

# Making a Difference:

The Impact of Aimhigher


## *Engagement of parents and carers*

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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  
Progression to HE from vocational, WBL + WRL  
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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## Introduction

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# Engagement of parents and carers

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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.

Reports and surveys reiterate that parents and carers have always been the most significant influence on their children as they make decisions about their future. Aimhigher partnerships have evolved a number of strategies to inform and involve parents and carers, inform them of the higher education opportunities open to all young people who can benefit from them, and involve them in the important life decisions their children have to make.

The case studies show the imaginative approaches of Aimhigher working with parents and carers of young people at all ages, in different contexts both in and outside schools and colleges, and with parents and carers of specific groups of young people – e.g. work with fathers and their sons, work with members of particular faith or community groups.

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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 through<sup>1</sup> and it will be possible to have a fuller picture of the impact of the overall programme.

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

# Reaching parents

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## Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher West Partnership:  
South West region

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without parental  
support the barriers  
to accessing higher  
education remain  
insurmountable

For some, the visit  
was the first time  
they had seen the  
inside of a university

## Background and context

Parents with little or no family history of higher education themselves are often afraid to encourage their child(ren) to consider going to university. This is partly due to lack of awareness of the current position, the anticipated costs and related debt, and partly due to fear of the unknown. They are often misinformed of the costs of going to university and cannot recognise the benefits that gaining a higher education qualification can provide. Parental support is, however, crucial if young people are to progress to HE.

Aimhigher taster events reach the young people themselves, with a tremendous amount of success, but without parental support the barriers to accessing higher education remain insurmountable.

## Description of the activity

The purpose of this activity was to dispel myths and allay fears by giving parents the opportunity to find out about the nature of HE in 21st Century and to give realistic and easily accessible information about the costs of gaining a degree.

Forty five Year 9 students from a local secondary school in an Excellence Challenge area spent the afternoon and evening at a university campus to find out, first hand, what it is like to be a student in higher education. They explored the costs, how students manage, and the value of gaining a degree.

Parents/carers were invited to join the group for tea and nibbles from 5.00 pm onwards, after which they were taken on a guided tour of the campus. This was followed by a series of presentations given by the school students about the work they had undertaken during the afternoon. The school students had been working in small groups with UWE Student Ambassadors to develop materials relating to university life. These included:

- An HE Leaflet: designed to encourage participants to examine some of the key issues relating to HE and to consider how their findings can be best conveyed to their peers;
- An Alternative Prospectus: designed to raise awareness of the diverse nature of higher education academically and socially;
- Why go to University?: designed to identify reasons why people go to university and highlight the benefits of gaining a degree;
- In the News: the writing of a 200–300 word article for the school Newsletter based on research carried out during the visit;
- Student Union Campaigns: designed to encourage consideration of issues that impact on student lives and to raise awareness of the campaigning role of the Union and how students participate; and
- Plan a Student Night: designed to raise awareness of the social events students might enjoy and that students can plan and organise their own events

## How the activity made a difference

The strength of this approach was the active and enthusiastic engagement of parents/carers:

- For some, the visit was the first time they had seen the inside of a university; for others, it enabled them to see the changes that have taken place over recent years, making HE

more accessible for a diverse range of people;

- Presentations made by the school students, in an easily accessible format, allayed fears about the costs and benefits of gaining a higher education; and
- Parents/carers watched the presentations with pride - for many it was the first time they had seen their child(ren) in this light.

Evaluation showed that all parents/carers found the event excellent or very good. The most informative parts of the event were:

- The presentations given by the school students. Many commented on the quality of the presentations and the relevance of the information given;
- The campus tour;
- The summary of costs given by the school students and endorsed by staff; and
- Raised awareness of the diversity of subjects available.

The quotes below are from parents attending the event:

"Excellent opportunity – I enjoyed the visit"

"Many thanks for giving me the opportunity to share this experience with my son"

"This was a great opportunity for the children. I was pleased I could attend and share this with my daughter"

"We both enjoyed the visit. Many thanks to everyone involved"

"An excellent idea – well done!"

The following quote is from member of School Staff:

"An outstanding event. I don't think anything could have gone better"

A letter of thanks was also received signed by all participating school students:

"We would like to thank you for the fantastic day we had at UWE. The experience got us all thinking about going to university at a later stage.

The Student Ambassadors were very friendly and helpful, making it easy for us to talk about our ideas and views. It meant we could do some excellent presentations to our parents and teachers.

We have brought back some excellent work which will go on display at our parents evening in March. An account of the day will go into our school newsletter"

### Subsequent or ongoing work

Although working with young people can be successful in raising aspirations, they are unlikely to progress to higher education without the support of their parents/carers. Work with parents/carers is therefore an essential part of the Aimhigher programme and the Aimhigher West partnership ensures that there is an HE presence at Parents' Evenings as well as designing specific events for this group.

**The experience got us all thinking about going to university at a later stage**

**Work with parents/carers is therefore an essential part of the Aimhigher programme**

# 'Changing Attitudes in South Tyneside' - a summary of a four-year parent and carer campaign

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## Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Tyne and Wear

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The thrust of the campaign was to 'demystify' HE among parents and carers

Evidence of impact so far has been promising

## Background and context

South Tyneside is one of four districts in the North East with levels of employment deprivation among the most deprived 10% of districts nationally. In addition, five areas within the borough rank within the worst deprived category of the overall index of deprivation of 2004 (Source: IMD 2004). The 14-19 Partnership Needs Analysis of 2003 also noted a significant demographic labour force change within the borough, combined with recognised issues concerning participation in FE/HE. A similar picture had already spurred the consultants engaged in the development of South Tyneside's 'Excellence Challenge' plan in 2001 to call for a public-facing campaign aimed at raising community aspirations and awareness of FE/HE. The thrust of the campaign was to 'demystify' HE among parents and carers and the strategy that followed was designed in response to a Parent/Carer attitudes campaign commissioned by South Tyneside Excellence Challenge. Key findings were:

- Most respondents would support their child's progression to HE;
- The most favoured progression routes were vocational pathways (Law, Business, IT);
- Academic subjects with no direct vocational link proved unpopular; and
- Concerns relating to debt, employability, uncertainty about progression, entry levels and application procedures.

## Description of the activity

A campaign was created involving publicity leaflets, press coverage, a launch event and parent/carers visits to the Universities of Northumbria and York. At our launch event, 100 delegates were given information provided by South Tyneside College, Connexions, and Northumbria University. The aim was to promote the proposed visits, though while people were quite happy to take information away, few signed up on the evening. A launch trip to York attended by 22 delegates followed, while Northumbria hosted 12 delegates in the Spring. Both events contained generic HE progression information, presentations and support from student mentors, finance information, campus tours and close-ups of student accommodation. Feedback received was positive although approximately 25% of attendees expressed a desire to attend future events accompanied by their children.

Formal evaluation in October 2004 focused on increasing numbers, the impact of publicity and ways forward. We conceded to feedback relating to the slightly patronising and one-sided nature of our leaflet and campaign design. This was addressed by reflecting on the impact of South Tyneside's 14-19 partnership brand, ST19. The brand's creators were enlisted to plan a campaign that was thematically linked to the pupil-facing ST19. The final product combined the emotive strap line 'How Proud Could You Be?' with a text-based leaflet design. Other modifications included reviewed and bias-checked information, the inclusion of websites and the opportunity to book places on HE visits by means of a pre-paid reply slip. The leaflet was mailed to all parents/carers of 14-19 students.

## How the activity made a difference

To summarise, we aimed to provide a campaign that would firstly reach our target group, secondly provide persuasive yet balanced information and thirdly provide non-threatening access to further events. Evidence of impact so far has been promising. While 140 people

**'The event has highlighted the fact that it is never too early to begin considering my daughter's options for the future'**

- > 'The event has highlighted the fact that it is never too early to begin considering my daughter's options for the future.' Parent of a Year 9 student.
- 'It has been very relaxed and friendly. I especially enjoyed the interactive activities as it helps you absorb the information.' Parent of a Year 10 student
- 'I would have liked more information on particular courses you can study.' Parent of a Year 12 student

The inclusion of 14-19 students has been successful and, although we have openly stated that events are aimed at parents, HEI's have been flexible in offering additional opportunities for students. One of the campaign's most positive aspects so far has been the development of supportive partnerships. We have gained much support from the universities involved, plus agencies such as Aimhigher North East and TEDCO Enterprise in Education:

"The Aimhigher strategy is key to the overall success of the 14-19 agenda and vice versa. Both managers have recognised this and now effectively link into each other's projects. A prime example has been the 'How Proud Could You Be?' event where both managers presented a united front in order to engage with parents. Both strategies now carry the same ST19 imagery in a deliberate attempt to add continuity and a point of reference for the community to recognise. This 'joined up thinking' approach is an excellent example of effective collaboration and partnership working - the key to success for any strategy!" - Jackie Nolan, South Tyneside's 14-19 Action Plan Manager.

"TEDCO Enterprise in Education is delighted to be involved in the extremely successful Aimhigher campaign in South Tyneside, which has been clearly instrumental in the raising of aspirations and achievements of young people in the borough. We have recognised the vital need to engage students considering university, in financial literacy training, alongside their parents/guardians. Issues examined during parents evenings and parent workshops include, how to access funding streams available to support young people through education and training, and student budgeting. We look forward to continued effective partnership working, alongside the Aimhigher Campaign into the future." - Katherine Humpleby, Assistant Manager, TEDCO Enterprise in Education

### **Subsequent or ongoing work**

Our next step will be to keep delegates 'warm' in preparation for trips to Sunderland and York. We are also seeking 60 parents and students to join us at Durham University's exciting 'Head-up' residential event. Piloted by Hartlepool LEA in 2004, this venture aims to provide a full immersion experience of university life over two weekends. In addition, we are working with TEDCO Enterprise in Education to develop a parent and student financial literacy event entitled 'Finding Funding' in July. We are also working with our Aimhigher colleagues within Tyne and Wear to investigate the possibility of a common approach to parent and carer work which may lead to joint marketing end events.

Although the campaign has led to an increased impact, our annual evaluation will no

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**the impact of the campaign will... lead to an upturn in progression over the coming years**

doubt throw up an equally potent set of questions asking why so few of the target population have responded to our call to action and so many people who sign up for events decide not to attend. I am optimistic that, although currently slow-burning, the impact of the campaign will accelerate during the coming 18 months and lead to an upturn in progression over the coming years.

# Family Awareness Days (FADs) at the University of Warwick

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Aimhigher Coventry and Warwickshire

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The aim of a FAD is to introduce pupils and parents to a university campus

## Background and context

There was a consensus that Warwick was running a variety of successful activities which were bringing pupils onto campus in large numbers. In addition to this, one particular outreach event based in schools was becoming increasingly successful in attracting parents, but there was still a need to engage parents on a deeper level in a campus environment. A small number of very local parents were accessing the University campus to use the Arts Centre, but many others didn't feel comfortable coming on to campus and so would not make the effort to travel to campus independently. The FADs were specifically created to bring parents on to campus who were wary about HE and HEIs, but whose children were being targeted for widening participation activities on a variety of levels. FADs were targeted at younger aged pupils and their parents/carers, as it was felt that parents would feel obliged to accompany their younger children on such a visit.

The aim of a FAD is to introduce pupils and parents to a university campus; to engage the pupils in enjoyable activities (assisted by Student Ambassadors), but more importantly to hold a parents' forum which would allow discussion about pertinent HE issues – especially finance and student life. There is also an opportunity to discuss lifelong learning opportunities in a general context.

## Description of the activity

The FAD is a three-hour event specifically for younger aged pupils (Year 7-8) and their parents/carers. School groups arrive on campus by midday and are taken through a jam-packed programme consisting of lunch, a campus tour, and activities in the SU or Sports Centre for the pupils, and a Parents' Forum/presentation for accompanying adults. Any involvement by various SU societies positively contributes to the day and is usually overwhelmingly enjoyed by the pupils. Past contributions have come from Warwick Tap, RAG, Revelation Gospel Choir and RaW (Warwick's radio station). The Sports Centre is also enjoyed and provides swimming, basketball, table tennis, badminton or rock climbing. FADs are funded by Aimhigher and delivered in association with the local Aimhigher partnership.

## How the activity made a difference

It is felt that this event has made a significant contribution to Aimhigher objectives, especially with regards to working with parents. FADs can only work if parents/carers attend with their children and so only those schools who make a concerted effort to engage parents can be involved.

FADs have the most impact in relation to increasing awareness, positive attitudes and aspiration towards HE among under-represented groups, and also positively impact on parents and encourage their confidence as they begin to think about HE for their children. In addition, many parents request that more information related to Lifelong Learning opportunities be sent to them. This indicates that they are encouraged to think more seriously about their own education following a FAD.

This event has significantly impacted on the parents who have attended, and has been well received by attending teachers also.

One parent commented:

"I found today extremely helpful, [the Recruitment Officer] and the team kept me interested and I felt all my questions had been answered. Thanks for this opportunity." (Parent, May 2004)

this event has made a significant contribution to Aimhigher objectives, especially with regards to working with parents

# Evening forums for learners with disabilities and their parents and carers

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## Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher London North Partnership

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## Background and context

The 'This-Ability' Activity Management Group (AMG) developed the idea of four cross-borough evening forums. The aim of the forums was to communicate much-needed information to key audiences across North London regarding progression to higher education, and the support available.

The main purpose of the forums was to provide learners with disabilities, parent/carers and relevant local professionals with a 'one-stop shop' of information on progression to FE/HE. This information covered:

- The transition from secondary school to FE/HE;
- Entry requirements;
- The role of Connexions/Prospects;
- The courses and support available in North London FE/HE institutions;
- The financial support available for HE learners;
- Mental and sexual health support available to learners from local support organisations;
- Learners rights under the DDA.

## Description of the activity

Evening forums for learners with disabilities were held throughout March in Barnet, Enfield and Haringey - Waltham Forest had to be postponed until May 17th 2005. The forums were attended by over 120 families. Each event provided learners, parents, carers and relevant local professionals with a wide range of information on progression to FE/HE.

Each forum outlined the purpose of Aimhigher in the borough. A prominent key note speaker was followed by a number of interactive workshops specialising in areas relevant to those attending. The evenings all closed with an informal networking opportunity for all in attendance. An important part of the success of these events was the strong presence of staff from the previously mentioned organisations. Everyone attending had extensive opportunities to seek 'one to one' advice and guidance from those professionals present.

## How the activity made a difference

This was a well targeted event and enabled learners with disabilities and their parents and carers to ask key staff present from a variety of organisations relevant personal questions. Anecdotal feedback from parents and carers who attended indicated that this event had made a real difference to them, and had made them feel less isolated and more empowered when considering HE for their child. The events also raised the profile and understanding of Aimhigher projects and activities across the three boroughs.

## Subsequent or ongoing work

The London North Aimhigher 'This-Ability' group are now looking forward to their four planned separate three-day summer schools for learners in May and June 2005. These will focus on learners with four separate disabilities: dyslexia, autistic spectrum disorders, sensory impairments, and physical impairments.

Each event provided learners, parents, carers and relevant local professionals with a wide range of information on progression to FE/HE

enabled learners with disabilities and their parents and carers to ask key staff... relevant personal questions

# Focus on parents and families

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## Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Hampshire & Isle of Wight

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## Background and context

The majority of aspiration-raising activities in Hampshire & Isle of Wight focus directly on young people and, whilst effective for many, feedback from teachers suggests that some parents and families do not understand the importance of HE for young people and fail to provide encouragement and support for progression. For this reason, Aimhigher activities which involve parents and families have proved to be particularly effective for raising aspirations of young people to progress to higher education. This is illustrated by the following case study of such work conducted in North Hampshire.

## Description of the activity

University College Winchester has been developing activities and materials for parents and families through links with selected target schools and colleges in Farnborough and Andover. For example, in November 2004 an evening event was held at Cricklade College, Andover, for parents of target pupils in Year 10 and 11 at the town's three secondary schools. Around 105 people attended, including some of the pupils themselves. Presentations were given by University College Winchester and Cricklade College staff on courses and qualifications in FE and HE, as well as student fees and financial support. Wine and nibbles were supplied by Cricklade's hospitality and catering students, and representatives from other universities in Hampshire were on hand with displays. Following the success of the Andover event, Oak Farm School in Farnborough held a similar evening event for parents of targeted pupils. In addition, many of the parents accepted an invitation for a follow-up evening workshop to focus on the financial costs and benefits of continuing to FE and HE.

Hampshire County Council's Teacher Adviser for Family Learning has been working closely with University College Winchester and a consultant to develop family learning materials which focus on financial matters in HE. The aim is not only to improve understanding of fees, financial support and long-term benefits, but also to help parents with their numeracy and financial skills and encourage them to become more involved with their children's education. Materials are being designed flexibly so they can be used in stand-alone workshops run by facilitators, or can be separated into classroom activities for pupils with concurrent activities for parents to carry out at home. Aimhigher Southeast is funding the development and trial of the materials, starting with schools in Farnborough and Andover which are targets for both Aimhigher and the 'Skills for Families' project - a joint initiative between the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit and LSCs - in which Hampshire is a partner. Once materials have been fully trialled they will be made available to all practitioners on the Aimhigher website.

Feedback from parents showed that the sessions held so far were very effective

77% of parents stated that the event had made a significant difference in their desire to encourage their children to continue to FE and/or HE

## How the activity made a difference

Feedback from parents showed that the sessions held so far were very effective in informing and motivating parents to support children's HE progression. 82% of participating parents at the first Andover event found the information on HE 'very useful' and 18% found it 'quite useful', with some parents resolving to return to study themselves. Schools have been delighted with the level of attendance by parents. At the second event, 77% of parents stated that the event had made a significant difference in their desire to encourage their children to continue to FE and/or HE.

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### **Subsequent or ongoing work**

As a result of the close collaboration engendered by planning for the parents' events, further joint activities are being organised focusing on Year 11 GCSE revision classes in English, Maths and Science, with classes taught by a mixture of school and college staff, with additional support from Student Ambassadors.

# Parents and Children Working Together Project: making a difference in Humber

## Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Humber

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## Background and context

Hull has held the position at the bottom of the education league tables for a number of years now, its reputation suffering as a result of this. We do not hold with the view that our children are any less capable of success than any other child. The key, we feel, is to change attitudes and beliefs through empowering the parents to feel confident about learning themselves. If parents understand how they learn effectively then they are more able to help and support their children. If children grow up within a home that values education then they are more likely to value the importance of education themselves. The project aim is to promote lifelong learning through encouraging the parents of primary-aged children to engage in their own and their children's learning through a focus on 'Learning to Learn' (L2L).

## Description of the activity

The Parents and Children Working Together Project was started 5 years ago by the University of Lincoln. Kay Jarvis was employed to spearhead an action research project to work with non-traditional learners looking at changing beliefs and deeply-held convictions that inhibited participation in formal learning. To address this, Kay designed a six-week course which explores how we learn. The programme was developed based on the theories of multiple intelligences and Neuro Linguistic Programming. The L2L programme allows the participants to reflect on their past learning experiences, and gives parents the opportunity to analyse and discuss their own school experiences offering them the opportunity to realise their own learning potential as well as that of their children.

Learning to Learn is a six-week course accredited through UL- 6 CATs points at level one. The focus is on learning through an experiential approach, using IT as the vehicle for achieving this. It also includes a range of other relevant transferable skills and builds confidence and self-esteem of project participants. The programme delivery takes place in the primary school.

The work was originally funded by the University of Lincoln and the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB4). During the last round of widening participation funding (2001) Kay Jarvis and Sally Pryderi, University of Hull, formed a partnership which allowed the L2L six-week course to take place in other primary schools in the Hull area and also in the East Riding.

This partnership allowed progression opportunities for parents to take place in the primary schools



This partnership allowed progression opportunities for parents to take place in the primary schools in the form of University Award Foundation modules accredited by the UOH. Parents continue to be taught in the school during the school day - whilst the children are in their classroom their parents are in theirs! The project is now funded through the Aimhigher initiative extending into the Humber area and working with Surestart and Secondary Schools as well as continuing work with the Primary sector. Our work is an excellent example of how partnership can work between providers when the learner is placed at the centre of what we do.

The project is now funded through the Aimhigher initiative

## How the activity made a difference

The project is an ongoing action research project and has continued to develop over the years, and as a result now has: local, national and international recognition; a database that contains 5 years of qualitative and quantitative data recorded; parents' personal written evaluation of the course; taped and video interviews of parents' views.

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There is a total of 438 L2L Students, 364 of whom earned accreditation and 308 L2L students who enrolled on follow-on courses. L2L involves 21 schools (9 in Hull) and 5 Community Organisations. 747 children have benefited from L2L.

Many parents who participate in L2L continue with further study, courses, training, new careers, accessing employment and promotion at work. Some parents have become school parent governors. Parents have set up homework clubs and have become actively involved in community development.

**"I have done 20 odd courses since doing the Learning to Learn. I wouldn't have gone back to college if I hadn't done this one**

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"I have done 20 odd courses since doing the Learning to Learn. I wouldn't have gone back to college if I hadn't done this one" (Parent Escourt Primary)

"My children now want to go to college and to university. They can succeed - I can succeed" (Parent - Broadacre Primary)

As a result of the success of the approach a book has been published: Burnett, G and Jarvis, K (2004), Parents First, Crown House Publishing, ISBN 1904424139

**"My children now want to go to college and to university. They can succeed - I can succeed"**

### **Subsequent or ongoing work**

The next phase of our project will see the development of a framework for broadening and progressing learning by offering a Certificate in HE that offers curriculum choices that the learners feel is appropriate for their needs. L2L is an ongoing project.

# Barnfield College Parent-Student Workshops

## Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Bedfordshire & Luton

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## Background and context

The Parent-Student Workshops aim to raise parity of esteem for vocational routes of progression and increase parent or carer and student understanding of the opportunities available post-16 and beyond. Funded through Aimhigher, the workshops are held at Barnfield College, which is one of two Further Education establishments in Luton. There are twelve high schools in the town and only one of these offers educational opportunities for post-16 students. The routes of progression at the end of Year 11 for the majority of students will therefore be the two local colleges.

These events are organized for students in Year 9 and their parents early in the Spring Term before choices for Key Stage 4 are made. Attendance at these events helps students make informed choices about appropriate options relevant to and supporting post-16 progression.

## Description of the activity

Saturday morning workshops are offered in a wide range of vocational areas and are delivered across the three college sites. They run from 10.00–12.30 and the format is 'hands on and practical'. Students and parents/carers are given a tour of the facilities available and information on courses, structure and entry requirements and possible routes of progression post-17/18. They take part together in activities ranging from developing a marketing plan to making choux pastry swans.

Staff from Barnfield College and Bedfordshire and Luton Education Business Partnership are present at each site to welcome and support parents and carers and students. At the end of each workshop, parents/carers and students are asked to complete an evaluation form. This information is collated and returned to course tutors and is also analysed by project staff. Evaluation outcomes are used to inform project planning for the next academic year

## How the activity made a difference

- Students in Luton need opportunities to investigate post-16 education as they are not available in their own schools (with one exception)
- The activity involved eleven schools and one college in Luton.
- The activity raised student and parental awareness of vocational opportunities and relevant routes of progression
- The number of students participating from each school was variable and ranged from 12–85. Many of these were from Polar data 'cold spot' target areas
- 100% of students and parents or carers who attended the event enjoyed taking part

What the students had to say about it:

"It showed me what subjects and grades I need to get";

"I have a much better idea of Business and management and what it involves";

"It has helped me to think about what I can do in the future";

"I got to see what jobs the courses could lead to in the future";

The activity raised student and parental awareness of vocational opportunities and relevant routes of progression



"I will go to university >  
then think about  
joining the  
Paramedics"

"I will go to university then think about joining the Paramedics";

"I now know I have to do A levels or another Level 3 course".

And the parents.....

"It has helped her to make an informed decision about which GCSE's to take";

"She has decided to go to university and then review her options";

"He now knows he has to obtain the highest GCSE grades possible to make the best choice";

"It has helped us to >  
see that college is  
different to school  
and how the college  
and classes work"

"It has helped us to see that college is different to school and how the college and classes work".

### Subsequent or ongoing work

- The Parent Student Workshops take place in the Spring Term of Year 9 and form the first stage of targeted activity.
- This is followed by students being given the opportunity to attend a taster day in a specific vocational area in the Summer Term of Year 10 (but parents are not involved in this activity).
- In the Autumn Term of Year 11 staff from the college visit schools in Luton to make a presentation about courses available at the college. Students and parents can also attend a number of open evenings.
- There is the potential to develop similar events with Year 11 students and parents / carers and the University of Luton. These could be offered in the Spring Term when students are making final decisions about post-16 progression.
- The Parent-Student Workshops will be delivered again next year. Some minor changes will be made in some vocational areas e.g. more information to be included on the Tourism aspects in the Hospitality and Tourism area.

# Working with families

## Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Lancashire

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raise awareness of factors that help or hinder... widening participation activities with families



## Background and context

The work of the Lancashire Aimhigher Families Theme consolidates previous good practice and insights obtained via Lancaster University's Families And Higher Education Decision-making project (FAHED). The FAHED action research cycle contributed to the regional HEFCE Widening Participation project, the Lancashire Compact (1999-2002).

Lancashire Aimhigher includes four Higher Education Delivery Partners (Edge Hill College and St Martins College of Higher Education, Lancaster University and University of Central Lancashire) and two Delivery Partners representing the FE Colleges within Lancashire (East Lancashire LLP and North and West LLP).

By working with school, FE and HE staff the Lancashire Aimhigher families theme aims to:

- disseminate findings from the FAHED cycle that illustrate concerns voiced by parents and family members, who are increasingly recognised as key influencers in young people's future educational decision-making;
- raise awareness of factors that help or hinder staff involved in, or responsible for widening participation activities with families;
- develop additional materials with each delivery partner within Lancashire Aimhigher, by undertaking and evaluating six targeted family learning projects that relate to delivery partners' area of interest in working with families;
- enhance communication between higher education providers and families currently under-represented within higher education in order to improve outreach to families and responsiveness of HE providers;
- highlight the importance of recognising the diversity of family backgrounds when developing and delivering family aspiration and awareness activities.

## Description of the activity

The activities within the Lancashire Aimhigher Families Theme include:

- six generic staff development events disseminating current good practice across the county and beyond;
- six mini-projects developing new materials and increasing our understanding of working with:
  - families in a community context who may not get involved via school,
  - families in a primary school setting who may think it is too early to start thinking about HE,
  - families to increase attendance at FE open days,
  - families to encourage them to access FE advice and guidance services,
  - community-based tutors working with minority ethnic families about teaching,
  - FE and HE staff to explore funding opportunities for family activities,
  - A portfolio of resources for use by all further and higher education providers within Lancashire,

- 
- A families newsletter to inform parents and schools about future family widening participation activities, disseminate successful events, respond to parental requests for information by providing websites, advice about financial changes and publicising FE and HE contact details and open days.

Our thanks are due to families participating in FAHED cycle and participants at Lancashire Aimhigher Families staff development events who have commented on materials shared their own experiences.

### How the activity made a difference

Lancashire Aimhigher families activities relate... to raising aspiration and... improving achievement and progression to higher education

Lancashire Aimhigher families activities relate primarily to raising aspiration and indirectly to improving achievement and progression to higher education. They are directly relevant to the two Aimhigher targets concerning increased awareness of young people whose families have little or no experience of higher education and improvements in the level of involvement of key influencers, in particular school, FE and HE staff who work with parents.

Information obtained from parents during the FAHED cycle feedback and from practitioners attending staff development sessions highlights the impact of the following good practice, which was built into the activities which have been delivered and which will have noticeable impact on families and staff who participated:

- Parents respond best to: targeted and personalised letters about their child; joint communication sent from school and HE, and letters including signatories known by the parents, or with whom they might relate, for instance more fathers attended introductory sessions when letter sent from male, and Muslim parents attended when letter sent from a Muslim.
  - Organising complementary activities for different members of the family encourages greater discussion at home and provides real opportunities for families to exchange information they have found out.
  - Parents frequently influence concerns of young people, however, whilst the concern may be the same, the interest may be different, for instance, Muslim parents concerned about the drink culture and their child not being able to adhere to Islamic teaching, young person concerned about not having any friends.
  - Although some parents and families have certain things in common, for example, belong to a particular minority ethnic or faith community, or have a son or daughter with a specific disability, for instance dyslexia, their concerns will not automatically be the same.
  - Staff and institutional operational and strategic awareness of possible cultural and social factors that underpin parental concerns about their child attending HE, is important in enabling higher education providers to anticipate needs and organise activities that are responsive and sensitive to families.
- there is commitment to working with families
- Although there is commitment to working with families, there is a need for staff development for teachers, FE and HE staff, who also need opportunities to explore their own uncertainty about working with a different target group. Staff, who may be excellent in working with young people, may need to develop and use a different set of strategies when working with parents.

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- Widening participation practitioners with awareness of family needs can provide useful insights to admission staff and academic colleagues involved in delivering on-campus activities.

### **Subsequent or ongoing work**

A programme of staff development that includes provision of materials for subsequent use by individual providers, and that is an ideal mechanism for disseminating existing materials, exchanging good practice, nourishing partnerships for future collaborative work, and developing new materials for wider use.

Interest and participation by colleagues from other NW Aimhigher regions extended the dissemination process and resulted in a shared, wider enhanced awareness of factors that contribute to effective work with families.

One future development within the families theme will be to cascade the targeted approach to school and Connexions staff, to identify strategies for embedding Families And HE Decision-making into existing home school activities.

# Weavers School Parents' Workshops

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## Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Lancashire

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the workshops... offer practical guidance and support to Year 10 students and their families

Parents and pupils alike felt that the Motivational Workshop had been a very positive experience overall

## Background and context

Aimhigher Northamptonshire is currently working in close collaboration with Weavers School in Wellingborough to deliver a series of Parents' workshops.

The purpose of the workshops is to offer practical guidance and support to Year 10 students and their families. The workshops will enable parents and students to have a greater understanding and working knowledge of how to achieve their full potential, and how they can be supported during the final two years of compulsory education. They are also designed to heighten awareness of the opportunities in higher education, and that there are various means of progressing educationally by following a traditional academic or a vocational route. This particular area of Northamptonshire has a very low rate of progression to higher education.

## Description of the activity

Parents' Evening One - "Motivational Workshop", February 2005: this first evening session was designed to enable the students to discover their own learning style and how they learn best at school. Roy Leighton, a leading educational consultant, was present with two actors. The evening lasted approximately two hours and succeeded in motivating both parents and students alike.

Using forum theatre, Roy Leighton and the two actors explored for their audience different learning styles, life-long learning, improving self-esteem and how parents could have a better relationship with their children centring around studying and homework issues. They played out different characters and roles and asked the audience to add their comments about what they should do.

Parents Evening Two - "Food to Feed the Brain", March 2005: the purpose of the second evening was to educate parents on how to eat more healthily and provide a tasting session to include foods they may not have eaten before. The group was a mixture of Year 10 parents, staff and pupils.

The evening began with a "Who wants to be a millionaire?" style quiz, with ten questions to get parents thinking about healthy eating. A bonus question sheet was then handed out for completion and an Easter prize was awarded for the best response. Parents took part in a fruit-tasting session to sample a selection of fruits – some of which, they had never tried. The final session summed up some of the main points covered, with information about nutritional values, some of the differences between tinned items and fresh items, and other healthy eating issues. Leaflets giving nutritional advice were provided for parents to take away with them at the end.

## How the activity made a difference

> Parents and pupils alike felt that the Motivational Workshop had been a very positive experience overall. They discovered that it was never too late to try something new and that there are many new ways to learn.

When asked what they would take away from the evening, the parents said they felt more confident, that they should believe in themselves and that they could do whatever they wanted when they put their mind to it. The evening also gave them tips and ideas about how to have a better relationship with their child.

**When asked what they would take away from the evening, the parents said they felt more confident**

The staff, parents and pupils who attended the "Food to Feed the Brain" evening very much enjoyed it. They thought it was about the right length of time at one hour, had found the appropriate supporting materials useful, and it had met their expectations.

They gained information about healthy foods and information to pass onto colleagues, learnt about the benefits of not eating too much, trying new foods and thinking more carefully about which foods to eat. One person commented that it was good getting the pupils to try different fruits!

Parents commented that they learnt how to keep calm, reduce stress and to relax more, learnt interesting facts such as how many different types of fruit there actually are, how to recognise fruits, how to make an effort to eat lunch and to think more carefully about children's diets.

### **Subsequent or ongoing work**

**More workshops are planned for the future**

> More workshops are planned for the future to complement the above. These include:

- a subject-related activity, particularly English and Maths - a lot of parents often have poor skills or poor experiences of Maths;
- an activity around how subjects are currently taught in school - parents will often comment at Parents' Evenings that they don't know the best way to support their child with studies and homework because subjects are now taught differently;
- an activity to help parents understand assessment and revision techniques - the purpose being to help pupils prepare effectively for assessments and tests;
- an activity to explore traditional and vocational routes to higher education, focusing on continuing in education post-16.

The two workshops described were with Year 10 parents, and workshops with other year groups will be explored at a later time.

# Building HE links at a distance

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## Aimhigher Area

The Peninsula Partnership:  
South West region

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For these young people and their parents going into higher education seems unrealistic

For many parents, this was their first visit to an HE campus

For many parents, they have had the opportunity to appreciate the activities their children are involved in

## Background and context

The Camborne, Pool and Redruth Excellence Cluster is located in West Cornwall and is very remote from a higher education campus. For these young people and their parents going into higher education seems unrealistic because the 'university experience' is geographically and culturally remote from them. Even those school students with ability who achieve good results at GCSE and at A-level are less likely to progress to higher education than their urban peers who can access HE more easily. Against this background, parents find it hard to appreciate the benefits of higher education and to give their children the support they need to be the first in their family to progress to higher education.

## Description of the activity

A partnership between the College of St Mark and St John, the University of Plymouth and the Camborne, Pool and Redruth Excellence cluster developed an 'e-buddying' system linking HE students in Plymouth with school students in West Cornwall. An initial face-to-face meeting between the mentors and their buddies was organised so that the young people could meet in person before they began to correspond. This meeting provided the opportunity for mentors and mentees to explore the various parameters within which their relationship takes place. This session usually takes place on the HE campus to give the young people a first-hand experience of university life.

The correspondence between the students begins at the start of the academic year and students can ask their e-mentor questions about aspects of life in higher education. The mentor system is monitored by school and HE staff to ensure that ethical guidelines are not breached.

By the end of the first term a second face-to-face meeting was organised, once again at the HE campus involving parents as well. The parents were offered the opportunity to travel to Plymouth on the coach with their children, to visit the HE campus and to do some timely Christmas shopping. For many parents, this was their first visit to an HE campus and it was helpful for them to be on hand to see the effect the visit had on their young people.

## How the activity made a difference

Indirectly funded by Aimhigher, the e-buddying system has made a difference to the school students, the HE students and to the parents. For the school students, the great advantage has been that it has enabled HE students to mentor school students with no HEI in their area. This has widened their experience and helped them to link up with potential role models who have already progressed to HE. For the HE students, many of whom are trainee teachers, the scheme has helped them with their studies by providing an exemplar of e-mentoring relevant to the training of school teachers – the target HE audience. For the parents, they have had the opportunity to appreciate the activities their children are involved in and to see an HE campus for themselves so that they can be more actively engaged in helping young people to realise their aspirations.

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### **Subsequent or ongoing work**

This scheme has developed over the time it has been running and the organisers have become more realistic in their expectations. Some contacts are not successful for a variety of reasons – but many are and the benefits for those who do persevere are considerable.

# Celebrating Success: the use of master classes and summer schools to engage parents and carers in County Durham

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## Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher County Durham

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Raise the self-esteem of students and parents

## Background and context

East Durham was the setting for this strategy, which was designed to tackle issues of negative student peer pressure, low levels of interest and low aspiration levels of parents. The five schools involved were all part of East Durham Excellence Challenge Partnership serving the former mining communities of Easington, Seaham and Peterlee. Only one of the schools offered post-16 provision and over 85% of the student cohort lived in wards ranked in the top 20% in terms of multiple deprivation. Progression rates to HE were among the lowest in the country and staying on at 16 rates trailed the rest of County Durham by 9.3%. The schools found it difficult to recruit for the HEFCE Summer Schools and even more difficult to interest parents in progression issues.

A decision was taken to focus on one Year group – Year 10 - and in collaboration with FE and HE partners, develop a range of Master Classes and Summer Schools which would offer opportunities to students with the potential to achieve at least 5 A-C GCSE grades. Each series of classes would culminate in a celebration event to which the parents of all participants were to be invited.

The project aimed to:

- Raise the aspirations and attainment of the students;
- Inform parents and carers;
- Raise the self-esteem of students and parents;
- Develop a culture of success;
- Counter the "no-one from round here goes to university" philosophy; and
- Develop long-term relationships with FE and HE partners to enable Master Classes and Summer Schools to become an integral part of school planning.

## Description of the activity

A programme of Master Classes/Summer Schools was developed. Each activity involved a high level of collaboration between teachers and FE/HE partners facilitated by Aimhigher/Excellence Challenge. All engaged in the development and delivery of the activities, and welcomed the opportunity to enthuse, challenge and provide the students with experiences beyond what was normally available in the classroom.

Key features:

- All schools were offered equal access to all activities;
- Clear briefings were provided to staff to ensure selection of appropriate students;
- Lecturer and students from Chelsea College of Art visited all participating schools prior to the residential;
- Science teachers from Seaham School delivered a preparatory class on a Saturday morning prior to the visit to Imperial;
- Parents of all students involved in visits to Chelsea College and Imperial College invited to briefing meetings with Aimhigher Co-ordinator.

When parents were initially informed of the Summer School/Master Class activities they were told that a celebration evening would take place early in the Autumn Term. This was

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followed up with invitations and the issue of tickets for the celebration evening at the Tom Cowie Lecture Theatre at Sunderland University. The evening involved the premiere of a DVD highlighting all the activities, presentations from students, talks from representatives of FE/HE partners and the presentation of certificates of achievement. To contribute to the success of the event, artwork and photographs were displayed, a buffet was provided and transport made available for the more distant schools.

### How the activity made a difference

The activity described is one of a number which have contributed to improvements in GCSE attainment and progression rates in East Durham. In 2001, East Durham schools averaged 32.2% A-C pass rate compared with 50.0% nationally. In 2004, East Durham schools averaged 38.8% A-C pass rate compared with 53.7% nationally. In 2002, 54.6% of students in East Durham stayed on at 16 compared with 64.1% county-wide. In 2004, 64.1% of students in East Durham stayed on at 16 compared with 67.0 % county-wide.

In its current form the celebration evening has taken place on two occasions, each attracting an audience of over 250. For many of the parents it was their first visit to a university and their informal response was overwhelmingly positive. This was supported by a piece of research into parental attitudes commissioned by Easington Community School.

Another measure of the impact of this approach has been the high level of support from all key partners. The evenings have been attended by Head Teachers, Principals of FE colleges, EAZ Directors and key staff from HEIs, including some who travelled from London specifically for the event.

### Subsequent or ongoing work

The programme of activities is now in its third year and this has been made possible by co-operation, communication and long-term planning facilitated by an Aimhigher co-ordination team.

The programme will be taken forward in two ways:

- Maintenance of the current programme;
- Development of a similar approach in the 28 schools in County Durham which are now part of Aimhigher through uplift funding.

For many of the parents it was their first visit to a university and their informal response was overwhelmingly positive



Another measure of the impact of this approach has been the high level of support from all key partners

# Parent-targeted events

## Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin

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## Background and context

A series of parent-targeted events has taken place at schools to date, with more to follow:

- Wrockwardine Wood Arts College (27-Jan-05);
- Abraham Darby School (08-Feb-05);
- Sir John Talbot's School (09-Feb-05);
- Ludlow School (03-Mar-05);
- Grove School (09-Mar-05); and
- Ercall Wood Technology College (22-Mar-05).

Parents are recognised as a key target group who are seen as very influential in a pupil's decision to go into higher education. It is reported that parents are still struggling to get information about the basics of higher education and therefore need to be better informed.

Parents of Year 9 students were targeted through a series of Aimhigher funded events at Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin schools. The aim of the events was to enable parents to have access to university staff and students in order that their questions and concerns about higher education could be addressed. It also provided the opportunity to deliver a presentation on higher education, in order that parents are better informed about the choices available to their children.

## Description of the activity

The events were delivered by various university partners including Harper Adams University College, Keele University, Loughborough University, Staffordshire University and University of Wolverhampton through Year 9 options evenings at schools. Parents were invited to listen to a 10-minute presentation on higher education that explained what higher education has to offer, information about student finance, and how parents can help their children make decisions about higher education. Parents were also able to ask questions of university staff and students. Finally, parents were given a pack including an Aimhigher leaflet directed at parents and an 'In the Picture' DVD developed to inform parents about higher education and address their concerns.

## How the activity made a difference

Improvements in the level of involvement and positive attitudes among a range of key people including parents and teachers at the schools involved:

- a total of 788 parents have been targeted to date through the events;
- parents at some of the schools were particularly keen to ask questions of university staff and students not only concerning their children but also in relation to postgraduate education for themselves;
- generally parents were very keen to take a parents' pack to inform them further about higher education;
- teachers at schools were also positive in the inclusion of university representation at parents' options evenings.

enable parents to have access to university staff and students in order that their... concerns about higher education could be addressed



parents can help their children make decisions about higher education



a total of 788 parents have been targeted to date through the events



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### **Subsequent or ongoing work**

Several schools that have recently come out of the Telford & Wrekin Education Action Zone since its disbandment are also being targeted, as they were keen to have access to the parents' packs at their options evenings. Although these schools are not currently target schools it is proposed they will be included in the programme next year and this was deemed a positive way of informing more parents in the region.

# Young People into Higher Education Project, Great Yarmouth College working with University of East Anglia

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## Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Norfolk

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the focus was on the whole family >

## Background and context

Great Yarmouth College was approached by the Four Counties Group in 2000 to become involved in a project aimed at raising the aspirations of students from families with no experience of higher education. The first cohort of pupils started in 2001.

Great Yarmouth is well known as a "cold spot" in terms of progression to further and higher education and is an area of high unemployment, high rates of teenage pregnancy, and social deprivation. Norfolk students seem reluctant to move far from the area and this presents challenges when looking at HE opportunities.

The aims of this project were different from those of Excellence Challenge and Gifted & Talented in that the focus was on the whole family rather than just the young person. It was felt that if families with no experience of higher education were actively involved in the project the "fear of the unknown" would be reduced and they would be more supportive of progression to higher education as a genuine option for their child. From the beginning, it was clear that if we "hooked the parent we could hook the child." Pupils from Year 8 are selected on the basis of academic potential and family background of no HE experience.

The involvement of the University of East Anglia (UEA) is a critical factor in the project as it provides a contrast to the HE opportunities available at Great Yarmouth College and provides a reference point for comparison with other universities outside Norfolk. The project is funded by Aimhigher.

## Description of the activity

The first activity for Year 8 pupils is a three-day event shared between Great Yarmouth College and UEA. We have run this activity for five years now and have used a similar format each time. We use a "theme" and then allow students to select from a number of practical activities based on courses at the college. These tend to be more arts-based but we have started to introduce more practical activities in recent years. The activities include Drama, Art, Graphics, Media, Welding, Hair & Beauty, Catering. The theme is continued at UEA when the pupils are involved in a couple of activities while parents have information sessions about aspects of Higher Education including Finance, Support, Accommodation etc.

Subsequent activities occur twice a year and have included:

- Involvement in the College Graduation Ceremony;
- A twilight session using a Treasure Hunt format to search for Universities and courses;
- University Open Day Visits;
- Cambridge University Taster visit;
- Norwich School of Art & Design Taster visit; and
- End of project celebration with networking opportunities with HE students, Connexions Advisors, UEA staff and a 6th Form college representative.

## How the activity made a difference

It was clear from the very first visit to UEA that the parents had absolutely no idea what a university looked like or did. On the coach back to Great Yarmouth I heard parents express

"I wouldn't mind going myself"

> "I didn't realise that students slept there"; "What a lot of open space there is"; "Fancy there being a bar/disco/shops etc"; "I didn't know what they did at University but I've got a better idea now"; "I wouldn't mind going myself"; "Do you really think my youngster could go here?"

On asking the parents what they would like to do as part of the project there was unanimous agreement on wanting to see other Universities. This is why we have made visits a major focus of our scheme.

The taster visit to Cambridge had a pupil take-up of around 40% but every pupil was accompanied by a parent. It was a particularly effective visit as both pupils and parents were able to experience lectures on Law and engineering topics as well as getting an explanation of the collegiate experience. Again, comments on the way home revealed the value of the day from a parent perspective.

"I could understand the lectures myself – it's not as high powered as I thought"; "I really do think my youngster could go here"; "Let me see if I've got this right – Cambridge has colleges and departments and teaching can go on in both but the college is like their home?"; "All the colleges are different so you have to see them to decide which is best for you"

we have 100% attendance on the initial 3 day event

> From a take-up point of view we have 100% attendance on the initial 3-day event. The attendance at the subsequent activities varies depending on the event. The college-based events average around 80% and the visits out of county around 45%.

No student from the scheme has yet gone on to HE as the oldest cohort is now in Year 12. However of the 26 original students from 2001 – 92% have gone on to advanced level studies –

- 77% have gone on to the local 6th form college (95% taking "A" levels, 5% BTEC Nationals)
- 15% have gone on to the general FE college to take BTEC Nationals
- The remaining 8% are in employment.

### Subsequent or ongoing work

The scheme continues using the format that has been so successful to date

> The scheme continues using the format that has been so successful to date. We have increased the number of local High Schools to five from four and will have some 50 youngsters involved this summer.

We are currently involved in the preparations for the new starters and a parents' evening has been organised to explain the project and hopefully "hook" the parents.

Year 9, 10 and 11 pupils are going on a University visit to Lincoln in May – all accompanied by one or more parents.

The end of project celebrations have been organised for Year 11 pupils once their GCSEs are complete.

# Families And Higher Education Decision-making (FAHED)

## Aimhigher Area

Aimhigher Cumbria

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Programme

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## Background and context

While Aimhigher funding is largely aimed at 13-19 year olds, it is accepted that aspirations are formed much earlier in life, and that family experience of Higher Education is a key factor in this attitudinal development. Aimhigher Cumbria therefore created a funding strand for family learning activities, one element of which was to link with a pre-existing family learning project run by the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University (UCLAN).

The project (known as FAHED - Families and Higher Education Decision-making) was part of the Community Access Programme, and had been run in 13 schools in Lancashire as part of the Lancashire Compact. The focus had been on cultural, religious, and social concerns, and three schools had focused on social concerns and three on disability. Aimhigher practitioners in Cumbria visited Lancaster University to learn about the project and decided to use the same mechanisms to focus on rural and social issues, and impact on aspirations towards higher education.

Aimhigher Area Leaders identified two communities, one centred on a secondary school in South Lakeland and, the focus of this case study, a primary school in Eden Valley. Eden Valley is a sparsely populated area between the Lake District and the Pennines. On the high moors, POLAR data shows that 24-32% of young people progress to HE, but closer to the M6 and to Carlisle some affluent areas have progression rates of over 43%. The largest town is Penrith where most of the town itself has 16-24%, and the surrounding countryside 32-43%, progression.

## Description of the activity

A junior school within the town was invited to join the project, and the Head Teacher suggested that the Community Development Centre (CDC), located in the adjoining infant school, would be an ideal vehicle for the partnership.

The core team for the project included the head teachers of the infant and junior schools, the development worker for the CDC, the Aimhigher Area Leader, and an infant teacher who agreed to be the course tutor. Training, support and guidance were provided by Lancaster University.

The schools were keen to be inclusive, and therefore targeting of "under-represented groups", particular low-progression wards or low-income households was avoided. Parents of all Y5 and 6 pupils at the junior school were invited (in a letter signed by the Junior Head teacher) to an initial evening called "Your child's Future". The head teachers of both local secondary schools spoke about the benefits of higher education, with the third speaker being the Aimhigher Area Leader. The course tutor, who was a popular infant teacher and wife of the local vicar, also spoke briefly to encourage parents to attend the FAHED course, and the Connexions Personal Advisor from one of the schools was there to answer informal questions.

Parents from fifty nine families attended the initial evening, roughly half of the possible total, and a large majority of parents had not attended higher education themselves. Twelve families signed up for the course. This was to consist of two further evening sessions, and a campus visit to a university of their choice.

Evening sessions were chosen to suit the largest number of parents, and nine parents

Parents of all Y5 and 6 pupils at the junior school were invited to an initial evening

The course tutor also spoke briefly to encourage parents to attend the FAHED course

## Involvement from the parents was excellent >

attended the first session, one father and the rest mothers.

Involvement from the parents was excellent, and their children also participated well in their own separate session. The first session was attended by the Connexions Personal Adviser and focused on "Our children's hopes and dreams, what jobs they want to do, and what would we like them to do?" The key issue brought up by them in the first session was "Are there any jobs locally that need HE, so is it a worthwhile investment?" and "What was our own experience of finding work locally?" They then submitted questions to be addressed in the second session.

Finance was the key question raised, so an activity was devised to make the support available to low-income families clearer. This had a very positive impact on parents. Two Y13 pupils from one of the local secondary schools helped with the session and were really valuable.

Two groups were formed to discuss the benefits of, and concerns about, higher education, and write them on flip charts. Those attending had the opportunity to voice and discuss their hopes and fears, the benefits and their concerns, around young people leaving local communities to participate in higher education. The atmosphere was very relaxed and afterwards one parent in each group was happy to explain the group's ideas. Interestingly they described an increased awareness of the local UCLAN campus at Newton Rigg which is seen to be offering local study and bringing other people into the area.

Some of the concerns about higher education for communities were described. For the young person as: the big step of moving away from home, leaving established set of friends, missing the family, finance, will they like it, will they be able to cope? For the community: too many bright young people leaving the area and not returning to work, this could result in an aging population and in local jobs unfilled, costs to parents of financial support which means they have less to spend in the local community. The sessions allowed for these concerns to be expressed and explored with the events organisers being able to deal with them directly.

## How the activity made a difference

## key hopes about what higher education might mean for their children and their families >

It enabled parents of Year 5 and 6 pupils, many themselves with little or no family history of higher education, to come together and look at some key concerns and key hopes about what higher education might mean for their children and their families. Finance in particular was discussed and this had a positive impact on the parents. Individual concerns such as one parent who had doubts about Cumbrian employers' expectations about their future need for graduates was allayed by specific evidence of local employment information.

Some of the mothers took away prospectuses from local Higher Education Institutions to think about what they might do themselves, and all said it had been helpful and enjoyable.

## < Parents from fifty nine families attended the initial evening

The delivery team comprised local Year 13 pupils, teachers of the local junior and infant schools (including head teachers), the local Community Development centre, the local Connexions service, and the local University (UCLAN) in an excellent example of an Aimhigher partnership able to bring together sectors and regions to deliver a very local activity.

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### **Subsequent or ongoing work**

The group has decided to visit Lancaster University, and also the local University of Central Lancashire campus, which offers a smaller range of higher education subjects. They also intend to create some record, possibly a collage for the school wall, of what they would now say to their children about higher education, and what they would say to other parents in the area.

## 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](http://www.actiononaccess.org)