

Making a Difference:

The Impact of Aimhigher

Dissemination of practice

Dissemination of practice

This booklet is one in a series of ten, produced by partnerships involved in Aimhigher activities and collated by Action on Access. The case studies provided are illustrative of an extensive and wide-ranging set of Aimhigher activities delivered across England.

Other publications in this series include:

ACE, taster and other aspiration-raising activity

Masterclasses and other attainment-raising activity

Summer Schools

Engagement of parents and carers

Mentoring, Ambassadors and Student Associates

Work with specific Widening Participation target groups

Work with communities and outreach activities

Work with all pre-KS4 pupils, including primary

Progression to higher education from vocational, work-based and work-related learning

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Introduction

Dissemination of practice

The case studies in this booklet show the different ways Aimhigher projects and activities have impacted on people's lives by creating exciting opportunities which operate in every local education authority in England.

Aimhigher aims to widen and deepen participation in higher education to help create a higher education system that includes all who can benefit from it – particularly those who might not view learning as an option, or perhaps face social, cultural, economic, or institutional barriers. Aimhigher particularly seeks to redress under-participation in higher education by lower social class groups and by vocational students. These aims continue to be an important government priority.

Aimhigher is an excellent example of partnerships bringing together schools, further education colleges, higher education institutions, employers, the skills sector, and others to focus on the core objectives; helping to raise attainment and aspiration and improving progression opportunities.

Aimhigher began in August 2004 and builds on existing widening participation programmes. It is still early days and it will be some time before targets of increases in the numbers participating in higher education can be shown to have been achieved. This booklet demonstrates some of the early impact of the Aimhigher programme.

Aimhigher partnerships have devised and developed creative activities to support people into higher education. Partnerships have developed a variety of ways to spread the news about what they have been doing so that others (including Aimhigher practitioners in other areas) are aware of these activities and of the impact they are having, and have every opportunity to be enthused or learn from them.

If many of the means of dissemination are in common use, it is because they work. Partnerships have developed websites; publish regular newsletters, case studies and reports; offer conferences and workshops; organise staff development to colleagues outside of Aimhigher; organise network meetings; and use regional and national opportunities to disseminate. These case studies demonstrate these and other more innovative or creative ideas.

The criteria for a partnership case study to be included in this booklet were observation of practice, analysis of partnership plans and successful progress in reaching targets by the end of the first year of the programme.

The case studies chosen reflect the range of activities undertaken – they are therefore illustrative but do highlight a number of key features which already show the difference Aimhigher is making.

They demonstrate the range of under-represented groups in HE who are involved in activities to find out about the possibilities for them in HE. They show the importance of working with different sectors and groups in partnership to address the range of barriers faced by people who have no experience of HE and who are socially disadvantaged in our society. They also demonstrate how in a very short period of time partnerships have got up and running and are delivering an extensive programme of work.

There are no claims to 'best practice', the term itself is problematic and is contested. However, the case studies are illustrative of the range of activities and processes that have been shown to add value in other countries. As the Aimhigher programme develops, evaluation results will come through¹ and it will be possible to have a fuller picture of the impact of the overall programme.

¹ The national evaluation programme started in May 2005. Early results will be available by December 2005.

Portfolio Days UK – Aimhigher Innovation Project

Aimhigher Area

Arts Aimhigher in London Partnership (one of the three pan-London thematic partnerships)

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Background and context

In the summer of 2004 a number of staff from or associated with the University of the Arts London Directorate of Further Education and Widening Participation visited a variety of arts schools in the United States. The purpose was to identify ways in which US arts institutions were working with their local communities to encourage applications from those learners likely to make their student body more diverse.

Staff returned to the UK with a lot of interesting ideas for outreach initiatives, however one initiative stood out – the National Portfolio Day Association programme.

The National Portfolio Day Association organises one-day events around the US where large numbers of potential applicants to art programmes can obtain advice on their portfolios. Each event is staffed by representatives from many of the country's major art schools. Although the US model was not specifically aimed at diversification, there seemed potential in adapting the US model and providing learners from non-traditional backgrounds in London with impartial advice about the contents of their portfolios, not only to improve their contents but also to encourage them to apply to courses or institutions to which they might not normally have aspired.

As several researchers have shown, the traditional art and design recruitment and selection process based around the preparation and discussion of a portfolio of practical work places non-traditional applicants at disadvantage. Further, pilot work at London College of Fashion as part of their COVE project and Glasgow School of Art's GOALS programme has shown that this disadvantage can be lessened where applicants are able to discuss the contents of their portfolios with HE staff prior to actual interview.

applicants are able to > discuss the contents of their portfolios with HE staff prior to actual interview

Description of the activity

The concept of a London-wide Portfolio Day based on the US model but specifically aimed at widening participation students, became possible after the University of the Arts London in partnership with Arts Aimhigher London successfully bid for London Region Aimhigher Innovation funding. As a consequence staff from the University of the Arts and Arts Aimhigher visited the US in January 2005 to attend the two portfolio days held in Florida; to see how the portfolio day worked in reality, and to establish whether a similarly large-scale event or series of events might be practical in the UK.

Following the trip to the US an evaluation report of the portfolio days was written detailing lessons learnt from the US model and ways to adapt the model to suit a London widening participation target group. In May 2005 a planning meeting was organised and representatives from London higher education providers of art courses were invited. The aim of the meeting was to disseminate the experience of the US model and to share ideas about how to take the project forward.

art and design degrees in London in one place which would enable potential applicants to access advice from more than one institution

The London-wide Portfolio Day is planned for February 2006 and will bring together representatives from main providers of art and design degrees in London in one place which would enable potential applicants to access advice from more than one institution. Attendees will be given advice according to the subject area they are interested in, rather than the institution – this will not be a recruitment event. In addition advice sessions will cover interview techniques, finance and careers in the creative industries, as well as offering information from prominent people within the industry about their own experiences and the opportunities available to graduates.

How the activity made a difference

Planned for February 2006 the day will be specifically targeted at learners from London's further education colleges with low progression rates. The aim of the day is to assist applicants from non-traditional backgrounds to improve their portfolios and therefore maximise their chances of obtaining places on arts HE programmes. By offering potential students expert advice, we hope to go some way towards removing a major barrier to participation.

Subsequent or ongoing work

If the project is successful, it would be relatively straightforward to replicate it in other regions possibly through existing networks or institutions offering arts programmes, or even to consider adopting the US model in full and running a road-show round the country: the model could be replicated regionally or even nationally. It is also planned that Arts Aimhigher will use this model to fund separately a smaller-scale performance arts audition day.

The event is planned to take place in February 2006 and will be hosted by the Institute of Contemporary Arts who have kindly offered us their premises for free.

the model could be replicated regionally or even nationally



uni4me website and presentations

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the presentation has been delivered to more than 60 high schools and further education colleges in Greater Manchester and has been delivered to more than 11,000 young people

Background and context

Many of those from communities or families with no heritage of higher education are unfamiliar with higher education, and find it mysterious. The uni4me website is designed to identify those questions and to answer them. uni4me is very popular and, since its launch in 2001, has received 8,418,731 hits.

A presentation based around the theme "Why go to university?" was developed to support and promote uni4me. The objective of the presentation is firstly to provide young people with an overview of what university is, and secondly to direct anyone wanting more information about university to the uni4me website.

Description of the activity

Issues and topics discussed during the presentation include:

- a quiz about celebrities who have been to university and what they studied
- what life at university is like and courses available
- the costs and funding of university study
- the long-term benefits of a degree
- information on applying for and getting in to university
- the fact that you don't have to be top of the class to get a university place
- alternative routes into university other than the traditional A-levels.

The intention is that after seeing the presentation young people will be prompted to go and have a proper look at more detailed university information and careers information, including the uni4me website, in their own time.

> Since 2003 the presentation has been delivered to more than 60 high schools and further education colleges in Greater Manchester. The school programme has targeted Years 9, 10 and 11 in high schools across the 10 boroughs of Greater Manchester and has been delivered to more than 11,000 young people. In some cases specific groups of pupils have been identified by Aimhigher Coordinators, while in others whole year groups have been included. The presentations have also been adapted for students attending further education colleges.

It is intended that pupils leave the presentation with clearer ideas of what higher education is like, that it is open to everyone, how going to university could affect their future and where to look if they want to find out more.

How the activity made a difference

The aim of the presentation is to provide general information about university to young people from our target groups. More than 68% of pupils attending presentations said they did not know anyone studying in higher education.

After each session the pupils complete a short questionnaire about the presentation and their attitudes to higher education. Examples of responses demonstrate that awareness of higher education is developed through the sessions:

"I liked learning that university is nothing like school" > "I enjoyed learning about university life and the opportunities available"
 "I liked learning that university is nothing like school"
 "going to university gets you a better job"
 "you don't have to pay for your loan until you are earning a decent wage"

"you can get in without having 3 As at A-level" > "you can get in without having 3 As at A-level"
 "the reality of student finances"
 "that you can pay your student loan off in instalments"

An increased willingness to go on to higher education is indicated in responses to the question, "Do you want to go to university?" Before the presentation responses were Yes – 71%, No – 26%, Don't know – 3%. After the presentation responses were Yes – 84 %, No – 9% and Don't know 7%. Perhaps the increased number of "unsures" indicates that a number had said they did want to go without really knowing enough about it.

Many are surprised to learn that you can choose to study a subject you may not have studied before > Pupils value the information about the huge range of options for study available, including some of the more unusual courses and more detailed explanations of what certain courses such as "media studies" or "football studies" would entail. Many are surprised to learn that you can choose to study a subject you may not have studied before.

The subject of finance is also popular. Most pupils have very little idea about how much university costs apart from a vague idea that "it's very expensive". They find information about course fees, student loans, grants and bursaries highly relevant and useful.

The questionnaires have enabled us to evaluate which aspects of the uni4me presentation people value. The results show that in discussing higher education it is as important to talk about the social side of university life and to emphasise the difference between university and school, as it is to talk about career opportunities. Informing pupils about the vast array of courses provokes discussion about courses and what they might choose.

the most important issue was regarding the costs of university study and how this may be funded > Possibly the most important issue was regarding the costs of university study and how this may be funded. Through these presentations we have managed to get across the message (especially how much it is likely to cost and how that cost will be paid back), regarding universities being open to everyone and encouraging those that may have been unsure about aiming higher.

Subsequent or ongoing work

Using feedback from pupils about what they find most useful, the presentation is being refined, and new tailored presentations for specific groups, or including specific careers information (e.g. vocational course and route information), are being created.

Feedback also informs development of the website, for example incorporating new financial information describing post-2006 procedures.

Judging by the demand, the presentations to schools have been successful and there is clearly still a need to provide Year 9 and 10 pupils with the basic facts from which they can make informed decisions about their futures.

The East of England Annual Dissemination Conferences

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher East of England

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Margaret Hodge MP,
then Minister for
Higher Education and
Lifelong Learning,
was the keynote
speaker

the conference was
designed to foster
networking and
discussion about
improving the impact
of Aimhigher

Background and context

For the last five years (2000-2004) the East of England region has facilitated an annual dissemination conference to showcase widening participation activities throughout the region, and occasionally activities outside the region. A range of keynote speakers has given the conferences an insight into higher education policy and widening participation funding issues.

Description of the activity

The first Conference in February 2000 showcased the work undertaken as part of the one-year higher- and further- education funding councils' Widening Participation Special-Funding Programme. Presentations by members of the Four Counties Group of Higher Education Institutions and from the Universities of Hertfordshire and Luton provided colleagues across the region the opportunity to explore and discuss initiatives that were proving successful elsewhere. Practitioners from the South East and North West regions came along to host workshops to discuss their work, and Action on Access hosted a workshop to explain their role within the forthcoming three-year Widening Participation Special-Funding programme.

The Conference in March 2001 was a showcase for activities which ran during the first year of the Special-Funding programme. Practitioners from across the region had an opportunity to learn about projects such as the "Children into Universities" Schemes, "the Money Game" - about student finances and budgeting, and schemes to develop mentoring. The work on identifying levels of age-related HE participation at ward level (subsequently developed by the HEFCE as POLAR data) was demonstrated, and the implications of low HE participation in rural and coastal areas across the region were addressed.

The third conference in March 2002 offered presentations from higher education, further education and the schools sector which enabled delegates to get a feel for the level of importance each of these sectors placed upon the widening participation agenda. Discussion workshops were followed by a presentation from the HEFCE Regional Consultant on the nature of future funding post-2002 for widening participation activity.

Margaret Hodge MP, then Minister for Higher Education and Lifelong Learning, was the keynote speaker at the Regional Conference in March 2003. The Conference showcased the activities that demonstrated proven outcomes from the three-year Special-Funding programme and provided examples of research undertaken to inform practice in the three partnerships. Delegates were also able to hear from both HEFCE and the LSC with regard to the forthcoming Aimhigher: Partnerships for Progression (P4P) programme.

The fifth Annual Conference, held March 2004 provided examples of work undertaken during the first year of Aimhigher: P4P and looked forward to the integration of P4P and the Excellence Challenge under the Aimhigher banner. Whilst old hands were familiar with the activities undertaken in the other partnerships, the event provided an opportunity for new staff and stakeholders to learn about established projects and new developments. As always, the conference was designed to foster networking and discussion about improving the impact of Aimhigher and widening participation activities.

The continuing high attendance at the Annual Widening Participation Dissemination Conferences testifies to their value to practitioners and other key stakeholders

led to the production on a near-weekly basis of the "In Brief" e-mail news sheet by the East of England Aimhigher regional team

How the activity made a difference

The continuing high attendance at the Annual Widening Participation Dissemination Conferences testifies to their value to practitioners and other key stakeholders as a means to learn about, question and discuss new policy developments, funding concerns and project initiatives. However, although attendance from HEIs and FECs has been very good over the five years, school representatives have constituted just over 2% of the total delegate list. This continues to be a matter of concern, despite extensive publication of the dates of the events and the offer since 2003 to buy out teachers' time to allow attendance. Employer engagement has also proved difficult to increase. These issues will certainly be looked at prior to the 2005 event.

All the conferences were evaluated and feedback was excellent. The 'break-out' workshop sessions were considered consistently to be particularly useful. The open questions on the evaluation have provided some useful comments, including one in 2004 which asked for a weekly bulletin newsletter to be produced. This led to the production on a near-weekly basis of the "In Brief" e-mail news sheet by the East of England Aimhigher regional team.

Subsequent or ongoing work

The 2005 Conference will be held on 10 November 2005 and will focus on the challenges and opportunities for the future of Aimhigher in the East of England.

'Widen the World' of Nottinghamshire Pupils, CragRats Theatre Company

Aimhigher Area

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CragRats' production, 'Widen Your World', helped over 7,000 Year 11 pupils in Nottinghamshire focus on their future plans

demonstrated how key messages can be put across in a fast-paced, lively way that engages and motivates the audience

Background and context

Apprenticeships, A-levels, vocational qualifications, school sixth form, Further Education College, Sixth Form College ... with such a wide range of post-16 options on offer it's no wonder they need signposting! Enter CragRats, the theatre company specialising in educational productions designed to raise aspirations and awareness of opportunities in further and higher education.

Description of the activity

Aimhigher Nottinghamshire first commissioned CragRats to deliver a pilot initiative with Year 9 pupils in early 2004. Subsequently the CragRats' production, 'Widen Your World', helped over 7,000 Year 11 pupils in Nottinghamshire focus on their future plans. Connexions Nottinghamshire, the LSC and Aimhigher Nottinghamshire joined forces to fund the tour which visited 66 mainstream and special schools in Nottinghamshire last October.

The production focused on four characters whose hopes, fears, knowledge and enthusiasm could be reflected in the lives of many Year 11 pupils. The pupils could easily identify with the storyline which presented the wide range of post-16 options, the pressures of exams and the influence of parents, teachers and peers when it comes to decision-making. Nearly 2,000 young people from Widening Participation cohorts then had the opportunity to explore these issues in greater depth through workshops run by the actors.

In January and February of this year CragRats embarked on a second tour of the county for Year 9 pupils who were about to decide on their options for Years 10 and 11. It was felt appropriate that Aimhigher practitioners should experience first-hand the lively, energetic (and noisy) performance in a workshop at the regional East Midlands Dissemination Event in March 2005. Apart from revealing who was or was not aware of the current trends in the music scene and popular television (the show includes hilarious spoofs of The Weakest Link and The X Factor), it demonstrated how key messages can be put across in a fast-paced, lively way that engages and motivates the audience.

How the activity made a difference

One of the most important aspects of the CragRats initiative for Aimhigher Nottinghamshire was the opportunity it offered to collect data from a significant number of young people and the second part of the workshop provided an opportunity to share some of the findings of the evaluations with delegates. The key issues discussed included:

- the high number of pupils who did not know anyone who had been to university, emphasising the deep-rooted cultural barriers to progression
- it is clear that whilst many young people aspire to higher education, they are concerned about the levels of debt associated with it. It is important that we use this information to inform future planning and activities for young people, so that debt is seen as something that can be managed and planned for, not an obstacle and a block to achieving potential.
- As key influencers it is important to include parents and carers in the decision-making process and there is clearly a need to develop strategies that will help engage and

inform them. One option might be to include a performance as part of an options or parents' evening.

- The feedback from the schools has been extremely positive and there was agreement from the workshop delegates that there are enormous benefits in putting across the Aimhigher messages through performances that inspire and motivate pupils.

Subsequent or ongoing work

As a result of the views gathered from pupils as part of the CragRats initiative we are developing a finance workshop which will present the facts about the new funding arrangements and help to overcome some of the barriers to progression relating to money issues. We hope to be able to offer all Nottinghamshire schools the opportunity to take part in CragRats tours for pupils in Years 9 and 11 over the coming academic year. We are currently negotiating with our colleagues in Connexions and the LSC to continue the joint funding arrangement, which has provided economies of scale as well as demonstrating a real partnership approach. The challenge is to ensure future funding so that such an initiative can fit into a cohesive Aimhigher programme to raise awareness and aspirations.

**a real partnership
approach**



Credit Unions and Higher Education

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher South Yorkshire

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Due to their community base credit unions have strong links into their local communities through individual members, community organisations and initiatives, schools and local authorities

Using credit unions as a vehicle the project aims to increase awareness of higher education opportunities and to encourage progress into higher education

Background and context

South Yorkshire is a European Regional Development Fund Objective One area and as such is an area of considerable economic deprivation. National concern over low levels of financial literacy and the growth in levels of consumer debt are reflected in the sub-region, as is concern over the amount of money being leached out of its disadvantaged communities by high cost credit companies in interest payments.

South Yorkshire has lower than national average HE participation. Both parents and potential HE students are expressing concern over student debt. Participation rates tend to be lowest in wards experiencing economic deprivation and experience suggests that families in wards previously linked to traditional industries have low aspirations in relation to children progressing on to HE.

Credit unions are community-based mutual savings and loans societies, membership of which is usually open to people living or working in a particular geographical area or working for the same employer.

Credit unions encourage people to develop a savings habit and provide them with access to fairly priced loans. Managed by a Board of Directors elected by the members from the membership, credit unions distribute their profit to their members in the form of a dividend on savings. Due to their community base credit unions have strong links into their local communities through individual members, community organisations and initiatives, schools and local authorities. Seventeen credit unions together provide a financial service to the whole of South Yorkshire.

For example, Rotherham Credit Union Development Agency (RCUDA) exists to support the five Rotherham-based credit unions and to address issues of financial literacy. Together these credit unions have approximately 2000 members living in the Rotherham borough.

Our Aimhigher project aims to work with credit unions and others in the community to promote financial literacy among parents and young people and reduce the fear of debt as a barrier to higher education. Using credit unions as a vehicle the project aims to increase awareness of higher education opportunities and to encourage progress into higher education through savings initiatives, the effective use of affordable credit, debt awareness, financial planning and guidance and active participation in managing personal finances.

Description of the activity

This is a pilot project focussing on two wards in Rotherham where participation in higher education is historically low. If successful, it is intended that the project will be rolled out across the South Yorkshire region.

The project will –

- Train credit union workers so that they can engage existing and potential members in the issues of educational opportunities, debt prevention and financial management.
- Review/adapt existing and produce new material/information for region-wide dissemination
- Run awareness-raising sessions
- Inform parents and young people within the specified communities, in financial literacy and debt issues especially as they relate to educational opportunities

in a unique position to reach the target group since they are already active in wards where HE participation is low

- help in schools/colleges on money issues in relation to higher education, the potential role of credit union services and young savers schemes in schools.
- > Target Groups. Rotherham community credit unions are in a unique position to reach the target group since they are already active in wards where HE participation is low. A high percentage of their current membership is made up of people who are least likely to consider higher education as a realistic option, specifically:
- Families with no higher education history
 - Low-income families
 - People in debt or locked into the use of high-cost credit (doorstep lending)
 - People who have not completed, or who want to return to, education

How the activity made a difference

The project started in November 2004 and is receiving a positive reception not only from potential partners in Rotherham but also elsewhere in South Yorkshire.

Work undertaken to date includes:

The production and mailing out of a leaflet to all credit union members in Rotherham giving money tips for university

- Raising credit union workers' awareness of the project and issues relating to financial support for people going to university and the need for money management skills
- >
- The production and mailing out of a leaflet to all credit union members in Rotherham giving money tips for university and also use of credit cards and store cards.
 - The development of 'Get a grip ... be money wise' in partnership with Dearne Valley College. This money management course is being piloted with young parents and workers of Central Sure Start and Rawmarsh Sure Start in May and June 2005. The course consists of four sessions each of 2 hours' length. After June it will be available for delivery to people in the community.

Subsequent or ongoing work

Work planned for the summer months includes partnership working with:

- Lifetime/Connexions (Rotherham) to engage with parents via community events
- Business and Education, South Yorkshire teachers and credit union workers in developing materials (to enable the financial literacy capability framework) and guidance for the establishment of Credit Union Young Savers in primary schools.

The first nine months of the project will be reviewed in July 2005 with more detailed plans made for the following year's work.

Using the web as a tool of communication

Aimhigher Area

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Background and context

As Aimhigher partnerships have expanded in size and complexity, communication has become a central issue. Practitioners working on different strands of activity or in different area partnerships within a region need to be able to share practice and learn from each other. In a region as large as the South West, face-to-face meetings are expensive in terms of time and travel costs and so other mechanisms have to be developed to support the Aimhigher practitioner network.

Description of the activity

Aimhigher in the Southwest (AHSW) has developed a website as an online information and resource service to staff working on Aimhigher in the region, and for other colleagues. The staff site went online in the Summer of 2003 and is continually updated. It includes pages on:

Bulletin Board, WP Jargon Buster, Aimhigher Southwest Diary, Resources page, Staff contact details, Partnership Business Plans, Activity strands by theme and by area, Case Studies, Presentations from seminar workshops and a WP skills page.

This staff site was provided in addition to the website "Good Practice for Student Retention" developed under Widening Participation South West, the forerunner to AHSW.

A gateway page was created so that other websites within the region such as the Peninsula's aspiration-raising site Gr8Choice and the SW Summer Schools site, could all be accessed from a single page on the Internet.

How the activity made a difference

- Availability of information/comparison with e-mail

The web is accessible from anywhere, whether working within an institution or from home. There have been 4045 hits on the website gateway page to date, indicating the extent to which it is used. It can store large quantities of information at no real cost or inconvenience to the end-user. As a form of electronic delivery it has the immediacy of e-mail but with the advantage that the information remains available online without the end-users having to retain it themselves. Two further advantages over e-mail as a method of the provision of information are that a website can provide downloads which would be too large to e-mail (e.g. which might cause inboxes to crash) and the material is available to people without the need for e-mail addresses. On the other hand, one major disadvantage is that an e-mail is very much more likely to be read than a website is to be accessed. However, the two media can obviously be used in conjunction; they are complementary.

- Comparison with paper/hard copy

No printing and postage costs or delays. Immediate delivery - material can be e-mailed to the web designer and placed online the same day.

One of the most significant advantages of a web site is that the reader is able to select their own line to follow. A book/journal/etc imposes a line of reading selected by the author. It has a linear format from one complete page to the next complete page. But a

4045 hits on the website gateway page



a website can provide downloads which would be too large to e-mail and the material is available to people without e-mail addresses



web site can make effective use of links within the text, enabling the reader to skip ahead, or skip back, make lateral moves between pages and to follow their own particular line of interest.

- Connections to further material through external links.

Subsequent or ongoing work

- There are technical challenges: the inclusion of password-protected areas on a site, with login passwords connected to a database; the inclusion of a message-board service where users can themselves publish onto the site; access to publishing onto the site is usually restricted to employees of that institution; it can be surprisingly difficult to get the target audience into the habit of accessing the website regularly.
- Using and developing the web as a communication tool has given much food for thought and the following useful advice.
- It is content that will bring users back for repeat visits. The Aimhigher South West website is successful and effective because: it is an information and resources, and content-led site with plenty of useful material on it; regularly updated so that it supplies the needs of staff in an ever-changing working environment; out-of-date material is regularly deleted to avoid making the site itself look out-of-date.
- AHSW faced the usual choice when making a widening participation website - employing a widening participation practitioner who understands the content of the site but is limited in technical web design knowledge, or employing an IT technician or external IT company who can do advanced design but who don't understand the content of the site. It follows that staff development training to either train a technician in WP or train a practitioner in IT would be very beneficial.
- Education web sites such as this one that act as gateways or portals to other sites should not cover so much ground that they attempt the impossible. A gateway web site will have greater clarity and utility for the user if it identifies one area of interest, incorporating various themes within that area rather than trying to do too much. For example, separate gateways for 'widening participation', 'academic research' and 'teaching and learning', despite an obvious degree of overlap, are preferable to having one huge gateway for the whole of higher education.
- Regarding the visual appearance of the site, a continuity of colours across different media promotes identification/recognition and is desirable. If the organization has a logo, produces leaflets, advertises conferences etc, the web site should be consistent in visual appearance with these other media.
- Remember to make use of whatever other media/communication the organisation has to promote the web site. Advertising leaflets can be included in conference packs, and can be handed out at seminars and staff development events. E-mail circulars and, if available, newsletters could also be used, as well as placement on search engines and reciprocal links with other relevant web sites.

It is content that will
bring users back for
repeat visits >

Vocational Pathways Mapping Exercise Project

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website

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This is a
comprehensive
model for mapping
vocational pathways



Background and context

Aimhigher Northamptonshire has recently completed the first edition of an annual mapping exercise of all of the vocational progression routes within the county from Level 2 through to Level 4. The document articulates progression routes across the main thirteen areas of learning.

Most if not all of the Aimhigher areas within the East Midlands had undertaken a mapping exercise of vocational provision. The extent and scope of the mapping varied considerably. The life of the project will run over twelve months before going live in July 2006.

Description of the activity

The mapping exercise has produced a weighty 38 page document which, whilst very useful for teachers and practitioners, is not very learner friendly. Aimhigher Northamptonshire has received Regional Innovations funding to develop the vocational mapping document into a manageable and user-friendly format to suit diverse users.

All representatives from Aimhigher partnerships in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Leicester City and Lincolnshire and Rutland agreed with the concept of the project. Participants at the March 2005 workshop (see below) were agreeable to Aimhigher's bid driving forward a regional model. Comments from participants included 'This is a comprehensive model for mapping vocational pathways. It will provide solid building blocks to produce diverse IAG materials for vocational learners.'

The project will develop the following:

- A web-based version with simple, efficient and clear navigational routes for each occupational pathway
- An A3 gatefold IAG document for all of the main 11 Areas of Learning and other learner/parent IAG mediums
- A Connexions Personal Advisor/Teacher/Tutor pack
- Opportunities for further 'Vocational Gap Analysis' work to engender Curriculum Development

A workshop session was organised on the Vocational Pathways Mapping Exercise Project presented by Aimhigher Northamptonshire at the Aimhigher East Midlands Regional Dissemination Event in March 2005, the aims of which were to disseminate the mapping exercise to partners and identify best practice taking place within the region and create collaborative opportunities to move the regional agenda forward. The session participants were split into their geographical areas and asked to consider three aspects of the regional bid:

- To identify best practice in the region by gathering information;
- Discuss the concept of Aimhigher Northamptonshire's IAG bid and share opinions and ideas to build a regional format;
- Feedback on a draft timetable of events.

Other Aimhigher regions used the model to produce their own mapping pathways

>

How the activity made a difference

The project has identified that there is limited comprehensive mapping of vocational progression routes within the county and an agreed model should be formulated for the East Midlands. Other Aimhigher regions including Yorkshire and the North East have received copies of the document and given very positive feedback, moreover, having used the model to produce their own mapping pathways.

Staff awareness of vocational progression routes has increased as a result of the project

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The mapping exercise has helped to get the message across within the county in relation to identifying gaps in the vocational offer at Level 4. It has also identified that there is little diversity in the mode of delivery i.e. predominantly either part-time or full-time with little e-learning or supported distance learning. Staff awareness of vocational progression routes has increased as a result of the project. Partner organisations have requested copies of the document as part of their 'IAG toolkits'. Finally the document is informing a county curriculum development group and it is hoped that compacts and progression accords will follow.

the document is informing a county curriculum development group

Subsequent or ongoing work

The document has proved invaluable for county-wide 'vocational gap analysis' and engendering curriculum development opportunities. Connexions Northamptonshire are very keen to undertake collaborative working with the project.

The Graduation Project, Sheffield

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher South Yorkshire

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we hope to create an
"If I can, you can"
attitude

It also helps boost
morale among
teaching staff by
illustrating the
success of past
pupils, whilst re-
engaging both these
groups with the
higher education
process

Background and context

The South Yorkshire sub-region (Sheffield, Rotherham, Doncaster and Barnsley), has lower than national average HE participation. The Graduation Project aims to tackle this by providing case studies of successful local graduates to local school (primary and secondary) and college students. By giving students access to a wide range of positive role models that they can identify with, we hope to create an "If I can, you can" attitude and enable them to start thinking about their longer-term education and career routes.

The project aims to demystify higher education, not only for local school and college students, but for their teachers and parents. It aims to encourage individuals who will benefit from higher education and have the ability to progress, to consider further study.

Description of the activity

We aim to work with partners to identify opportunities (primarily via attendance at graduation and awards ceremonies) whereby graduate profiles are gathered and subsequently forwarded to our target groups. Through these opportunities we make contact with graduates (both FE and HE) who grew up and were educated in South Yorkshire. These graduates complete a personal profile of their learning journey and outcomes. The graduate is also asked to provide a line of key advice to others. The project particularly targets groups which are currently under-represented in higher education.

Case studies illustrate and provide information regarding different progression routes, courses on offer and career choices. The project also aims to provide information to parents and help them offer support to their children. It also helps boost morale among teaching staff by illustrating the success of past pupils, whilst re-engaging both these groups with the higher education process.

The team gather and record the case studies, organise them into an attractive and accessible format and print them to a high quality. These profiles are then sent for distribution within schools/colleges. The materials are also used on display stands and tend to be used to support outreach work. Initially four stands (one for each Area), have been created for use at raising-aspiration events throughout South Yorkshire. These are supported by an interactive, information-packed website, enabling audiences to view case studies online as well as providing information and advice for key influencers, a jargon-buster and course information.

The project has developed and is run as a partnership between further and higher education providers in South Yorkshire, with the lead institution being Sheffield Hallam University.

How the activity made a difference

reaching a potential audience of 186,476

>

Between September 2003 and March 2005 contact has been made with 827 local graduates. These are made into case studies and sent to primary and secondary schools and colleges, reaching a potential audience of 186,476.

Feedback from staff concluded that the resources helped increase awareness and instil a positive attitude towards HE, they help 'motivate both staff and children to reach their own goals' [Head Teacher, Owler Brook Nursery & Infant School, Sheffield].

Resources have been used for a variety of purposes including 'raising awareness of range of opportunities available, celebrating success and raising aspirations', [A. Tomlinson, Head Teacher, Burton Road Primary School, Barnsley] and 'Use in connection with PSHE Careers Unit' [L. Hilbert, Deputy Head Teacher, Thorpe Hesley Junior School, Rotherham]. The project materials have also been used for numerous parents' evenings at twelve secondary schools.

'motivate both staff and children to reach their own goals'

'the profiles are excellent, simply because they are meaningful and relevant to our students'

>

Demand for case studies has developed from audiences. Comments included 'the profiles are excellent, simply because they are meaningful and relevant to our students', [C. Gammons, Aimhigher and G&T Co-ordinator, Wickersley School and Sports College, Rotherham] and 'This resource is greatly appreciated', [G. Worrall, Head Teacher, Greenlands Junior School, Sheffield]. Audiences also appreciated the quality of resources: 'Excellent idea, professionally presented and appreciated here at RVC', [I. Beever, Aimhigher Co-ordinator, Rother Valley College].

Subsequent or ongoing work

The project is running through 2004/5 and 2005/6 and continues to grow from strength to strength with an increasing number of case studies being collected and a strong awareness of the project throughout the area. We will continue to target groups that are under-represented in higher education, and to develop the website and other resources, in conjunction with our partners.

Sharing Best Practice in a Distributed Network: the London South Aimhigher Annual Conference 2005

Aimhigher Area

London South Aimhigher

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the main priority was to gain the commitment of all nine local higher education institutions and ten local further education institutions to the partnership model

Workshops, delivered primarily by student ambassadors, provided delegates with the opportunity to 'taste' the experience a student may have at an Aimhigher event

Background and context

Aimhigher in London South operates as a distributed network, with a central project team focused on managing the development of the partnership and supporting institutional plans through monitoring visits and provision of seminars, newsletters, ad-hoc interventions, etc. In the initial stages of development the main priority was to gain the commitment of all nine local higher education institutions and ten local further education institutions to the partnership model. Once all the partners were engaged the aim was to provide an equitable approach to delivery of activities by both further education and higher education institutions with funds allocated to enhance existing activity, rather than duplicate it.

In the second phase of the project, following the integration plan, the partnership has focused on two key areas:

- building stronger links with schools as partners
- developing staff understanding and capacity to support progression through a series of staff development events.

The staff development programme that has developed involves a series of seminars targeted at specific staff and an annual conference for all those involved in the partnership. Both types of activity serve a dual purpose of providing opportunities to exchange good practice and to encourage networking between staff from different institutions. The Annual Conference, first held in March 2005, provided the first opportunity for representatives involved in the planning and delivery of widening participation activities from ALL educational sectors to network with colleagues, exchange ideas and good practice and become more aware of current issues at national, regional and local levels.

Description of the activity

The one day event was organised in two clear parts. The morning session took a traditional conference approach with three keynote speakers from Action on Access, a partner higher education institution and the Aimhigher Area Steering Group presenting the national, regional and local perspectives on widening participation and Aimhigher. This was followed by a structured discussion with a panel of higher education representatives about Access agreements.

The afternoon session involved a series of showcase workshops led by staff and student ambassadors representing the range of activities delivered by further and higher education institutions across the London South region. Workshops, delivered primarily by student ambassadors, provided delegates with the opportunity to 'taste' the experience a student may have at an Aimhigher event. Delegates were able to see the e-mentoring website up and running, sample healthcare experiments roadshows, exchange ideas as to how the Aimhigher teachers' resource packs are used, share good practice as to how to embed Aimhigher into further education college strategy, learn about awareness raising activities for younger students and attainment raising activities through sport, exchange ideas about training FE student ambassadors, discuss the research into vocational progression pathways and decide how to take the findings forward, learn more about Aimhigher summer schools and discuss cross-sector collaboration within a single borough.

How the activity made a difference

The Annual Conference helped improve the level of involvement and general awareness of Aimhigher amongst a range of key people. 70 delegates from 9 higher education institutions, 10 further education colleges, 14 schools, Connexions, two LEAs and the Government Office for London attended the event. Delegates agreed that it was useful to gain an overview of developments and to experience actual examples of projects. The opportunity to network with colleagues and share ideas was also welcomed.

More specifically:

has encouraged a local further education college and a school to work together in setting up an e-mentoring component to their existing mentoring scheme

- > • The e-mentoring workshop has encouraged a local further education college and a school to work together in setting up an e-mentoring component to their existing mentoring scheme
- One local college is supporting another in a neighbouring borough to share good practice about embedding Aimhigher into the strategy of an FE college
- Relationships with Connexions have strengthened. The Aimhigher team has been asked to present a workshop at a forthcoming information evening organised by Connexions and a meeting has been held with a local careers company to discuss future ways of working together
- Enquiries to HEIs about their programme of activities have increased and one HEI programme is now fully booked as a consequence
- The use of Aimhigher literature in schools is actively being encouraged by LEA representatives at borough 14-19 meetings
- Local press coverage has helped to raise the profile of Aimhigher in the community.

Enquiries to HEIs about their programme of activities have increased

Subsequent or ongoing work

It was agreed that the first Aimhigher London South Annual Conference was a successful event that should be repeated on an annual basis. Whilst an overview of the issues affecting Aimhigher was appreciated, it has been noted that delegates would have welcomed more opportunity to exchange ideas with colleagues, in particular amongst their own sector.

It was also recognised that the workshops were the most well received part of the event. Future events will be planned to allow delegates to attend more workshops and to increase the opportunity to exchange ideas with colleagues.

London South will continue to focus on staff networks and seminars as an important feature of addressing the Aimhigher agenda locally. In addition to the annual conference the partnership has an established, successful dyslexia network for further education and higher education staff, a programme of workshops focused on specific themes (such as involving further education and higher education students in Aimhigher activities, the impact of the introduction of variable tuition fees, etc) and a mechanism to exchange ideas between school, LEA, further education and higher education representatives in borough clusters.

Aimhigher Greater Manchester newsletters

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Greater Manchester

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primarily the newsletters feature articles about Aimhigher events and activities that have taken place

The newsletters are proving a great way to promote the message of aiming high to all, opportunities to share ideas, inspire people and create a sense of pride

Background and context

As one of the largest Aimhigher partnerships, with 10 LEAs, 6 universities, 28 colleges and nearly 200 schools, communicating information about what is happening across the area and creating a shared vision is very important. Aimhigher Greater Manchester Co-ordination Unit produces a quarterly newsletter which is distributed to around 900 people including representatives from all the schools, colleges, universities and other organisations involved in the Aimhigher partnership.

Description of the activity

The newsletter is usually around 20 pages long and is put together by the Team Assistant, Zoë. The first newsletter was relatively compact with only 8 pages. As it has increased in popularity, its size has expanded. Starting small helped to ensure that readers read the first editions and were not overwhelmed.

There are regular features like the intro and the "and finally" last page. Also included are special features, for example when a large event has taken place like an HE Fair there can be a two-page article with lots of photographs and positive quotes from people who attended the event. Important news about policy and funding relating to Aimhigher is included, but primarily the newsletters feature articles about Aimhigher events and activities that have taken place – this is always much more appealing to a larger audience. A special newsletter about Aimhigher and links with other key initiatives has also been produced and distributed with the usual newsletter.

As the newsletter is widely circulated it is important to ensure that when using photographs permission is sought in advance, and publicity request forms are sent to all whose case studies were used in our magazine.

Articles are written by different people involved in Aimhigher; teachers, borough coordinators, HEI coordinators, people in the workplace, people from local government and pupils from schools and colleges within the boroughs. We try to include all articles that are submitted, but sometimes too many for one issue are received so it is important that the newsletter reflects the broad range of views about how different people experience and view Aimhigher. The stories are then collated and published in magazine format and distributed via post. The newsletters can also be downloaded from our website.

How the activity made a difference

The newsletters are proving a great way to promote the message of aiming high to all, and give lots of people a chance to read what is actually happening across Greater Manchester with regards to Aimhigher events, activities and news. The newsletters provide opportunities to share ideas, inspire people and create a sense of pride and it's a great way to recognise everybody's achievements. They can also be used as an advertising tool to promote future events and activities.

Overall the newsletters provide a clear picture of the range, reach and impact of Aimhigher Greater Manchester activities. Once the newsletter has been distributed many people request further copies for their organisations. From an original circulation of only a few hundred we have increased this to 900 because of demand from an increasing

< Overall the newsletters provide a clear picture of the range, reach and impact of Aimhigher Greater Manchester activities

variety of organisations and individuals. Requests are also received from people asking when they can download the next issue from the website. In general the newsletter is proving very popular and is certainly aiding communication within the partnership and to external agencies and organisations.

We are never short of articles to include and lots of people seem eager to contribute their stories and photographs. As the magazine has developed, an increasing number of articles from all different kinds of people have been received and included.

As the newsletter reaches a wide audience it is helping to change attitudes among those who are less aware of the diverse backgrounds of those in higher education today. Inspirational case studies about individuals from across Greater Manchester who have progressed to higher education and are prepared to share their experiences in the newsletter provide a powerful message to those key influencers who might be sceptical about whether those they are working with might be "suitable" for being encouraged to think about going to university.

As the newsletter reaches a wide audience it is helping to change attitudes

The special newsletter had an additional benefit of developing understanding of where Aimhigher Greater Manchester fits with other key initiatives.

The newsletter has helped in disseminating good practice and sharing ideas across the wide network of partners, particularly for those working in schools/colleges where there are limited opportunities because of time constraints.

As the newsletter covers the whole of Greater Manchester one important impact is to stimulate and develop an interest in activities taking place in the different boroughs, locations and institutions among partners.

Inspirational case studies about individuals from across Greater Manchester

Feedback from participants at previous events shows that the newsletter has often helped to motivate those in the planning stages of other events, and used as a promotional device with prospective attendees to encourage them to attend.

Subsequent or ongoing work

There has been a notable increase in interest in the magazine since changing to a design software package rather than Office. It has enabled the creation of a glossier and more eye-catching design and a reduction of the file size so that the newsletter can be emailed and added to the Aimhigher Greater Manchester Website without causing any download problems.

Currently articles are submitted in a variety of formats and it is intended that a more structured template will be introduced so that less work needs to be carried out when articles that are too lengthy, photographs that are too large, etc are received. This will make production of the magazine a lot easier and quicker to handle.

Ensuring inclusion

Aimhigher Area

West Area Partnership:
South West region

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the strand decided to focus the main thrust of its work towards inclusiveness

Background and context

In 2003, the West Area Partnership took the decision to include a dedicated Disability Strand in its Aimhigher programme. This strand aimed specifically at raising aspirations of disabled students as well as providing information, advice and guidance for disabled students and their advisors. The Aimhigher West partnership considered that disabled students were perhaps located differently in the schools and colleges across their partnership area and hence the need for a dedicated strand.

Since then, however, there has been an ongoing debate, both nationally and within the West Area Partnership, around the comparative effectiveness of providing discrete and targeted activity aimed at disabled students as opposed to ensuring that all activity is as inclusive as possible. After discussion with other disability support professionals and advice from groups representing the views of the disabled community, the strand decided to focus the main thrust of its work towards inclusiveness. They do, however, accept the need for some discrete, targeted provision.

Description of the activity

The task of the strand is to provide clear and useful guidance in a format that could be used to inform a wide range of Aimhigher activities including:

- Taster Days;
- Summer Schools;
- Staff Development Activity;
- Provision of Information; and
- Recruitment of student ambassadors and mentors.

Initially, the strand contacted a number of groups representing the Disabled Community both locally and nationally to assess what already existed. They also contacted Access Officers in two District Councils and one City Council, two Race Equality Council offices and a number of Councils for Voluntary Service. Examples of guidance varied considerably in length and style. Whereas one organisation provided a single paragraph consisting of a Disability statement asking the reader to provide a description of any "special needs", another offered a sixty-four page document covering race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality and other diversity issues.

It was agreed, however, that none of these examples was entirely suitable for Aimhigher. Many of the definitions of the term "disabled" were not appropriate within the context of higher education. A decision was taken to develop a tick box checklist on just one side of A4 to ensure ease of use. This brief was later expanded to encompass two checklists – one for arranging inclusive events, activities and meetings and one for production of accessible information.

The two checklists were developed, together with supporting information. So, for example, before co-ordinators can tick the box next to 'Select an accessible venue', they need to ensure the venue includes:

- good (accessible) transport links;
- level or ramped access;
- an accessible toilet ;
- a variety of seating; and
- an induction loop for people with a hearing impairment.

These checklists were trialled at a number of events, including an Aimhigher South West staff

development event on Disability at which participants were encouraged to consider how inclusive the event itself had been.

The document was also sent to the organisations and groups who had provided examples of guidance for comment. Feedback was generally positive with the main additions being:

- a model booking form;
- a disability statement;
- encouraging people to disclose any disability or support need; and
- a folder for further information such as where to get documents transcribed into alternative formats.

The document was printed under the title "Ensuring Inclusion – a good practice checklist intended for people planning and putting on events or producing or publishing information". It is twelve pages including the two checklists and the model booking form and has a pocket for addition of further useful information. The DSG has had the document made available as a word document and in PDF format on its website. Copies are also available in Braille and on Audio CD.

The Disability Strand Group is grateful to all the groups, individuals and organisations who supplied their own guidelines freely on which the early versions of the checklist drew heavily. It is also grateful to all DSG members for their hard work in refining the early drafts into the final document.

How the activity made a difference

There is a body of evidence to suggest that it is making a significant contribution to inclusion, both within the West Area Partnership and further afield.

The National Disability Team have adapted it for use on their web site

- > • The National Disability Team that is contracted by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for Employment and Learning for Northern Ireland (DELNI) to undertake the service of a national team to improve provision for disabled students in higher education have adapted it for use on their web site.
- The co-ordinator of one strand used the model booking form for a follow-on event. They found that the number of respondents disclosing a Disability or Support Need rose fivefold even though the same groups of people were invited each time.

Requests for copies of the document have been received from other HEIs

- > • Requests for copies of the document have been received from other HEIs including Plymouth, Newcastle, Sheffield Hallam, Cambridge, University of the West of England, the OU in South East and the OU in Milton Keynes, Dartington College as well as the Equality Challenge Unit, Job Centre Plus, a number of Connexions offices and lead officers in other Aimhigher regions.
- The booklet can be easily downloaded from the website and many other organisations report that they have accessed the information via the web.
- The document has been widely welcomed and credited with helping people provide a better service in an area where Aimhigher co-ordinators often lack confidence in use of appropriate language.

Subsequent or ongoing work

The checklist is under constant review in the light of good practice and subsequent legislation.

One Day Staff Development Programme for Project Co-ordinators: West Yorkshire

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher West Yorkshire

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CragRats Theatre Company

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Background and context

The aim of this staff development programme was to share information and develop project management skills with a group of project co-ordinators with mixed experience and who were responsible for fifteen projects. The challenge was to devise a programme that was interactive and participatory without being threatening to co-ordinators. Collaboration with CragRats Theatre Company in planning and managing the programme and using their theatrical skills was a radical departure from the conventions of training experienced professionals.

There was a simple purpose, which was to capture the attention of co-ordinators to talk freely about their projects and the management challenges they face when working in partnership and across sectors of education. The use of 'open forum theatre' with its emphasis on simulation and recreation of professional situations by professional actors was illuminating and encouraged self-reflection amongst co-ordinators. It would also encourage closer links between diverse projects and help to bring coherence to the whole widening participation process.

Description of the activity

The first task was a brief mapping exercise on each of the projects, then short conversations between project co-ordinators on their respective projects. This was done in pairs, normally with colleagues that were merely acquainted. The scene setter for the day was a colleague chosen to speak personally about how higher education had affected his life and the benefits this had brought.

The mainstay of the programme was the use of Open Forum Theatre whereby professional actors from Crag Rats, performed a series of short project sketches drawn from genuine project experiences and performed in front of co-ordinators.

Each sketch touches on a particular project issue, e.g. targets or funding, then this is performed and stopped at an appropriate moment for discussion and analysis by practitioners.

The process moves on, is repeated and its effect is dynamic, energising, but non-threatening to co-ordinators. They are observers who can change or manoeuvre the actors as they wish. This episode of activity lasted over two hours. It was absorbing and enthralling for participants because they could discuss freely their professional roles and responsibilities and see this acted out before their eyes. Using drama for professional development purposes involves risk but it brings benefits of restoring energy and confidence to a group of committed, experienced professionals.

How the activity made a difference

The activity made a difference in a number of immediate and positive ways. First, the use of drama techniques in a staff development programme is not only innovative but its effects were to allow project co-ordinators to appreciate the different layers of understanding and skills they need to apply when managing Partnership projects.

Second, it made co-ordinators consider and appreciate the conflicting demands they are exposed to, as they manage projects that cut across different sectors of education.

Using drama for professional development purposes involves risk but it brings benefits



all projects co-ordinators have gained more knowledge and a deeper understanding of the different projects funded by Aimhigher

> Third, all projects co-ordinators have gained more knowledge and a deeper understanding of the different projects funded by Aimhigher. This has stimulated a willingness for co-ordinators to meet and share their experiences and approaches.

Finally and most important, the use of active drama enabled co-ordinators to see themselves positively as managers. The experience gave them an insight through dramatic reconstruction into the complexity of their role as well as its value.

Subsequent or ongoing work

Each project agreed to pair-up with another project as a commitment they made after the staff development day. New relationships have been formed and information has been shared.

A large number of co-ordinators are involved in numerous ways in the governance of Aimhigher across the area. For example, they are engaged in mentoring, work-based learning, aspiration and attainment activities.

There is a better understanding by co-ordinators of all the projects and what they are trying to achieve; whereas before there was less understanding, some indifference and a single-minded mentality of focusing purely on their own project. That narrowness of thought has disappeared.

New relationships have been formed and information has been shared

Communicating the future of Higher Education: 'On Target', a broadsheet newsletter

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher
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The current edition of 'On Target' can be viewed on the Aimhigher Practitioners website, please see the link: http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/resources/Beds_Luton_Jan_05.pdf

comprehensive coverage of widening participation activities, which has increased cross sector communication and brand awareness

Background and context

The broadsheet newsletter 'On Target' grew out of the recognition that positive messages about Aimhigher and higher education should be repeated as often as possible using a range of different media. 'On Target' is one means of providing an entertaining, appealing and readily available source of information across Bedfordshire and Luton, distributed to reach as many young people and their carers and advisers as possible. It is also intended to promote effective communication throughout the Bedfordshire and Luton Aimhigher Partnership.

Description of the activity

Launched in September 2004, 'On Target' is produced three times a year and targeted at Aimhigher practitioners and co-ordinators, parents/guardians, teachers, advisors, lecturers, Connexions personal assistants, community centres, school and local libraries, work-based learning providers and, most importantly, learners. More recently there has been a move away from editorial to more comprehensive coverage of widening participation activities, which has increased cross-sector communication and brand awareness.

The content of 'On Target' has included:

- Advice and guidance on such topics as the new tuition fee structure, UCAS applications, foundation degrees.
- Information on the structure and personnel of Aimhigher in Bedfordshire and Luton
- Student success stories
- School- and College-based activities
- Engaging and working with employers
- Return to study opportunities
- Changes to apprenticeships
- Conferences, seminars and local events
- Contact listing of all local further and higher education providers.

The Aimhigher Partnership office acts as a central point for collating information and articles from other partners including local Further and Higher Education institutions.

The main aim of 'On Target' has been to disseminate to a wide audience successful initiatives and practices

an important means of reaching under-represented young people, their carers and their advisers to increase their awareness of higher education

> The main aim of 'On Target' has been to disseminate to a wide audience successful initiatives and practices. It highlights the impact of the Aimhigher initiative in the local area by giving a balanced perspective of widening participation activities, changes in legislation and developments in organisations affecting access to higher education from organisations such as the DfES and UCAS.

'On Target' can also make a difference because it is an important means of reaching under-represented young people, their carers and their advisers to increase their awareness of higher education, and to strengthen positive attitudes and aspirations amongst those who need extra encouragement and reinforcement of their own ambitions.

Since every issue contains information on the events organised with and for the schools, colleges and HEIs in the area, it is highly relevant to all the participants. This keeps all the recipients up-to-date with developments and makes them feel a part of a nation wide initiative that is making a difference.

The feedback that is being received from other Aimhigher practitioners illustrates gradual improvement in the level of involvement and as well as raising interest and dedication among such influential groups as parents, admissions officers, and local small and medium-sized businesses.

Subsequent or ongoing work

There are plans to establish a focus group to analyse the direct impact of 'On Target'. It will explore ways to develop the newsletter to become a more effective communication tool both locally and nationally.

Producing the Aimhigher Summer School DVD

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Yorkshire
and the Humber

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Background and context

The Yorkshire and the Humber Aimhigher Regional Summer School programme is co-ordinated through the regional higher education association which is responsible for co-ordinating the development, production and distribution of regional promotional materials relating to summer schools for all institutions delivering summer schools through this regional strand of work.

This includes Leeds Metropolitan University, the University of Leeds, Sheffield Hallam University, the University of Sheffield, the University of Huddersfield, the University of York, Trinity and All Saints College, York St John College, the University of Hull and the University of Bradford. Those delivering national specialist programmes within the region have also been included in the development of the video which brings the Northern Contemporary School of Dance into the group. The lead body on this project is Yorkshire Universities.

The rationale for delivering summer schools on a regional basis is that it gives pupils a choice of institutions and achieves economies of scale in the development of promotional materials and the recruitment process. Although each summer school has a different programme and different delivery modes, there are learning outcomes and contents that are common to all programmes. Aimhigher Summer Schools promotional materials have been branded through a variety of mediums including a web site, prospectuses and paper-based support materials.

The purpose of the DVD is threefold:

- To create awareness of Aimhigher Summer Schools, their purpose and outcomes
- To create demand for summer school places amongst target groups
- To ensure that those who have been offered a place remain committed to attending.

The DVD is not designed to stand alone but rather to be used alongside other promotional materials and to be integrated into summer school recruitment activities such as parents' evenings, visits to schools by higher education institutions, and used in conjunction with talks by school Aimhigher co-ordinators to target group pupils.

Description of the activity

A media production company was employed to capture footage and a working party of summer school co-ordinators was convened to identify the format and desired outcomes of the DVD.

The DVD is entirely made up of real footage from 2004 summer schools and is commentated by pupils who attended a variety of programmes. The pupils who participated in making the video are very much 'typical' summer school participants, rather than being selected because they had an interest in acting. The pupils participated in developing the script. The DVD has three interspersed parts and lasts about 12 minutes. This comprises

- A montage of footage taken at summer school showing a range of summer school activities without identifying any particular institution

The DVD format is extremely flexible and allows information to be added and taken away

> The DVD format is extremely flexible and allows information to be added and taken away as the summer school programme develops and changes. It is possible, for example, to add downloadable teachers' notes, parent information, case studies, application forms etc to the DVD. The contents of the DVD are downloadable from the Yorkshire and the Humber Aimhigher Regional website and clips of the contents can be viewed online.

How the activity made a difference

The DVD has been enthusiastically received by schools, pupils and higher education institutions

The DVD has been enthusiastically received by schools, pupils and higher education institutions. Many LEA Aimhigher co-ordinators requested a copy for each of their target schools. Aimhigher co-ordinators have reported improved confidence amongst pupils due to attend summer school after having seen the video. Withdrawal from summer school prior to attendance has decreased this academic year which may in part be due to the introduction of the video. Teachers report that the DVD reduces the burden on them to explain to pupils the benefits of summer school and to ensure pupils attend once they have been offered a place.

improved confidence amongst pupils due to attend summer school after having seen the video

Subsequent or ongoing work

During Summer 2005, the media team will again visit summer schools to capture more footage and to do a series of mini-interviews with participants. The mini-interviews will focus on particular areas of concern for would-be summer school participants such as being away from home, making friends, travelling long distances, food choices at university and participating in academic and social sessions while at summer school. This footage can then be added to the DVD as deemed appropriate.

'What on Earth' and 'Land Learn', East Anglia

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher East of England

Contact details

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The purpose of the booklets is to promote land-related industries within the East Anglian region,



Background and context

The 'What on Earth' initiative was originally an initiative of the Four Counties Group using Special Funding Widening Participation monies; Aimhigher funding has been used subsequently to update it. The 'What on Earth' and 'Land Learn' booklets were updated and redesigned for dissemination to potential students, careers services, Connexions, libraries, schools and colleges within the land-based industries giving clear information on courses, progression routes, careers and institutions. This is a joint project between the four 'Land Learn' colleges in East Anglia – Easton College, Otley College, The College of West Anglia and Writtle College.

The purpose of the booklets is to promote land-related industries within the East Anglian region, raise the profile of land-related courses and provide information to the public and potential students. The aim is to list examples of the land-related courses together with the modes and levels of study, progression routes and career opportunities.

Potential students can often get confused with the many options available to them, for example what to do if they do not have the expected grades, what courses may be available to them, and what their choices are after gaining a particular qualification. 'What on Earth' and 'Land Learn' aim to address these issues and identify the variety of courses on offer at the four institutions at all levels.

The 'What on Earth' and 'Land Learn' booklets target different audiences. 'What on Earth' is aimed towards students who want a general overview on the courses which can be studied. It directs students who require further information to the 'Land Learn' booklet or to the institution that they would like to study at. The target audience for 'Land Learn' is potential students who want more detailed information on each course and qualification, the entry requirements and course content. Until recently, it was produced for use by information providers such as careers advisors, schools and colleges as an aid to inform potential students about land-related study, but is now also available directly to potential students.

Description of the activity

Writtle College was given the task to update the two booklets with the help of the other colleges. Both of the documents looked tired, and had become a little outdated.

'What on Earth' was updated with a new design and layout which allowed easy access to the information contained inside. Course and career examples were updated and useful information was added, for example the qualification tree diagram.

'Land Learn' is a text-based publication, so care was taken to ensure that the information was well presented and easy to read. Diagrams were added where appropriate, and care was taken to make the document accessible to all.

As a partnership the four colleges work closely together on various activities to promote the 'What on Earth' and 'Land Learn' booklets.

potential students can obtain information quickly and see all the options, courses, progression routes and institutions available to them

- > Having the land-based courses listed in one booklet means that potential students can obtain information quickly and see all the options, courses, progression routes and institutions available to them. This saves time for both potential students and career services by having the information in one document and not across a variety of prospectuses.

In the 'What on Earth' booklet there is a detachable form that students can return to get further information or send for a college prospectus. They are sent to Writtle College which then disseminates the information to the relevant colleges. From the first batch of 'What on Earth' booklets that were sent out there has been a high number returned asking for more information.

The booklets are used as a tool to show potential students the progression routes available from further education to higher education and increase their awareness of the courses on offer, whilst enhancing positive attitudes and aspirations towards HE among under-represented groups. As these booklets are being disseminated to schools, career services, libraries and Connexions centres the level of involvement and positive attitudes from the staff has helped with raising aspirations of potential students.

The booklets are used as a tool to show potential students the progression routes available from further education to higher education

Subsequent or ongoing work

As with all information, courses and qualifications soon date. Writtle College and the associated colleges will have to seek further funding to have these booklets regularly updated to ensure that information is correct and potential students get the most out of the them.

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Further information

If you want to know more please get in touch with those named in the case studies. If you wish to contact someone in your area go to the Action on Access website where you will find contact details for those responsible for Aimhigher.

www.actiononaccess.org