



## Foreword

Over the last few months, we have gone through a period of significant growth and reorganisation. To achieve our aims, we are reasserting ourselves as a member-led organisation, not in the traditional model of a lobbying group, but as a body of professionals keen to influence further education and related policy at the highest levels.

The first of our aims is to influence and help shape policy, by building a trusted but challenging relationship at very senior levels of government.

Secondly, we see our role as fundamental to sector improvement. 157 Group colleges are highly successful, innovative and influential providers, and their experience is invaluable to building capacity and to self-improvement in the context of self-regulation.

Our third aim is to enhance the national reputation of further education and of FE colleges. 157 Group colleges have an important role to play in the strategic leadership of reputation building, to help ensure that colleges are recognised and respected in their communities and for their vital contribution to local businesses and the economy.

Fourthly, we propose to develop the 157 Group as a strong peer network, sharing excellence in leadership and management, creating leaders for the next generation.

We are building strong and productive relationships with several partners, and working with organisations that deliver programmes and services in the sector.

Our impact is already being felt throughout the sector, and our scheduled plan of strategic activity for the next year is ambitious.

I hope you enjoy reading our first newsletter.

Best wishes

**Lynne Sedgmore CBE**  
Executive Director, 157 Group

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# Capital crisis brings capital opportunity

Further educational colleges become front page news. The chief executive of the largest quango falls on his sword. The Chancellor of the Exchequer promises to match Barack Obama pound for dollar to transform the further education estate. Well, maybe not yet, but we have MPs up and down the country banging on John Denham's door. May I suggest that we now need to point those MPs at Alistair Darling, as he prepares his April budget.

Hats off to the Association of Colleges, who coordinated the campaign and secured that excellent coverage. Now let's ensure that we don't just fade back into the crowd.

We need to paint the picture of our FE colleges standing proudly at the heart of their communities, ensuring that today's students and their employers gain the skills that will carry us out of the recession and into a secure and prosperous future.

The argument for investing further in the FE infrastructure is compelling. The size of the investment is finite and manageable. Colleges up and down the country can be transformed.

We are already halfway there. Each community will have its strategic provider of education and skills for young and the not-so-young lifetime learners. The new world-class buildings are a beacon of hope and aspiration, drawing in the ambitious and reluctant learners to place learning and skills at the heart of the community.

New buildings are just the start of our ambitions. We want to see colleges acknowledged as key strategic partners in the subregion working with their communities, local authorities, Jobcentre Plus and employers to spearhead recovery, economic growth and social cohesion.

We will tackle the long tail of underachievement, place apprenticeships and diplomas at the heart of our delivery and ensure that local priorities get as much attention as key national targets.

We can do all this because we have grown out of our communities, we know the territory, we have the partnerships and relationships with employers, schools and students whose parents and grandparents studied with us.

We have the trust of our communities and as leaders we have that sense of civic pride and public values that ensures that our priorities remain our students, our employers and our community.

We also bring a willingness to innovate and ability to flex our resources, if allowed, to react to rapid change.

What will the proposed new Skills Funding Agency bring to the table? What will 1,800 civil servants do? They will plan, they will second-guess, they will develop bureaucratic systems, they will be cautious and seek consensus and will be prey to the whims of ministers.

Now is the time to trust colleges, not just with new buildings but also with that subregion that the Learning and Skills Council will be relinquishing and which we are ready and capable to take up.

Have you drafted that letter for your MP to write to the Chancellor yet? Do it now.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Graham Moore". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Graham Moore OBE  
Chairman, 157 Group

# The 157 Group voice: a policy update

In developing our strategy and seeking to offer our distinctive voice and play a significant role in thought leadership and capacity building for the sector, much of our focus has been on the value of large, often urban, successful colleges. This underpins a new strategic activity and themes calendar for the forthcoming months, which outlines where the 157 Group aims to make a valuable contribution on sector developments.

## The apprenticeship, skills, children and learning bill

On 3 March 2009, 157 Group chair Graham Moore gave evidence to the apprenticeship, skills, children and learning bill committee.

Publication of the bill has dominated recent 157 Group activity and we are working with a range of partners, including the Association of Colleges, to clarify and amend the legislation as it progresses through parliament.

We want to ensure that the new Office of Chief Skills Funder – which will hold significant intervention powers – is transparent, accountable and responsive to the sector.

We propose that it should be granted the same organisational status as the Young Persons Learning Agency (YPLA), namely that of a non-departmental public body (NDBP).

Secondly, we want to ensure that the duty to cooperate locally, as proposed in the bill, becomes a reality.

This will lead to formal recognition of colleges as key players in local partnerships.

We have also proposed amendments on issues such as support for learners with learning difficulties, transport arrangements and entitlement for study and training outside full-time provision. These have been debated and will have a significant impact on the legislation.

This work has provided an excellent opportunity to place on record our concerns about the complexity of future funding arrangements and the potential for additional bureaucracy following the machinery of government changes.

## The economic downturn

We are continuing our focus on how colleges can play an effective role in limiting the impact of the economic downturn for individuals, employers and communities. We are producing a series of case studies and working with various government officials and partners to develop and share effective practice across the sector.



## Consultations

We have responded to several consultations, including:

- Self-Regulation Prospectus
- Common Inspection Framework
- Adult Advancement Service
- The New National Improvement Strategy
- Social Mobility
- 21st Century Schools.

We have commissioned a piece on the strength of governing bodies, which will explore how governance, quality, improvement and potential self-regulation interrelate.

Over the next few months, our focus will turn to quality governance, tackling inclusion and capacity building.

The 157 Group activity and themes calendar and all our consultation responses and policy papers can be found at [www.157group.co.uk](http://www.157group.co.uk)

**Kat Fletcher**  
Director of Policy and Development



# Essential skills – a novel approach

It has long been recognised that there is a set of transferable skills and abilities that are prerequisites for employability, career progression and the realisation of academic potential. Many students are, however, reluctant to engage in additional studies. To address this, the business studies division at Ealing, Hammersmith & West London College devised and carried out a two-year project.

Launched for the first time in September 2006, the two-week College Apprentice programme was offered to over 100 higher-level students starting the following courses:

- HND business
- HND hospitality management
- Access to business
- Association of Accounting Technician (full-time)
- International business programme.

The diverse cohort included Esol and mature students, A-level and BTec qualified students and those without formal educational qualifications.

The programme was designed as a prelude to preparation for formal course programmes. It incorporated a set of essential business skills that related directly to the business courses students were undertaking:

- Team working
- Time management
- Holding effective meetings
- Research and internet skills
- Referencing work and plagiarism
- Giving presentations
- Portfolio building
- ICT.

## Pedagogy

The project was designed to harness the full potential of current technologies to deliver more effective learning. Successful development of the essential skills would:

- Allow students to embark on their courses with high levels of confidence in terms of what was expected of them
- Allow teachers to harbour common expectations of the style and quality of work that students would present to them thereafter
- Ensure students were able to exploit and apply technology to their learning.

Ambiguity of expectation so often undermines effective performance and achievement. The intention was to create a level of expectation amongst staff and students that would endure far beyond the conclusion of the project.

## Project design

To add appeal and structure to the project, it was loosely based on the popular BBC programme, *The Apprentice*.

It was delivered to the whole intake of students, rather than on a course-by-course basis, to assist with academic and social integration. All resources and a discussion board for each group were available online from inside or outside the college at any time. Students also had online access to staff mentors.

Students were required to carry out extensive research, meet daily, record their meetings and keep evidence of their research, properly referenced. They also had to prepare presentations, which were recorded on video and graded.

Skills audits before and after the programme show significant improvement in all areas of development. Feedback from staff has been positive, with comments such as:

“Excellent idea that streamlines the effectiveness of students in all fields ... it shows in how they deal with assignments, group tasks etc.”

“It is evident that HND Year 1 students feel more confident than in previous years.”

[www.wlc.ac.uk](http://www.wlc.ac.uk)

# Re-skilling takes priority for now

A report by the innovations, universities and skills select committee says that the recession has made re-skilling redundant workers a priority, and that Britain's ambition to have world-class skills by 2020 is probably impossible. Jackie Fisher, chief executive of Newcastle College Group, talks about the importance of re-equipping redundant workers for new careers and the employability agenda.



With tens of thousands of people having lost their jobs in recent months, it is welcome news that the government is addressing concerns that training organisations and colleges need a freer hand to meet the needs of employers and individuals.

The prime minister is appealing to businesses and individuals not to abandon training as the recession gathers pace. He says that "if the skills of the workforce are kept fresh, businesses can hit the ground running and trained individuals will be in demand when the recession ends".

This is vital if we are to have a re-skilled workforce ready to meet the demands of industry in the future and to help meet the government's aspirations of achieving world-class skills that would put the UK in the top quarter of international league tables.

As an organisation committed to responding to government agendas, our focus is on meeting national and regional education, skills and employability needs for individuals and the skills priorities of employers.

We work closely with our stakeholders and clients to understand their needs and design and deliver bespoke solutions that provide real time, tangible benefits. The emphasis is on practicality, on delivering courses that have real and immediate relevance to an organisation's or individual's concrete need.

For example, one of our divisions, Intraining, has put additional support in place for its work-based learners facing redundancy. Learners have access to a dedicated training centre to gain real work experience and tailored qualifications and retrain for future employment. It also offers a recruitment service to learners and employers.

Lord Digby Jones, former minister of state for trade and investment, visited Newcastle College before the downturn. He said that the skills crisis was the biggest barrier to the UK's success in the 21st century, and made a stirring call for all employers to release staff to gain basic skills.

He went on to say that training institutions and businesses were our future, and if we could

make sure that there was not one employer in this country that had not bothered to train their staff to level 2, everything would flow from that.

As we all know, training needs have changed. While it is still crucial for the population to achieve level 2, the recession has forced the government's hand to readdress the skills agenda and we must be ready to be flexible and adaptive to meet its needs.

So it is not all doom and gloom. Training organisations and colleges are in demand as never before. By responding to the government's new priorities, there are many opportunities, particularly for developing employer-facing provision, including work-based learning, and meeting the government's employability agenda.

By fostering outstanding stakeholder and client relationships, we will continue over the coming year to create unrivalled provision and innovative solutions to meet the needs of our customers, our people and our communities.

[www.ncl-coll.ac.uk](http://www.ncl-coll.ac.uk)

# Reaching out with creative solutions for local businesses

While providing education to enrich people's lives is an important part of the work that colleges do, the severity of the current economic downturn gives a real sense of urgency to the economic mission of colleges and their crucial role in supporting local communities and the wider economy. The 157 Group is producing a series of case studies describing how member colleges are working with local people and businesses to help them weather the economic storm and grasp new opportunities.

## City and Islington College

When Woolworths announced it was closing all its 807 stores after 100 years of trading, City and Islington College's business unit contacted stores across London to offer support and advice. Their offers were eagerly accepted by a wide range of staff, from store managers to sales assistants, who took up the college's offer to attend a series of four-day workshops designed to give them the skills to find new jobs.

Boots is also receiving help from the college while going through a major restructuring of its distribution network.

## City of Bristol College

Numatics International has seen a 20 per cent improvement in production of its Henry vacuum cleaner after Brunel and Gordano Training, the training arm of City of Bristol College, ran a business improvement techniques programme for more than 80 staff.

The college also works with Oldland CNC, an aeronautical precision engineering firm, and paper-based packaging company Smurfit Kappa to deliver apprenticeships.

## Cornwall College

West Country retailer and agricultural supplier Cornwall Farmers has launched a major training programme for its 350 staff in the belief that developing capability and confidence will equip the business to cope better with the effects of the downturn. It has chosen Cornwall College to deliver to the store managers, sales and warehouse staff in its retail division a programme that will act as a business driver to improve customer service, customer satisfaction, staff turnover, and customer loyalty.

## St Helens College

Workers at Heinz developed a taste for world-class manufacturing skills when St Helens College initiated a training programme to boost the performance of staff at its can-making factory.

Two groups, a mix of shop floor workers and middle managers, were given the opportunity to see lean manufacturing techniques in action on visits to the Jaguar car plant at Halewood, near Liverpool. St Helens College runs apprenticeship programmes for both Jaguar and Heinz.

## Stoke on Trent College

Employment in the ceramics industry has declined by nearly two-thirds in the last 13 years, and Stoke on Trent College has been instrumental in providing jobseekers with the skills to take advantage of new employment opportunities.

Waterford Wedgwood went into administration in January and the college has been retraining many of its staff to secure jobs at New Look, the fashion retailer, which is expanding in the area. The scheme has a success rate of 90 per cent.

## West Nottinghamshire College

More than 100 warehouse staff and drivers at a DHL freight depot at Coalville, Leicestershire have taken part in a training programme delivered by West Nottinghamshire College that gave them skills and learning opportunities and helped them work together more efficiently, providing substantial cost savings for the company.

The college also provides training for Arriva, Bombardier, DB Schenker and First UK Bus, and now plans to open a dedicated transport academy.

# The World Class Skills Programme



The 157 Group is a partner of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service's World Class Skills (WCS) programme. It is easy to see why the partnership works. Both the 157 Group and the WCS programme are focused on improving the further education sector and being a proactive part of the solution, rather than simply a reactive force.



The WCS programme provides a range of highly tailored products and services for individual providers as they seek to improve the responsiveness and quality of their offer to employers.

Fully subsidised by LSIS and therefore free of charge to providers, the World Class Skills programme offers seminars, interactive workshops, thematic development projects and bespoke consultancy. It is delivered for LSIS by KPMG and a consortium of national partners.

Lynne Sedgmore, executive director of the 157 Group, says, "The WCS programme is an excellent sector-led initiative that aims to drive up standards by sharing expertise and problem-solving."

The WCS programme was developed in response to Lord Leitch's 2006 review<sup>1</sup>. Since then, the economic climate has worsened and skills policy has come under review.

<sup>1</sup> HM Treasury, 2006. *Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills*. Norwich: TSO.

Many 157 Group members find the WCS programme attractive because it allows them the time and space to look at the issue of skills in relation to the UK's workforce in a systematic and creative way.

As the government reacts to the recession by pumping resources into Jobcentre Plus, Train to Gain and apprenticeships, WCS is already working with high-performing FE providers to ensure that they are nimble on their feet.

FE providers are used to change. To succeed, they must be able to draw on talent from outside the sector. WCS offers 157 Group members the opportunity to build on this experience by working with their counterparts and independent, expert consultants to address challenges, pool expertise and own the final solutions. The ultimate goal is to make sure the UK remains globally competitive.

In nine months, the programme has so far delivered more than 300 scheduled and in-house events.

These are being held regionally and can be tailored to meet your needs. The WCS events and seminars range from *Structuring your organisation to support employer responsiveness* to *Delivering to small and micro businesses*.

The latter, to take just one example, helps providers base their offering around training packages customised for the employer rather than off-the-shelf packages that may prove ineffective in a small business context. The consultancies, along with other innovation and development projects, have also been very successful.

Graham Moore, 157 Group chair and principal of Stoke on Trent College says, "The bespoke consultations are fantastic opportunities to problem solve with your counterparts, share expertise and own the final, tailored solutions."

For further information, visit [www.excellencegateway.org.uk/wcs](http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/wcs) or speak to a member of the team on 0800 328 6075.

# Spring 2009 Newsletter



## Dates for your diary

24 April 2009	Association for University Research and Industry Links (AURIL) and 157 Group conference: Innovation for Economic Growth through Development Agencies and the Tertiary Education Sector working together. Discounted rate for 157 Group members. For further information, please visit <a href="http://www.auril.org.uk">www.auril.org.uk</a>
20 May 2009	157 Group invited to give evidence to the innovation, universities, science and skills committee on capital investment for FE colleges.
3 June 2009	157 Group Keeping In Touch (KiT) meeting with Siôn Simon MP.
8 June 2009 14.00	All 157 Group meeting.
8 June 2009 18.00	Parliamentary reception hosted by Phil Willis MP.
9 June 2009	157 Group Keeping In Touch (KiT) meeting with Stephen Marston.
12-13 July 2009	157 Group annual conference.
3 November 2009	157 Group meeting and AGM, followed by reception at the House of Lords, hosted by Lord Morris of Handsworth.

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Graham Moore OBE  
157 Group Chairman

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