

...And then there were 10

Agatha Christie's macabre tale of 'Ten Little Soldiers' aside, '**...and then there were 10'** is an appropriate description for the **S7** group of Sixth Form Colleges located in Surrey and Sussex. Sally Bromley, current Chair of **S7** and Principal of The College of Richard Collyer in Horsham, agrees with last week's article in *TES Further* by Bill Watkin, CEO of the SFCA. "I echo what Bill said about SFCs being '*a family working more closely together than ever, embracing change as an opportunity*' (*TES Further* 30/09/16).

Bill's article emphasised the strengths of SFCs, many of which have been established in their communities for over 40 years, for quality of experience and value for money. The ABR process has shone a spotlight on their success and, perhaps a surprise for some in the education world but not for SFCs, how collaborative and outward facing they are. The **S7** group of SFCs exemplifies this."

The **S7** Consortium of Sixth Form Colleges was formed in 2002 and originally comprised seven colleges located in Surrey: Esher, Farnham, Godalming, Reigate, Spelthorne, Strodes and Woking. The colleges work together to provide a forum for sharing ideas and good practice in teaching and learning, leadership and management and to promote the interests and ethos of the Sixth Form College brand. Member colleges contribute to a consortium fund which pays the salary of Anna Loveday, **S7** Director, and additional administrative support. This organisational structure is necessary to ensure that the range of activities and events run smoothly. There are over 25 groups of staff from the Principals and Vice Principals to HR Directors and Clerks, who meet regularly to discuss their particular area of work within the local and national landscape. Then there are groups of teachers who get together to share professional practice in their subject areas or specialism, for example Collyer's hosted a very successful Modern Foreign Languages day for MFL teachers and support staff in the summer term of 2016. Peer Review and Development work is also valued; member colleges take part in one another's lesson observation schemes and Self-Assessment Review meetings. And then there's the biennial **S7** Teaching and Learning and Support Staff Conferences. The former are held at Royal Holloway with over 400 staff from across the colleges attending a full range of workshops and enjoying key note addresses from fellow educational professionals such as David Didau and Frank Coffield.

Undoubtedly a strength of the **S7** Consortium is the professional development and training which takes place annually, organised by Anna and delivered mostly but not exclusively, by the Senior Teams in the colleges: Teachers' Toolkit for NQTs, Aspiring Middle Managers, Senior Leadership Programme and everything else for everyone else above, beyond and in-between. There are excellent opportunities across the colleges for professional advancement. Testament to this are the recent appointments of Will Baldwin, previously Assistant Principal at Godalming taking over from Chris Thomson as Principal at BHASVIC, and Emma Young, previously Vice Principal at Esher, taking over from David Adelman as Principal at Godalming.

'...and then there were 10'? David Adelman famously launched **S7** to the strains of S Club 7 but unlike their namesake they have gone from strength to strength in quality, range of activity and number. Initially reduced to five colleges when Spelthorne and Farnham merged with GFEs, the original founder five have since been joined by Coulsdon, Collyer's, BHASVIC, Bexhill and Varndean, in fact all the Sixth Form Colleges in Surrey, Sussex, Brighton and Hove. ABRs have encouraged reflection on future direction for some colleges and academisation, federation or merger may be on the cards but the **S7** Consortium of

colleges will continue to be proud of their record and the difference they are making to post 16 education in the region.

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