeholders – including the government, business, media, the public and learners – is critical, and a positive perception contributes to promoting the profile and status of the whole sector.



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### Making a case

Our case studies are intended to demonstrate best practice in the sector and provide a useful insight into the ways in which colleges are managing topical issues.

Each set of case studies typically includes the in-depth view of six colleges, how they handle a particular issue, their strategies, visions, and the impact on learners.

This year we have published case studies<sup>8</sup> on

- Apprenticeships
- Job outcomes and skills conditionality
- The Training Quality Standard.

In May 2011, we commissioned a set of six case studies detailing how colleges were preparing for job outcome incentive payments to be implemented by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Civil servants in the department said they found these to be a refreshingly honest but well-informed source of information to help them shape future proposals and to assess, from the ground, the potential barriers and challenges.

This example, we believe, demonstrates how our publications have the ability to raise awareness and the reputation of the good work being done in the sector, and to influence policy development directly.

### Media coverage

Through our press activity, we have achieved good coverage in a range of newspapers, journals, broadcast channels and online media, including:

- *FE News*
- *FE Week*
- *The Guardian*
- *The Independent*
- *People Management magazine*
- *Policy Review TV*
- *Times Educational Supplement (TES)*.

During our lobbying against education maintenance allowance (EMA) cuts, our research featured prominently in the *Times Educational Supplement*, helping to raise the profile of our campaign.

**“Students who receive the education maintenance allowance (EMA) have better attendance records and are more likely to complete courses than wealthier students not eligible for the support, according to research. Despite coming from the poorest families and in some cases having low prior qualifications, EMA students miss fewer classes and are more likely to stay in education than even wealthier students, according to data gathered by the 157 Group of large colleges.”**

Joseph Lee, 2010. EMA keeps recipients in education for longer. *Times Educational Supplement*, 3 December.

Our concerns about reductions in entitlement funding were published online by *FE News*.<sup>9</sup>

8 [www.157group.co.uk/case-studies](http://www.157group.co.uk/case-studies)

9 Lynne Sedgmore, 2011. Cuts to entitlement could harm social mobility. *FE News*, 17 January. [www.fenews.co.uk/featured-article/cuts-to-entitlement-could-harm-social-mobility](http://www.fenews.co.uk/featured-article/cuts-to-entitlement-could-harm-social-mobility)



“‘Colleges’ international work provides an excellent advertisement for UK plc,’ says a November 2010 Policy Paper by the 157 Group, a membership organisation of the largest colleges set up in 2006 following Sir Andrew Foster’s Review of the future of FE colleges. It is hard to argue with this succinct statement.”

Laura Darnley and Audrey Elliott, 2011. Proposed new immigration laws could deprive colleges of overseas students they depend on. *The Independent*, 20 January.

Education journalists and editors routinely approach the 157 Group as the voice of 27 large colleges, for timely and authoritative comments about FE sector news, policy announcements and topical issues.

“Lynne Sedgmore, executive director of the 157 Group, says: ‘This inquiry will reinforce the notion that colleges are important hubs which have the ability to shape and boost local economies and societies, providing opportunities and social mobility while fulfilling the demands of the local labour market.’”

Jeremy Sutcliffe, 2011. Colleges in their communities. *The Guardian*, 17 May.

“Frank McLoughlin, principal of City and Islington College and chair of the 157 Group, said: ‘We are delighted with the recommendation to make explicit the legal right of colleges to enrol students under 16 and ensure that funding procedures make this practically possible. Many 14 to 16-year-olds thrive in different environments outside school, and we believe that offering provision for them in colleges also makes good economic sense ... We are pleased that Professor Wolf has endorsed the need for qualified FE teachers to be allowed to teach in schools.’”

FE News, 2011. Sector’s response to the Wolf Review. *FE News*, 4 March.

“Lynne Sedgmore CBE, executive director of the 157 Group, said: ‘We are seriously concerned that delegating responsibility for the provision of careers guidance to schools will result in many young people not receiving impartial professional guidance at a critical stage in their lives. We know that many schools do not give students the full picture about the opportunities available in vocational education and apprenticeships.’”

Nick Reinis, 2011. Group adds to Careers Service debate. *FE Week*, 12 September.

## FE colleges’ international reputation

As well as working together to share best practice on topical issues, the 157 Group continues to operate internationally and has developed the British Colleges Consortium (BCC) brand to actively promote the excellent work of our members overseas.

The BCC, led by the City of Sunderland College, hosted a visit by a group of Chinese principals in 2010, and this led to the further development of significant work in China and more opportunities for Chinese students to come to the UK.

The government’s response to our concerns about changes to immigration policy was positive, and influenced largely by the fact that we are known to deliver high-quality learning for international students. Through our international network, members successfully influenced the UK Border Agency (UKBA) and the government in relation to tier 4 proposals to restrict the intake of international students coming to UK colleges.

Members are now beginning to make inroads to other areas of the globe – and organisations such as the British Council acknowledge that the BCC brand is important for high-quality FE around the world.



## Aim 3: Self-improvement

Working towards the development of a UK world-class skills system, the 157 Group contributes to the self-improvement agenda. As the coalition government introduces greater freedoms and flexibilities, we are building on and supporting the sector's own capacity for self-improvement in ever more innovative ways.



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### Peer-to-peer support and network success

This year, our 157 Group networks have continued to thrive and expand. We have complemented our portfolio of six well-established and productive networks for senior professionals (in curriculum, HR, technology, finance, marketing and policy) with the creation of a new business development network. Such is the perceived benefit that these networks offer members and the opportunities for sharing good practice that we plan to establish two more networks in November, for community development and management information systems, based on member demand.

Our networks enable a forum for debate and critical thinking, learning and support between senior managers in different colleges, with members taking back invaluable shared information and best practice to their colleges and disseminating this further with other college staff.

The networks have become a vital conduit for input at a practitioner level for our publications as well as our responses on policy. This year, the networks have taken on a greater strategic overview of the challenges facing members, their colleges and the sector, and have debated innovative practice in areas as diverse as staff management and income generation.

Collaboration through the 157 Group networks is also enabling our members to unlock opportunities for shared services, efficiencies and savings. Members of these networks realise the potential of collective bargaining power in negotiating better deals from suppliers, as well as the might of their ideas in driving forward innovation and best practice to make savings. During a time of tighter fiscal restraints, our networks have proved to be an invaluable resource in terms of efficiencies.

Examples of successes so far with our networks include:

- Last year, the **technology network** led on a JISC-funded project that explored the use of cloud computing among our member colleges and the opportunities and barriers to greater use of cloud-based services. This year, the technology network continues to explore the options for jointly procured and managed 157 Group services, including some exciting opportunities that aim to generate significant savings.
- **Finance network** members have spent time examining the various models available for federated and shared services and continue to explore ways of making backroom operations within 157 Group colleges more efficient. Our finance network was used as a valued sounding board by government officials planning changes to funding methodologies, and a number of key suggestions concerned with learner-led funding have been adopted as a result of the discussions.
- The **HR network** has begun a series of pilot joint procurement services, and is engaging with providers of key services to look at securing value-for-money contracts.





“LSIS approached the 157 Group to deliver a project to explore how best to support FE and skills in difficult times, because we know that self-improvement is a primary commitment of the organisation. They have a drive and passion to support the FE sector, especially in turbulent times.”

Rob Wye, Chief Executive Officer, Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS).

## Supporting FE and skills in difficult times

Our networks were seen to be just the right kind of conduit for such debate when the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) approached the 157 Group with funding to implement its Supporting FE and Skills in Difficult Times project. As part of this project, members have been able to analyse the current strategic challenges and priorities for college leaders; and determine the key strategic options that are open to them.

College leaders, LSIS and the government are already benefiting from the insights provided by the resulting framework, and the aim is to ensure that new action is taken and appropriate support provided to address the real challenges caused by financial stringency and the need for tightening belts across the sector.

## Peer review

Building on the success of our networks, we have established the opportunity for every 157 Group member college to benefit from being part of a peer review group.

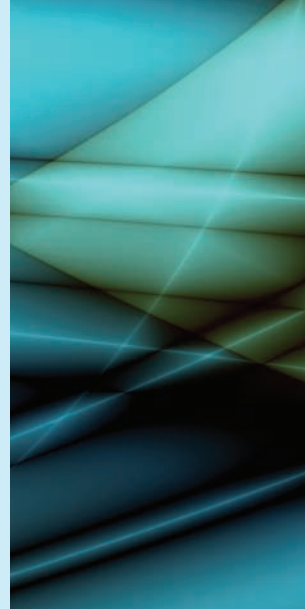
Such groups are already operating successfully for a number of 157 Group colleges and have impacted positively on areas such as the production of self-assessment reports (SARs) and engaging in quality improvement through critical scrutiny. We are looking to develop a model of peer review that will benefit the whole sector in the longer term.

These groups are being established via our curriculum network and, although supported and facilitated by the 157 Group, they will be self-directed according to the specific needs of peer group members.

Our commitment to sector improvement has been further challenged this year by the impact of the new Ofsted framework on some of our existing members. We have not been afraid to look inwardly to support those members facing new challenges in this area, and, through mechanisms such as peer review and the ongoing support of our networks, we are determined to ensure that we support our own members on their individual self-improvement journeys.

## Aim 4: Efficiencies

During these turbulent times, the sector faces a constant and growing demand for efficiencies and greater productivity. However, the 157 Group believes these demands bring with them opportunities to demonstrate how we can deliver high-quality, effective, value-for-money provision in new and innovative ways.



### International roundtable

Our *Doing more for less*<sup>10</sup> discussion paper was the product of a roundtable discussion in November 2010 at which leaders of 157 Group and RC-2020 Inc colleges discussed the common challenges they face across six countries, including having to do more with fewer resources; shared ideas about the successful strategies they employ; and explored innovative solutions to the issues they face and to ensuring that vocational and community colleges remain pillars of society.

### Shared services, innovation and collaboration grant

Our commitment and zeal for working with partners has been recognised by the government and by national sector agencies.

We are keen to influence the government's drive towards greater flexibilities, freedoms and efficiencies, and this year the Skills Funding Agency awarded £2.6m for the 157 Group to administer on behalf of the sector, for developing innovative work on efficiency and shared services. This grant was awarded to the 157 Group in recognition of the leadership shown in supporting cross-sector projects to drive efficiencies and collaboration.

The prospectus we produced focused on encouraging and enabling innovative, large-scale projects that will have a real and lasting benefit for the sector as a whole, and we look forward to managing these projects in the coming year.

Among the areas that will be directly affected by the grant are:

- Sharing back-office functions
- Sharing curriculum development and student-facing services
- Enabling and encouraging progression through collaboration
- Developing IT solutions that support frontline delivery
- Implementing new models of delivery.

With the National Improvement Partnership Board (NIPB) and others, we are also supporting the development of a series of efficiency indicators, which have gone to consultation.

### Establishing a college-owned awarding body

During the year, we have continued our work as a Cabinet Office pathfinder, one of just 12 selected for its mutuals initiative.

In February 2011, our members agreed to explore the opportunity of forming an awarding body, based on a clearly articulated vision to form a college-owned and led qualification-awarding organisation.

We believe that becoming our own qualification-awarding body will lead to greater simplification for our colleges and the sector, multiple savings and greater control and direction not just for college staff and senior leaders but for learners too.

We continue with negotiations and believe that a college-led awarding body will bring consistency and improved value for money for awarding many types of qualifications. We expect this to be developed over the coming year.

<sup>10</sup> 157 Group, 2011. *Doing more for less: An international dialogue about the challenges facing vocational and community colleges.*  
[www.157group.co.uk/files/doing\\_more\\_for\\_less.pdf](http://www.157group.co.uk/files/doing_more_for_less.pdf)



“The 157 Group has demonstrated an innovative and forward-thinking approach in its contribution to shaping the FE landscape. Its involvement in the work on collaboration and shared services for the sector has been impressive and the Group has played a pivotal role in championing the importance of driving greater efficiencies for all colleges.”

Geoff Russell, Chief Executive, Skills Funding Agency

“Having the opportunity to present to the principals of leading FE colleges in England was a real privilege. Their thirst for innovation and strategising and their quest for the latest knowledge is admirable, and is why PwC shows no hesitation in sponsoring 157 Group events.”

Sara Caplan, Partner, PricewaterhouseCoopers

## The 157 Group as an efficient organisation

When it was established in 2006, the 157 Group derived its income solely from membership fees. This situation has changed in recent years and the 157 Group now generates considerable revenue from bidding successfully for projects and acquiring sponsorship. Since 2008, our annual revenue has increased fivefold, from £420,000 to over £2m.

Three out of our six staff salaries are self-financing and in the last year, every one of our meetings for member principals has been paid for by commercial sponsors from the private sector. This enables us to give additional value to members, over and above the cost of their subscriptions, and to fund additional activities, including policy and good practice publications and broader projects, all of which are intended to benefit the wider FE college domain.

We continue to seek sponsorship for all our meetings of 157 Group principals and receptions, and to establish partnerships and relationships that benefit members and commercial partners alike. In addition, many network meetings are sponsored or hosted by commercial organisations that value the opportunity to make contact with influential groups of senior managers and leaders in further education.

## Supporters

This year, our supporters have included:

- Barclays Bank
- CfBT Education Trust
- Edexcel and Pearsons
- Eversheds
- IBM
- KPMG
- Learndirect
- Microsoft
- Neil Stewart Associates
- PricewaterhouseCoopers
- VMWare.

Our principals say that the inputs from our wide range of partnerships provide invaluable insights into how they individually, and the 157 Group collectively, can work more effectively with the private sector for the interests of our colleges, to benefit learners and staff and, in the spirit of the Big Society, pave the way for more innovative collaboration as we adopt new business and organisational models.

“As a principal, I find it rewarding when external companies present to us their latest technologies and ideas about tools that can enhance the learning experience. Our member meetings give us the opportunity to network and develop partnerships with stakeholders, and having sponsors means that our membership fees can be put back into the FE sector, delivering real value for money.”

Denise Brown-Sackey, Principal, Newham College



## Aim 5: Employment and skills

With more than 670,000 learners and over 31,000 employer relationships, our members are major players in boosting employment levels and equipping the nation with skilled workers. Throughout a period of fiscal restraint and rising unemployment levels, our colleges are working and engaging with employers to maximise successful job outcomes for their employees.



### Apprenticeships

The importance of apprenticeships within the government's skills strategy<sup>11</sup> has been emphasised time and time again this year. The 157 Group welcomed the government's announcement that £150m of additional funding would be available to create more than 50,000 apprenticeships for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Our apprenticeships case studies and policy paper, published earlier this year, exemplified our colleges' commitment to their learners and to working directly with employers. A number of key recommendations were presented to the government, and the response to date indicates that these are being responded to – in particular with the increased flexibility for colleges to establish apprenticeship training agencies (ATAs).

### Direct impact on employers – LSIS-funded skills and employer responsiveness (SER) programme

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) and the 157 Group – supported by Niace, the Association of Colleges (AoC) and KPMG – successfully delivered the LSIS-funded Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) Programme in the West Midlands, East Midlands and East of England regions through two successive phases, completing in August 2011.

The programme provided a range of improvement activities focused on building provider capacity in three critical areas:

- Employer responsive provision
- Delivery of apprenticeships
- Supporting people into employment.

As well as the programme being managed by sector membership bodies, the majority of the actual delivery of support was undertaken by the sector, i.e. individuals currently employed by colleges, private or third-sector providers.

Through close links with regional partners and provider networks, we demonstrated our ability to develop sector ownership of skills improvement and have developed a successful model for maximising the utilisation and development of sector expertise in peer-to-peer support and the management of regional improvement programmes. Over 90 per cent of the participants in the programme said that the activities were good, and expressed a definite intention to change some of their working practices as a direct result of the input they had received.

**“AELP was very happy to work with the 157 Group to deliver the SER programme. This brought together providers from right across the sector and we were able to develop a very effective delivery partnership. We have been very pleased with the impact of the SER programme and we look forward to working with the 157 Group on future provider support programmes.”**

Graham Hoyle, Chief Executive, Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)

<sup>11</sup> BIS, 2010. *Investing in skills for sustainable growth*. [www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/s/10-1272-strategy-investing-in-skills-for-sustainable-growth.pdf](http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/s/10-1272-strategy-investing-in-skills-for-sustainable-growth.pdf)  
BIS, 2010. *Skills for sustainable growth*. [www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/s/10-1274-skills-for-sustainable-growth-strategy.pdf](http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/s/10-1274-skills-for-sustainable-growth-strategy.pdf)



“The 157 Group has an unwavering commitment to ensuring that there are opportunities and life chances for people in their local communities. This year alone, it has demonstrated passion and energy in supporting the government’s ambitions to create more apprenticeships to offer effective on-the-job training and skills.”

John Hayes MP, Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning

“The positive partnership between AoC and the 157 Group enabled us to take a collaborative approach to further supporting colleges to develop their enterprise provision for learners; their role in driving local business growth and entrepreneurship; and their own capacities to become more enterprising organisations.”

Teresa Frith, Skills Policy Manager, Association of Colleges (AoC)

## Local enterprise partnerships

In partnership with the Local Government Association (LGA) and the British Chambers of Commerce, (BCC), we conducted research<sup>12</sup> on the newly emerging landscape of local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) and specifically their role in identifying and addressing local skills needs. This timely piece of work with representatives from the chamber movement, local government and further education highlighted key areas of support for aspects of LEPs, together with a number of outstanding issues and potential challenges.

The project suggested a number of general principles aimed at supporting the effective development of LEPs and their capacity to identify and address skills needs in their localities. We continue to build upon the conclusions of this work and, with the LGA and BCC as well as the government and others nationally, we look to support the transition to this new landscape.

“It is clear to see that the 157 Group is committed to boosting the delivery of education and skills with a focus on job outcomes and employment. We chose to collaborate with the 157 Group for this very same reason with our research on local enterprise partnerships.”

Anne Tipple, National Skills Executive,  
British Chambers of Commerce

## Enterprise Network

The Enterprise Network, funded by the Department for Education and managed by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT), aimed to improve the quality and quantity of enterprise education for learners aged 5 to 19. It ran from April 2009 until the end of March 2011. The 157 Group and AoC led the FE part of this programme, which included the production of case studies; the implementation of an audit of enterprise education in FE; a series of regional college-based workshops; and the establishment of a pool of enterprise sector coaches able to provide targeted support to other colleges.

We recognise that enterprise is a key plank in many government initiatives, and have created through this project a network of professionals who can support colleges to do more to improve the entrepreneurial skills of learners and also to develop colleges themselves as enterprising businesses.

Our joint publication, *A review of enterprise provision in FE, colleges in the entrepreneurial economy*,<sup>13</sup> suggested that colleges are well placed to serve entrepreneurs and catalyse enterprising communities, but although colleges do contribute significantly to their local economy, there is further scope for the sector to demonstrate its role in driving entrepreneurship and economic growth.

The 157 Group is looking forward to collaborating further with AoC to take forward the recommendations of this report. Several resources have also been developed and shared via the SSAT’s Enterprise Village website.<sup>14</sup>

12 *The role of LEPs in tackling skills needs – Collaborative Project Report with the Local Government Association and British Chambers of Commerce*

[www.157group.co.uk/files/lep\\_report\\_-\\_full.pdf](http://www.157group.co.uk/files/lep_report_-_full.pdf)

13 [www.157group.co.uk/files/colleges\\_in\\_the\\_entrepreneurial\\_economy2.pdf](http://www.157group.co.uk/files/colleges_in_the_entrepreneurial_economy2.pdf)

14 [www.enterprisevillage.org.uk](http://www.enterprisevillage.org.uk)

## Strengthening alliances and partnerships

Our commitment to and effectiveness in influencing skills policy, raising reputation, achieving self-improvement and seeking efficiencies depends not only on our own efforts, but also on the effectiveness of our partnerships and collaborations with key sector stakeholders and wider audiences. We are pleased to have a wide variety of partners to help maximise our impact as an organisation and support the achievement of our strategic aims.

You will have seen examples of our key strategic alliances illustrated throughout this document, but we work in particularly close relationship with sector organisations as diverse as:

- Association of Colleges (AoC)
- Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)
- Association of National Specialist Colleges (Natspec)
- Forum of Sector Chief Officers (FoSCO)
- Helena Kennedy Foundation
- Higher Education Funding Council for England (Hefce)
- HOLEX
- Institute for Learning (IfL)
- LANDEX
- Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)
- Mixed Economy Group (MEG)
- National Improvement Partnership Board (NIPB)
- National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (Niace)
- National Union of Students (NUS)
- Sixth Form Colleges' Forum (SFCF)
- Skills Funding Agency
- Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT)
- UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES)
- Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA).

Our relationships with other sector membership bodies are critical. Key senior staff from AoC joined our principals' meeting in February 2011, when we discussed policy priorities and future partnership working.

We have worked closely with key membership bodies in the delivery of many of the projects already described (e.g. AELP and the Skills and Employer Responsiveness Programme, and AoC and the Enterprise Network) and will continue to develop these critical, positive relationships.

One example of our sector-based collaborative work can be seen in the influential Colleges in their Communities Inquiry, where the 157 Group was a valued commissioner, with AoC and Niace. We were delighted that Baroness Sharp, a 157 Group patron, was appointed as chair of the commission.

The 157 Group plays an active role in the NIPB, facilitated by LSIS and chaired by Graham Hoyle of AELP, and works with other sector bodies to research and debate key sector issues.

We are an active member of FoSCO, the forum for membership body chief executives, which is chaired by Bob Powell of HOLEX, and gives leaders of sector membership bodies the opportunity to review and discuss sector developments.

We also work with a range of organisations beyond the further education sector (e.g. the Local Government Association, the British Chambers of Commerce and the Gatsby Charitable Foundation), responding to the priorities of our members, to maximise the impact and breadth of our activities.

While several of our partnerships are based on the delivery of projects, we have also built a close rapport with several commercial organisations. This has enabled us to operate efficiently as a membership organisation and provide an up-to-date, rounded knowledge base to stimulate discussion and thinking for our members. In May, for instance, IBM sponsored our principals' meeting, presenting ideas on cloud computing and demonstrating how IT could lead to a new pedagogy for the sector; and in July, PricewaterhouseCoopers sponsored our annual conference and contributed stimulating ideas on possible strategic developments for the 157 Group.

We look forward to developing these strategic alliances, and new ones, in the year to come.



# Looking forward

The 157 Group will continue to take a strategic lead in further education and skills, focusing on work in the international arena; higher education in the FE sector; skills development and apprenticeships; and new business models that deliver efficiencies and support mutualism, in the spirit of the Big Society. We intend to harness opportunities for developing new business in FE over the next 12 months.



In July 2011, at our annual conference in Leeds, 157 Group principals clarified four key pillars for future focus and action. They articulated a strong intent to work even more effectively and systemically as a collective, pooling the combined resources, experience, innovation and expertise of all 157 Group colleges for even better impact and influence.

In essence, the 157 Group plans to generate big ideas and big solutions, drawing upon expertise from big colleges.

The four strategic pillars are:

- Shaping more powerfully the policy and funding landscape for colleges
- Generating excellence for ourselves, and for others
- Raising our game on further improving and developing a national profile and reputation for FE colleges
- Collective and innovative solutions for maximum impact, efficiency and value.

Strategies and actions in 2011–12 for the four strategic pillars will include:

- Continuing to generate our well-regarded policy papers and responses, our thinkpieces and our strategic dialogues with influencers at the highest levels
- Setting new performance criteria for the nature of quality and excellence within the changing requirements of Ofsted and the new freedoms announced by the government

- Upgrading our peer review work and developing our peer support networks
- Continuing to produce good practice case studies in key policy areas and highlighting innovation and excellence
- Raising the profile of colleges with large employers and with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to ensure they understand how we add value and can offer a wide range of services in the new skills landscape
- Leading, in partnership with AoC, on improving sector efficiencies and developing innovative business models
- Profiling FE positively with the Treasury and key government ministers beyond the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)
- Using our collective resources to best effect, including to contribute to bottom-line improvements for individual member colleges
- Setting up our own awarding organisation
- Exploring new organisational and business vehicles for priority areas such as HE in FE, and responding to the 14–19 agenda.

## 157 Group members

- Barnet College
- Bedford College
- Birmingham Metropolitan College
- Blackpool and The Fylde College
- Chichester College
- City and Islington College
- City of Bristol 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
- New College Nottingham
- Newham College
- St Helens College
- Stoke on Trent College
- Sunderland College
- Sussex Downs College
- The Manchester College
- The Sheffield College
- Vision West Notts
- Warwickshire College
- York College

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