

Making a Difference:

The Impact of Aimhigher

*Masterclasses and other
attainment-raising activity*

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

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Introduction

Masterclasses and other attainment-raising activities

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 always 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 group 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.

The single most significant factor in the social class division in higher education participation is differential educational attainment at all levels in schools and colleges. Young people in particular, not achieving Level 3, will find it difficult to progress into higher education.

Masterclasses are one strategy employed by Aimhigher partnerships to help raise achievement in schools and colleges, covering not only academic and vocational subjects but also critical thinking, research and other key skills necessary to succeed in higher education. Delivered by academics or experts in their field they stimulate and extend the interest and knowledge of young people in their subjects.

Complementary direct approaches to raising attainment involve revision classes, and junior universities, and other innovative ideas as demonstrated in these case studies.

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.

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

Smallpeice Masterclasses and Residential Experience

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Nottinghamshire

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to target pupils from widening participation and Gifted and Talented cohorts in Year 9

The residential included input on their career pathway from graduates from Corus, Ford, Rolls-Royce and Arup, several illustrating progression via a work-based learning route

Background and context

The Smallpeice Trust is an educational charity that works with schools across the country to inspire young people to pursue engineering-related careers. Aimhigher Nottinghamshire has developed an initiative in partnership with Smallpeice to encourage progression in science, engineering and technology, subject areas that suffer from a lack of entrants from a widening participation background. It was agreed to target pupils from widening participation and Gifted and Talented cohorts in Year 9, before they made their options choices.

Description of the activity

The project comprised a series of 8 masterclasses across the county and a residential experience during the Easter holiday at the Sutton Bonington campus of the University of Nottingham.

For the masterclasses, pupils drawn from 30 schools competed in teams and worked in groups of five. After an introduction about team-working and creativity, they were given a design brief and limited resources with which to build a barge against a specification. Teams sketched designs, built prototypes and worked on modifications within strict time limits.

Of the 400 pupils who took part in the masterclasses, 79 pupils (33 male, 46 female) from the winning teams took part in a three-day residential course at the Bonington campus in March. All Smallpeice Trust programmes are facilitated by graduate engineers from companies ranging from multi-nationals to smaller, specialised industries. The residential included input on their career pathway from graduates from Corus, Ford, Rolls-Royce and Arup, several illustrating progression via a work-based learning route. The graduates also supported the teams on challenging design-and-make projects: a vehicle that could withstand a head-on crash with the 2 passengers (eggs!) intact, a remotely-operated handling machine and a bridge that could span a 2 metre gap and support a weight of 2 kg.

The pupils were able to benefit from:

- experience of a university environment
- the opportunity to develop problem-solving, team-building and presentation skills
- engagement with positive role models from industry
- having fun

How the activity made a difference

Although 81% had said they would consider going on to higher education prior to the residential, a substantial number did not know anyone who had been to university,. Only 1% were considering an apprenticeship. When asked if they would consider a career in engineering, 27% said yes, 26% said no and 47% did not know.

The feedback following the residential reflected important changes in perceptions or aspirations, particularly in willingness to think more about their choices and to consider going on to college. Over 85% would now consider higher education, and over 6% were interested in an apprenticeship.

most students found it interesting and challenging, felt they had improved their confidence and other skills, and their understanding of higher education and engineering

> From evaluation of specific aspects of the experience it was clear that most students found it interesting and challenging, felt they had improved their confidence and other skills, and their understanding of higher education and engineering. Aspects highlighted were opportunities to make new friends, attend a formal dinner, and work in teams on the design and make projects.

"The choice of facilitators was very good and the feedback from the students suggested they all had interesting briefs to follow. Companies that sent young graduates built up a good rapport because pupils felt closer to them in age and ideas. Rolls-Royce were particularly good because they involved apprentices and graduates from other countries" - Paul Davies, teacher at The National C of E School, Hucknall.

"I enjoyed the design-and-make projects the most because we made new friends and got the chance to work with qualified engineers" - pupil from Queen Elizabeth's School, Mansfield.

"I learned new skills in engineering and made lots of new friends" - pupil at Retford Oaks High School, Retford.

"I enjoyed working with new people on an interesting and challenging project. It helped give me an insight into what engineering is about. It also helped me work in a team with people I had never met before" - pupil at Magnus C of E School, Newark.

The residential brought young people into a university environment with the aims of working with positive role models from industry, breaking down preconceptions of higher education, and encouraging the pupils to see university as a place for them. The teachers who attended the residential emphasised that they cannot possibly provide that sort of experience in school.

The world of work increasingly demands employees to be innovative problem-solvers and strong team players; the masterclasses help to develop these valuable skills at an early age.

Subsequent or ongoing work

Aimhigher Nottinghamshire intends to build on this pilot project and continue to work with the Smallpeice Trust to raise the aspirations of more young people from disadvantaged communities.

Over 85% would now consider higher education, and over 6% were interested in an apprenticeship

Team Research Project – offering HE in schools in Suffolk

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Suffolk

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The key aims of the Team Research Project thus were to provide sixth form students with a taste of HE study and to equip them with skills that would benefit them in higher education

"I continue to be amazed at the quality of the work and the commitment and enthusiasm that the students display. Clearly this work enhances their school-based studies"

Background and context

The Team Research Project is an Anglia Polytechnic University (APU) module designed to be delivered to Year 12 or 13 students in schools, providing an experience of higher education (HE) and developing skills in research, team working and independent study. The module was first piloted in 1996 and has been extremely successful.

Both Bungay and Queens School have large rural catchment areas which do not have progression rates into HE that would be expected from their levels of attainment. For example, some pupils will be working in family enterprises or farms and have limited parental encouragement to leave home to study for an HE qualification.

The key aims of the Team Research Project thus were to provide sixth form students with a taste of HE study and to equip them with skills that would benefit them in higher education.

Description of the activity

At Bungay High School, the programme is offered to all Year 12 students and is delivered over a calendar year, from January of Year 12 to the December Year 13. Usually 15 to 20 students take up the option, which is additional to their standard curriculum. The students work throughout the year in teams of three to six to undertake a research project on a topic that they choose.

Decisions about group membership are the first learning experience for participants making them consider the relative merits of working with friends, with others with complementary skills or, a factor in Bungay and other rural areas where schools have large catchment areas, with those who travel to school together.

Each team chooses a topic, in discussion with school and APU staff to ensure that it is appropriate. Topics chosen will be those that are especially meaningful to the students and that will sustain interest and have included: Violence in the Media, Eating Disorders, Social Impact of Mobile Phones, and Exam Stress. In addition to library and Internet searches, students are expected to undertake field research.

Teams have to keep a log book of activities, make a 15-minute presentation which outlines the aims of the project, presents its findings and draws conclusions, and produce an artefact. This might be a video, a booklet, a set of teaching notes, or a report. Each team member also keeps a personal log with reflections on how the team are working together, the challenges faced and successes shared. Participants are assessed, but not graded, and if successful, receive a Certificate of Credit for 10 Level 0 CATS credits. The certificates are presented at a graduation ceremony at APU or a local college to which the students' families are invited.

How the activity made a difference

The Team Research Project gives students an opportunity to study a topic in depth and, as a group, draws on a range of disciplines and approaches. It therefore provides a challenge and stretches their skills and abilities. The practice of offering HE modules to school students is thus in line with the Tomlinson Report and the 14 – 19 White Paper.

The (previous) head teacher at Bungay High School observed that "I continue to be amazed at the quality of the work and the commitment and enthusiasm that the students

display. Clearly this work enhances their school-based studies” and the former Vice-Chancellor of APU commented “This award gives students an opportunity to develop the independent study skills they will need in higher education and employment”.

In a rural area such as north-east Suffolk, where HE participation rates tend to be lower than average, programmes such as this can have a positive impact on individuals giving a young person wavering about HE the confidence to apply for a place. The 10 Level 0 credits gained from the Team Research Project could be counted towards an HE award at APU, although no student has yet taken up this opportunity. However, having some credit already in “the bank” may have a strong symbolic value in influencing a young person to progress to HE.

Subsequent or ongoing work

The scheme has been spread to Queens School in Wisbech, an area with similar rurality issues >

The scheme has been spread to Queens School in Wisbech, an area with similar rurality issues. Here the programme, which is delivered through Isle College, is one of two options that all sixth form students are expected to undertake (the alternative being a Key Skills profile). There are plans to roll the scheme out to other schools, and other HEIs in the region have considered adopting it although the success of such schemes depends on the encouragement given by the school. Aimhigher funding is being used to extend the project.

The Ladders Project

Aimhigher Area

Central London Partnership & Aspire (South East London) Partnership

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Background and context

This Aimhigher Central London Partnership covers the local authority areas of Camden, Islington, Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster. It is characterised by areas of extreme wealth and high participation in higher education existing very close to areas of poverty and low participation in higher education. It is also characterised by the presence of a large number of higher education institutions involved in the partnership:

- Birkbeck College
- University College London
- School of Oriental and African Studies
- City University
- Kings College London
- University of the Arts
- University of Westminster
- London Metropolitan University
- Royal Veterinary College
- Central School of Speech and Drama

The Ladders Project has been delivered through a partnership of the Aimhigher Central London Partnership and the Aimhigher South East London Partnership: Aspire. The aim of the project was to develop sets of learning materials appropriate for young people from Years 9 -13 which would address progression to higher education in vocational areas. The project has been delivered in 2 phases. Phase 1 was concerned with the development of generic learning materials to introduce learners to the nature of progression to higher education and the stages involved and the particular routes available in vocational areas.

In phase 1 a 'pack' of learning materials was produced which is available in hard copy and the learning materials are available on the project website. The learning materials covered:

- Personal development and 'progression ladders'
- Understanding your personal 'progression ladder'
- Research and decision-making skills for choosing a vocational course
- Research and decision-making skills for choosing a university course
- Moving on and up from AVCE Business-making optimal choices at 18+
- Confident speaking, effective listening and personal presentation skills in an interview setting
- Skills for University Life: Time management
- Skills for University Life: Critical analysis and essay writing

Phase 2 was concerned with the development of more detailed learning materials in specific vocational areas. The vocational areas being addressed are:

- Media
- Construction
- Health
- Hospitality

- Leisure
- Business
- Art & Design

The learning materials for each subject while covering some common themes will be bespoke to each subject area. They are likely to be 3-4 sessions per area and will be available in pack form and online from Autumn 2005.

Description of the activity

The project is being delivered through a 'bottom up' approach of consultation, partnership working and extensive piloting of activity. The project is therefore innovative at a number of levels:

- In the partnership working between two different Aimhigher areas
- In addressing important vocational areas where there was a deficit of work
- In the way in which it addressed this issue
- In the production of high quality teaching materials for use in the classroom

The development of materials in phase 2 is based firstly on consultation with specially formed groups in each subject area consisting of school/college staff, higher education staff and representatives from employer organisations in the relevant subject areas. These groups attempted to identify the skill needs in the subject area. This is followed by 3 pilot sessions in each subject area with particular target groups which include learners from Year 9 to Year 12, parents and staff. The materials are then to be developed by the Project Worker and phase 2 materials will be available from October 2005. This is an important model of working for Aimhigher. It concentrates on developing work on the basis of need in the area and through a rigorous process of testing and review.

The actual production of physical teaching materials is also an important aspect of this project. Feedback from teachers has highlighted the value of physical teaching materials which are user-friendly and produced to a high standard. Materials are also available on the project website.

How the activity made a difference

The Ladders materials have been requested by over 50 schools not just in London but across the UK. Phase 1 materials have been delivered centrally by the Ladders project officer and student ambassadors from the Focus Ambassador Project to over 500 learners. The project has also promoted partnership working between Aimhigher areas to benefit more learners.

Subsequent or ongoing work

Evaluation of the use of the Ladders materials in schools and colleges by those who have the materials has just begun. It was necessary to allow a period of time from the main dissemination of the materials (in late 2004) to allow teachers to use the materials in a number of ways. The phase 2 materials are in development. They will be available from September 2005 and launched via a specific event at this time. Phase 2 of the project will work through the pilots with over 350 learners.

Delivering Ladders materials is to be integrated into the training of student Ambassadors in the Central London Partnership from September 2005 and into the Aimhigher Central London Partnership curriculum offered to schools and colleges in the 2004-05 academic year. Potential extensions of the project to develop bespoke materials for other key Aimhigher target groups, in particular Modern Apprentices, are also being explored.

The Ladders materials have been requested by over 50 schools not just in London but across the UK. Phase 1 materials have been delivered... to over 500 learners

Phase 2 of the project will work through the pilots with over 350 learners

Delivering Ladders materials is to be integrated into the training of student Ambassadors in the Central London Partnership

Easter College - Raising Achievement

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Humber

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The recent area inspection team recognised the progress being made in North Lincolnshire and recognised the contribution of the raising achievement activities

"This was an enjoyable day and will help me get the grade I need in Maths"

Background and context

North Lincolnshire has been a 14-19 Pathfinder for the last three years and has worked on a range of raising achievement activities throughout the project. The levels of achievement are below the national average in Key Stage 4. The achievement of learners at 16 is below the national average for 5 A*-C grades. Two years ago the figure was in the low 40's and a number of strategies were put in place to improve this. One such strategy was the Easter Revision College, designed to give a boost to learners to achieve GCSE grades to access Level 3 courses.

Description of the activity

The Easter Revision College has taken place for a full day during the Easter holiday for the last two years. In 2004, 170 C/D learners from Year 11 attended and in 2005 520 learners from Y11, Y12 and Y13 attended. The 5A*-C figure has improved to almost 50% in two years.

The 2005 Easter Revision College was held at John Leggott College, Scunthorpe, and a full day of revision was given to each learner in a key subject. KS4 learners had lessons in Mathematics, English and Science, and the post-16 learners were provided with a wide range of lessons.

The KS4 learners were from 12 local schools and the feedback returns were almost all positive. Lunch, transport and learning materials were provided for all learners.

All schools were offered 20 places for those pupils on the border of achieving 4-5 higher grade GCSE certificates. A flyer was professionally produced to give the event as much profile as possible.

How the activity made a difference

The results at KS4 are still below the national average but North Lincolnshire has improved its 5 A*-C figure from 43% to 49% in two years. The recent area inspection team recognised the progress being made in North Lincolnshire and recognised the contribution of the raising achievement activities.

Student comments:

- > "This was an enjoyable day and will help me get the grade I need in Maths." Sam
- "It was good to learn with pupils from other schools." Sally
- "The lunches were great!" Brendan
- "The teachers were really patient and I now understand forces." Zenab

Subsequent or ongoing work

The Easter College will take place again next year and will include one KS4 class in each core subject for the most able learners with a view to increasing the percentage of A* grades obtained. Universities have informed John Leggott College that the number of A* grades achieved at GCSE may well be used to indicate the most able candidates. We anticipate that by providing further support for our most able learners we will provide them with the best opportunity to enter the university of their choice.

The Easter Revision College is one of a number of strategies to provide support and raise the aspirations of young people.

BUMP: Raising Attainment in Media

Aimhigher Area

The Aimhigher LIFE partnership: South West region

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The participating students were treated like professionals in a real working context



Background and context

Despite its affluent image, many young people in Dorset do not consider progression to HE as a realistic possibility. A partnership between Dorset Education Authority, Aimhigher LIFE and the Media School at Bournemouth University has been working with schools to raise attainment and aspirations. Media offers an exciting and interactive way of engaging young people in learning and strong local progression routes were already available in the area for education and employment.

Description of the activity

The BUMP project recruited 45 young people in Year 10 with the potential to progress to HE and invited them to participate in an intensive programme of activities to be delivered over three years. In its first year, the programme included visits to an HE campus where students would be given the opportunity to work in a TV studio to produce their own news broadcast, the second year focused on using digital media equipment to author, edit and produce a CD while the third year will engage participants in producing website material on 'Imagining University'.

The programme opened by giving students the opportunity to use the TV Studio, a labour-intensive working environment that offers opportunities to engage 15 people at a time in a period of intense activity. It is the perfect place to stress the importance of good teamwork and to develop the school students' skills. The participating students were treated like professionals in a real working context and this helped them to take responsibility and work well, using real equipment to produce a tangible end product. Throughout the day the school students were accompanied by mentors from the University, many of whom came from similar backgrounds. The importance of the role model effect on these young people cannot be overstated.

Once the pupils had completed their visits to the HEI and produced their programme, this was disseminated to their school and their parents through screenings of their work and through the presentation of awards.

How the activity made a difference

- The tour of the University was very popular and well-received in familiarising students with the physical structure of the campus, informing them of the various facilities available and in introducing them to the psycho-social culture of the HE environment. A number of students suggested that a more extensive tour would have made the visit even better. They had been enthused and, at the same time, reassured about university life from this aspect of the visit.
- In a similar way their contact with current students of the Media School had been beneficial both from a role-modelling perspective and in relation to the learning process about HE study. One interesting lesson identified by visiting students was that they needed to have prepared rather more for their session with current students by having more questions ready to ask of them. Nevertheless 76% of visiting students rated the session with current Media School students as being either "excellent" or "good".

The programme has also supported a specialist technology college within the LIFE area to develop its media teaching

87 per cent of participants have remained in education or training

provides the opportunity for young people to take part in a national specialist summer school in Media

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- The media presentation/introduction to the programme was generally well received and certainly resulted in a buzz of excitement at the conclusion of the session. If anything, students were keen to have more information about the forthcoming programme as evidenced by one group's unexpected request to read the activity briefing for the subsequent visit on the journey back to school.
 - 96% of students confirmed that the experience had made them think about or want to go to college or university after leaving school. This indicates that the project had already become a significant source of reinforcement for students' HE aspirations and goals.
 - Comments were all complimentary about the visit itself and, in particular, how friendly they had found university staff and students alike. From young people visiting a potentially intimidating environment this was reassuring and encouraging for the future.
 - Final words from students:

"It was good and I know now that I am definitely going to this university"

"I love it here; see you in a few years."

- BUMP has been successful in promoting progression to post-compulsory education in that 87 per cent of participants have remained in education or training;
- Teachers commented on the difference the programme made to the confidence, maturity and self-esteem of the participants as well as their technical skills. All the schools originally selected to take part in BUMP have signed up for the second and third years, indicating the value they place on the programme.

Subsequent or ongoing work

This is an ongoing programme that started in Year 10, continued in Year 11 and provides the opportunity for young people to take part in a national specialist summer school in Media and will be completed in Year 12. The programme provides the opportunity to engage students in a subject area that is creative and exciting while also giving information about HE life in general.

The programme has also supported a specialist technology college within the LIFE area to develop its media teaching. Initially, the school was unable to offer media teaching as they lacked skilled staff and specialist equipment. HE and FE staff have worked with the school, teachers, teaching assistants and pupils to develop a media department and the University has purchased video equipment to enable the school to offer a media stream in its 14-19 curriculum. The school has been able to use this as a basis to bid for additional funding to develop this area still further.

Artists in Residence at Long Road Sixth Form College, Cambridgeshire

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Cambridgeshire & Peterborough

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Website

CJ Mahoney website:

<http://www.wysingarts.org/index.php?section=artists&page=studioartistdetail&personid=21>

Laura Ellen Bacon website:

<http://www.lauraellenbacon.co.uk/gallery.htm>

they had a tour of the campus and discussed career options and progression routes available to them at the various colleges in Cambridgeshire >

Background and context

In July 2004, with Aimhigher funding, two Artists in Residence were invited to work in the grounds of Long Road Sixth Form College in Cambridge. Students from local 11-16 schools attended for one day to work with the artists, leaving with a piece of work which they had created. The day would address the raising of both attainment and aspirations towards higher education.

Description of the activity

The pupils were from Year 10 and came to the college in groups of 15-20 to work with the artists. The pupils represented over 10 different secondary schools in and around Cambridgeshire. They were accompanied by a teacher from their own school who had the opportunity to discuss progression from secondary school to post-16 education with the staff at the college. Pupils worked alongside their chosen artist, developing a technique and completing a small sample, which they were able to take away to their school. In some cases these were used as part of their GCSE coursework.

Pupils were given the opportunity to look at the facilities in the Art department and were invited, with their parents, to the annual summer art exhibition to observe the range of work by students who had just completed their Advanced Level/AVCE courses.

The two artists were selected as specialists in work not usually covered in the schools. The first, CJ Mahoney, is a sculptor fascinated by the use of the human body as a prime means of expression, using the body to convey emotions. Her work focuses on the smallest and most intimate details, and upon issues affecting society as a whole. To her, the body provides a means of communication that is both reassuringly familiar yet eloquently expressive. For all viewers, the very familiarity we have with the body and its forms can be exploited to complicate our responses, or to question our first assumptions.

When working with the students she started by talking about her own work, and in particular how she takes whole body casts. She then taught them the process of producing a body cast and each student, working in pairs, took their own cast of a hand. Whilst their work was drying, they had a tour of the campus and discussed career options and progression routes available to them at the various colleges in Cambridgeshire

The second artist, Lauren Ellen Bacon, uses the natural world as a backdrop for her work. She is inspired by nests and cocoons. Her landscape work is site-specific using willow to produce fluid, organic forms which are more robust than they appear, often being entered or passed through by the public. Her workshops allowed students to select their materials and produce willow work reflecting their surroundings to take away with them after their day at the college.

Artists in residence provided... an opportunity for secondary school students to visit the college and talk about progression to and beyond 16 -19 education

Excellent links were made between the art teachers from the schools and the staff at the college

How the activity made a difference

One of the bonuses of the event was that students at the Sixth Form College were also able to experience working with the artists and use previously untried media. The annual art show coincided with the artists being in residence and so parents and visitors were able to talk with the artists about their own career paths and experiences of the artistic profession. The younger children (pre Year 7) who were visiting the exhibition also made casts of their hands to take away and perhaps to be inspired for a future career.

Artists in Residence provided both a chance for a young person considering a career in the visual arts to meet with "real" artists and, more generally, an opportunity for secondary school students to visit the college and talk about progression to and beyond 16 -19 education.

Excellent links were made between the art teachers from the schools and the staff at the college which have enabled both groups to understand the experiences available pre- and post-16. Having two artists in residence enabled staff development amongst the art teachers to occur and they too produced artwork with the visiting artists.

Subsequent or ongoing work

It is intended to repeat the event and to build on the relationships with art teachers in the secondary schools.

Pier 18 Saturday School (Preparation to Improve Exam Results)

Aimhigher Area

London East Thames Gateway (LETG) Partnership

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to compensate for loss of earning from a possible Saturday job, students are paid an attendance allowance for every class they attend

interest from other boroughs was such that a 'buy in' scheme was set up, which allowed places to be offered to students from other boroughs

Background and context

Pier 18 Saturday School aims to provide academic support for A-level students in order to help them achieve the grades they need to enter higher education. This work is done through a series of Saturday morning subject support classes taught at a university campus. The classes assist students to reach their full potential, raise their aspirations and to enhance their performance in the A-Level exams.

Originally funded by the Sir John Cass's Foundation, Pier 18 has been providing students with A-level subject support, revision and exam practice since 2001. This illustrates how effectively Aimhigher can build on previous programmes of activity.

The target groups here are those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who have little or no family history of higher education. The LETG partnerships' catchment area includes some of the most deprived boroughs in the country, has some of the lowest levels of attainment, and has a high proportion of families who come from a minority ethnic background where English is a second, if not a third, language.

Description of the activity

Provision of a series of A2 level support Saturday classes (10am - 1pm) was from November to April each year, taught at London Metropolitan University, Queen Mary University of London and City University.

Students enrol for a programme of three-hour classes in one subject. Currently subjects offered are; Business Studies (vocational or GCE), Biology, Chemistry, Economics, Health & Social Care, Law, Mathematics, Physics, Psychology or Sociology. While most of the teaching is geared towards core topic revision and exam style question practice, there is time spent on improving core academic skills such as critical analysis, report/essay writing and research/study skills, all within the context of the subject.

Enrolled students are given a student ID card and they are able to use university facilities any day of the week, with reference access at the university libraries and a university IT account. Some students use the university campus as a quiet place to study and to do other course work.

In order to compensate for loss of earning from a possible Saturday job, students are paid an attendance allowance for every class they attend.

The project has been particularly effective though the close working of the Aimhigher partnership and the lead Institution, London Metropolitan University and partners Queen Mary University of London and City University.

How the activity made a difference

Pier 18 provided for 120 places for students from Tower Hamlets and Hackney. After its first year of operation, interest from other boroughs was such that a 'buy in' scheme was set up, which allowed places to be offered to students from other boroughs.

The programme's reputation has continued to grow and is well-regarded by schools, colleges and Aimhigher coordinators. With the new funding through Aimhigher, Pier 18 is now providing for students from secondary schools and colleges in the boroughs of Barking & Dagenham, Havering, Hackney, Newham, Redbridge and Tower Hamlets.

Student feedback has shown that students feel that attending Pier 18 gives them a realistic idea of university life, boosts self confidence, and helps improve grades

This year the Reeves Foundation has provided funding for twenty Camden students to attend and Islington LEA are paying for twenty of their students to attend the classes.

Student feedback has shown that students feel that attending Pier 18 gives them a realistic idea of university life, boosts self-confidence, and helps improve grades. Students say that the teaching standard is high and that tutors are very approachable and helpful.

The 2002 – 2003 student cohort achievement, using achieved AS grade as a guide, showed that 42.5% improved by one or more grade while another 42.5% maintained that grade. Of the whole that same year 53% of Pier 18 students achieved a grade of A – C in the subject that they studied with us.

This year there was provision and funding for 320 students.

Subsequent or ongoing work

Pier 18 also has a sister project, Pier 17, delivering an Easter Revision School. Easter revision is a programme of classes for AS level students. Classes are run over a two-week period, either side of the Easter weekend, providing classes in the morning and afternoon, four 3-hour classes in each subject. Students can enrol for up to 4 subjects.

Pier 17 is a feeder and introduction to the concept of the Pier 18 classes and students who enrol and show good attendance and commitment are automatically sent out details and application forms for the Pier 18 Saturday School programme.

Residential Study Weekends

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Berkshire

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teaching staff tell of
a change in attitude

an activity over a
weekend at which all
27 students would
aim to complete their
data manipulation
module

Background and context

Aimhigher: Berkshire is a small partnership which includes six LEAs. Prior to integration there was an Education Action Zone in Slough, but no other Excellence Challenge funding in the other LEAs. The integration uplift funding gave us the chance to spread the lessons learned in Slough to the rest of the area. In particular we were able to offer similar activities to those contained in the EAZ action plan to schools throughout Berkshire.

One such type of activity from the EAZ plan was entitled "Residential Study Weekends". In Slough these had been used as a chance to get groups of young people away from their school, usually to an Outward Bound or similar centre. The timetable for the events combined motivational activities with concentrated study. The way this activity was described in the integration plan left enough flexibility for schools in other LEAs to develop ideas that suited their needs.

As a small partnership Aimhigher: Berkshire decided that the best way to allocate resource was to target schools based on their figures for GCSE performance, progression to HE and measures of deprivation. Category 1 schools are offered high impact activities for their WP cohort and many other activities for others in the school. Category 2 schools are offered a range of activities for their WP cohort. We have a handful of schools in Category 3 where GCSE performance and progression to HE is well above the national average. These schools are given information about the activities and invited to approach the Aimhigher team if they identify specific young people from Aimhigher target groups who would benefit from taking part.

The first of the "Residential Study Weekends" for a non-Slough school came about as a result of an enquiry from a Head of Maths in one of the Category 1 schools. Her Year 11 GCSE Maths class needed to complete their data manipulation module, which requires each student to spend between 20 and 30 hours working at a computer. The school was not able to provide time on a computer for the whole class of 27 with any regularity and the students were becoming demotivated about the module as a result.

Many of the students did not have access to a computer at home, so it was impossible to get the module completed by setting homework. Initially the Head of Maths enquired whether Aimhigher could help with the cost of hiring a computer room at The University of Reading, as commercial rates were prohibitive. After a phone call and meeting, it became obvious that there was scope for a more ambitious event that also looked at raising the aspirations of the students.

In the end it was agreed that we would hold an activity over a weekend at which all 27 students would aim to complete their data manipulation module. We would have student ambassadors working over the weekend to assist the students to concentrate on the task, but also to speak about life as an undergraduate and encourage the school students to think about higher education.

Description of the activity

The students arrived just after midday on Friday and stayed through to Sunday at about 2pm. After booking into a hall of residence they went straight to work on the computers. We had booked a computer lab with 40 machines so there were plenty to go round. The students worked through to 8:30pm on Friday night, with a break for dinner. On Saturday

many have expressed firm intentions to go on to higher education

A much larger number than average has chosen to study A-level Maths

All 27 students achieved either an A or A* grade for the data manipulation module, and 13 of the group sat and passed their GCSE early in January

they worked from 9am right through to 8pm, again with breaks. Most had finished the module by this point, but the few who still had work to complete were back in front of a computer at 9:30am on Sunday morning. The school brought 3 members of the Maths department and Aimhigher employed 5 student ambassadors, all of whom were studying science subjects and felt comfortable with the Maths. The evenings were spent on the usual round of DVDs, quizzes, disco/karaoke etc. Both school and undergraduate students were encouraged to talk about hopes, fears and experiences of education, with a focus on HE.

On the Sunday afternoon parents and teachers were invited to attend a closing ceremony where we presented the students with certificates of attendance. The students were also informed of their grade for the module.

How the activity made a difference

This group came from a school where the 5 A*-C GCSE pass rate is below 25%. The group itself contained 1 student who was predicted to get an A. Most of the others were predicted C-E before this weekend.

> All 27 students achieved either an A or A* grade for the data manipulation module, and 13 of the group sat and passed their GCSE early in January. Reports from the teaching staff tell of a change in attitude. The members of this group now regard themselves as being capable of good grades and many have expressed firm intentions to go on to higher education. None had considered HE before this point. Many of the group have changed their intentions regarding destination after Year 11, choosing to stay on in education rather than leave. A much larger number than average has chosen to study A-level Maths.

Subsequent or ongoing work

The school will be bringing the next Year 11 for a similar event sometime in the next academic year and those students who have opted to do A-level Maths have petitioned the Head of Maths for a similar event covering part of the A-level curriculum. Since this event we have run a similar activity covering the Devised Theatre part of GCSE Drama and further events are planned in English and French.

Looking Forward: Aiming High. African Young Men of the Future Conference and follow-up study programme

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Birmingham and Solihull

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Background and context

Birmingham and Solihull has a significant population of African Caribbean boys who are underachieving at school and failing to progress to further and higher education.

This activity involves a motivational conference for Year 10 boys and their parents, followed by a Saturday school programme of study support and exposure to the HE environment.

In 2004, a pilot activity by the University of Birmingham was expanded with Aimhigher involving the other four HEIs and several Further Education Colleges putting on a large partnership conference followed by study support at the University of Birmingham.

Description of the activity

The University of Birmingham was joined by nine local universities and colleges of further education, together with MG Rover, The National Black Boys Can Association and Connexions Career Service, to put together an exciting programme of activities for the 135 Year 10 conference delegates and 40 parents.

The Conference, which was hosted by Radio WM presenter, Dr Robert Beckford, of the University's School of Historical Studies, forms part of the Widening Participation Unit's commitment to the AimHigher initiative to raise standards of attainment among cultural and community groups identified as underachieving in comparison with city averages.

In the morning, the students enjoyed a range of practical workshops on business, construction, catering, engineering, electronics and health, while the afternoon session focused on design engineering, business, media/music, science, fashion and design, and sports studies. Parents and teachers were also invited to attend the event and had the opportunity to take part in advice sessions about further and higher education.

Following the workshop a number of boys went on to complete supplementary classes at the University of Birmingham in Maths and English combined with added aspirational activities.

How the activity made a difference

The delegates certainly enjoyed the conference as they got the opportunity to take part in a wide range of activities including putting on a fashion show, doing some resistance training for Sport, putting together a business plan, icing cakes and designing model buildings!

The conference also gave the students some practical information on how to realise their career goals:

"Before I came here today I wanted to be a football coach or PE teacher. This day has helped me to figure out the best way of doing that and the qualifications I will need" (Dean Harris, pupil).

One student, Cameron Gallimore, from Cardinal Wiseman School, found the event entertaining but also learned an important lesson:

"I really enjoyed today and I learned that if you want to better yourself in life you need to carry on at school."

to raise standards of attainment among cultural and community groups identified as underachieving



"Before I came here today I wanted to be a football coach or PE teacher. This day has helped me to figure out the best way of doing that and the qualifications I will need"

Evidence from previous programmes shows that the boys develop greater maturity, value the University experience and become more motivated



Evidence from previous programmes shows that the boys develop greater maturity, value the University experience and become more motivated in their studies as a result of the programme.

Subsequent or ongoing work

As a follow up to the conference pupils are invited to apply for a place on a year-long course at the University. Sessions run fortnightly, on Saturday mornings, at the University and cover English, Maths, Science and personal development. The programme is run in partnership with local voluntary organisations, Black Boys Can and Ishango.

Future evaluation will seek to record GCSE performance against predicted performance on entry to the programme to back up qualitative data with statistical 'improvement' data.

The model for this programme has informed other areas of work – notably lessons learned in working with voluntary organisations, developing programmes of activity that meet the needs of specific target groups and working in partnership with other FE and HE providers. Proposals for activity directed at other target groups have been discussed.

Headstart – Skills for Study and for Life

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Greater Manchester

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Background and context

Headstart originally began at City College Manchester (CCM) in 2000 as part of a widening participation project, in response to a perceived need for study skills in non-traditional students. Originally developed in partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), Aimhigher Greater Manchester recognised the need for Headstart and integrated it into its portfolio of activities, providing funding for the project from August 2003.

Description of the activity

Headstart is a programme in use and in continual development. It has a modular structure with online and paper-based seminar versions. It is accredited by Greater Manchester Open College Network (GMOCN), and designed with non-traditional students in mind. There is strong tutor training and follow-up support, and a continuous upgrade of the materials with daily maintenance of the website. 30 hours of study can draw 1 Level 3 credit.

Headstart began with six modules designed to prepare non-traditional students for university life. These were Plagiarism, Essays, Tutorials, Briefs, Research and Personal Development. From the outset, users saw the potential for expansion and for creating with us their own bespoke course. Course leaders were asking for 'Report Writing', 'Note-taking' and 'Referencing' to be added to the repertoire. Students asked for more 'personal development' material as they felt that they had gained confidence through studying 'Time Management' and 'Problem Solving'.

It is now in use in 15 institutions and organisations. Most of these use the online version. For some students a seminar induction is indicated because of the lack of confidence experienced after a few years' absence from employment or study. It also offers the student induction to IT after the first two sessions.

Much of Headstart's appeal lies in its flexible nature. We have worked closely with curriculum staff, tutors and users in creating the many and varied versions. Our team works quickly and is able to deliver a working programme within two or three weeks of the decision to go ahead. The learning materials are part of an ever-increasing grid for all to share. Modules are now organised by level, mode and type.

How the activity made a difference

Headstart has become increasingly more dynamic as we respond to the demands of the users. These have included students, tutors, curriculum managers and employers who found the format very useable and spurred us on to create an online version. Headstart is now a process rather than a product. It is an approach rather than a course. Please visit the website which is a website of rich and various materials and amenities.

We have gathered a variety of feedback from students, course leaders, managers and employers in every instance of Headstart installation. This has been positive in the vast majority of cases. Here are a few specific findings.

MMU assignment results show 70% of students who used Headstart as part of the first Foundation Year at MMU gained at least a pass. This shows an improvement of at least 20% on the previous year's results before the inception of Headstart.

70% of students who used Headstart... gained at least a pass. This shows an improvement of at least 20% on the previous year's results before the inception of Headstart

100% of Headstart students gained two credits at Level 3 from Gmocn. Over the duration of 16 sessions with 25 students, there were only four single absences. Retention was 100%

> At South Manchester Health Trust (SMUHT) 100% of Headstart students gained two credits at Level 3 from Gmocn. Over the duration of 16 sessions with 25 students, there were only four single absences. Retention was 100%. Many of these learners have completed degrees in Nursing at The University of Manchester and have returned to SMUHT as qualified nurses. All of them have stated that they gained confidence from Headstart.

Our target for Year One of Aimhigher was to install Headstart into ten Greater Manchester institutions. The target of 150 completers was massively exceeded to 1000 completers due to innovative ideas of online use implemented in close liaison with the users.

Subsequent or ongoing work

Currently we are developing a quality framework as an optional alternative to existing accreditation. We have found from our evaluation that only 25% of completers seek this accreditation. Our framework will enable students to be certificated for a single unit of study. The certificate will be of value as part of a learning portfolio.

A further innovation will be online tracking and assessment. This is under development and will be welcomed by our partners using Headstart. It will ease staffing problems and give flexibility to both student and assessor.

Salford, Bolton and Trafford Health Trusts have found Headstart so useful over four years that they are now starting an online version that will serve all workplace learners across the entire trust. We have undertaken to match appropriate modules from the Headstart selection grid to the learning objects that are now mandatory to all employees in the National Health Service.

Optimise Your Life

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Tees Valley

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those who had chosen
not to go regretted their
decision

introduce strategies to
change behaviour,
establishing more
effective study patterns
thereby raising
attainment

Background and context

Michael Heppell is a motivational speaker and author who has achieved recognition in the UK and USA. In the first couple of years of what was then Excellence Challenge, a number of initiatives had involved presentations by Michael. In the Spring Term 2003, some Advanced and Intermediate GNVQ Business students and staff attended an Exam Slam session with him in Middlesbrough. The students talked about it so much on returning to college that those who had chosen not to go regretted their decision. The tutors followed through with the techniques and the positivity in the classroom and the enthusiasm was maintained. They felt that the students were better motivated, were working more effectively and believed for themselves that they could achieve success. The day after the event, some took a Key Skills exam and said 'I remembered what Michael Heppell said and it made me smile. I felt better about it then'.

Description of the activity

It was decided to run a college-wide event, and Michael was booked for a day. He designed a course, 'Optimise Your Life', which would expand on some elements of Exam Slam and bring in some new ones. A venue was hired, making the day more of a special event and transport and lunch were provided. All staff were invited (not optional for teaching staff) and students were expected to attend.

Michael started by explaining the importance of a positive approach. His 'Be Brilliant!' motto underpins everything. Brilliant results come from brilliant work; why accept 'good' or 'excellent' when everyone can be 'brilliant'? Topics covered included: the concept of studying smarter not just harder; using positive language; moving out of your comfort zone in order to progress; recognising when the 'reptilian' part of the brain takes over (during panic), blocking thinking and how to re-activate higher level thinking; identifying personal barriers then developing a strategy for breaking them down; goal setting; and the 'Ultimate Exam Technique'. The final session was quiet and reflective with students visualising failure then success on a very personal level.

Everyone was given a workbook and Michael included exercises to start students using the techniques and ensure they had been understood. His team were on hand to answer queries and help students during these.

The delivery was punctuated by short bursts of high-energy (and high volume) physical activities to get everyone moving and refreshed.

The aims of this activity were to:

- promote the positive outlook and self-belief that would carry students into the exam period with confidence and extend beyond it into the future;
- raise motivation for success; and
- introduce strategies to change behaviour, establishing more effective study patterns thereby raising attainment.

The day was followed by a one hour session with staff.

About 90% of evaluation forms were positive

> Student evaluation on the day was superb. About 90% of evaluation forms were positive, 5% mixed and 5% negative. Many said it was fun and they had enjoyed it and comments like 'I now feel less scared about exams', 'I'm more confident that I can succeed', 'I've never considered what it would really be like if I fail' were frequent. Their response to the final, reflective session was incredible. They took it very seriously and their expression and posture changed markedly with the two states.

Staff evaluation was mixed, but even those who weren't comfortable personally with some of Michael's delivery techniques acknowledged that the messages were good.

Subsequent or ongoing work

The themes were carried on in college for the remainder of the term. The entrance to the main exams hall was decorated using the 'holiday' theme of the Ultimate Exam Technique (it involves substituting the anxiety of exams with the good feeling of going on holiday, but one has to see Michael to understand how this works). On the last day before study leave students were given a small pot of sun cream and staff came to work dressed in 'holiday' clothes, sunglasses, straw hats and large stuffed donkeys included. One student told me (with a smile) that he hated thinking about his holiday now because it made him think of exams!

Staff continued to keep the positive energy going and use the techniques in the classroom

> The buzz after the event was tangible. Whether they had enjoyed the day or not, everyone was talking about it. Staff continued to keep the positive energy going and use the techniques in the classroom. Some are easier to apply than others but examples were identifying what students found most difficult about a topic (the barrier or 'rock') then finding ways to break the rock; using positive spirals (find something you know about a topic and allow that to lead to the next thing you know etc); changing a negative into a positive and identifying appropriate action. A number of people commented that many students looked less nervous than usual while waiting to go into exams. Playing with the beach balls and inflatable parrots might have helped here.

As with any event of this nature, it involved a lot of work. From co-ordinating dates to squirting sun cream into empty film cases, a lot of effort went into it. Financially, it worked out at around £35 per student.

That summer we had our best overall exam results ever

> That summer we had our best overall exam results ever. Obviously, 'Optimise Your Life' wasn't solely responsible, especially as it came relatively late in the academic year, but it may have focused minds and offered strategies that helped quell panic sufficiently to put learning within reach, keep the reptile brain at bay and to really be brilliant. So yes, it was worth it. Be Brilliant!

Critical Thinking Masterclasses and Teacher INSET

Aimhigher Area

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opportunities for students to be involved in problem-solving activities and prepare them for university interviews and entrance exams

"It made me realise how doing simple things can improve the quality of my essay writing in all subjects"



Background and context

Greater Merseyside Aimhigher borough co-ordinators decided to put on Critical Thinking Masterclasses for Year 12 and 13 students, targeting the Gifted and Talented cohort.

The aims were to support students preparing for AEA or AS Critical Thinking courses and also to provide additional support for students taking General Studies. A further aim was to increase opportunities for students to be involved in problem-solving activities and prepare them for university interviews and entrance exams.

It was also seen as an ideal opportunity to provide INSET for teachers who might wish to use critical thinking as a tool in lessons across all subjects.

Description of the activity

Dr. Alec Fisher is Director of the Centre for Research in Critical Thinking at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK, where he taught critical thinking and philosophy until 1999. He designed the new AS level examination in Critical Thinking for OCR (the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations Board) and was until recently its Chief Examiner. His latest book, 'Critical Thinking: An Introduction' was published by Cambridge University Press in November 2001. He conducts workshops for schools and other educational institutions on Critical Thinking and on Assessing Critical Thinking.

The student workshop encouraged the participants to recognise good and bad arguments and to construct good arguments of their own.

Dr Alec Fisher delivered a whole day INSET to teachers. He also delivered teacher INSET as a twilight session the day before the Year 12/13 Masterclass. The teachers who attended were given copies of Dr Fisher's book.

How the activity made a difference

As a consequence of attending the workshop students were entered for the AEA and AS in Critical Thinking. Some students commented:

- It taught me very useful techniques that I will be able to apply to everyday life.
- I think it will be useful for university interviews.
- It made me realise how doing simple things can improve the quality of my essay writing in all subjects.

Teachers concluded that they would be able to encourage students to think critically in a range of subjects through lessons learned from the workshop. Some comments from teachers who participated were:

- I am planning to implement Critical Thinking in Year 12/13 and now feel far more confident and inspired – thank you.
- Brain hurting from so much thinking. I would recommend this to everyone.
- This was a brilliant workshop, Dr Fisher was fantastic and his ideas will certainly help me in my teaching career.

I feel inspired and confident



-
- I wanted my students to be less passive, to engage in discussion and argue viewpoints. The course has given me strategies for doing this – I feel inspired and confident. I can now also see the value of Critical Thinking in a wider context across all subjects and age groups.

Feedback from teachers is that it is very likely that grades for General Studies improved as a result of the workshop but there is no way of directly proving this kind of impact.

At least 6 schools are now delivering or considering delivering Critical Thinking AS directly as a result of the teacher workshops

Subsequent or ongoing work

At least 6 schools are now delivering or considering delivering Critical Thinking AS directly as a result of the teacher workshops.

The Critical Thinking Masterclasses and INSET sessions will be offered again next year.

Masterclasses at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Tyne and Wear

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Many students
 commented that they
 enjoyed the chance to
 see how subjects are
 taught at university

Background and context

The Masterclass Programme has been running at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne for the past five years. This year approximately 250 Gifted and Talented Year 10 students, and 150 Gifted and Talented Year 13/final year college students, will take part in the Programme.

Over 40 schools from six local LEAs support the Programme: Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Gateshead, Northumberland and County Durham. The University works in collaboration with Northumbria University to offer participating students a broad range of subject areas.

The aim of the Masterclass Programme is to raise the aspirations and awareness of 13 – 18 year olds towards higher education. Academic staff involved in the delivery of the Masterclasses are encouraged to meet teachers from local schools and colleges to ensure that the content of the sessions is relevant to the school curriculum and appropriate for the target audience. As a result, the Masterclass Programme also aims to promote attainment, challenge able students and introduce students to the teaching methods used in higher education.

Description of the activity

The Masterclass Programme for Year 10 students runs in the Spring Term each year. The subject areas on offer in 2005 were: Business Studies; Biology; Geomatics (Surveying and Mapping Science); History; Mathematics; Medical Sciences; and Music. They took place over three consecutive Saturday mornings, or, in the case of Music, on one full Vocational Masterday.

In 2005, a Parents' HE Information session was organised to coincide with the Vocational Masterday. Parents/guardians of the students attending each Masterclass were invited to attend the event at which Student Recruitment Office staff delivered talks on key issues such as finance, 'Thinking about Higher Education' and student life. There was opportunity for parents/guardians to ask questions, chat to staff and collect relevant literature.

Year 13 Masterclasses take place over three or four consecutive weeks in the Autumn Term, and offer between six and eight hours of teaching (depending on the subject area). In 2005 the Masterclass Programme will consist of a one-day Masterclass and will include information about progression routes and career paths in each subject area. The subject areas available in 2005 are: English Language; English Literature; Mathematics; Historical Studies; Chemistry; and Biology.

How the activity made a difference

Feedback is gathered from all students and academic staff who have participated in the Masterclass Programme. The feedback from students who have attended the Programme in previous years has been extremely positive. Many students commented that they enjoyed the chance to see how subjects are taught at university.

"The masterclass helped my understanding of the subject and showed me realistically how it is taught at university." English Literature student

Feedback supported these students' comments: Across both age groups in 2004/5, 97% of

97% of students agreed that the Masterclass Programme was relevant to their current studies, with 94% intending to apply to university

students agreed that the Masterclass Programme was relevant to their current studies, with 94% intending to apply to university. Of the participants on the Year 10 Masterclasses, 55% stated that they were more likely to apply to university as result of attending the masterclasses.

"I am definitely more interested in taking history and [the masterclass] has just made me more determined to go." History student

From those students who took part in the Year 13/final year college Masterclass Programme in 2003, 63.5% went on to apply to study at Newcastle University, with approximately 50% of them applying for courses related to their Masterclass subject.

"[The masterclasses] expanded my knowledge on certain topics I am studying at school and pushed my skills to a higher level." Mathematics student.

55% stated that they were more likely to apply to university as result of attending the masterclasses

The Masterclass Programme has involved close liaison with the LEAs, University staff and school teachers. The activity looks set to expand as an increasing number of schools and academic subject areas have expressed an interest in being involved next year.

Subsequent or ongoing work

Key to the success of the Masterclass Programme has been the liaison between teachers and academic staff. Engaging enthusiasts in the subject areas has helped to make sure that the Masterclasses are appropriate and interesting to the audience. Work is ongoing to develop guidelines for schools to support the identification of appropriate students for the Programme.

63.5% went on to apply to study at Newcastle University

The University plans to run the Masterclass Programme in 2005/2006 (subject to funding). It proposes to extend the programme of Masterclasses in association with the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY). It is anticipated that an expanded programme of activities for Gifted and Talented students will include special lectures, additional masterclasses and interactive enterprise activities.

Raising achievement in Science for Bristol schools

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher West Partnership:
South West region

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The event was designed to provide a deeper knowledge and understanding of the key science concepts required to enable students to achieve higher grades



Background and context

Bristol is an urban area with some of the lowest educational achievement in England. It is seriously below the national average in terms of GCSE results, post-16 staying-on rates and progression to higher education. Following an analysis of GCSE results by the Bristol Excellence in Cities (EiC) partnership, and discussion within individual schools, Gifted and Talented co-ordinators across Bristol identified a need for curriculum-based input to help the students and staff achieve the higher (A* - B) grades in GCSE Science. It was also recognised that the more able school students would benefit from meeting similar students from across the City and that giving them a taste of 'cutting edge' science would help to increase their motivation. The event took place in the laboratories of the University of the West of England and encouraged participants to consider studying science at Key Stage 5 and beyond.

Description of the activity

The Year 10 Science Event is hosted annually by the Faculty of Applied Sciences at the University of the West of England. It is jointly organised by the Faculty's WP Co-ordinator and a representative from Bristol Excellence in Cities – Gifted and Talented Strand. Many of the schools targeted are designated by the DfES as 'facing challenging circumstances'.

At an initial meeting with science teachers from EiC schools across Bristol, it was established there were certain topics in the GCSE specification that were difficult to 'bring alive' due to lack of equipment and resources in the school science departments. The event was designed to provide a deeper knowledge and understanding of the key science concepts required to enable students to achieve higher grades.

The programme for the Science Event was carefully negotiated between school teachers and the University staff to ensure that it built upon and extended the GCSE curriculum while also motivating the participants to pursue further studies in science. A basic outline for a science event was put in place and the academics at UWE were provided with GCSE specifications and national curriculum details for the chosen topic. The school students were accompanied by their teachers who were thus involved in the activities and could reinforce the topics in lessons within school. All Bristol EiC schools were invited to participate in the initial event in Spring 2002, with 12 schools each identifying 8 students.

'Inheritance and Selection' was the topic chosen to be covered in the day-long event. The students gained hands on practical experience working in three different laboratories within the Faculty of Applied Sciences:

Biochemistry – DNA extraction, genetic engineering, inheritance;

Microbiology – GM, antibiotics, selection; and

Chemistry – forensic science plus a visit to the electron microscopy suite.

Around 30 academic, technical and administrative staff were involved in delivering the event, together with a number of postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers. Trained student ambassadors also supported the event - greeting, guiding and then mixing with the school students at lunch time. The use of HE students as role models was immensely valuable and helped to encourage the participants to consider HE as a realistic option.

Following its successful launch in Spring 2002, the Citywide science event has become a regular feature of the school calendar, with similar events being held for Bristol EiC schools in 2003, 2004 and 2005.

How the activity made a difference

Student and teacher responses to the evaluation questionnaire completed at the end of the event indicated the difference this event has made.

91% of school students said they would recommend the event to a friend



91% of school students said they would recommend the event to a friend;

Comments from students indicated that they enjoy and are motivated by carrying out experiments successfully in highly specialised science laboratories. This is something they do not experience at school and the value of the event is illustrated by comments such as 'Why can't it be like this at school, Miss?';

"Why can't it be like this at school, Miss?"

100% of teachers reported they had benefited from attending the event. 'I've never done this myself' said a teacher referring to a DNA extraction practical;

100% of teachers reported they would bring students to a similar event in the future;

Schools are limited to 8 student places and each school attending would like additional places. Following the success in Year 1, there has been a reserve list of other schools also wanting to attend.

100% of teachers reported they would bring students to a similar event in the future

Subsequent or ongoing work

The event has become a regular part of the schools' and University's calendar. Links are being made with the LEA's Science subject network in order to further extend this work by placing science undergraduates into local classrooms to support and develop learning.

Professions Progression Partnerships (PPP)

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher South Yorkshire

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opportunity to gain a realistic insight into the commitment required to study for a degree >

visiting external venues to see the chosen professions in real life situations

Background and context

Based on the model of Sheffield's Outreach & Access to Medicine Scheme (SOAMS), PPP was developed to work with professions that typically do not attract students from widening participation backgrounds - Accountancy, Architecture and Law.

The programme is now in its third year. Although the University of Sheffield is the leading partner, Sheffield Hallam University is also involved. This is seen to be particularly beneficial for activities such as the Y13 UCAS information events, where students are given the opportunity to meet with Admissions Tutors in relevant departments from both institutions.

Description of the activity

Target groups:

- Accountancy/Architecture - programme starts in Y12, continuing into Y13 (Introduction to architecture piloted at Key Stage 3 & 4 (Y9/Y10) in 2005)
- Law - programme begins in Y11 continuing through to Y13

Schools and colleges in South Yorkshire are targeted for the programme. The activity supports both 13-16 Raising Aspirations and 16-19 Preparation and Transition. It provides students with an opportunity to gain a realistic insight into the commitment required to study for a degree in these fields and a practical insight into careers in Architecture, Accountancy and Law.

Participants visit the institutions to sample typical first year (degree) activities as well as visiting external venues to see the chosen professions in real life situations.

Introductory sessions for each strand of the programme provide information about the length of study for the particular degree course and the likely costs involved, together with details of professional career routes upon graduation. Students gain a better understanding of their likely commitment in undertaking the degree and in working in the chosen profession.

Alternative guidance to the HE route is also provided, as appropriate, to further encourage progression into these professions. For example, information about ILEX (Independent Legal Executives) is provided for the Law programme and ACCA (Association of Certified Chartered Accountants) provides information for the Accountancy programme.

Law Programme - 100 places available at Year 11. Focus is given to the criminal justice element of a Law degree, with students spending time behind the scenes at Law Courts, observing real trials, visiting an interactive law museum to experience the changes in crime and punishment through the ages, and visiting Doncaster Prison. Students are introduced to careers within the court service, as solicitors and barristers, and in probation and rehabilitation services.

Architecture Programme - 30 places available at Year 12. Y12 students undertake activities at both universities to gain an insight into practical work within the first year of the degree, sampling CAD (computer-aided design), modelling and planning techniques. Participants meet architects and related professionals and undertake site visits to current inner city developments and 'classrooms of the future'.

This year, Y9 and Y10 pupils from 5 South Yorkshire schools were invited to take part in a week-long event, introducing them to the built environment and ecological aspects of architecture, working alongside an international group of architects through PLAYCE. The pupils produced models which were exhibited at the University of Sheffield, photographs of which will be used to promote architecture amongst school pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4, internationally.

Accountancy Programme - 45 places available at Year 12. Students undertake practical exercises, working alongside accountants, looking at the marketing and promotion of a new chocolate bar. They also experience business development through the setting up of their own radio station, with the aid of ACCA and a local radio station.

UCAS Advice - Year 13 for all programmes. Guidance is given on how to write effective personal statements and the completion of UCAS application forms. Admissions Tutors from the relevant departments meet with students to discuss applying to university.

How the activity made a difference

There are 5 ring-fenced places on each of the relevant degree programmes for participants of the PPP programme

> At the University of Sheffield there are 5 ring-fenced places on each of the relevant degree programmes for participants of the PPP programme.

Results from PPP2 (second year of project):

Law Programme -

100 x Y11 pupils started the programme.

4 have been offered places at the University of Sheffield for 2005 entry.

Architecture Programme -

25 x Y12 pupils started the programme.

4 have been offered places at the University of Sheffield for 2005 entry.

Accountancy Programme -

45 x Y12 pupils started the programme.

12 have been offered places at Sheffield Hallam University for entry in 2005. 8 of these students are also holding offers at the University of Sheffield.

Approximately 20 further applications have been made to HE from PPP students.

Collaborative working between the two universities continues to widen participation within South Yorkshire by promoting the opportunities for studying locally.

Subsequent or ongoing work

From 2006, the University of Sheffield will introduce a bursary (household income related) for PPP participants enrolling onto degree courses at the University.

Despite the discontinuation of Aimhigher funding from July 2006, the University of Sheffield will endeavour to continue with the PPP and may look to expand the number of professions to include for example engineering.

Herefordshire Engineering FE students visit to Northern Ireland

Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Herefordshire and Worcestershire

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The visit to Northern Ireland has certainly expanded their horizons to go beyond the boundaries of Herefordshire

The company will also be supporting further training at level 4 either through a Foundation Degree or HNC

Background and context

Herefordshire and Worcestershire Aimhigher partnership operates within a geographical area of approximately 1000 square kilometres that consists of the 2 cities of Hereford and Worcester and a largely rural area across the remainder of the 2 counties.

Hereford College of Technology, in Hereford city, serves a substantial proportion of learners whose geographical isolation necessitates significant travel to study as well as limited opportunity to participate in HE-focused activity as there is no HEI within the county.

The students were invited to participate in a specialist residential in their subject area, as progression onto HE for these students will almost certainly involve selecting a HE provider away from home. The aim of the residential was to introduce the students to the advanced technology and facilities available in their chosen subject area and enable them to experience life as a student.

Description of the activity

The students are all studying for a National Diploma in Engineering. The six students visited the Engineering departments of Queens University Belfast and the University of Ulster. The students had the opportunity to meet some renowned experts in the field of Engineering - Professor Dr Robert Fleck, Professor Dr Gerry McNally and Dr Justin Quinn - and spent time looking at the latest technology from 3D virtual engineering, to student Formula One racing projects and plastic extrusion technology. The students also visited North Down Ards Institute of FE to meet National Diploma students like themselves, and had the opportunity to use the College's ICT suite to design and process components in 3D.

How the activity made a difference

The target group of first and second year National Diploma students was extremely motivated by the fact they had been chosen to participate in the event. The opportunities open to these students in the local area are limited and so, for some, thoughts of progression to HE were not high on the agenda.

Both John Hurds (HCT team leader Engineering) and Michael Keating (HCT Engineering lecturer) were impressed by the amount of time these very busy professors spent with the students explaining the range of Engineering programmes available at the Universities and the relationship to the world of work across the globe. The students' eyes lit up when one asked about salaries!

The impact of the event on the students' choices is not just limited to their intended progression onto further study but has supported retention amongst the group on their current course. The visit to Northern Ireland has certainly expanded their horizons to go beyond the boundaries of Herefordshire. As a direct result of the visit, one student will be relocating to Belfast with the company he is currently with, to work in the new factory upon completion of his National Diploma. The company will also be supporting further training at Level 4 either through a Foundation Degree or HNC.

Three of the visiting students are now seriously thinking about completing their education with a Degree in Engineering.

The whole experience > for staff and students was a positive one

Herefordshire College of Technology will also host a residential for National Diploma Engineering students studying and based in Northern Ireland

Subsequent or ongoing work

The whole experience for staff and students was a positive one both on what Northern Ireland was like, the opportunities available for engineers and the HE provision. The Engineering department at Herefordshire College of Technology would like to make this activity available each year to continue to raise awareness of progression from FE to HE and develop student experiences of campus life and beyond. A particularly successful activity was taking part in the 3D technology lecture and, at the FE college, the students designed a component and processed it using the same technology to produce a finished product.

The partnership between the Universities, North Down Ards Institute of FE and the College has developed well, with some joint project working in the pipeline for students and staff. Herefordshire College of Technology will also host a residential for National Diploma Engineering students studying and based in Northern Ireland.

Notes

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Masterclasses and other attainment-raising activity

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

Summer Schools

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

Engagement of parents and carers

Mentoring, Ambassadors and Student Associates

Dissemination of practice

Work with specific Widening Participation target groups

Work with communities and outreach activities

Work with all pre-KS4 pupils, including primary



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www.actiononaccess.org