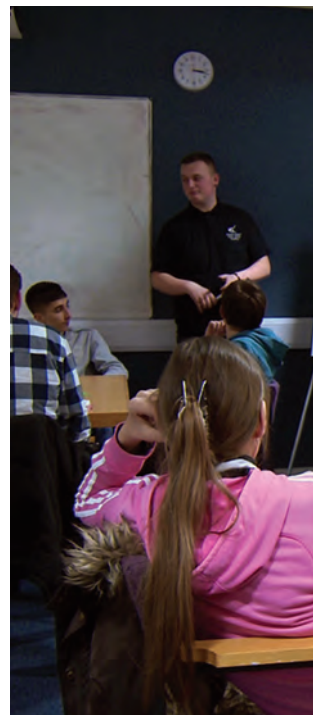
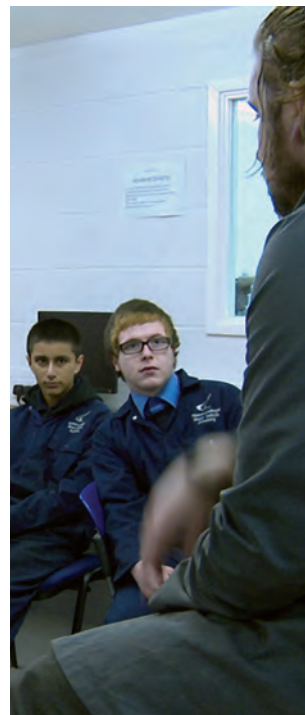


## A 157 Group project report



Curriculum redesign in further education colleges:  
exploring current challenges and opportunities

Funded by



## Acknowledgements

The 157 Group and Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) would like to thank the seven colleges that participated in the project; CUREE (the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education); and the RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) for their involvement and support. We would also like to thank the participants at the March 2013 seminar for their feedback on project findings and their contributions to the discussion on curriculum change within the further education sector.

## Author

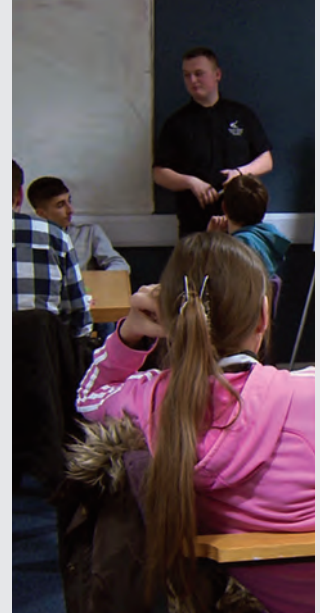
Kate Green.

## Publisher

© 157 Group, April 2013.

Published by the 157 Group. Publication reference 157G-110.

All rights reserved.



# Contents

The 157 Group	5
Curriculum redesign in further education colleges: exploring current challenges and opportunities	7
1. Background	7
2. Methodology	8
3. Areas of focus of college projects	9
4. Lessons learned	10
5. Challenges to implementing curriculum change	13
6. Next steps	14
7. Conclusions	15
Annex 1: Executive summary from the final report of Derby College	16
Annex 2: Executive summary from the final report of Hull College	17
Annex 3: Executive summary from the final report of Liverpool Community College	18
Annex 4: Executive summary from the final report of New College Nottingham	19
Annex 5: Executive summary from the final report of Sunderland College	20
Annex 6: Executive summary from the final report of Sussex Downs College	21
Annex 7: Executive summary from the final report of York College	22



## Introduction

In April 2011, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service invited the membership bodies from each part of the learning and skills sector to engage in a strategic dialogue to discuss the issues that they were facing. Colleges involved in this discussion highlighted the challenges associated with amending and re-aligning their curriculum offer to be more responsive in order to meet their business objectives, including the cultural and structural issues involved in achieving the necessary changes.

As a result, LSIS commissioned the 157 Group to work with a small number of colleges to establish action research projects to explore the following areas:

- Aligning curriculum to business objectives and organisational vision
- Wholesale curriculum redesign
- Building organisational capacity to be responsive – focusing on skills, culture and structures.

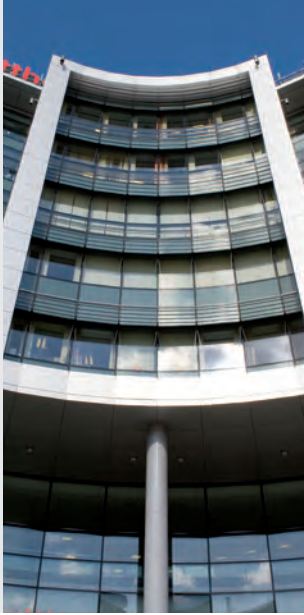
We believe that through their action research, the colleges have identified solutions to some of the key issues faced by the sector as it shifts from offering a largely supply-led to a more demand-led curriculum.

LSIS would like to thank the 157 Group and the colleges involved for their commitment to this project. We hope you will find inspiration from their work as you tackle the challenges you face in your own setting.

**Gillian Reynolds**

**Head of Improvement Services: Leadership and Curriculum Design  
Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)**





## The 157 Group

The 157 Group is a membership organisation that represents 27 large, regionally influential further education colleges in England, most of which are highly successful. All our members are key strategic leaders in their locality, who take seriously the role of leading policy development, and improving the quality and reputation of further education.

Providing a national voice on strategy and policy for large, mostly urban colleges in England, we aim to promote change for the benefit of our members and the sector as a whole. Our members' knowledge, capability, experience and commitment brings a unique breadth and depth of expertise to bear on every aspect of further education and skills. We also work together as a peer support network, and are committed to equality and diversity.

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

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

## Our approach

- We strive to be thoughtful, flexible and responsive; acting quickly and decisively for the benefit of our members and the sector.
- We promote the FE and skills sector as a whole. Committed to excellence and instrumental in resolving sector debates and issues, we adopt a pragmatic approach to delivering positive solutions and achieving success.
- We are bound by a strong and unanimous commitment to using our collective knowledge, capability and experience to lead policy development, improve performance and champion the reputation not only of members but also the sector as a whole.
- We seek to be critical friends and advisers to the government and shadow government, local communities and the sector itself to achieve positive outcomes for communities, employers, businesses and individuals.
- We work with fellow 157 Group members, sharing expertise, ideas and resources.

## Policy role

Our member colleges operate within a complex and volatile policy environment, and our objective as thought leaders is to exert powerful influence on critical policy priorities. Our policy and discussion papers draw on and reflect the practical experience of 157 Group member colleges. The themes, developed over a series of debates, represent the areas of greatest concern for them as leaders of some of the largest and most successful colleges. The following policy and discussion papers are available to download from our website:

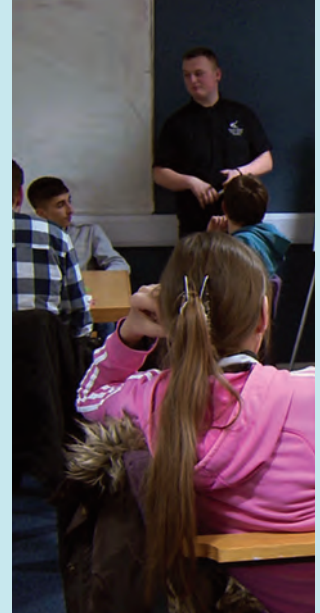
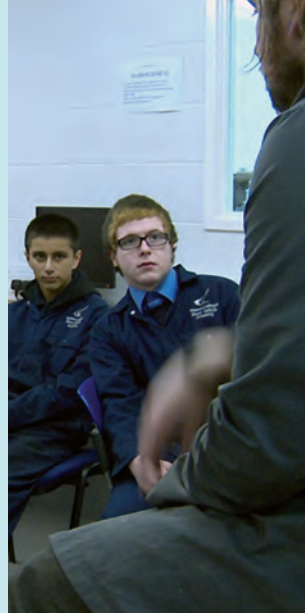
- *Protect services to students, by targeting cuts and embracing efficiency*
- *Real choices for 14 to 19-year-olds*
- *Preparing colleges for the future*
- *Learning and skills needs local leadership*
- *Strong colleges build strong communities*
- *Making the QCF work for learners*
- *Colleges' international contribution*
- *Rising to the challenge: how FE colleges are key to the future of HE*
- *Learning accounts that count*
- *Doing more for less*
- *Leading learning in further education*
- *The role of local enterprise partnerships in tackling skills needs*
- *Adult further education – the unfinished revolution*
- *Expanding apprenticeships – colleges are key to employability*
- *Information is not enough: the case for professional careers guidance*
- *Tackling unemployment: the college contribution*
- *Effective transitions from school to work: the key role of FE colleges*
- *Great teaching and learning*
- *The challenges of Stem provision for further education colleges*
- *Shaping the future: opportunities for HE provision in FE colleges.*

Through these papers we seek to:

- contribute a new, strong and relevant perspective, influencing national policy through offering workable and practical policy ideas
- focus our recommendations on changes that can bring improvements for learners, stakeholders, colleges and the whole sector
- raise the level of debate and discussion across the sector
- recommend improvements that can be made by colleges themselves and the sector
- raise awareness amongst sector agencies of their own roles.

## Our members

- Barnet and Southgate College
- Bedford College
- Birmingham Metropolitan College
- Blackpool and The Fylde College
- Chichester College
- City and Islington College
- 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 (formerly 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
- Trafford College
- West Nottinghamshire College
- Warwickshire College
- York College.



# Curriculum redesign in further education colleges: exploring current challenges and opportunities

## 1. Background

The further education and skills sector is no stranger to change, having adapted responsively to numerous policy and funding changes over many years. However, the current volume and rate of change is unprecedented and is, unsurprisingly, presenting a number of challenges to sector leaders and practitioners.

Changes are multiple and complex, including for example: reductions in government funding and changes in funding methodology; the introduction of FE loans for learners over 24 studying at level 3 and above; an increasingly populated 14–19 landscape, including free schools, studio schools, academies and university technical colleges (UTCs), together with a strong push for improved public information to facilitate effective decision-making by learners, parents and employers; and the devolution to new local and regional structures, such as City Deals and local enterprise partnerships (LEPs), for skills planning that responds to the current and expected future demands of employers and the local and regional economies.

Among all this change, the sector has welcomed the introduction of greater freedoms and flexibilities as part of the coalition government's *New challenges, new chances*,<sup>1</sup> simplifying funding and giving colleges greater flexibility to be responsive to the priorities of learners, employers and communities.

As colleges engage with demonstrating greater accountability to their communities, many are reviewing their curriculum offer as well as their capacity to facilitate curriculum development and redesign in order to ensure responsiveness. However, in an environment where funding and quality assurance mechanisms have been driven by qualifications and a focus on success rates, and where funding pressures have limited the appetite for experimentation and risk, this capacity for curriculum change is in need of development.<sup>2</sup>

1 The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), 2011. *New challenges, new chances: next steps in implementing the further education reform programme*.

2 This is also echoed by a recent report – Ofsted 2013, *Local accountability and autonomy in colleges* – which reviewed how well colleges are responding to the new freedoms and flexibilities in determining their priorities and developing their curriculum to respond to local community needs.

College capacity for curriculum change may be constrained by a range of factors:

- A lack of appropriate staff skills and attitudes, as staff have over the years become accustomed to delivering a prescribed, supply-led curriculum
- A lack of appropriate college infrastructure to enable colleges to be able to respond swiftly and rapidly to new demands; colleges are large organisations, often with bureaucratic processes for decision-making, meaning quick responses can be a real challenge
- Inadequate quality, and intelligent interpretation, of market information
- Inflexible staff contracts and structures, with drives to maximise staff utilisation leaving little scope for involvement in new opportunities.

This report describes the findings of a 157 Group project, supported by LSIS, which aimed to better understand college approaches to implementing curriculum redesign, in order to help build capacity for curriculum redesign in the FE college sector.

It is worth pointing out that at the first project meeting the group developed a shared understanding that curriculum is much wider than simply the content of what is delivered and how this is delivered, but also includes the individuals who undertake the delivery and their skills and capabilities. In its broadest sense, **curriculum relates to anything that affects the 'planned learning experience'**.

## 2. Methodology

Seven colleges<sup>3</sup> participated in this project, which ran from July 2012 until the end of March 2013. The project was managed by the 157 Group and colleges were supported through regular communication, the cross-sharing of college reports, one-to-one visits and group project meetings.

Each college developed an initial project brief for an action research project and was supported by the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE) to review and reflect on their research methodologies and approaches to collecting and assessing evidence. A wide variety of methodologies was used across the colleges, combining qualitative and quantitative evidence to assess the success of the individual projects. These included, for example, learner, staff and employer surveys; semi-structured interviews with staff; reflective diaries; lesson observations; monitoring learner enrolments and achievement; analysis of video recordings of training delivery; and focus groups with employers.

In addition, CUREE supported the colleges by signposting relevant research in the areas of their project focus, providing ongoing research mentoring support and providing guidance on reporting the projects to the wider FE audience. A stakeholder consultation seminar was held in March 2013 to share the findings more widely and elicit feedback from a key group of sector stakeholders. This feedback has been incorporated throughout this final report.

3 Derby College, Hull College, Liverpool Community College, New College Nottingham, Sunderland College, Sussex Downs College and York College.



### 3. Areas of focus of college projects

The projects were developed and implemented by the individual colleges, but there was much commonality in terms of the key questions they attempted to address, which can be grouped as follows:

- What does an employer-responsive curriculum look like? How can employers be engaged in the curriculum development process? What structures are needed to enable a college to become more employer-led and responsive to employers skills needs?
- What does a learner-responsive curriculum look like? What sort of curriculum is needed, for example, to work with unemployed people or with entry level learners? What staff structures are required to support this delivery? What skills development do existing staff need to work in new ways? With which partners do colleges need to work?
- How does a college facilitate college-wide curriculum change, such as a new way of working with entry and level 1 learners or embedding enterprise across the curriculum?
- How can staff be encouraged to be more creative in their curriculum design and delivery? How do colleges build a culture in which staff feel enabled to experiment and to identify their own continuing professional development (CPD), to improve teaching and learning?

The executive summaries of each of the individual colleges' final reports are provided in the annexes, and the table below summarises the focus of each project.

Overview
The <b>Derby College</b> project aimed to improve the relevance of the content, delivery and teaching methods of the foundation and level 1 college curriculum through the use of enterprise projects.
The <b>Hull College</b> project aimed to develop an infrastructure to facilitate the delivery of new business activity to respond to employers' current and future skills requirements.
The <b>Liverpool Community College</b> project developed a teaching and learning strategy informed by staff and students, which was then used to stimulate dialogue within staff teams about curriculum development and staff CPD to meet the strategy objectives.
The <b>New College Nottingham</b> project aimed to improve the enterprise offer at the college and embed enterprise into the student curriculum.
The <b>Sunderland College</b> project aimed to develop a new engineering curriculum that is responsive to local employers' needs.
The <b>Sussex Downs College</b> project aimed to increase in-year responsiveness by developing a 'rapid response task group' made up of 'curriculum innovators' capable of developing and delivering curriculum at short notice.
Through the establishment of professional learning communities, the <b>York College</b> project aimed to promote discussion and debate about teaching and learning, to identify individual and team CPD requirements and to raise staff confidence to experiment with curriculum design and delivery.

## 4. Lessons learned

### 4.1 The varied nature of curriculum change

Each college was tasked with preparing a plan for an action research project focused on its key issues concerning curriculum redesign. Interestingly, a range of proposals (as described in the table on page 9) was submitted indicating a wide variety of curriculum redesign issues that needed addressing.

All were driven by the need to improve college responsiveness and staff capacity for innovation and experimentation, but the nature of the desired curriculum change varied across the group.

For one college, this involved the actual development of new curriculum content. For others, it involved consideration of how the curriculum is delivered, or reviewing the college structures required to facilitate responsiveness; and for others it centred on developing staff confidence and skills to be able to determine their own CPD and innovate with teaching, learning and curriculum development.

This wide range of projects illustrates that curriculum change can take many forms and, crucially, that many aspects of curriculum change are interrelated and interdependent and should be considered as a whole. For example, when reviewing the actual content of the curriculum offer, it is essential also to consider how that curriculum is delivered (i.e. what teaching methods will be used, when and where the curriculum is delivered, etc) and by whom (i.e. whether staff have the required pedagogic and vocational skills), to ensure that these aspects (as well as the specific curriculum content) meet the needs of learners.

### 4.2 Use of multiple strategies to ensure effective employer engagement

Sunderland College aimed to develop new curriculum content to respond to the specific requirements of employers in the engineering sector. The key element of its project was therefore effective employer engagement and the accurate identification of employers' current and expected future skills needs. The college originally aimed to collect feedback from employers via an email questionnaire, but due to limited responses it then targeted its energies at engaging with employers in other ways, such as focus groups and engagement with the sector skills council.

By engaging with a number of the large engineering firms, the college also found that it was able to reach the smaller engineering firms to which these large firms subcontracted. This multiple approach to needs identification enabled essential triangulation of data and also enabled the college to develop important relationships with employers, beyond simply collecting their views on training needs. This broader engagement has led to the creation of a new engineering strategy group with local industry leaders, which has proved critical to the effective identification of the college's new engineering curriculum.

The key lesson learned from this project was the importance of ensuring that employer engagement commences promptly and that implementation plans include several means of contacting and engaging employers, in order to secure effective partnerships with employers and their active involvement throughout the curriculum development process. The college also recognises that curriculum redesign is an ongoing process and its engineering strategy will be a live document, updated regularly in response to developments in technology and industry practice, and the needs and priorities of local employers, the sector skills council for the advanced manufacturing and engineering sectors (Semta) and the LEP.

### 4.3 Change needs to be driven by learners' needs

Derby College focused on its entry and level 1 curriculum with the objective of providing a more coherent and meaningful provision for young learners at these levels that would better support their progression to further learning and employment. The college piloted a new curriculum focused on an enterprise-based project approach to encourage the development of appropriate attitudes and behaviours among this cohort of learners, with groups working together across the college.

Staff involved in the pilot carefully developed the tailored enterprise activity, based on a thorough understanding of the characteristics and needs of their learner groups, and were open to reflecting on their own teaching styles as part of the exercise. Tailored targeting and staff engagement were critical to the success of this project and it is recognised that to roll out this approach across the college, other staff will need to be supported, through suitable training, to develop the required pedagogic skills.

### 4.4 College staff are the starting point for effective curriculum change

#### 4.4.1 Invest time in building staff capacity for curriculum innovation

The projects at Liverpool Community College and York College were focused on developing staff capacity and confidence, with the clear rationale that staff need to have the necessary confidence and skills to be able to be innovative and make changes to current curriculum provision. This capacity-building is recognised as an essential first step in the process of developing a responsive, innovative curriculum. Traditional and statutory approaches to staff CPD have led to a 'sheep-dipping' culture, which colleges recognise does not empower staff or build their skills as independent creators of curriculum.

Both colleges trialled new approaches to staff CPD, giving staff much greater responsibility for the identification of their own CPD requirements, and both reported positive outcomes in terms of the self-identification of teaching and learning-focused CPD and greater confidence among staff to discuss and debate teaching and learning practice and related curriculum design.

At York College, the investment of time and resource in the professional learning communities led to a significant change in the culture of college CPD, away from measuring and logging hours in favour of genuine individual and team development and ownership of CPD.

At Liverpool Community College, the pilot approach has led to the successful self-identification of staff CPD requirements and a number of curriculum changes are already under way as a result of these new processes, including the revision of level 2 ICT provision (to better prepare students for level 3) and the introduction of industry-leading techniques in the hairdressing curriculum.

#### 4.4.2 Importance of providing staff support

Many college projects highlighted that time and support for staff were critical ingredients for supporting the curriculum change process. Staff need time to take part in the change process as well as to reflect on this and take action; they also need support to implement change, in terms of possible training requirements as well as essential support from their line or senior managers.

This focus on staff support was highlighted by the Sussex Downs project, which aimed at enabling the college to respond to in-year demands for training from the business and project areas of the college, particularly requests from Jobcentre Plus to run short training programmes for unemployed people. A new 'rapid response team' was created, with identified and trained 'curriculum innovators' able to take time out of their regular college commitments to develop and deliver the required training programmes. To date, this approach has been successfully used to deliver one two-week training programme to Jobcentre Plus clients and three more programmes are planned for delivery throughout March and April. However, the college has recognised that innovative and creative staff, although welcoming the opportunity for a challenge, need effective support to be able to make the most of their skills and talents to support curriculum change.

The New College Nottingham project aimed to support the college's enterprise strategy and identify ways to embed enterprise into curriculum across the whole college. In order to address some staff reluctance to adopt this change, the college identified a number of 'enterprise intrapreneurs', one in each curriculum area, to act as change agents, supporting staff to embed enterprise in the curriculum.

The intrapreneurs have developed a staff training module, accessible via the college virtual learning environment (VLE), which helps staff to recognise where enterprise and employability teaching is already take place in their programmes and reassures them that enterprise is an approach to learning, not a discrete subject that requires a full redesign of their provision. In addition, the college hired an entrepreneur in residence, together with supporting enterprise interns, to improve the awareness of enterprise among learners and their engagement in enterprise activities and competitions.

Again, a key lesson from this project is the recognition of the importance of staff support and training as the critical starting point to facilitate curriculum change. In this example, staff need to understand the value of embedding enterprise and the clear benefits this offers their learners. They also need to recognise that the change required is about the approach taken to delivering learning, rather than the actual content of learning, and to be supported in developing the required skills to facilitate this new delivery approach.

#### 4.5 The value of team-working

Many projects benefited from initiating team-working to support the curriculum change process, of staff within departments as well as cross-college teams; making effective linkages with external partners and stakeholders; with new mechanisms for facilitating this being supported by, for example, introducing structured regular meetings, new team structures, procedures for reporting and communicating, and staff roles to coordinate activities and communication.

The Hull College project aimed to establish a structure to facilitate new and more responsive commercial activity at one of the college sites. This involved the restructure of the commercial department and the recruitment of some new commercial posts, but critically if focused on communication and linkages between the commercial team and staff in the curriculum areas.

Staff in the curriculum areas felt there was a conflict between achieving the dual objectives of high-quality provision and responsive provision, and were concerned that the drive for responsive provision would compromise the quality offered. The project focused on developing mutual understanding between these areas and on developing the necessary mechanisms to ensure that provision could be both responsive to employers and high quality. The value of team-working across the college was a key lesson from this project, with shared roles and responsibilities and mutual dependencies for achieving agreed outcomes critical to ensuring a sense of true collaborative working between staff.

#### 4.6 Importance of a clear rationale for change

Although the college projects were relatively short, they were able to build up a considerable momentum and all the colleges plan to continue with their curriculum change initiatives. This has been supported by each college having a clear plan, with stated objectives and expected outcomes, for their curriculum change. These plans provide an essential rationale for instigating change and critically for explaining that change process (why it was needed, what the change would look like, etc) to colleagues. In many of the projects, effective communication of this change rationale was stressed as being essential to ensuring that staff understood why a change was being implemented and were not 'scared off' by the change process. In some cases, this active communication helped ensure that staff took ownership of the process and avoided staff feeling that this was being 'done to them'. This was also supported in several colleges by the adoption of a whole-college approach, ensuring that the change was perceived as a clear organisational strategy, with standardised procedures across all areas, supported by senior staff throughout the college.



## 5. Challenges to implementing curriculum change

### 5.1 Differing 'cultures'

All projects naturally involved the project teams working with a wide group of internal and external stakeholders. Many of the projects have depended on cross-college collaboration and have found this to be a challenge and a benefit. Much discussion has been had among the project group of the influence of 'culture' and how cultures, including the ways of working, risk appetite and willingness to change of different staff and staff teams, can differ across a college, leading to a common sense of 'them and us' attitudes among different groups of staff.

It is clear that rather than attempting to create one 'culture', it is important to understand different cultures, attitudes and behaviours and to seek to develop mutual understanding between groups, which can be stimulated by developing a common understanding of the key drivers for change – both internal and external.

Colleges need to foster cultures that encourage innovation and enterprise, to fully support responsive provision that meets the needs of their local communities. This may require considerable investment in terms of time and resource required, which has been a challenge for these short action research projects, but is aided by having a clear rationale for curriculum change (as described earlier) that is clearly communicated and understood by all staff.

### 5.2 Competing pressures

Financial pressures on staff and on college resources, and competing demands for time, naturally affect the opportunities for full staff engagement in the curriculum change process. As stated earlier, allowing staff time to reflect on and action necessary curriculum change is essential, but a major challenge in pressured colleges where staff are often fully utilised. Some staff may doubt that new ways of working will achieve the desired outcomes, or be cynical about more change, in an environment with a history of short-term initiatives. Again, effective communication is required in order to reassure staff and gain their support.

### 5.3 Inflexible staff contracts and structures

Staff contracts and structures may inhibit a college's ability to be responsive, if there is little flexibility of staff availability, due to their formal contracts and a limited amount of 'free' time to allocate to new initiatives. This is obviously the issue that some of the colleges have tried to address through their action research projects, most notably the trialling of a 'rapid response approach' by Sussex Downs College.

It should also be acknowledged that although *New challenges, new chances* has introduced greater freedoms and flexibilities to the sector, colleges are still governed by defined eligibility guidance set by the government, determining which learners and programmes are eligible for government subsidy. The 157 Group is supportive of the government's introduction of the 'innovation code', to support the development of responsive, demand-led provision, and was particularly pleased to see recent revisions to the code ensuring that it allows the development of responsive provision to meet community needs as well as those of employers.

### 5.4 External factors

As in any project activity, external factors beyond the control of individual colleges can impact negatively on project progress. A number of colleges were inspected by Ofsted during the course of their projects, naturally deflecting the focus of attention for a period of time. Other projects were affected by sickness of key project members, causing a delay in project activity. Such delays can in themselves negatively impact on enthusiasm and confidence for instigating and maintaining change.

## 6. Next steps

All the projects are supporting key strategic change within their colleges, with broad outcomes expected in the medium to long term. For some projects, the new curriculum currently being developed will not start being delivered until September 2013, so the impact on learners and employers will not be evident until sometime in 2014.

Many colleges are internally reviewing project progress and outcomes now, with a view to continuing, adapting and rolling the initiative out across the college, as well as disseminating project findings widely within the college.

In Liverpool Community College, the teaching and learning strategy has been formally adopted, so its implementation and development will continue, with curriculum teachers and managers reviewing the strategy every year to identify priorities, progress and associated CPD. Equally, in York College it has been agreed that professional learning communities will form a core component of the college's annual CPD programme.

In New College Nottingham, the work of the enterprise intrapreneurs is ongoing and they are now involved in developing a staff tool for embedding entrepreneurial learning (Steel), a guidance tool to help staff identify activities where there is enterprise potential or where there is a need for additional support, as well as developing the enterprise section of the VLE. There are also plans to further develop the curriculum for 19+ learners for the next academic year.

Derby College plans to roll out the use of enterprise-based projects in its foundation and level 1 curriculum, which will involve cross-college staff training and communication to ensure that staff are able and committed to embrace this new model of delivery.

Hull College plans to replicate its commercial-curriculum model at another college site, and Sussex Downs College has decided to continue supporting the curriculum innovator model to ensure in-year responsiveness to requests from partners such as Jobcentre Plus.

Sunderland College continues to develop its engineering curriculum, with vital input from its employer partners, focusing on content as well as the associated requirements for equipment, facilities and staff.

## 7. Conclusions

This project enabled seven colleges to undertake action research addressing key issues of curriculum redesign. The variety of college projects highlights the breadth of the curriculum redesign challenge. To ensure responsiveness to their learners, employers and communities, colleges must assess the content of their curriculum; the delivery methods used (including how, when and where the curriculum is delivered); whether the college infrastructure is able to respond quickly to emerging needs; and whether staff skills and capacity match demand.

With respect to our original research questions, findings from the project include:

- Curriculum change needs to have a clear rationale that can be communicated and easily understood by college staff.
- Colleges need to adopt broad strategies to engage effectively with employers, so that they can identify employers skills and training needs adequately and, importantly, ensure their involvement in the curriculum development process. Many colleges already have strong relationships with their local and regional employers and are building on these to review and develop their curriculum offer.
- Colleges need to review their internal structures to ensure that demands from employers and other external organisations (such as Jobcentre Plus) can be fed in and responded to quickly. This may involve creating new team structures; new ways of working between different areas of the college; and possibly new job roles for facilitating this greater responsiveness (such as the curriculum innovator role at Sussex Downs College).
- Effective curriculum change needs to be soundly based on the identified needs of the curriculum users, in relation to content, delivery methods and staff skills.
- College staff need support to facilitate and enable curriculum change. This can take many forms, including investing in time to build staff capacity and confidence to innovate with teaching and learning and curriculum redesign; training to develop their skills in new areas; and ensuring that they are supported by their managers throughout the change process.

Clear priorities for the sector are to build staff capacity to innovate with curriculum design and ensure they are supported throughout the curriculum change process and to address the current inflexibility suffered by many colleges due their inability to move quickly in response to identified needs from their communities. Colleges need to review their structures (including staff contracts and processes for planning staff utilisation) critically, and develop mechanisms that enable them to identify and respond to needs in a timely way with high-quality provision. As this project has shown, there is much that colleges can learn from each other and this peer support should be continued and strengthened through the sector membership bodies, such as the 157 Group, the Association of Colleges (AoC), the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP), the Institute for Learning (IfL) and Niace.

In relation to research in further education colleges, seminar participants recommended that colleges should be supported to make effective use of evidence-based research. Such research is already available, but is dispersed and may not be readily accessible. It was suggested that a meta-analysis would help sector practitioners. In a similar vein, it was also suggested that a sector group is established to champion research, scholarly activity and reflective practice within FE. The 157 Group would be keen to support such a development, with other sector partners.

The group of participating colleges will continue to share their experiences of curriculum change, facilitated by the 157 Group. The 157 Group is also keen to work with other sector stakeholders to support capacity building among colleges for curriculum change and redesign and would welcome dialogue on this critical issue. With government drives to coordinate skills planning at local and regional levels, the task of curriculum change and redesign may become even greater, requiring curriculum review and planning not just at an individual college level but at an area level, involving a range of different providers. The 157 Group is keen to support the sector in responding to these clear challenges.

## Annex 1: Executive summary from the final report of Derby College

Can a redesign of the content, delivery and teaching methods of entry level 3 and level 1 provision encourage sustained success for young people?

Derby College is a large further education college with four main campuses, located in and around Derby and Derbyshire. Each year we have over 30,000 learners, 6,000 of whom are aged between 16 and 18, studying on courses of all levels, ranging from pre-16 provision for school learners, to higher education courses and work-based qualifications. The project sought to trial a meaningful and integrated curriculum innovation that uses vocational work-related learning and enterprising educational approaches.

The long-term aim of the project was to improve learners' motivation and behaviour, in addition to improving their prospects by developing their innovation skills.

16

Initially, an enterprise project was developed and carried out by the level 1 motor vehicle and business students and staff. The project was based on sustainability and the links with tyre pressure and fuel consumption, as the students wanted to raise awareness of the environmental effect of having the wrong tyre pressure. Therefore, students tested cars in the college car parks and left a red, amber or green card on the windscreen of the car with technical information and additional information about the services the college garage covers.

The scheme was run in partnership with the business area in order to generate the promotional materials for the event by using their marketing and design skills. The general intention was to encourage different curriculum areas to work together on one short enterprise project with level 1 learners, which they could plan, evaluate and capture on film. The rationale for using this approach was to have the evidence to support change, derived from internal sources, by using the college's own resources and infrastructure to develop and deliver the project and to use external methods to help review and support the process.

The project achieved its aims as the learners reported that they had found the experience very positive. Staff commented that they felt that the learners had developed cognitive skills such as innovation, problem-solving and confidence-building. Further staff comments focused on the project matching the typical profile of a level 1 learner and encouraging them to use English and maths in a context-driven environment. Both of these points were taken as key lessons from the project, as enterprise-based learning encouraged the learners to buy into the ideas being proposed and immerse themselves, while the use of English and maths improved their chances of progression and success.

As a result of the project, it is hoped that the design of the entry level 3 and level 1 curriculum across the college will change to meet the learner profile and the requirements of study programmes so that these learners can improve their prospects. Moving this project forwards will require the involvement of the teaching and learning group to develop the pedagogic skills needed by the staff working with these learners. Project teams are also needed to project manage the micro levels of the programmes. A peer support and buddy support system in the college will also be important to the success of this curriculum redesign project.



## Annex 2: Executive summary from the final report of Hull College

Hull College's curriculum redesign project was designed to further underpin and support a process management change in the organisation by examining the relationship between curriculum areas and the commercial department.

Objectives included:

- To identify areas for improvement in an increasingly competitive marketplace
- To increase the business engagement and income of the college across all schools (internal delivery departments)
- To pilot the new structure and collaborative approach shown between the commercial department and curriculum areas on a full external project.

As part of the annual review and real-time feedback from employers, it was acknowledged that opportunities existed for further development of the curriculum offer to satisfy employer needs and further test management processes, aligning them across the whole organisation. It was recognised that the way forward was to forge closer working relationships between curriculum areas and the commercial department, by providing dedicated time for information-sharing, priority discussion and recognising external influencing factors such as LEP objectives, changes to funding methodology and employer liaison.

Reviewing resources suggested that a restructure of the commercial team would greatly assist in this process, bringing in specialist roles to drive links with the curriculum. In addition, an updated, formalised set of systems and processes was designed to document and track interventions, meetings and actions. We recognised that while several areas of good practice existed via the informal relationships, a uniform approach was needed, one that involved everyone in a non-discretionary process that would lead to communication improvements and a shared understanding.

To address the issue of curriculum development, we recognised that the local market intelligence (LMI) and employer engagement activity also needed review. This led to a refreshed evaluation of the market conditions; review of LMI; research into the relationships already in place with employers; and a review of employer satisfaction surveys, existing communication methods and the use of the college customer relationship management (CRM) systems. These areas of improvement were identified in an open appraisal of curriculum delivery, which focused on whether current processes and systems provided competitive advantage. Part of the appraisal of curriculum delivery was achieved by holding regular business forums, to gain an understanding of exactly what the marketplace actually required.

A commercial departmental restructure was followed by the introduction of updated formal tracking processes and a commitment from the commercial division to lead on the actions identified. Heads of school (department) were briefed on the needs of the employer market and where there was incongruence between commercial activity and the demands of the central curriculum. These meetings led to improved understanding and commitments being made to a stronger working relationship.

Early piloting of some of the systems, relationships and processes in a preliminary project has given a true focus to activity and a more meaningful opportunity to evaluate the changes. This project required the involvement of a large, cross-departmental working group at levels from management to tutorial delivery, providing the opportunity to test the new structure, action planning techniques and communications processes in a real and commercially important project, allowing all parties to see the benefits of this new approach and appreciate the improved business model.

The project has led to a sector-based strategy whereby newly recruited business partners and business development managers build their own capacity in line with the appropriate curriculum area, networking extensively and meeting employers who provide feedback about their needs to a receptive curriculum partner that can then work with them to provide solutions that are fit for purpose.

## Annex 3: Executive summary from the final report of Liverpool Community College

### Can a CPD revolution put practitioners in the driving seat?

#### A community of practice teaching and learning strategy

Liverpool Community College is one of the largest English FE colleges, with 17,000 students. Following a restructure in 2012, the college is organised into four curriculum pillars plus pastoral support, with a revised management structure and a newly established teaching and learning group. The project sought to promote identification of CPD by practitioners and to renew the emphasis on the leadership of professional learning. The project also responded to Coffield and Williamson's advocacy of communities of discovery (2012),<sup>4</sup> by developing a new teaching and learning strategy explicitly informed by lecturers, and linked to subsequent curriculum planning and self-identified CPD.

Initially a teaching and learning strategy was developed by the teaching and learning group, informed by lecturer and student input. CPD proformas were developed to encourage a dialogue between individuals and teams about curriculum developments and CPD. Lecturers were encouraged to reflect on practice; consider curriculum changes; and participate in identifying associated CPD required. The whole-college wider leadership team was tasked with leadership of this renewed professional learning by collating the CPD findings to inform longer-term curriculum staff development planning, and ultimately to establish pillar-specific CPD plans. A concurrent survey of students was undertaken using a strategy adapted from Coffield's *All you ever wanted to know about learning and teaching but were too cool to ask* (2009).<sup>5</sup>

The project achieved a practitioner informed teaching and learning strategy with a rich data set identifying CPD changes that lecturers advocated. Three key CPD themes emerged: technology-enhanced learning, subject-specific and industrial updating, and peer and collaborative models of CPD.

An analysis of the impact of the process on institutional CPD processes and the role of management support and leadership is ongoing, but emerging examples are encouraging. Several key barriers also emerged: competing professional demands; aspects of the teaching and learning strategy process itself; credibility of the project in shifting culture; and a lack of CPD parity. The overarching finding emerging from the project is that the process has the capacity to act as a vehicle for lecturers to engage in a journey of CPD self-identification focusing on teaching and learning.

4 Coffield, F and Williamson, B, 2011. *From Exam Factories to Communities of Discovery: the democratic route*. London: IOE Publications.

5 Coffield, F, 2009. *All you ever wanted to know about learning and teaching but were too cool to ask*. London: LSN.

# Annex 4: Executive summary from the final report of New College Nottingham

## Background

New College Nottingham (ncn) has 20,000 learners over six campuses across Nottingham, 93 per cent of whom come from greater Nottingham. Courses offered range from GCSEs to degree-level study.

## Scope of project

The main aims of this project were to:

- identify examples of staff-supported enterprise education
- identify examples of student-led enterprise education
- identify the challenges of embedding enterprise into an FE college.

## Project interventions

In order to achieve these goals, ncn:

- hired an entrepreneur in residence
- identified college intrapreneurs across the college
- hired two enterprise interns and two enterprise and enrichment interns
- set up the Enterprise Society for students.

## Outcomes and impact

- The intrapreneurs have produced a staff training module on Moodle about how to give students an enterprising education, which has initially proved successful.
- An enterprising skills audit tool for staff is being developed.
- The entrepreneur in residence and the enterprise interns have proved pivotal in improving the enterprise offer at ncn. They have supported and organised a range of enterprise activities.
- Students are showing that engaging in an enterprising education helps them build their confidence and express themselves better.
- Although staff initially found the process daunting, with strong support from the senior management team, they are being reassured that embedding enterprise does not lead to more work and a redesign of their course.

## Annex 5: Executive summary from the final report of Sunderland College

### Background

Sunderland College identified the need to redesign its engineering and advanced manufacturing provision to better meet the needs of the local economy, through training young people in the skills (vocational and generic) that are demanded by employers and by providing employers with a skills development offer that is relevant to their workforce, can be used to improve their competitiveness and is delivered in a way that is appropriate to their business needs. Further, the resulting curriculum should support priorities for the sector, as identified by the LEP and sector skills councils.

### Our project

The project developed an engineering strategy based upon research carried out with employers and other stakeholders to identify the current and future skills needs and demands of the sector. The research methods used included questionnaires for employers to complete, outlining their skills needs, gaps and demands, as well as preferences for how those skills should be developed; employer forums, where more detailed discussion was held and information exchanged between the college and employers to build a feasible suite of curriculum products; attendance at BQ magazine debate, with heads of local engineering companies, where skills needs and demands were debated. An engineering strategy group was established to analyse the evidence gathered and develop the strategy.

The strategy provides not only our direction of travel but also:

- an engineering strategy that defines the skills needs of our local industry and the appropriate curriculum responses and resources to meet those needs
- a curriculum plan that is being prepared for scrutiny by the senior management team and members of the engineering strategy group prior to implementation
- a financial business plan that defines the physical resources and materials required in order to deliver those skills responses
- a risk assessment, outlining the risks, likelihood, impact and jeopardy of implementing our plans
- a skills profile outlining the human resource we need to deliver our strategy with success – there has been an audit of staff skills and expertise and a plan put in place to fill any identified gaps.

### Key learning

For the college, an overarching conclusion is that curriculum redesign should be an ongoing process, with continual input from well-engaged employer representatives and other stakeholders, including the LEP and sector skills councils. Further, a shared understanding of employer skills needs, with what is possible and effective in terms of curriculum and its delivery, can potentially form a powerful basis upon which to develop skills provision. It is also an effective way of engaging employers, growing their confidence in our provision and our people and ensuring that we understand and continue to understand each other's direction of travel, in terms of skills development and supply.



## Annex 6: Executive summary from the final report of Sussex Downs College

The issue to be addressed was a lack of effective in-year responsiveness to new activities generated by the business development and projects area of the college. There are cultural and structural issues in achieving this within the college.

The project aimed to develop a rapid response task group who would be able to undertake teaching, training and curriculum management at short notice, utilising their appropriate skills. We identified potential 'curriculum innovators', who are staff with a developmental, positive approach and the confidence and ability to work in non-traditional ways to meet newly identified needs. The project has provided the financial resources to facilitate their secondment to the rapid response task group.

A key aspect of this proposal has been to develop the curriculum innovators into learning champions able to have an influencing role with staff in their curriculum area, thereby increasing the number of staff who could play a role in the rapid response task group.

### Project interventions

- Recruitment of curriculum innovators from four vocational areas
- Training, support and hours allocated to curriculum innovators to develop and deliver intensive two-week courses for unemployed people referred by Jobcentre Plus
- Curriculum innovators kept reflective diaries to evaluate their experiences
- Curriculum line managers' response and involvement in the project was captured at the beginning and end of the project, to evaluate project activity.

### Project outcomes (February 2013)

- Eight curriculum innovators have been recruited and trained (double the original target of four).
- Only two of the eight innovators took up the mentoring offered.
- Curriculum innovators took a team approach and have planned a co-delivery model using the college VLE to share resources with four courses having been developed, in office skills; hospitality; customer service and stewarding; and social care.
- Recruitment via Jobcentre Plus has been slower than anticipated, with only one course delivered so far.
- A further course faltered at the pre-screening and interview stage when there were insufficient suitable candidates for the course.
- The three courses have planned delivery dates in March and April, with a college-wide evaluation event planned for later this term involving curriculum innovators and college managers.

### Impact

In one area of the college, there has been very effective delivery and line management support and involvement. In the other areas, the delay in delivery has proved a challenge in maintaining momentum and staff confidence.

We have identified the optimum success factors in terms of curriculum innovator skills; the mentoring and training required; effective line management support; and the need for improved communication between the projects and business development departments and the curriculum areas. In essence, we have learned what works and what gets in the way of effective delivery; and how to overcome these barriers.

## Annex 7: Executive summary from the final report of York College

### Professional learning communities at York College

York College occupies a recent new build with first-class resources for providing teaching, learning and assessment to the largest cohort of post-16 students in the region, including more than 40 A-level subjects, 80 vocational programmes, and a range of higher education courses for full-time and part-time study. Tutors are experts in their subject areas and pastoral support for students is excellent.

For staff, however, some aspects of CPD, in particular the discussion of new ideas, models and technologies, are limited by an overall lack of time and the prioritisation of other work.

22

The 'professional learning community' model aimed to provide staff with time to digest material presented in training sessions; to develop individual ownership of CPD; and to gain confidence in the discussion and debate of pedagogy and curriculum design.

The professional learning community concept was proposed at the annual York College teaching and learning conference, in a keynote speech and workshop directed by Professor Frank Coffield. Using these ideas, a York College model of professional learning communities was developed and launched during the next staff development day.

Training was followed up by reallocation of time for divisional (departmental) teams to focus purely on issues of teaching, learning and assessment practice, organised locally to maximise effectiveness. The initiative also required development of small-scale pedagogical action research projects or focused subject-specific updating within each team.

Heads of department attended additional training on the Dylan Wiliam model of assessment for learning, which was cascaded to teams via professional learning communities, and formed the basis of a number of subsequent professional learning community project ideas. Proposals were designed locally in response to key issues or ideas in teams. They were overseen and approved by a college manager, and reported at interim and final phases to the senior management team but otherwise conducted relatively autonomously. A key component of the professional learning community model is the need for teaching and learning practitioners to be given autonomy to discuss and develop their own ideas.

Over 20 projects were realised during the academic year, with final presentations feeding into the college's annual teaching and learning conference. The projects have had a direct impact on students through improvements in teaching and learning practice and have increased staff confidence in experimentation and in the design of curriculum materials.

There is a renewed interest in evidence-led pedagogy and enfranchisement of staff to consider not only their own CPD but also to make a contribution to improving teaching, learning and assessment practice across the whole college.

Professional learning communities are helping to foster a confident culture in which pedagogical ideas are genuinely considered on merit and discussed widely across the organisation.



**Contact us**

The 157 Group Limited  
P O Box 58147  
London  
SW8 9AF

[www.157group.co.uk](http://www.157group.co.uk)  
[info@157group.co.uk](mailto:info@157group.co.uk)

**Chair**

Peter Roberts

**Executive director**

Lynne Sedgmore CBE

**Our patrons**

Lord Victor Adebawale CBE  
Sir Andrew Foster  
Prof Sir David Melville CBE  
Baroness Perry of Southwark  
Baroness Sharp of Guildford  
Sir Michael Tomlinson CBE  
Baroness Wall of New Barnet