



2012–13
Impact review

Who we are

The 157 Group is a consortium of 30 of the UK's largest FE colleges. We offer a UK-wide view of educational practice and policy development.

Our member colleges:

- are **large**, with a combined turnover of over £1.5bn, impacting over 670,000 learners, employing 37,000 staff and engaging with 31,000 employers
- have **a range of specialisms**, offering vocationally focused courses at levels from entry level to higher education, and catering for learners from 14 upwards
- identify our **core function** as securing and delivering the highest quality of **teaching and learning**
- are **strategic leaders** in their locality to ensure an effective skills system:
 - as **community leaders** (by sponsoring academies, other types of school and adult learning provision)
 - as **strategic influencers and enablers** (through relationships with local enterprise partnerships, local authorities and employers)
 - as **major employers**, each with an average of over 600 employees and large purchasing power
 - as **strategic contributors** to local economic growth through provision of relevant and high-quality skills development and supporting young people and adults to obtain meaningful, sustainable and relevant jobs
 - as **social entrepreneurs** generating wealth creation, start-ups and enterprise.

The 157 Group exists to serve its members and to be at the leading edge of the sector more widely on three levels:

- **thought leadership** – setting out visionary, challenging and radical agendas for how things might be done differently, and better, into the future
- **practice improvement** – enabling our members to work together to derive experience and knowledge, and to spread good practice for the benefit of all learners and employers
- **policy influence** – using the experience of our members to directly inform the views of the government and policymakers, government bodies and agencies, academics and other influencers of opinion.

We focus on the areas of:

- improvement and innovation in **vocational teaching and learning** and the development of the curriculum
- **strategic influence and economic impact** within localities
- **employer engagement and advocacy** that contributes to economic growth.

We use **praxis-based evidence**, through a combination of research, peer support, practitioner-based activity and public communications, and our members act as the **laboratory for testing and developing** new approaches. We work **in partnership** with other colleges, employer umbrella organisations, national and regional bodies involved in education, the government and its agencies.

The 157 Group is **financially autonomous**, supplementing value-for-money membership fees with project-based income and corporate sponsorship secured on the basis of our high reputation. In 2012–13, all corporate 157 Group activity was again sponsored by key partners.

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Introduction

It has been a pleasure and a privilege to chair the 157 Group this past year. This impact review offers many examples of the work we are doing and the respect our voice increasingly commands in policymaking and academic circles. This is critical to our goal of raising the profile and the reputation of the work done in further education colleges across the country.

We have been at the centre of genuine strategic discussions this year as what felt like a whirlwind of policy initiatives continued unabated. The laudable aim of ensuring access for all to a high-quality offer of vocational education is one we wholeheartedly support. We are happy to support, and have embraced, many new developments, such as working with new types of schools and reforming apprenticeships. In other areas, we are not convinced that the system always needs 'fixing' in the way proposed, and our concerns have gained much respect across a broad spectrum of opinion.

What is clear is that the voice of the 157 Group is a genuine and collective one. Our Principals' Network and the Networks of staff at different levels of our organisations, which are made possible through the 157 Group, are active. They provide a forum for us to exchange our views and share our practice, and they lend weight to the representations we make to the government and others. I am constantly impressed at the innovative practice showcased by my colleagues, and am happy that this year we have taken that practice and turned it to positive use through policy influence.

Our manifesto marks a key point for the 157 Group, a chance for us to take stock and to ensure that we are focusing on what really counts: the impact that FE colleges have on their local economies and the development and delivery of high-quality teaching and learning for our learners and for employers. Our pioneering work on economic impact in partnership with Economic Modelling Specialists International (EMSI) has been revealing, and it has been exciting to work with some of the leading thinkers in the area of vocational pedagogy, including the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL); Dr Jean Kelly and colleagues at the Institute for Learning; Professor Ann Hodgson and colleagues at the Institute of Education; and Professors Frank Coffield, Bill Lucas and Guy Claxton.

Last year's impact review talked about the ways in which our reach was extending to include colleges beyond our own membership. I am pleased that membership increased during 2012–13 and now includes colleges in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, and that we have continued to work with partners who share our values and aspirations and who, importantly, have been able to involve other types of education provider in the work that we are doing.

The outcome of our Delphi work and the report *Further education in 2020*, both covered in this impact review, demonstrate the richness of what can be achieved when everyone in FE comes together, and I look forward to more of this type of work in the future.

The clarity of our message and beliefs has meant that our project work has become more focused. I am especially pleased that our bids for project funding this year were almost exclusively driven by staff in member colleges, and focused on key areas where they believed our practice could influence policy thinking. From working with disaffected young people to providing a new offer for unemployed people, the extent to which our own staff are engaged, through the 157 Group, with setting the policy agenda is very encouraging, and bodes well for a future generation of inspiring leaders to take the reins in the sector.

The Education and Training Foundation is now up and running, and the 157 Group is completely behind the work of this new body in supporting professionalism and leading vocational education and training in England. We intend to play a full part in ensuring that the best thinking goes into the professional development of staff and the consequent improvement of learner experiences, wherever they are.

So, FE is at something of a turning point – the many new initiatives of the past year will need time to settle in, and we must take control of our own destinies. I hope you find, as I did, that reading this publication gives you a flavour of the ways in which the 157 Group can continue to contribute powerfully to that work. With thanks to my member colleagues and to the central 157 Group team under Lynne Sedgmore, I offer this impact review to you in that spirit.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Roberts', with a long horizontal line underneath.

**Peter Roberts, Chair of the 157 Group
and Chief Executive of Leeds City College**

Our influence

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I very much value the insights provided by the 157 Group and its members. The group understands that our focus must be on bringing rigour and responsiveness to the FE and skills sector, and its counsel over the past year has been invaluable. I have engaged personally in debate with 157 Group principals and always found the experience supportive but challenging. I look forward to that continuing.

Matthew Hancock MP, Minister for Skills



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The day I spent exploring the future of skills policy with 157 Group principals was invaluable. I am looking forward to working more closely with the 157 Group in my role as shadow education secretary.

Tristram Hunt MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Education

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I know that I can always turn to the 157 Group for a sensible take on what matters in further education. This year has been no exception, as I have been able to meet personally with member principals, as well as benefiting from the detailed contributions the 157 Group has made to our ongoing policy work on apprenticeships and the future of FE.

Gordon Marsden MP, former Shadow Minister for Further Education, Skills and Regional Growth

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The 157 Group made an important contribution to the work of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning, and continues to be at the forefront of thought leadership in vocational teaching and learning. The debate with my fellow members is always stimulating, and I am impressed with the group's commitment to enhancing quality, in colleges and nationally.

Frank McLoughlin CBE, Principal of City and Islington College and Chair of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL)

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The Education and Training Foundation is committed to working with and through sector bodies as it develops its plans and delivers against its objectives. The 157 Group will be an important part of that sector involvement and we look forward to continuing to work closely with them in the future.

Peter Davies, Interim Chief Executive, Education and Training Foundation

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The 157 Group has a positive and proactive approach to encouraging colleges to work with employers to build more strategic relationships. This has successfully underpinned the joint work that we've been carrying out over the past few months and is enabling this work to be more dynamic and relevant for FE colleges.

Michael Davis, Chief Executive, UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES)

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The very positive relationship between the 157 Group and Ofsted has continued to develop this year. We have discussed the many challenges facing the FE sector with openness and candour and begun some very helpful collaborative work on governance. It is reassuring to know that we can turn to our key stakeholders, including the 157 Group, for such help and support.

Matthew Coffey, Director, Further Education and Skills, Ofsted

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The 157 Group never fails to have a clear take on the issues of the day. Whether reacting to announcements or providing expert pieces to stimulate debate, its views are always clear and well articulated. We all want to see a higher profile for the sector, and the 157 Group is making a very strong contribution to bringing this about.

Nick Linford, Editor, FE Week

How we work

Our success depends on member colleges working closely together, 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 improve and succeed together, raising the game for all.

In each of our key policy areas, we aim to influence on three levels:

- **Thought leadership** – setting out visionary and sometimes radical agendas for how things might be done differently in the future
- **Practice improvement** – enabling our members to work together to benefit from one another's experiences and knowledge, and then to spread good practice more widely across the sector, beyond our own membership
- **Policy influence** – using the experience of our members to directly inform the views of those whose decisions affect further education and skills – whether in the government, the civil service, government bodies and agencies, academia or opposition parties.

By focusing on these three aspects of work, we set out to enhance how things are done in further education, with the deliberate intention of using the voice of practitioners and learners to influence what is possible and to enrich the reputation of vocational education and training in further education colleges.

Our mechanisms of regular meetings and workshops enable our members, at different levels in their organisations, to react and respond to policy decisions; to share their own practice and decisions; and then to influence future policy decisions in a proactive and visionary way.

157 Group principals have a business meeting three times a year as well as taking part in two-day reflective workshops. Each of these gatherings provides an opportunity to share reactions to recent developments, before engaging in peer support and improvement at the highest level. In 2012–13, for example, members engaged in a whole-afternoon session on their approaches to quality improvement in teaching and learning.

At any point, five of our principals are directors of the 157 Group and work with other members to establish the key priority areas for the group in each academic year.

In 2012–13, a number of key priorities were identified:

- teaching and learning
- employer engagement
- strategic local leadership
- the future landscape of the FE sector.

One member principal leads work in each of our priority areas, the impact of which is described in this review.

The 157 Group's directors for 2012–13 were:

- **Peter Roberts**, chair (Leeds City College)
- **Sarah Robinson OBE**, vice-chair (Stoke-on-Trent College)
- **Denise Brown-Sackey**, treasurer (Newham College)
- **Stella Mbubaegbu CBE** (Highbury College Portsmouth)
- **Amarjit Basi** (Cornwall College, previously New College Nottingham).

Senior staff from our member colleges replicate this approach in 12 strategic **networks**, which meet once a term. They cover:

- business development
- community development
- curriculum and HE
- estates
- finance
- human resources and organisational development
- international
- management information systems
- marketing
- policy
- teaching and learning
- technology and innovation.

Network members have contributed enormously to our policy papers, consultation responses and project activities this year, as well as producing focused outcomes, which have included an HR audit among members; peer groups to support international activity; detailed benchmarking data focusing on success rates; IT infrastructure and staffing requirements; a shared framework for lesson observations; and a number of other collaborative initiatives. You will find examples of 157 Group network-influenced activity throughout this impact review.

157 Group highlights of the year

November 2012

- Marilyn Hawkins, chair of the 157 Group, gives evidence to the Liberal Democrats' skills review panel.
- The 157 Group, Institute for Learning (IfL) and the Institute of Education (IOE) host a seminar on local learning ecologies.
- Lynne Sedgmore CBE, executive director of the 157 Group, attends the London Festival of Education and debates vocational education with Owen Jones, the author of *Chavs*.
- The 157 Group, Gazelle Group and Pearson Education host a reception at the Association of Colleges (AoC) conference with the president of Babson College, Leonard Schlesinger.

- Lynne Sedgmore shares a platform with the deputy prime minister, Nick Clegg MP, at an Ofsted event on employer engagement.



The 157 Group International Network is a vibrant group that mixes those colleges with significant experience alongside those that are just beginning to start international work. It provides a valuable opportunity to share best practice, discuss joint ventures and keep abreast of the latest trends and issues in international work. The ethos of the group is that we all gain by sharing information because although we are in competition with each other in some overseas markets, ultimately we all gain by building the reputation of UK FE. Mark Allen, Sussex Downs College, Chair of the International Network

December 2012

- The 157 Group annual reception, hosted by Baroness Wall, features speeches from Charlie Avent, a learner at Ruskin Mill College; skills minister Matthew Hancock MP; and shadow skills minister Gordon Marsden MP.
- At the annual reception, we launch our 2011–12 *impact review* and *Finding my voice*, a publication featuring the voices of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, six of whom join us at the event.
- Trafford College joins the 157 Group.
- The 157 Group is quoted in a *Financial Times* article about the enrolment of 14-year-olds in FE colleges.
- We are invited to be a part of the BIS Industrial Strategy review.
- Peter Roberts becomes chair of the 157 Group.



January 2013

- On behalf of the 157 Group, Baroness Wall hosts an EAL-sponsored round table in the House of Lords focusing on the implementation of advanced learning loans.
- A further seminar in our series with IfL and the IOE focuses on collaborative professionalism in FE.
- Leicester College joins the 157 Group.
- Lynne Sedgmore joins the Skills Task Force contributing to the Labour party's policy review in advance of the 2015 general election.

157 Group highlights of the year

February 2013

- The 157 Group is represented at a high-level round-table event on the future of higher education with the universities minister, David Willetts MP.
- Lynne Sedgmore is invited to chair a subgroup of the Ministerial Working Group on 16–19 Reform, on behalf of Matthew Hancock MP.
- Asha Khemka OBE, principal and chief executive of **West Nottinghamshire College**, accompanies the prime minister, David Cameron MP, on an official visit to India (right).
- At our February members' meeting, Lord Baker of Dorking joins principals to debate the future of 14–19 education.



March 2013

- Several 157 Group colleges begin a relationship with Economic Modelling Specialists International (EMSI) and undertake detailed surveys of their economic impact.



It is important that FE takes every opportunity to showcase its great value to learners, employers, funders and other key stakeholders. An economic impact study is the perfect PR vehicle to show the value provided by the college to the taxpayer, learner and the local business community. By encouraging members to sign up for an Economic Impact Study in order to help achieve these goals and take a lead on driving the sector forward in this challenging economic climate, the 157 Group is making the case that investment in skills should be a key national priority.

Andy Durman, VP for UK Operations, EMSI

- The 157 Group joins the technology advisory group reporting to the skills minister, Matthew Hancock MP.
- The 157 Group is included in advance consultation on the government's new skills strategy, and features in its press release about *Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills*.
- The 157 Group contributes an expert commentary on the Budget to *FE Week*.



Boosting the skills level of the workforce is a core element of the UK's long-term growth strategy – and it's also the first step to getting people into good jobs. The 157 Group, as the leading body representing the further education sector, has a vital role to play in raising the skills of young people and helping achieve our shared goal of prosperity through growth.

Katja Hall, Chief Policy Director, CBI

April 2013

- The 157 Group and its colleges feature in a celebratory *FE Week* supplement on the 20th anniversary of incorporation.
- The 157 Group and IfL jointly publish *Leading partnerships with employers and building collaborative professionalism*.
- The report of our year-long curriculum redesign project, *Curriculum redesign in further education colleges*, is published and receives much attention.



The 157 Group curriculum redesign project enabled the college to explore innovative delivery models for courses linked to non-traditional funding streams running throughout the year. This meant that we were able to sharpen our approaches, pilot innovative delivery models and run projects which in the past we might not have been involved with, thus generating additional income for the college.

Wayne Wright, Deputy Principal, Sussex Downs College

157 Group highlights of the year

May 2013

- With City & Guilds and the Centre for Real-World Learning, the 157 Group hosts a one-day workshop with sector leaders on the leadership of teaching and learning.
- We publish *Why culture matters*, a think piece on the importance of leadership in setting cultural expectations for change, written in partnership with The Pacific Institute®.
- At a national conference, Lynne Sedgmore and Fintan Donohue of the Gazelle Colleges Group launch our collaborative research project on employer engagement with the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES).



The 157 Group's *Further education in 2020* publication is one of the best things I have seen in the sector for a long time. It demonstrates vision and clarity of purpose. I know that the 157 Group has engaged fully with LEPs over the past year, because they understand how crucial colleges are to skills development across the country. Colleagues in LEPs across the country will be grateful for this input.

Dr Ann Limb OBE DL, Chair, South East Midlands LEP

June 2013

- The 157 Group publishes *Further education in 2020*, the results of our cross-sectoral Delphi-style events during 2012–13, which receives much acclaim.



I value my interactions with the 157 Group. They offer the opportunity to explore new ways of working with open-minded professionals. I know that the feedback I get will always be honest and constructive.

Kim Thorneywork, Interim Chief Executive, Skills Funding Agency

- The Department for Education (DfE) awards the 157 Group funds to manage a project examining college preparations for the implementation of study programmes in September 2013.

- 157 Group principals host their annual planning forum in London and guests include Janice Shiner, former deputy director at DfE; Sir Geoff Hall, interim chief executive at the Education and Training Foundation; Dr Ann Limb, chair of the South East Midlands LEP; and Susan Pember, former director of skills at BIS.



During my years as director at BIS, I always valued the 157 Group's enthusiasm and positive input on FE policy. I also knew they would offer their critique in a thoughtful but persuasive way. I have been pleased this year to have the opportunity of working with the 157 Group directly, and find their understanding of the FE agenda very insightful. Their research papers are providing FE with real thought leadership.

Susan Pember, former Director of FE and Skills at BIS

July 2013

- Walsall College joins the 157 Group.
- With AoC, the Gazelle Group and the Principals' Professional Council, the 157 Group hosts a seminar at **Stoke-on-Trent College** with shadow education minister Tristram Hunt MP and shadow skills minister Gordon Marsden MP to debate the future of FE.
- The business secretary, Dr Vince Cable MP, and director-general of the CBI, John Cridland CBE, visit **Hull College** and praise its excellent work.
- On behalf of the 157 Group, Lynne Sedgmore speaks on management virtues and wisdom at a prestigious conference at Yale University in the USA.
- The 157 Group supports the launch of Centre Forum's *Train Too* report on industry secondments to FE.

- **Chichester College** student George Callow wins gold for cabinet-making at the WorldSkills competition in Leipzig, Germany.



157 Group highlights of the year

August 2013

- **Belfast Metropolitan College** joins the 157 Group.
- **Hull College** and **New College Nottingham** are cited as examples of good practice in the CBI's report, *Tomorrow's Growth*, which focuses on outstanding employer engagement.
- The final report of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), *Leading Learning Organisations*, cites the 157 Group's *Further education in 2020* report in its commentary on sector leadership.



My career in policy development taught me the value of mission groups in bringing together different organisations' perspectives and influencing the big picture in a more effective way. The 157 Group is particularly good at this. Members really do get listened to and therefore have the opportunity to influence the policy debate around FE, whether this is through publications, meetings with ministers or other methods. It is surely right that policy should be influenced by practice, rather than the other way around; the way the 157 Group works is the embodiment of this philosophy.

Ben Nicholls, Head of Policy and Communications,
Newham College

September 2013

- **Coleg Cambria** and **Aberdeen College** join the 157 Group.
- The 157 Group publishes *An Evaluation of Collaboration and Shared Services*, an academic research paper into the impact of our shared services projects, carried out by Warwick University.
- Following Ofsted's critical report on careers guidance in schools, BIS asks the 157 Group to be a key partner in implementing the *Inspiration Vision* statement.

October 2013

- The 157 Group plays host to Professor Frank Coffield, as practitioners from member colleges gather to hear his latest research and input to his latest publication.
- The 157 Group publishes its manifesto for further education and skills, which aims to influence policymakers' thinking ahead of the 2015 general election.
- The 157 Group launches its new website.
- The 157 Group launches, in partnership with City & Guilds and the Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester, *Pedagogic leadership*, a think piece aimed at expanding upon academic theory to enable college leaders to create the culture and behaviours necessary for outstanding vocational learning.



Rarely do I see a piece of work that I want every teacher to read and then talk to me about. *Pedagogic leadership* is timely, important and energising, so I'll be doing my best to get as many people as I can to talk about it.

Shane Chowen, Policy Officer, Institute for Learning (IfL)



Victoria Marshall of **Hull College** is the worthy winner of this year's 157 Group Award at the Helena Kennedy Foundation's annual awards ceremony. Although she did not have the most stable environment – because of her family experiencing unemployment, financial worries and mental health issues – this did not discourage Ms Marshall from completing a BTec and enrolling at the college to do a foundation degree in criminology. Her decision to remain at Hull College to complete her degree comes from the fact that she had a great experience there and valued her tutor assistance and guidance highly. After completing her studies, she intends to work as a police constable, with the intention of becoming a scenes of crime officer.

Member college highlights

- Following its merger with Southwark College in 2012, Lewisham College completed a successful rebranding to **LeSoCo** in April 2013 and launched its Enterprise Champions initiative, bringing inspirational figures from business and the arts into the college to act as mentors for current learners.
- The **College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London** hosted a visit by the skills minister, Matthew Hancock MP, in April 2013. The college was chosen to host the event in order to demonstrate to the minister the benefits of the Careers Academies UK initiative, which the college has been involved with since 2009 and which aims to offer students more detailed preparation for the world of work.
- In June 2013, **City and Islington College** celebrated the 20th anniversary of its incorporation at an event at its Centre for Lifelong Learning. At the time of the college's incorporation in 1993, fewer than 50 per cent of students achieved success in their courses. By 2012/13 the success rate was 83 per cent. Since 1993, a quarter of a million young people and adults have studied at City and Islington College.
- In response to the need for greater employer engagement, **Barnet and Southgate College** embarked on an initiative to address the issue of young people not in work, education or employment by partnering with Reed NCFE and opening an 'employment zone' based on the campus.
- **Ealing, Hammersmith & West London College** won a number of high-profile awards, including the Queen's Award for Enterprise, after being nominated by the prime minister, and the LSIS and NUS Leading the Learner Voice award for excellence in information, advice and guidance. Former student Jamal Edwards, who had a poor track record but went on to run his own video company worth £8m, appeared on BBC Breakfast and a Channel 4 documentary.



- **Newham College** developed the Learning Revolution Trust charity to help students facing hardship and New Horizons London to train people in private and public sectors in IT. More than 3,000 pupils attended its WorldSkills activities and more than 400 people participated in its 10K Run. Its A-level pass rate was over 90 per cent.
- Findings of an independent research report demonstrated the social and economic impact of **Hull College Group**: its total contribution to the economy of Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire is £517m a year, equivalent to £1 in every £20 spent in the region or more than 23,000 jobs on average wages. The economic impact was revealed among the findings of detailed research by Economic Modelling Specialists International (EMSI).
- **St Helens College** had double success at the first annual Liverpool City Region Apprenticeship Awards 2013, with the announcement of two young apprentice award winners. Dean Sankey and Alex Fath received awards at the prestigious event held in Liverpool, with more than 500 guests. The students were joined by their employers and representatives from the college to celebrate their success.
- **Leeds City College** unveiled plans for its pre-16 offer, giving young people an alternative educational route into employment. The first of its kind in the country, the 14+ Leeds Apprenticeship Academy will deliver an apprenticeship offer, supported directly by key local employers taking an active role in helping to develop young people. It will combine the teaching of key GCSEs alongside vocational qualifications, linked directly to real employment opportunities.
- A health and social care student from **Blackpool and The Fylde College** was named as one of the UK's most talented young skills stars after winning a place in WorldSkills Squad UK. Amy-Leigh Wilson was one of just three students from the UK who had the chance to represent the UK in health and social care competitions.

Member college highlights

- **The Manchester College** was proud to announce that two learners were winners at this year's Adult Learners' Week awards. It was also delighted when a logo designed by one of its students was chosen by Matthew Hancock MP as the winning design for 'chartered status'.
 - **West Nottinghamshire College** opened its £11m lifestyle academy, which is training the hairstylists, beauticians, holistic therapists, chefs and hospitality professionals of tomorrow. The flagship building – the centrepiece of an ongoing £40m transformation of the college's estate and facilities – boasts commercial hair and beauty salons, a state-of-the-art spa and a fine-dining restaurant to give students high-quality industry experience.
 - Following David Croll's retirement, Mandie Stravino became principal and chief executive of **Derby College**. Ms Stravino is also a board member on the Derbyshire Economic Partnership and was elected to sit on the CBI East Midlands Council, as well as being chair of governors at Merrill College.
 - **Leicester College** received the first Habia Skills Academy's Centre of Expertise status in the country for its foundation degree in artistic make-up and special effects. Centre of Expertise status highlights training providers that are delivering the best training and education, and have the best teams and best facilities.
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- **Stoke-on-Trent College** embarked on a professional partnership with Reed NCFE to strengthen the college's aim of providing a 'real education' for all students, which includes ensuring they are fully prepared for employment. The Reed NCFE Job Shop was established in February 2013, and offers an in-house recruitment service for students, starting with workshops to develop valuable employability skills.
 - **New College Nottingham** became the first college in the UK to acquire a car dealership, the biggest investment yet in its Learning Company programme. The dealership continues to be a fully commercial operation and maintains contracts with Nissan, Renault and Chrysler Jeep, while pursuing new lines of business such as valeting and vehicle wrapping. It will become the base for the college's new range of motor vehicle courses and apprenticeships, with students working and learning side by side with industry professionals.
 - Companies and entrepreneurs from across the local area celebrated the launch of **Warwickshire College** as a Gazelle Local college. Gazelle Local is an innovative new forum bringing together education, business, social innovators and community stakeholders to transform the enterprise capabilities of students and enhance the opportunities for local business to grow and thrive.
 - Young women were encouraged to explore a career in engineering and manufacturing with a series of summer schools at Jaguar Land Rover, in partnership with **Birmingham Metropolitan College**. The latest course involved 150 young women, who were also able to gain a level 1 award in employability and personal development. The initiative is part of the Jaguar Land Rover Education Business Partnership with the college.
 - In February, **Chichester College** organised and ran WoW2013 (World of Work), which was the first county-wide West Sussex careers fair for local schools. The event brought together employers, colleges, sixth forms, universities, training providers and schoolchildren from across the county. Students had the opportunity to attend workshops led by different employers and colleges; learn about interview techniques, CV preparation, and writing effective personal statements for Ucas; as well as having a go at many vocational crafts. The college has been asked to run the fair again in 2013/14.
 - **Bedford College** had a record-breaking year, recruiting 3,091 full-time 16 to 18-year-old students, more than ever before in its 110-year history. This included record A-level student numbers with the launch of The Bedford Sixth Form on its own prestigious campus. It opened its third adult learning centre, and Shuttleworth College produced the runner-up out of 24,000 entries in the Pearson Teaching Awards, as well as winning national awards in a range of land-based learning areas.

Member college highlights

- In 2012–13, **Sunderland College** welcomed new principal Anne Isherwood and announced an investment of £22m in new buildings and improvements, covering engineering, performing arts, sports and sport science. The new facilities will significantly improve student experience and course choice. The college also enjoyed another successful A-level results day, with a 99 per cent pass rate for the fourth consecutive year.
- In March 2013, **Walsall College** became the first general further education college in England to be graded 'outstanding' under the new Ofsted inspection framework. Ofsted's report highlighted how the college is firmly rooted in the community and works in very strong partnership with key organisations for the benefit of students and to promote the regeneration and prosperity of the borough.
- **Trafford College** celebrated a year of accolades, including a gold award for the delivery of career education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG); an AoC Beacon Award for Widening Participation in Lifelong Learning; an Inspiring Learning Project Award for its work with supported learning students; and first-place ranking in this year's National Student Survey with 100 per cent satisfaction ratings.
- Deputy prime minister and Sheffield Hallam MP Nick Clegg held round-table talks with local business people at **The Sheffield College** in July 2013 when he visited to discuss how to increase the number of businesses offering apprenticeship opportunities in Sheffield. The college delivers apprenticeships in more industry sectors than other local training providers, and is continuing to expand its programme.



- **Cornwall College** business star apprentice Lizzie Hosken was named EAL Advanced Apprentice of the Year at the 2012 National Apprenticeship Awards. Lizzie received the accolade at the Skills Show in Birmingham after winning the regional award earlier that year for her work at Perranworthal-based accountants Clark Jenner Angove.

- Student success rates (for 2011/12) made **Highbury College Portsmouth** the top general further education college in the south-east region. Highbury College student Johanna Richards won Outstanding Adult Learner of the Year at the National BTEC Awards, and the college's enterprise society was named College Society of the Year at the National Association of College and University Entrepreneurs (NACUE) Leadership Summit.
- **North East Scotland College's** company, ASET, provides training for the oil and gas sector. Following recent investment of £10m, the company trained over 3,600 people in one year, recruited from over 80 countries worldwide, and generated a profit of around £1.5m on a turnover of approximately £6m.



- Addressing an invited audience at Belfast Waterfront Hall on 17 June 2013, before the G8 summit, US president Barack Obama singled out **Belfast Metropolitan College** for its work in peace-building and offering life-changing opportunities to young people. In a speech that was broadcast live across the world, he said, "We will keep investing in programmes that enrich us: programmes like the one at Belfast Metropolitan College, which teaches students from west and north Belfast the skills they need for new jobs."
- **Sussex Downs International College** was judged a Centre of Excellence by the British Council for the second year in a row. The college is in the highest 2 per cent of the British Council's Centres of Excellence 2013, which lists the top-rated language schools, colleges and universities delivering English language programmes to overseas students.
- **Coleg Cambria** celebrated becoming the first provider of post-16 education in Wales to achieve 'excellent' grades for both teaching and learning experiences. The college has set the standard by achieving the best set of work-based learning results in an Estyn inspection to date. The college's innovative approach to teaching and learning was also recognised by three Colleges Wales awards: in digital learning; teaching and learning; and literacy and numeracy.

Teaching and learning

We are passionate about enabling outstanding teaching and learning to be consistent across the further education sector, and work with a number of key strategic partners, including the Institute for Learning (IfL) and the Institute of Education (IOE), the City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development and the Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester. We were inspired by the work of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL) under the leadership of former 157 Group chair, Frank McLoughlin CBE, and have worked closely with the CAVTL team to influence its report's findings and support their implementation.

Thought leadership

We have begun a six-month project in partnership with Ofsted examining the issues for governance of colleges in relation to teaching and learning. Using our proven 'policy through praxis' method, we will bring together college governors to debate and synthesise their priorities and vision for the future before presenting a think piece for the sector and its leaders in early 2014.

More than 60 practitioners and sector leaders attended two seminars in a series, supported by IfL and IOE, exploring the nature of local learning ecosystems and developing employer relationships that influence the quality of teaching and learning. The results of these seminars were outlined in *Leading partnerships with employers and building collaborative professionalism*, published in April 2013. In this, we set out a vision for the ways in which staff can best be supported to enhance their industry awareness through continuing professional development (CPD) and how college leaders can understand the nature of their local learning ecology.



The Institute for Learning continues to enjoy a positive relationship with the 157 Group. Our recent joint work on vocational partnerships for excellence in teaching and learning has added knowledge and insights for practitioners and leaders in the sector. IfL and the 157 Group work together to add value to the further

education and skills sector, for the benefit of learners, and to enhance its reputation. IfL is passionate about high standards of teaching, and we know that qualifications for teaching followed by ongoing professional development are vital for high-quality colleges.

Toni Fazaeli, Chief Executive, Institute for Learning (IfL)



In April 2013, we also published *Why culture matters*, in conjunction with the world-renowned Pacific Institute®. This publication examined the types of culture needed in a learning environment if quality improvement is to be the focus and drew on the institute's experience over more than 10 years of working with colleges across the UK. The publication was very well received by college leaders newly exposed to some of the theories it contained.

In May 2013, 40 practitioners and leaders gathered in London for a workshop session run by Professors Bill Lucas and Guy Claxton, whose *How to teach vocational education* was published in 2012. The workshop, in partnership with City & Guilds, enabled them, and the participants, to reflect on the leadership qualities required to deliver excellence in teaching and learning. Among the practical suggestions that came out of the session were ways in which leaders can use pedagogical theory to engage all staff in the quality improvement journey.



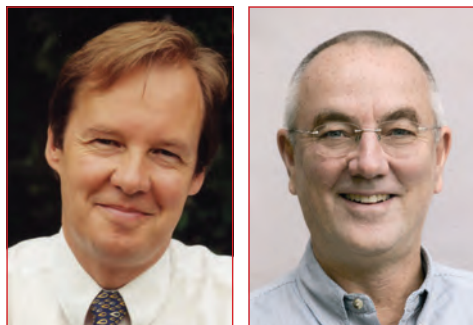
We are very pleased to be working with the 157 Group in a number of different areas.

At City & Guilds, we are passionate about furthering our understanding of vocational teaching and learning for the future benefit of everyone in the country, and we believe the 157 Group is the perfect partner to help us in this work.

Kirstie Donnelly MBE, Director of Product Development, City & Guilds



The outputs of the May workshop were published in *Pedagogic leadership: Creating cultures and practices for outstanding vocational learning*, in October 2013. The launch of this publication was attended by more than 30 people, and generated a lively debate on Twitter, with many urging the sector to take up the messages as they impact on the improvement of leadership.



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We were delighted to have the opportunity of working with the 157 Group this year. At our May workshop, many practitioners from its member colleges and beyond engaged fully in the construction of a framework for pedagogic leadership, which has significantly advanced our thinking and allowed practice in this important area to develop further. Professors Bill Lucas and Guy Claxton, Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester

In 2012, the 157 Group made a strong submission to CAVTL of evidence based upon practice in our member colleges. We have continued to be central to discussions with CAVTL and the Education and Training Foundation about future activity to support the leadership of outstanding vocational education and training.

Among the CAVTL recommendations was the notion of *Teach Too*, a programme designed to recruit people from industry with relevant and outstanding expertise to enhance the quality of vocational teaching and learning. The 157 Group partnered with the think tank Centre Forum, and in July 2013 released *Train Too*, a detailed report outlining how a programme of industry secondments might work. This is among the options being considered for future work on teacher professionalism.

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The 157 Group was immensely helpful in the research work that led up to the publication of our *Train Too* report. Members of staff gave generously of their time to help us understand key issues in FE, which are often complex, and to engage in the debate that the report provoked. It is good to see an organisation so engaged in the policy world.

James Kempton, Associate Director: Education and Social Policy, Centre Forum

We were honoured to be invited by Professor Frank Coffield to test some of the concepts in his latest book, *Beyond Bulimic Learning*. A group of leading practitioners from member colleges worked with Professor Coffield for a whole day in October 2013 to consider the propositions in his groundbreaking new work. The 157 Group aims to provide a 'laboratory' environment for new policy and academic thinking in the area of vocational education, and the participation of our experts enabled the content of this new work to be refined in the light of practical implications.

Policy influence

We were at the heart of consultation over many aspects of the government's 16–19 reforms, taking part in specific consultation events around the reform to vocational qualifications and the introduction of traineeships. Our executive director, Lynne Sedgmore, and Sarah Robinson, principal of Stoke-on-Trent College, sat on the full Ministerial Working Group on 16–19 reform, and Ms Sedgmore was asked to chair an influential subgroup looking at the future status of large programmes for level 3 learners, the outcomes of which will be reflected in future policy decisions.

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The focus of the 157 Group is very clear and, as a group of directors, we work hard to ensure that our voice can be heard by the right kind of people. At the heart of all our work are the best interests of learners and employers, and a desire to work for the whole sector, and not just our own members. I know from my meetings with ministers and others that this is appreciated. Sarah Robinson OBE, Principal, Stoke-on-Trent College



Following direct contact with the skills minister, Matthew Hancock MP, at our October 2012 principals' planning event, we were asked to submit examples of how our member colleges were responding in an innovative way to new developments. We presented case studies on the English and maths challenge; the implementation of study programmes; and approaches to work experience. Many of the featured elements of practice from 157 Group member colleges have subsequently formed part of government guidance and best practice information.

We flagged concerns over the availability of traineeships across a wide geographic area after it was announced that only 16 to 18-year-olds would be able to access them and that only providers with 'good' or 'outstanding' Ofsted grades would be allowed to deliver them in 2013–14. The policy was soon extended to include 18 to 24-year-olds, and we are now in detailed discussion about broader success measures that could be used to ensure that traineeships are available to all who need them.

As well as working with the government to influence policy, we were invited to be a part of the Skills Task Force, chaired by Professor Chris Husbands, informing the development of Labour party policy in regard to skills for the 2015 general election. Our input to the initial consultation and meetings, and subsequent comment on drafts of the policy documents, were welcomed, and shadow ministers requested specific briefings from us on the nature of the academic-vocational divide. The final reports, published in autumn 2013, will reflect much of the influence of our members.

As part of our engagement with the Labour party, we coordinated a workshop with AoC, the Gazelle Colleges Group and the Principals' Professional Council at which sector leaders, including principals from our member colleges and others, engaged directly with Tristram Hunt MP, shadow education secretary (left), and Gordon Marsden MP, former shadow skills minister. Those present voiced their vision for the future of the sector under a possible Labour government.



Practice improvement

In January 2013, our Teaching and Learning Network met for the first time. Lead professionals with responsibility for quality improvement in teaching and learning came together and immediately discovered a shared passion for the work they were doing to raise standards. The network has quickly established itself as an unparalleled peer support mechanism, with new approaches to areas as diverse as lesson observation and curriculum planning being adopted by colleagues in other colleges.



The 157 Group Network meetings are among the few times that I actually get to step back from my day-to-day work and think about what I am doing. Hearing about the practice of others stimulates my own development, and I have put some great ideas into practice 'back at base'. As a peer support mechanism, it does not get better.

Sheila Thorpe, Chichester College, Chair of the Teaching and Learning Network



We have been pleased to support once again the work of the 157 Group this year. It is an important organisation whose members are at the forefront of practice in further education. 157 Group principals are a great sounding board for OCR's own thinking and we are happy to be embarking upon more partnership work in the coming years.

Mark Dawe, Chief Executive, OCR

Three 157 Group colleges acted as design partners and pilot sites for SKEIN in FE – an evaluative tool judging the effectiveness of approaches to managing staff professional development, established by the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE). Thanks to funding from LSIS, the project was able to demonstrate that the SKEIN approach, already successful in over 20 pilot schools, could be adapted to FE colleges, and the colleges involved gained much useful insight into how their approaches to CPD could be improved. One college took the findings and immediately recruited a new member of staff specifically to implement them.

The 157 Group and CUREE are now examining ways in which this approach could be rolled out more broadly across the sector, with many principals keen to have the 'SKEIN experience' themselves.



The 157 Group has demonstrated its commitment to evidence-based practice and academic rigour by working collaboratively with CUREE on a number of projects this year. Our work to test the viability of the SKEIN CPD assessment model in FE colleges has been especially successful, and we now have a workable model to help leaders evaluate and improve the college's capacity as a professional learning environment.

Philippa Cordingley, Chief Executive, Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE)

After making a strong contribution in 2012 to strategic dialogue on the challenges facing the sector, the 157 Group was asked by LSIS to lead an innovative action research project on the skills of curriculum redesign. Member colleges submitted a project proposal for looking at one aspect of their curriculum, and subject matter ranged from the design of a new teaching and learning strategy, through the creation of specific curricula for particular sectors to a complete overhaul of one college's level 1 curriculum to include more entrepreneurial activity. The project leaders undertook the work in a rigorous academic environment, with scrutiny of their methodology from CUREE and the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) working jointly. The outcomes of the project included a report, *Curriculum redesign in further education colleges*, which received significant media coverage, and a complete toolkit, published on our website and the Excellence Gateway, with practical information for colleagues in other colleges to use.

As a result of our discussions with the skills minister, the 157 Group was asked to be a part of a DfE-funded project producing case studies and materials to support the introduction of study programmes for 16 to 19-year-olds. Using information provided by our member colleges, we developed a series of case studies focusing on the different aspects of study programme provision, as well as two videos, which are available on the 157 Group website.

Impact on learners

The most important way in which the impact of the 157 Group is felt is by some of the 670,000 or so learners who study at our member colleges each year, and another million learners studying in other parts of the further education sector.

Our work to influence policy has resulted in significant concessions being made that directly benefit learners. For example, our briefings on the implementation of the advanced learning loans policy contributed to the decision to write off loans for those who complete access courses and then progress to university. We have argued strongly for ages 14 to 24 to be seen as one all-encompassing phase of education, and this has influenced the availability of programmes such as traineeships, which, after initially being only available to 16 to 19-year-olds, were quickly rolled out to those aged 19 to 24 as well. Our opinion and viewpoint ensured that more learners were able to access high-quality learning opportunities in 2012–13.

The fact that our colleges work together and have opportunities to hear about one another's ideas and practice means that learner experiences can be improved in different places. In 2012–13, our 12 networks enabled staff to collaborate on, for example, the development of professional tutors in colleges; the use of mobile devices in classes; and teaching and learning for international students. Colleges across the group learned from the practice of the best in each area, with the effect that learners' experiences in their own colleges improved.

Our project work, involving many member colleges, is most often designed with a specific benefit to learners in mind. In 2012–13, for example, our curriculum redesign project led to one college piloting a new approach to its level 1 curriculum; another reworking its curriculum to encourage enterprise and entrepreneurship; and a third developing key staff members to ensure that the college could better respond to the needs of learners. As well as improving things for the learners in these individual colleges, the project resulted in the creation of a series of resources and tools that have been published on our website for others to use.

Learners have even been able to get involved with the work of the 157 Group for themselves:

- Following last year's successful pilot, more colleges have developed the role of eAmbassadors, and more learners are now engaged in developing staff skills by helping teaching staff to seek ways of using technology in class.
- When the All Party Parliamentary Skills Group wanted to hold a series of seminars on learners' skills needs, we suggested that learners themselves should be asked to be a part of the work and, as a result, several learners from our London member colleges not only went to the House of Commons but actually addressed a parliamentary meeting too.

- At our annual reception in December 2012, learners stole the show. Charlie Avent's speech, in particular, elicited a spontaneous round of applause, the loudest and most enthusiastic of the evening. We continue to offer learner perspectives in our publications to inform policymakers.



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I didn't have learning difficulties – I had teaching difficulties!

Charlie Avent, learner at Ruskin Mill College

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Attending the parliamentary event was an amazing experience for me and an opportunity of a lifetime. I want to be a public speaker and make a difference to people's lives by one day running my own company which empowers local community leaders. This experience has given me a platform and has really affirmed and given me the confidence to pursue this.

Natasha Okonye, learner at City and Islington College

We are proud that our college learner voice networks feed directly into our policy work. For example, when learners at one of our colleges spoke about the benefits of having teachers still working in industry, we were able to feed their views in directly to an influential Centre Forum report on industry secondments.

In October, we supported the UK's first ever Online Careers Fair, a radical move away from traditional classroom-based careers guidance. More than 6,500 learners attended the fair, where they were able to access information and advice direct from employers and careers professionals, 24 hours a day over a 14-day period.

Our partnerships

Further education is a broad sector, and the 157 Group believes that our work can best be achieved by forming strategic partnerships with those who share our values and approach. We continue to form such relationships, acting not just in the interests of our own members but for the benefit of the sector as a whole.

This year we have been forging very strong links with the third and adult sectors in particular. Extension projects to the shared services work described in last year's impact review were agreed with HOLEX, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (Niace) and the Third Sector National Learning Alliance (TSNLA). They covered three strands and we had extremely positive feedback from adult and third sector bodies, which acknowledged that our funding of this work enabled them to improve their practice significantly.

We are very proud of the partnership we have built with the leading data analysis firm Economic Modelling Specialists International (EMSI), which is enabling our member colleges to demonstrate the impact that they have on local economic prosperity and growth in a way that has not been done before. And, significantly, many organisations that directly influence policy – such as Ofsted and government departments – are choosing to work with the 157 Group not as commissioners but as partners. We believe this marks the respect with which our work is viewed in influential circles.

Among the groups with which we have worked this year, the following is just a selection.

Links in further education and skills

- Association of Colleges (AoC)
- Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)
- Association of National Specialist Colleges (Natspec)
- Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL)
- Education and Training Foundation
- Further Education Reputation Strategy Group (FERSG)
- Gazelle Colleges Group
- HOLEX
- Institute for Learning (IfL)
- Landex
- Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)
- Mixed Economy Group of colleges (MEG)
- National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (Niace)
- National Improvement Partnership Board (NIPB)
- Third Sector National Learning Alliance (TSNLA).

Academic links

- Institute of Education
- The Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester
- Warwick University.

Policy links

- Centre for Social Justice
- Centre Forum
- Chambers of Commerce
- Confederation of British Industry (CBI)
- Department for Education (DfE)
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
- Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)
- Department for Communities and Local Government
- Education Funding Agency (EFA)
- Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)
- The Higher Education Alliance
- Higher Education Funding Council for England (Hefce)
- Ofsted
- Policy Connect
- Policy Exchange
- The Skills Commission
- Skills Funding Agency (SFA)
- TVET UK
- UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES)
- UK Trade & Investment (UKTI)
- Universities UK
- University Alliance.

Project partners

- Award Scheme Developing and Accreditation Network (Asdan)
- Banks Cannell
- Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE)
- City & Guilds
- The Pacific Institute®
- Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA)
- Timebank.

Corporate sponsors

- DWF
- EAL
- Economic Modelling Specialists International (EMSI)
- OCR
- Pearson
- Wickland Westcott
- WPM Education.

Employer engagement and strategic leadership

157 Group colleges play a significant role as strategic leaders in their local economic areas. As the policy debate has focused more this year on how colleges and employers can interact more successfully to enhance the UK's skills base and tackle issues such as youth unemployment, so our work has sought to provide a leading voice in this area.

Thought leadership

Our member colleges have led the way in establishing mechanisms for demonstrating the economic impact of further education colleges. Through an exciting partnership with EMSI, we have developed and trialed a method by which key economic indicators can be evidenced and reported. Initial out-turns suggest that every college contributes an average return of over £550m to their local economy. This powerful model will, we believe, prove valuable across the sector.

We have developed powerful links with the Gazelle Colleges Group and through them with Babson College in Massachusetts. At the AoC conference in November 2012, we jointly launched the first ever programme for college leaders to focus on entrepreneurial leadership, in terms of outcomes for learners and the way in which individual colleges are run as role models of excellent enterprising practice. We supported the first phase of developing the programme, the first cohort of which successfully completed in June 2013.

We undertook, in partnership with Gazelle Colleges Group and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), an extensive research project, covering the views and practice not only of colleges but also of leading employers and policymakers. This groundbreaking work will shortly result in a publication that offers a model for how colleges and business communities can go beyond transactional relationships to develop more strategic partnerships.



The 157 Group has been at the forefront of reform and development of the sector for more than a decade. The support from the 157 Group for the development of an entrepreneurial leadership programme and the shared commitment to a redefinition of employer-college partnerships underline the fact that both organisations, while distinctive in focus, will continue to work collaboratively to secure advantage for the sector and for their members.

Fintan Donohue, Executive Chairman,
Gazelle Colleges Group

Policy influence

The 157 Group is represented at the highest level on strategic working groups with regard to the implementation of new policies such as traineeships. We were part of the Richard review stakeholder group and continue to influence BIS as part of the high-level group reflecting on *New Challenges, New Chances*.

Our views were sought prior to the publication of the government's flagship skills strategy, *Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills*, and comments from Lynne Sedgmore, our executive director, were included in the official press release accompanying its publication.

We have established good partnerships with the national and local networks of local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) this year, with Dr Ann Limb, chair of the South East Midlands LEP, addressing our annual forum and enabling principals to hear first-hand how they might best work with the emerging and developing network of LEPs.

We have been a key player in the Joint Ministerial Forum on Youth Unemployment and were consulted on the content of the National Framework for the Unemployed that was launched as part of the skills strategy. Paula Whittle, principal of **Ealing, Hammersmith & West London College**, was asked to co-lead a sector-wide dialogue on future propositions for unemployed people, which will conclude with a report to the government.

Practice improvement

We are pleased to be launching, alongside this impact review, a collection of case studies featuring the views of employers about what makes for a good college-employer relationship. *Employer voices* includes contributions from our member colleges, models of good practice that will be of interest to many in the sector.

Our Business Development Network has been especially busy this year in sharing approaches to employer engagement, apprenticeship and traineeship delivery and supply chain management. Members of the network have established links on a local and national level, enabling effective exchange of practice and peer development.

The reputation and future of FE

There has been much discussion this year about the core purpose of further education colleges and how we fit into new worlds with new types of school; changing technology; increased employer involvement; new policy initiatives; and new approaches to learning, leadership and business management. We believe the core proposition – of colleges as institutions that enable large-scale access to high-quality vocational education – is sustainable, and we are keen in our work to help leaders in and beyond the sector to form their own place in the emerging landscape.

We also see it as a key role for the 157 Group to influence debate by maintaining a visible presence at high-profile events, in the media and, increasingly, in social networking forums.

Thought leadership

The 157 Group expanded its membership this year to include colleges outside England: Belfast Metropolitan College, Coleg Cambria and North East Scotland College. We are regularly approached by colleges wanting to join us as they have been interested in the work we have done, for example, on vocational teaching and learning, and have seen the way in which we have included colleges beyond our own membership in many of our projects and initiatives, for the benefit of the whole college sector. The devolved governments have taken somewhat different approaches to policy and further education in the recent past. We believe that further education is not homogeneous, and we have always been open to learning from other ways of doing things, so we think we can learn from the experiences of our colleagues in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.

As these nations take a different approach, for example, to the formation of larger colleges through mergers, we want to understand the impact of different approaches to policy. And in the crucial area of promoting outstanding vocational teaching and learning, we believe that our new members will bring different perspectives that will enrich our thinking yet further.

As part of our work on bringing shared services to colleges, in 2012 we embarked on a detailed research project using a Delphi-style approach. This brought together practitioners and potential future leaders and encouraged them to envision scenarios for the FE world in 2020. Armed with a set of variables in areas such as the use of technology and the recovery of the economy, participants sketched out a positive model of the likely outcome, as well as a less positive one. The pictures they painted were fascinating.

We were especially pleased that, having trialled the approach with future college leaders, we were also approached to work in the same way with independent training providers, through AELP, and with adult and voluntary sector providers, through HOLEX and TSNLA. The resulting report, *Further education in 2020*, presents a genuine picture from across the sector of what the future might look like. It provides all of us with much food for thought in terms of future policy direction and the positioning of individual institutions.



AELP members have really valued the opportunities presented by the 157 Group to become involved in joint projects and activities over the past year. It is clear that the 157 Group is, in everything it does, mindful of the diversity of the sector and keen to work with partners, such as AELP, who share the same goals.

Stewart Segal, Chief Executive, Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)

The report has been called by one senior political aide “the most innovative and exciting piece of research to come out of the sector in years”, and it has been regularly cited by think tanks and improvement bodies.

The shared services and collaboration projects managed by the 157 Group and detailed in last year’s impact review came to a successful conclusion in 2012–13, with over £2.1m savings generated in one year, and projected savings of £6.3m in a three-year period. The legacy of the projects will be felt in the more than 40 colleges that were involved, but we were also keen to provide a legacy for leaders in the sector seeking to reflect on the efficacy of sharing services. We therefore commissioned Warwick University to undertake a detailed analysis of the projects and their perceived impact, and this analysis was published in September. It examines whether the development of shared services is associated with a broader capability for innovation, for example, whether these projects have helped to change attitudes, intentions or work roles so that future innovation will be facilitated. The evaluation investigates which strategies for innovation work in which contexts and explores how successful innovation can be supported.

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HOLEX and our members have benefited greatly from our positive and supportive links with the 157 Group over the past year, especially in the area of action research on shared services and collaboration. The views and perspectives of adult learning providers have been fully integrated into a significant piece of thought leadership for the sector; recent work by the 157 Group in partnership with IfL has helped stimulate our own activity on improving teaching and learning among HOLEX members; and the 157 Group has made formative input into work we are undertaking for the new Education and Training Foundation, focused on targeted support for the implementation of community learning reforms. We have shared values, a shared focus on responding to need, a shared commitment to high-quality provision, and a shared belief that we can – and do – learn from each other.

Bob Powell, Chief Executive, HOLEX

The final report of the **Highbury College**-managed shared services and collaboration project focusing on innovative and collaborative use of technology in teaching and learning was shared with members and the wider sector in September. The project successfully tested a number of new technologies and, more significantly, opened the doors to possible increased collaboration across teaching and learning between our own colleges.

We have a growing reputation for offering a thoughtful yet challenging commentary on key issues affecting vocational education and training. The 157 Group has been referenced in academic work in the area of vocational education, from the City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development report *How to teach vocational education*, through papers from SKOPE at the University of Oxford to the *Education Journal*. The *Further education in 2020* report in particular was mentioned in several key sector publications, including the LSIS report, *Leadership in the Further Education Sector*.

National media coverage has included an article in the *Financial Times* giving our views on the enrolment of 14-year-olds in FE colleges and features in the *Times Educational Supplement* on international education and on skills development. We contributed research to BBC Radio productions on raising the participation age and enrolling 14-year-olds in FE colleges.

As well as regular coverage in *FE Week*, we are routinely invited to provide ‘expert pieces’ on important issues, which this year have included:

- The Budget and the spending review
- The Lingfield report
- The nature of vocational qualifications
- LEPs and employer-centred funding
- Ofsted
- Leadership in colleges
- Curriculum design skills
- Traineeships
- Our Delphi work on *Further education in 2020*.

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The Delphi process showed two things: the 157 Group was willing to help the whole further education and skills sector succeed; and its up-and-coming leaders were willing to confront the toughest challenges that policy and circumstances can offer. *Further education in 2020* gives a clear, insider’s view of those challenges, and sets out the options for overcoming them.

David Sherlock CBE, Director, Beyond Standards

We have supported and offered contributions to innovative and high-profile national events, including the IOE’s London Festival of Education, and the Education Innovation conference. Our work on leadership, in particular, has led to high-profile appearances at, among other things, the Yale University conference on management wisdom, in July 2013.

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The AoC and the 157 Group continue to work together in a collaborative and complementary way. It has been good to see 157 Group colleagues provoking debate about some of the key issues facing the sector, and we look forward to an increasingly positive way of working in the future.

Martin Doel OBE, Chief Executive, Association of Colleges (AoC)



Policy influence

We developed and published this year *Our manifesto for further education and skills*, which was driven by member principals. Grounded in policy development and with expert input from senior figures in the sector, the document sets out our key proposition for policymakers, outlines the value that the 157 Group can bring to policy formulation, and calls on the government to provide stability in policy and funding. The manifesto was published as a follow-up to the party conferences in autumn 2013 and we now intend to build on its key messages in discussion with politicians and others over the coming year, as a powerful way of demonstrating the impact of further education.

We have meaningful strategic links with the Education and Training Foundation, and have established a clear role for the 157 Group in the work of that organisation around teaching and learning. We fully support the various bodies in FE coming together to provide a unified approach to quality improvement. In addition, we remain close to the government advisory boards on chartered status and the work of the FE Commissioner.

We remain committed to the work of Baroness Sharp and the committee pursuing the recommendations of *A Dynamic Nucleus: The Final Report of the Independent Commission on Colleges in their Communities*.

In February this year, we provided a narrative of the role that colleges are playing as strategic leaders across their communities, and we were also able to submit case studies of innovative strategic leadership practice to parliamentary enquiries. We continue to be called on by parliamentarians of all parties for expert comment on a broad range of FE-related subjects.

We have engaged fully with a number of reviews and enquiries relating to higher education this year, and developed a strong working partnership with Universities UK, with whom we worked on the Thomas review of part-time HE, and University Alliance, whose work on the development of a new funding model for HE we are supporting. Our colleges continue to offer innovative and necessary HE provision to their local communities, and these relationships will enable the role of FE in HE to be at the forefront of future policymaking decisions.

The work of the 157 Group has been cited in a number of parliamentary submissions this year, on issues as diverse as Ofsted and careers guidance. Senior figures have described 157 Group publications as “among the most thought-provoking and intelligent”.

Our relationship during 2012–13 with influential policy think tanks has matured. Policy Exchange was keen to engage with us and seek our input to its report on vocational education: *Technical Matters*. We were key partners and supporters of Centre Forum’s investigations into industry secondments detailed in its report *Train Too*. The Centre for Social Justice sought input from the 157 Group when preparing for what promises to be a major piece of research, *Breakthrough Britain 2*, examining educational success and failure. And we have worked closely with Policy Connect during this year, enabling learners to take part in parliamentary seminars and actively supporting the work of the Associate Parliamentary Skills Group.

Practice improvement

Our members have worked this year to support their own responses to policy developments. When the second wave of City Deals was announced, those who had been involved in the first wave formed a peer support group for those embarking on the second round. When traineeships were announced, members held a practice-sharing discussion to establish how each college was responding.

A key development this year has been the production with members of a wide set of key performance indicators against which all member colleges rate themselves. This enables us to form a picture of the impact of the 157 Group as a whole, and also lets individual colleges turn to others whose performance in a given area might be better than their own. The Curriculum Network, for example, held a workshop on raising success rates, led by the most successful colleges in the group. We intend to refine this assessment process further in the coming year.

Our International Network has been busy this year examining the possibilities for joint ventures overseas and in support of the government’s international education strategy. Within the next year, we are confident that the international brand of the 157 Group, the British Colleges Consortium, will be recognisably established as a provider of trust in new and emerging markets around the world.

Our extension projects with the third and adult sectors focused on three strands: first, barriers to collaboration and how to address them; second, a summary of established models of collaborative working among London-based specialist designated institutions (SDIs); and third, exploring the pros and cons of third-sector consortia. These projects enabled participants to discuss and share experiences of issues as wide-ranging as the nature of their independence and their funding, and resulted in a consensus on better ways of future working for all.



As a member of the ACL Steering Group and project manager of our Shared Services Research and Development, I found working with the 157 Group interesting and rewarding. It was great to have your enthusiasm and strategic grasp on our Steering Group, because of your understanding of the distinctiveness of the adult and community learning sector, as it operates outside the mainstream of FE sector colleges.

Miranda Seymour-Smith, Director, Old Hall Associates



The 157 Group shared services workshops brought together cross sections of thinking in the sector – putting together the likes of finance directors, heads of IT, heads of e-learning, MIS analysts, curriculum specialists and vice-principals into groups to think about the future with stimulating scenario exercises with Delphi methodology. The cross section of roles and the context provided by the 157 Group in these groups provided a unique opportunity for very stimulating and thought-provoking work – the sector needs to do this more often – it was a real pleasure.

Martin King, member of the 157 Group Technology and Innovation Network, Ealing, Hammersmith & West London College

Our members

The 157 Group's membership comprises 30 of the UK's largest further education colleges, providing strategic leadership in their localities and collectively offering a UK-wide view of educational practice and policy development to ensure an effective skills system.

We were pleased to welcome the following new members to the 157 Group during 2012–13:

- **Trafford College**, led by Sir Bill Moorcroft
- **Leicester College**, led by Verity Hancock
- **Walsall College**, led by Jatinder Sharma
- **Belfast Metropolitan College**, led by Marie-Thérèse McGivern
- **Coleg Cambria**, led by David Jones
- **North East Scotland College** (formerly Aberdeen College), led by Rob Wallen.

The three new member colleges outside England will provide a valuable perspective on FE from the UK's devolved nations.

One of the key elements contributing to the reputation of the 157 Group in vocational teaching and learning is the nature of the trusting and professional relationships that our principals share. They debate key issues in an open way, but are also not afraid to share problems and find collective solutions. Our group of principals is regularly refreshed with new arrivals, and this year we have welcomed:

- **John Thornhill**, chief executive of The Manchester College
- **Jack Carney**, principal of The Manchester College
- **Gary Warke MBE**, chief executive of Hull College Group
- **Bev Robinson**, principal of Blackpool and The Fylde College
- **Anne Isherwood**, principal of Sunderland College
- **Jane O'Neill**, acting principal of the College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London
- **Dawn Whitemore**, interim principal and chief executive of New College Nottingham.

Our members are:

- Barnet and Southgate College
- Bedford College
- Belfast Metropolitan College
- Birmingham Metropolitan College
- Blackpool and The Fylde College
- Chichester College
- City and Islington College
- Coleg Cambria
- College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London
- Cornwall College
- Derby College
- Ealing, Hammersmith & West London College
- Highbury College Portsmouth
- Hull College
- Leeds City College
- Leicester College
- LeSoCo
- New College Nottingham
- Newham College
- North East Scotland College
- St Helens College
- Stoke-on-Trent College
- Sunderland College
- Sussex Downs College
- The Manchester College
- The Sheffield College
- Trafford College
- Walsall College
- Warwickshire College
- West Nottinghamshire College.

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