

A 157 Group policy paper



Colleges' international contribution

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The British Colleges Consortium, which represents the international activities of colleges in the 157 Group.

Participating 157 Group member colleges.

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Introduction by Angela O'Donoghue

UK education has an excellent and well-established reputation across the globe. UK qualifications are recognised all over the world and are highly valued by individuals and employers alike. The overseas market – whether in the form of recruiting international students to study in the UK, or development of in-country delivery – has been dominated by the university sector, feeding the demand for graduate qualifications, but this focus has shifted in recent years.



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Developing and growing economies are now looking for support and training in the technician-level skills needed to maintain their industries. The UK college sector has a significant amount of knowledge and expertise in this area of education, providing people with technical skills, alongside problem-solving, team-working, and the ability to undertake independent research and apply initiative. This places UK colleges in an excellent position to sell their expertise to other countries, either through recruiting students to UK colleges or, increasingly, by offering in-country provision. In-country work promotes knowledge-transfer and development, assisting sustainable delivery of the required skills and qualifications.

The many benefits that accrue from colleges developing international work include:

- contributing to the UK's international economic and social development
- developing good relations between nations
- contributing to UK plc
- raising the profile of the UK as a knowledge-based economy
- sharing good practice with other countries
- diversifying income streams and reducing reliance on state funding
- boosting the local economy
- encouraging progression to higher-level skills, including master's degrees and doctorates, which in turn contribute to the research base in the UK.

Colleges need more support and encouragement from central government to enable us to meet the demands from a wide range of countries. The recognition of public-funded colleges as legitimate providers of education for international students, alongside universities, would remove some of the present barriers to students accessing college provision.

Members of the 157 Group of colleges have agreed to share expertise in working internationally and to support each other through the joint development of an overseas brand – the British Colleges Consortium. We will work with the government to strengthen the international dimension to the work of UK colleges. This policy paper seeks to raise the profile of UK colleges' international activities, nationally and overseas. We intend to further develop our relationship with the British Council and ministers to put UK colleges at the forefront of international vocational education.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angela O'Donoghue".

Angela O'Donoghue
Principal, City of Sunderland College



Who we are

The 157 Group is a membership organisation that represents 28 large, highly successful and regionally influential further education colleges in England. 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.

Our 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 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.

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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 College
- Bedford College
- Birmingham Metropolitan College
- Bournemouth and Poole College
- Chichester College
- City and Islington College
- City of Bristol College
- City of Sunderland College
- College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London
- Cornwall College
- Derby College
- Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College
- Highbury College Portsmouth
- Hull College
- Lambeth College
- Leeds City College
- Lewisham College
- Newcastle College
- Newham College
- New College Nottingham
- St Helens College
- Stoke on Trent College
- Sussex Downs College
- The Manchester College
- The Sheffield College
- Warwickshire College
- West Nottinghamshire College
- York College



Colleges' international contribution

Summary

The 157 Group is drawn from those of the larger colleges in England that are also acknowledged by inspectors as being particularly well-managed and governed. They are typically responsible for budgets in excess of £35 million a year, with the largest budgets being over £180 million. They are major providers of education internationally – both for students from abroad studying in the UK, and in the form of the delivery of education and training services overseas. They draw students from all parts of the community, home and abroad, and are a powerful force for social integration. They are inclusive institutions, where all students are accorded equal respect, irrespective of their background or level of study.

Internationally, our vision is to:

- contribute to the achievement of the UK's overseas development objectives, by building positive and constructive relationships with individuals and organisations from around the world, enhancing mutual understanding, and bolstering trade, investment and political cooperation
- maintain and strengthen the quality of education provided by colleges, to the benefit of students from the UK and from abroad; and in doing so
- significantly enhance the economic and social well-being of the UK.

In order to achieve this vision, we plan to:

- attract and assist even more international students than the 66,000+ who enrol at colleges in England each year at present
- expand operations abroad, as part of UK government-sponsored projects and commercially
- deliver a wide range of UK-accredited qualifications abroad through excellent partnership models, including training and support
- ensure that all our provision is designed to benefit those we serve, at home and abroad.

The realisation of our vision would be greatly assisted by support from the government to:

- facilitate access to study at UK colleges by legitimate student applicants from abroad
- back responsible college providers by promoting more vigorously the guarantees of their probity, whilst bearing down on fraudulent operators
- maintain and strengthen a healthy college sector that continues to attract international students and other overseas clients.

Introduction

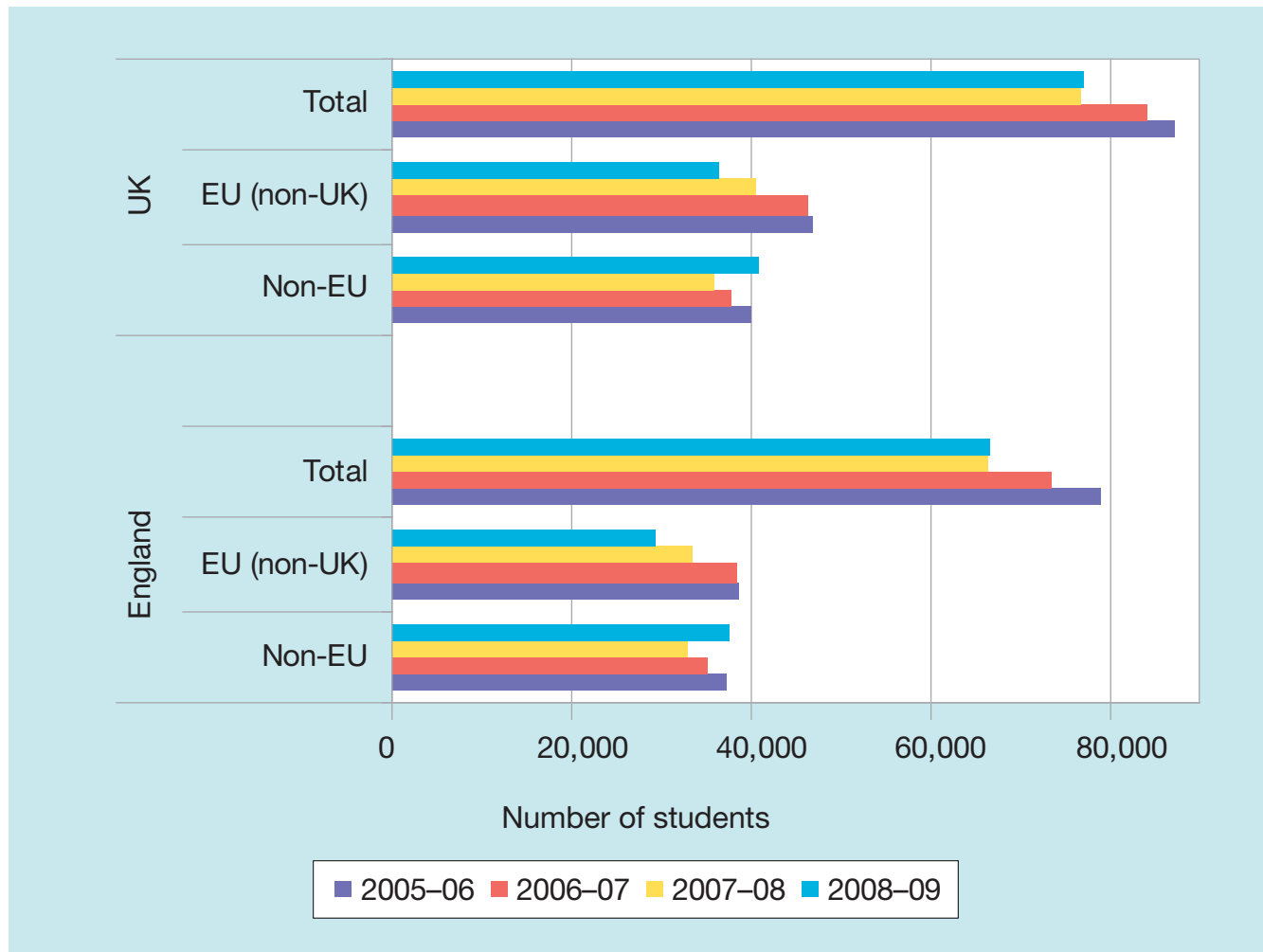
1. The 157 Group brings together leaders from some of the largest and best-run English further education colleges to contribute to policy development, exchange good practice and sponsor joint management initiatives.
2. Colleges provide a vital segment of the British educational system, offering a majority of the A-level provision in the country, as well as being the major supplier of vocational qualifications, and making a significant contribution to higher education.
3. The 157 Group brings together colleges that have a collective budget of over £1.6 billion, serve 700,000 learners, employ 39,000 staff and engage with 32,000 employers. They are found in each of the English regions. They are therefore well equipped to play a major role in UK plc and to play an active part in the nation's strategies for globalisation.
4. Colleges work internationally and on a substantial scale. For many years, they have recruited large numbers of international students to the UK. These students have proved highly successful in their studies, strengthening their command of English and acquiring a wide range of academic and vocational qualifications. Overall, they have gained skills that make them more employable, and in many cases also guarantee them entry to university, in the UK, in their own countries or elsewhere.
5. Colleges are increasingly active outside the UK. In many other parts of the world, they deliver UK qualifications to the resident population, often in partnership with the British Council and the governments and educational institutions of the countries concerned. They provide research and consultancy skills related to educational and economic development abroad. Additionally, they deliver tailored training packages for the employees of international corporations, internationally as well as in the UK.
6. Together these international activities bring tremendous benefits. They enable students from abroad to acquire skills, knowledge and qualifications that are often unavailable in their own countries, and provide routes of progression into the most respected universities in the world. They represent a significant part of the UK's contribution to international economic and social development, helping promote growth and cement good relations between nations. For the UK, colleges' international work provides an excellent advertisement for UK plc, while simultaneously enhancing the relevant experience and expertise necessary for our nation to operate successfully on a global stage. Last but not least, it is a valuable source of income – for individual colleges via tuition fees; for their local communities via the money spent in the area by international students; and for UK plc more generally via associated trade and investment.
7. UK colleges also benefit substantially from working with international partners, as there is a great deal to learn from other education systems and cultures. Good practice from partner countries can be incorporated into the management of UK colleges, resulting in stronger, more viable, innovative institutions.
8. The UK vocational education system and training for a 'technician class' is second to none. Many emerging and developing economies are now looking to train at technician and advanced technician level, as well as at graduate level, in order to meet the needs of employers. Some of these economies require help and advice in the development of appropriate vocational education to meet this demand. UK colleges are ideally placed to provide this support and have many years' experience in successfully delivering and developing a technician class.
9. It is important that colleges are given backing so that they can continue to strengthen the international dimension of their work. Colleges are keen supporters of the *Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education* (PMI2), launched in 2006, with goals that include increased recruitment, demonstrable improvements to student satisfaction ratings, and a significant growth in the number of partnerships between the UK and other countries. The recent tightening of the UK visa requirements for foreign students, however, aimed at cutting the numbers of bogus entrants, also penalises the majority of reputable colleges and legitimate applicants. There is a real danger that, on balance, the interests of this nation will suffer rather than gain as a result.

The scope of colleges' international activities

International students in the UK

10. The recruitment of overseas students to study in the UK is the main area of colleges' international work. Over 66,500 overseas students study in colleges in England. The numbers of fee-paying students from outside the EU have remained relatively stable over recent years, although those of non-fee paying students from within the EU have shown some decline (Chart 1). Colleges within the 157 Group are among the largest providers of education for international students, some enrolling more than 1,000 each year. Typically, they have a long-established commitment in this area, involving specialist staff, learning resources and residential facilities.

Chart 1: International students enrolled in further education institutions¹



11. Large colleges, such as those in the 157 Group, offer a comprehensive range of educational opportunities, and are extremely flexible in their provision to learners, which has a strong appeal for international students. Courses are offered all the way to degree level, including preparation for entry to postgraduate study. Colleges are especially strong in vocational education, offering high-quality, up-to-date training across all main professional and technical areas.

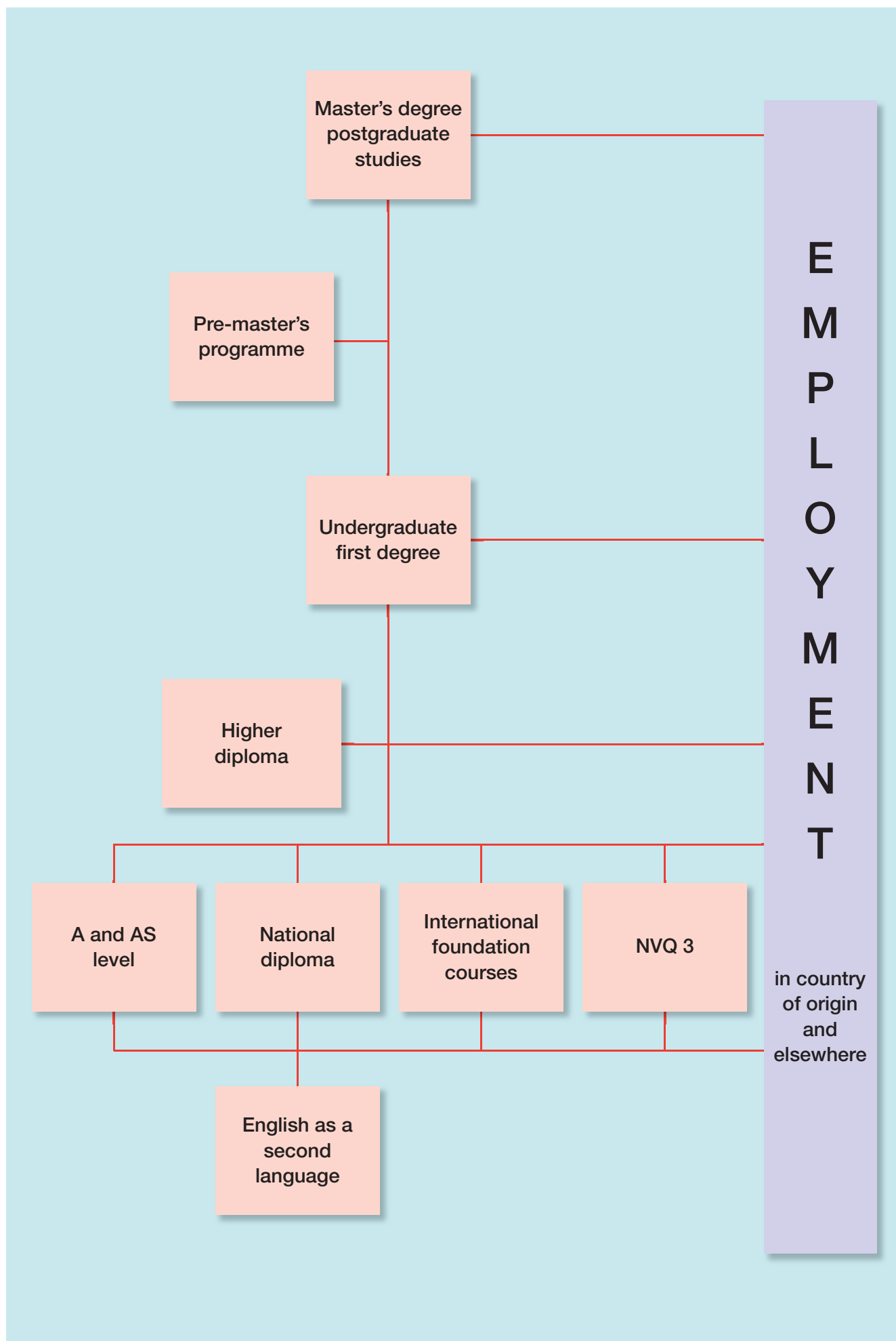
¹ Data compiled by British Council from funding council and government sources for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

12. The cohort of international students enrol in colleges in the following main areas:

- A wide variety of English as a foreign language (EFL) courses, some lasting just a few weeks, others up to a year, often in combination with other subjects. The acquisition of English language skills improves employability and enhances opportunities for progression to degree-level education in the English-speaking world and beyond. A range of English language examinations are typically offered, including IELTS – the International English Language Testing System, jointly managed by bodies including the British Council.
- Two-year courses leading to mainstream qualifications at level 3. Here, A and AS levels are very popular, as are vocational courses, mainly BTEC national diplomas.
- One-year international foundation programmes, specifically designed to prepare those who have already completed level 3-equivalent studies in their own country for entry to a degree programme in a UK university. In some cases, international pre-master's programmes are also available, providing a bridge to postgraduate studies in the UK for those who already hold a first degree-level qualification.
- Two-year higher diploma programmes, providing a respected vocational qualification in its own right, but also allowing entry to the second or third year of degree courses at UK universities.
- Short courses and bespoke provision, ranging from summer schools to specialised higher-level modules of study for groups nominated by a single organisation or government.

On completion of their education in the UK, most international students return to take up employment in their own countries, or elsewhere in the global economy, with a well-qualified minority gaining posts in areas of skill shortage in the UK. Typical pathways for overseas students at colleges in the UK are illustrated in Chart 2 opposite.

Chart 2: International student pathways in UK further education



13. Colleges typically have links with one or more local universities that guarantee entry to the second or final year of degree programmes to international students who complete foundation or higher diploma programmes successfully. Work placements and internships are frequently provided as part of vocational programmes, providing invaluable experience and sometimes also leading to the offer of employment.

One 157 Group college – Chichester – has over 2,000 international students from more than 90 countries involved in courses including agriculture, horticulture, equine studies, animal management, art, design and media, business studies, computing and ICT, engineering and construction, hair and beauty, healthcare and social sciences, hospitality and tourism, music, performing arts, and sports. Apprenticeship programmes are also organised on an individual basis. A specialised higher diploma computing and satellite imaging course involves a group from the United Arab Emirates, as the local area has similar tidal problems to Dubai's and the course provides ideal conditions to study methods to reduce erosion and flooding. The college has a close partnership with its local university and students successful in their level 3 course are accepted on to a number of BA honours degree courses there. It has recently formed a consortium with three other colleges to offer a foundation year for entry to the University of Bath. In the past four years, its international students have also progressed successfully to over 70 other UK universities, including Cambridge and Oxford.

International partnership work in other countries

14. Colleges are increasingly committed to delivering their services abroad as well as in the UK. Some of this work is associated with projects managed by the British Council on behalf of the government, connected to PMI2 or to Skills for Employability.² To be successful in these ventures, colleges must be capable of forming strong links with the countries involved as well as demonstrating their commitment to international educational development. Delivery typically involves helping to strengthen reforms to technical and vocational education, addressing the needs of local industry; establishing good practice in the curriculum, linked to occupational standards; and training young people in relevant skills, including entrepreneurship. At a more modest level, there are a host of smaller ventures, involving initiatives such as sponsoring a local school, or providing resources and student volunteers to assist with the building of village community facilities.

The British Council Iraq, in conjunction with the Association of Colleges, established a collaborative project in 2005 with the Foundations of Technical Education in Iraq; known as 'Rawabit' – the Arabic word for 'partnership'. An initial visit from representatives of the Iraqi vocational training sector to the UK led to the twinning of eight UK further education colleges with 14 Iraqi institutions. Derby College has been involved in this project every year in the delivery of annual conferences for Iraqi senior managers and lecturers, as well as hosting visits. This year, the college delivered a seminar on leadership development for women to a group of Iraqi delegates at a conference held in Istanbul.

2 Skills for Employability is a four-year project, scheduled for completion in 2011, involving seven different countries in central and southern Asia. It aims to build the vocational skills of young people and adults by encouraging closer links between education and industry with a focus on strengthening the technical and vocational education sector in the countries concerned.

15. Increasingly too, colleges are involved in establishing their own partnership arrangements abroad on a commercial basis. A wide variety of models have been developed, between them involving arrangements with both state and private educational providers in the countries concerned, the former with ministerial involvement and approval. Most commonly, the partnerships involve the delivery abroad of UK-accredited qualifications, provision covering the whole range that colleges offer in the UK, from level 1 to higher diplomas. A number involve the delivery of the first one or two years of a programme, with a final year spent at a college in the UK. Colleges are also involved in the provision of a wide range of related services, including advice, guidance and practical help on the purchase and operation of learning resources; curriculum design; teacher training and professional development; and assessment. Some different examples of 157 Group college international partnerships are:

The delivery by City of Sunderland College of information security system higher education programmes at Nanjing Institute of Technology, China, and of higher diplomas in business and management and in travel and tourism at Inner Mongolia Business and Trade Vocational College, Huhhot, China – the latter also involving a third year of study in the UK. This project, to develop partnerships between 157 Group colleges and institutions, has been sponsored by the Joint International Unit.

The establishment by Bournemouth and Poole College of a college-owned training centre in India, which offers the City & Guilds international diploma in healthcare (IVQ), and also offers progression routes to enable students to apply to UK colleges for NVQs at levels 2, 3 and 4. Candidates achieving the IVQ are eligible to apply for visas to continue studying at the college in the UK, via progression to a preconversion nursing programme there.

The establishment by Derby College of a sports academy in Malawi, plus work with Riyadh College of Technology in Saudi Arabia to design eco-friendly houses.

Higher diploma courses in South Korea, delivered by UK-based staff from Chichester College who travel there to teach over 1,200 local students via links with a number of local colleges and universities.

16. Colleges are also able to offer training to corporate clients. Most 157 Group colleges hold the Training Quality Standard (TQS), the UK Skills Funding Agency's rigorous standard for organisations that are recognised as best at delivering training to employers. As such, they typically have a range of corporate clients, ranging from large multinational organisations to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Delivery often demands the flexibility to provide training at the times and places required by the company, including internationally. Colleges are also now building upon this experience to provide similar kinds of expert service to companies based in other countries, especially those seeking to operate globally.

Derby College provides intensive training for oil companies in Libya, plus government departments and the Libyan civil aviation authority. Over 400 Libyan students from 15 oil companies have been involved in intensive engineering programmes.

Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College provides work placement opportunities for hospitality and catering students with prestigious international concerns, including Gordon Ramsay Holdings. Placements frequently lead to the offer of full-time employment on completion of studies, at locations throughout the world.

The benefits of international further education

17. As with all education, the primary goal of international activity is to help the students involved acquire the knowledge, skills and qualifications that are appropriate to their needs. The active involvement of colleges internationally offers students from abroad the chance to improve their competence in the English language, to progress to university and to enhance their employability in the global economy. In many cases, the opportunities that colleges can offer are either not available to the students concerned in their own countries, or are much more restricted. For instance, in some other nations it is not possible for college-based students engaged in technical education to progress to university.
18. Despite increasing competition, the British educational system is generally regarded as one of the best in the world, demonstrated by the distance international students are willing to travel.³ Its reputation in their eyes is fostered by the regulatory mechanisms and quality assurance systems that apply here. UK-accredited qualifications can be relied upon to “mean what they say” and they therefore have a wide international currency. Similarly, British Council accreditation, and the UK Border Agency’s ‘highly trusted’ status – which applies to the majority of 157 Group colleges – represent guarantees that colleges so covered are reputable providers of high-quality education. This reassurance is of enormous importance to students when they are engaged in decisions about where and what to study. Success rates for international students at colleges in the UK are also high – typically well over 90 per cent, with some programmes regularly achieving 100 per cent pass rates.
19. It is not just the quality of the education on offer that matters. International students coming to the UK are also seeking to have a wider experience of life here that is enjoyable and fruitful for them. Colleges pay considerable attention to ensuring that these expectations are likewise fulfilled. The 157 Group colleges are inclusive institutions that act to promote integration between communities, and they are fully committed to maintaining and strengthening this ethos. Many have student populations that are significantly multi-ethnic, even without including international students. Overall student satisfaction rates are over 90 per cent.⁴ Colleges with a significant involvement in international work necessarily devote considerable time and resources to this area of activity in terms of specific student support. Liaison officers are often employed, fluent in a range of languages, so that students can be fully confident that their questions and concerns are understood. A full induction to college life in the UK is provided on arrival. Students are given help in arranging suitable accommodation – usually a choice between the college’s own halls of residence, a shared student flat or house, or “homestay” with an English family, the latter being carefully vetted to ensure that a caring environment is provided. Work experience, work placements, and internships are organised, as are a range of cultural activities. International students are therefore assisted to become fully engaged in life in the UK, and to have ample opportunity to exchange experience with the local population, and with their counterparts from other countries studying at the same college. They can also be confident that they are doing so in an environment that is safe and secure.
20. Typical testimonials from international students who have attended a 157 Group college include:

My mother used to live in London and studied English at our college and I found that her progress in studying English was so impressive. That is the main reason why I decided to come here. All my teachers are very experienced in teaching English and when I don't understand something they explain everything clearly to me. I have been given an opportunity to have a global understanding from studying English with my classmates from all over the world. I believe this experience will be useful in my future career.

Japanese EFL student attending Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College

3 The latest available British Council data indicates that over 37,000 non-EU students enrolled in further education in England, 56 per cent of the total international numbers.

4 Data from the 2007 National Learner Satisfaction Survey, published by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in July 2008.

I didn't know what to expect when I came to the UK, but when I got here I found that everyone I met was so friendly and helpful. The course we studied was really good. It is very fast paced and takes a lot of work, but the teachers have been great to us. Extra classes and seminars were laid on if we needed extra help with a particular topic, and the teachers made sure we understood a subject before we moved on to the next. I am going on to study computer systems engineering at Nottingham Trent University. Applying to university in the UK can be very difficult, but the careers service at the college helped so much with my application. With their help, I got offers from five universities in the UK. I like mixing with the British people but it's also nice that there are so many Nigerian students here because they remind me of home!

Nigerian access to sciences and engineering student attending Highbury College, Portsmouth

After completing the higher diploma in college, I want to do the top-up year at university. UK culture is totally different, but I was able to settle in easily. The facilities at the college and the university are great.

Pakistani higher diploma business and management student attending City of Sunderland College

I felt that the foundation course was right for me because it covered a broad background of business studies while supporting me to continue learning English. The teachers taught me how to read for and write essays; they taught us the process of learning, which helped me so much when I went to university. My foundation teachers were very, very helpful, always trying to find the easiest way for the students to understand. I found the first semester at Nottingham University difficult but it is much easier now. In the future, I would like to become an accountant. I plan to gain some work experience and later return to study a master's degree. When at college, I stayed in homestay for a year with an elderly couple. I liked it because it gave me the chance to understand English culture. I've adapted well and love living here.

Chinese former student of a one-year university foundation course in business at New College Nottingham, who progressed to a finance, accounting and management degree at the University of Nottingham

Retail is very developed in the UK so I wanted to learn it here and also to gain experience. Everything we have learnt on the course will help me in the future. I like the tutors, they are very helpful and they are giving me all the support I need in a foreign country. I am learning about retail management but also about Great Britain, customs here and the life itself. Since I came, I have become much more confident.

Vietnamese postgraduate diploma in retail management student attending Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College

21. As well as benefiting students from other countries, international operations bring many educational advantages to the UK. Home students benefit from the additional investment in facilities that is made possible by the associated income. International students also help to maintain the viability of some minority courses, and provide positive role models in terms of hard work and high aspirations. Those successfully completing their college courses represent a valuable and trusted source of entrants to UK universities. 157 Group colleges believe strongly that local students, staff and the surrounding community all gain as well from the cultural interchange and enrichment that is involved. For colleges in some parts of the UK, international students provide local communities with their main day-to-day contact with people from a different ethnic heritage. Experience suggests that everyone learns from this. UK students make contacts that enable them to travel and work abroad. International links also provide valuable professional development opportunities for college staff, including the chance to work in other countries. Colleges help their local communities to engage with those from abroad who might otherwise be hard to integrate, including refugees and asylum seekers. Having international learners also helps colleges to foster and strengthen their relationships with minority ethnic groups within their own local communities.

22. More broadly, these activities “help build friendships with people from around the world, fostering understanding and opening the doors to greater trade, investment and political cooperation. By internationalising its education provision, the UK is able to attract intellectual capital, enriching home capacity for research, technological growth and innovation”.⁵
23. Last but not least, international activities represent an increasingly valuable source of income for colleges and for UK plc more generally. Total fee income from the 66,000+ overseas students studying in colleges in England is estimated at over £42m per annum.⁶ This contribution helps colleges to survive and flourish without having overdue reliance on the UK taxpayer – an important consideration in times of financial stringency. What is more, international students – including those from the EU and others who do not pay fees – spend considerable sums in colleges' local economies on accommodation, food and drink, travel, entertainment, and the like.⁷ On top of this, international students also contribute economically via their part-time employment and voluntary work. Income from the growing number of contracts to deliver courses abroad supplements the fees paid by international students studying in the UK, and in turn has an impact on the home economy through the job opportunities that colleges can then sustain. Overall, therefore, we estimate the total annual contribution to UK earnings arising from colleges' international activities to be of the order of £554m.⁸

The latest annual earnings from international work reported by one 157 Group college are as follows:

Fee income	£2.75m
Rent from student accommodation	£1.50m
Educational services abroad	£0.25m
International examinations syndicate	£0.50m
Total	£5.00m

Challenges faced

24. Successful involvement in international work requires considerable commitment on the part of colleges. The international market for education is becoming ever more competitive, and students increasingly discerning in the choices they make. Without considerable investment, colleges cannot sustain the level of quality that is necessary to attract and retain the loyalty of students from many different nations. Yet work with overseas students is more vulnerable to short-term risks outside colleges' own control. Fluctuations in the value of the euro or dollar to the pound and other worldwide events mean that recruitment from particular countries can suddenly slow down or stop. This is one of the main motivating forces for the formation of long-term partnerships with institutions and organisations overseas. Furthermore, many of the regulatory mechanisms that apply in the UK do not exist in other countries. This allows some less reputable UK organisations to trade abroad under the title of ‘college’, competing unfairly with legitimate further education providers and threatening to tarnish the brand.

5 From *PMI2 Overview*. British Council (2010) at <http://www.britishcouncil.org/eumd-pmi2-overview.htm>

6 LSC data for 2008–09. British Council data for 2003–04 compiled from LSC and other sources shows total UK tuition fee income as £46.3m (£60m when English language teaching programmes are also included).

7 Research undertaken by RCU Ltd in 2007 on behalf of a college and a neighbouring university, which calculated the total economic impact on the locality arising from the presence of some 2,200 international students as being in excess of £8m. Figures for 2003–04 compiled by British Council suggest a total UK spend over and above tuition fees of almost £500m.

8 Based on data quoted in Lenton, P. *Global value: the value of UK education and training exports: an update*. British Council (2007); and *Making it happen: the Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education*. British Council (2010).

25. Effective partnership work in other countries likewise demands time and cannot be built up overnight. Colleges involved in international work typically appoint local agents to act on their behalf in a wide range of other countries. The selection and training of such staff requires care if the right individuals are to be appointed. The recruitment of students abroad, and the provision of intelligence that assists in the identification of new educational markets, also benefits from the advice and support of the British Council, British embassy and consular staff, and UK Trade and Investment (UKTI). Sometimes, however, UK government agencies operating abroad are more geared up to assisting the university sector than they are in providing support for the expansion of international work by colleges.
26. Colleges' ability to recruit students internationally to study in the UK is hampered by the conditions imposed by the UK government, under tier 4 of the immigration rules that govern the award of visas to those wishing to come here to study. The new highly trusted sponsor licence introduced for tier 4 sponsors on 6 April 2010 is welcomed by colleges as identifying those sponsors who are achieving the highest levels of compliance with their obligations and whose students are showing the greatest compliance with the terms of their visa or leave. This status – which applies to the majority of 157 Group colleges – brings with it permission for students to commence their studies before receipt of the UK Border Agency's decision on their application. However, other restrictions remain that are off-putting to potential students from abroad, and arguably discriminate against those applying to study at college rather than at university. For example, students studying towards higher diplomas are restricted to a maximum of 10 hours' part-time paid employment a week alongside their studies, while degree-level students are allowed a maximum of 20 hours. Foreign students are not allowed to move between two colleges – even those with highly trusted status – without going through a further UK Border Agency (UKBA) application process. Changes introduced recently also make it a requirement for most students studying below degree level to provide evidence at application of having passed a UKBA-approved secure English language test at a minimum of B1 level on the Common European Framework of Reference for languages. This effectively excludes a significant number of students whose counterparts were able to come here successfully in the past – particularly those taking courses at level 3 and below. Colleges fully appreciate the need to have measures that exclude bogus applicants and clamp down upon untrustworthy providers, but the current arrangements arguably penalise the majority of legitimate students and reputable colleges as well, to the overall detriment of all concerned.

Conclusions

27. International activities are an important part of educational provision. They provide valued opportunities to students from all over the world, and by doing so, help to cement positive and constructive international relations. They are also a vital source of income, for colleges themselves and for the wider community. As a result, the economic well-being of all concerned is enhanced, and colleges are able to be less reliant on the UK taxpayer.
28. Large colleges, such as those in the 157 Group, are major providers of education internationally. No other educational organisations supply the same opportunities to students overseas, spanning entry to advanced levels, and including preparation for first degree and postgraduate studies, across a huge range of academic and vocational areas. They have also been able to sustain the large-scale investment of time and resources that is vital if international students are to be given the high-quality experience necessary to attract and retain their loyalty in the face of increasing competition between providers globally.
29. Operations abroad represent an area of substantial recent and potential growth for colleges. They are playing an ever-greater role in British Council and other UK public-sponsored initiatives, especially those concerning much-needed improvements to technical and vocational education in the developing world. They are establishing further capacity to deliver courses and qualifications in other countries, by setting up their own branches there or working in partnership with the host countries' own educational institutions. Corporate training and consultancy, too, is expanding abroad, building upon colleges' impressive track record in the UK.
30. The UK's immigration rules present an increasing barrier to legitimate students wishing to apply here, especially for those seeking courses at what are classed as sub-degree programmes – i.e. level 3 and higher diploma. The gains in excluding bogus applicants are arguably more than offset by the loss of goodwill abroad and the transfer elsewhere of the associated income and other economic and social benefits. An early review of the impact of the operation of the current rules is called for, with a view to lifting some of the restrictions that now apply to international students at 'highly trusted' colleges – including those relating to prior English language attainment, movement between institutions in the UK, and permitted hours of part-time employment.
31. Colleges are keen to forge further links abroad. Their ability to do so would be enhanced by:
 - continued and enhanced support from the British Council, UK Trade & Investment (UKTI) and other government agencies in identifying opportunities, demanding increased awareness on the part of those concerned about the role and capability of the UK college sector
 - further backing from UK government agencies to protect the interests of legitimate colleges operating overseas by promoting the guarantee of probity inherent in accreditation by the British Council, and the granting of highly trusted status by the UKBA.



“International education provides the UK with a dynamic, high-skill and sustainable industry, estimated to be worth more than GBP 10 billion. International education, however, is not merely an export industry. It helps us to build friendships with people from around the world, enabling us to understand more about each others’ cultures and opening the doors to greater trade, investment and political influence. By internationalising its education provision, the UK is able to attract intellectual capital – enriching the UK’s capacity for research, technological growth and innovation.”

From *PMI2 Overview*. British Council (2010).

“Total fee income from the 66,000+ overseas students studying in colleges in England is estimated at over £42m per annum. This contribution helps colleges to survive and flourish without having overdue reliance on the UK taxpayer – an important consideration in times of financial stringency.”

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