



Annual report 2007-08



This year's highlights

August 2007	The network Delivery Plan for the year takes shape
September 2007	The partnership successfully recruits its first round of additional student numbers (ASNs)
October 2007	Northern College hosts the first network team away day
February 2008	The 'Activity Round-up' is launched to showcase innovation and good practice across the network
February 2008	'Engaging learners in the workplace' provides the theme for the second stakeholder event
March 2008	FE college partners negotiate the first progression agreement
April 2008	The Interim Network Review is published
May 2008	Two new Foundation Degree routes are approved
June 2008	Practitioners take part in the last in a series of joint workshops with Aimhigher to develop skills in research and evaluation
July 2008	Data from the IAG and transition team shows that well over 4,000 students have attended Higher Futures support sessions

Contents

Introduction	4
<hr/>	
Summary	5
<hr/>	
Network development	6
Team development	6
Partnership developments	7
The Interim Review	7
Network team structure	8
<hr/>	
Activities and achievements	9
Putting learners first	10
Curriculum development	11
Supporting progression	12
Sharing best practice	13
Spreading the word	14
<hr/>	
Collaboration	16
Working with Aimhigher	16
Regional work	17
National involvement	18
<hr/>	
Finance and resource allocation	19
<hr/>	
Conclusions	20
<hr/>	
What next?	20
<hr/>	
Glossary	21
<hr/>	
Directorate team	22
<hr/>	



Introduction

In 2007-08 Higher Futures moved from its initial start up to implementation phase, triggering a wide range of development activities across the partnership. Many of these are highlighted in this Annual Report and it is really pleasing to see the growth and progress that has been achieved this year.

The sector teams have introduced significant curriculum developments in several areas. A number of progression agreements have been negotiated or are nearing completion, the first of which was led by and engaged all our further education partners. Literally thousands of learners have benefited from information, advice and guidance support delivered through the network of specialist professionals.

We have also reflected on the conclusions of the Interim Review and are already putting into practice our response to the main areas for development - a focus on work-based learners and employer engagement, and an assessment of opportunities in the creative and media industries.

It is particularly encouraging to see the effort that has gone into partnership working, team development and staff capacity building. This will certainly bring dividends to Higher Futures' work in future and that of the partners themselves but, more importantly, to the vocational learners we aim to encourage in their progression and transition to higher education.

Professor Rhiannon Billingsley

Network Chair

Summary

Last year's report reflected our focus on infrastructure and establishing the network; this year's story is one of action and achievement.

Capacity building and network development have been key themes, as the wider team has grown from 25 to 39 staff over the year. Significant development activities have taken place across the network team, the partnership and as a result of our first Interim Network Review, published in April 2008.

From an ambitious Delivery Plan, covering 55 activities across 20 objectives, Higher Futures has registered key achievements under all of its major targets, including IAG (information, advice and guidance), curriculum development, progression, sharing best practice, and communication and dissemination.

The IAG and transition team has developed significant learner guidance and support services, which have been accessed by more than 4,000 potential learners, and has put together a range of interesting and innovative events and activities.

Curriculum development work has expanded rapidly in the latter part of the year, and has seen the creation of new Foundation Degrees, bridging courses and work on top-up modules, providing a variety of new HE routes through the partner institutions.

Progression agreements (PAs) are fundamental to the legacy of the network. We were delighted to see our first PA signed by nine FE partners this year, with further PAs close to completion in 15 subject areas. Mapping work and data gathering systems are in place, additional student numbers (ASNs) have been used to recruit students to courses across the network, and several exciting ongoing development projects have begun.

The network's mechanisms for sharing best practice feed neatly into wider-ranging collaborative efforts with institutions across the partnership, the region and the country. Our first Stakeholder Forum helped to stimulate the employer engagement which is taking place in all five sectors. We have continued to forge links and contacts with key colleagues within our partner institutions and externally.

The profile of the network has been growing steadily through our communication and dissemination activity, which has led to new publications, a suite of marketing materials and a wide range of events targeted at learners, employers, stakeholders and the wider network team.

Moving into our third year of operation, Higher Futures will now focus sharply on seven main themes: communication and dissemination; embedding systems, practices and processes; employer engagement; internal and external evaluation; learner engagement; staff development; and sustainability. The last of these will undoubtedly be the overriding priority through the year, as we strive to embed real and lasting changes for the benefit of vocational and work-based learners.



Network development

Team development

The strength of Higher Futures lies in the knowledge, experience, commitment and enthusiasm of its wider network team, which has expanded to 39 colleagues, having started with 25 a year ago.

The **Directorate team** continues to act as a cohesive central body, driving developments forward and bringing the wider network team together. This comprises the **IAG and transition team**, which has achieved a great deal this year and successfully demonstrated the advantages of working in partnership for the benefit of vocational learners (see 'Putting learners first', page 10). The **sector development team** has experienced a slightly slower start but is forging ahead with new curriculum development and progression activity that is moving on rapidly and producing tangible results (see 'Curriculum development', page 11, and 'Supporting progression', page 12). Both sector and IAG teams are beginning to support each other's activities and work together to great effect.

There are also a number of **supporting roles** that provide crucial backing to the operation of the network. Coordination roles have been created in the two universities backed by additional administrative and managerial capacity, and a joint Higher Futures and Aimhigher research development position is providing valuable expertise to support the evaluation strategy (see 'Research and evaluation workshops', page 16).

Here is a sample of the activities we have organised over the year to build team capacity and encourage cross-team working.

Northern College hosted our first **network away day** in October 2007. The event brought together 39 colleagues from the wider team and partner management level, to join forces for the very first time. Combining workshops, presentations and planning sessions, the away day provided the opportunity for the wider team to discuss Higher Futures' aims and objectives, meet other members of the network and contribute to a meaningful and achievable Delivery Plan, creating a launch platform for the year.

Two further half-day events have been organised at key intervals in the year to bring the **sector and IAG teams** together, explore roles and encourage cross-team collaboration. The sessions provided space to update on network achievements, allow colleagues to demonstrate and discuss development projects, identify areas of common interest and focus on the coming year, future issues and challenges.

Together with Aimhigher South Yorkshire, Higher Futures organised a programme of four practitioner **research and evaluation workshops** for their staff. Beginning with an initial workshop in March 2008, and culminating in four half-day sessions running from April to June 2008, the programme was delivered and supported by our two Research Development Officers.

The workshop sessions encouraged participants to evaluate their own research and assessment activity, and included presentations from guest speakers, training on key evaluation and impact assessment techniques, and the opportunity to explore a small-scale project with other practitioners. Nearly 40 Aimhigher and Higher Futures colleagues participated in these workshops, which are generating some valuable and exciting investigative project ideas, paving the way for further joint working across the Aimhigher and Higher Futures initiatives.

All partner institutions have been allocated funding for staff development, to finance training courses, conferences and workshops.

The Higher Futures Directorate team have organised training sessions to run alongside these developmental activities, and have continued to provide **ongoing development support** and guidance on a structured and an ad hoc basis, for both teams and individuals.



Above left and right: The first Higher Futures network away day



Partnership developments

The Strategic Management Board (SMB) has welcomed Chesterfield College and North Nottinghamshire College as full members, rather than associates, a decision discussed and agreed with HEFCE in June 2008. The Executive of Sheffield City Region has also joined the SMB. Our Operational Management Group (OMG) also invited University Centre Barnsley (UCB) into its membership. UCB has close links with several of the college partners and Aimhigher, which we expect to bring benefits to our work within the region.

The Interim Review

It was important to take stock a little after the first year to judge how well the network had positioned itself to achieve its aims and objectives. This would be a strategic assessment to inform future thinking. **The Interim Review**, carried out by Madeleine King between January and March, was published in April 2008 and disseminated to SMB, OMG, the wider network team and those stakeholders who directly contributed evidence.

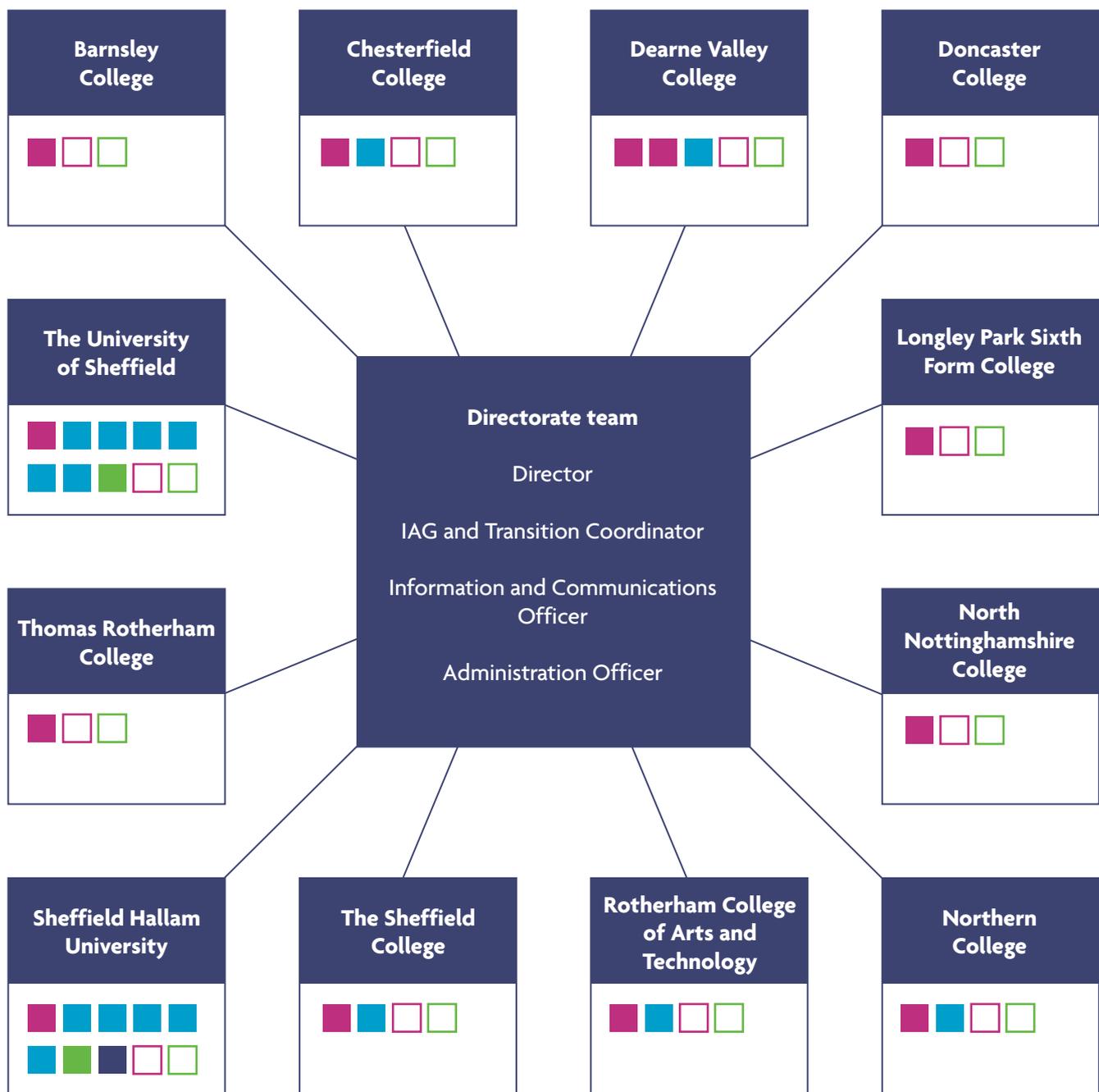
The central message of the review was to move on from “complex but easy” wins to pursue some of the more “simple but hard” options, particularly in relation to employer engagement and targeting work-based learners (WBL). No time has been lost in responding to this challenge. Joint work with the LSC to target major WBL providers has commenced and several of the sector development projects contain a strong employer engagement focus. The Directorate has also been careful to position the network to focus on sustainability strategy, our regional profile, interest in exploring the creative and media sector, and engagement with the wider HE agenda.

The strength of Higher Futures lies in the knowledge, experience, commitment and enthusiasm of its wider network team



Network team structure

- IAG and transition team member ■
- Sector development team member ■
- Coordination role (HE institutions) ■
- Access and Progression Support Officer ■
- Operational Management Group representative
- Strategic Management Board representative



Activities and achievements

Higher Futures had an ambitious Delivery Plan for 2007-08, containing 55 activities across 20 objectives covering network development, communication, curriculum and progression developments, stakeholder and employer engagement, and support for vocational learners. The key achievements highlighted in this section demonstrate the growth and progress made this year.

Key achievements

- Developed and validated new FD in Control Technologies
- Approved new route for FD in Early Years Education in partner colleges
- Developed top-up route for FD in Working with Communities
- Created new bridging module in 'Building Sustainable Communities' as feeder for FD
- Produced guidance resource pack for IAG and transition team
- More than 4,000 potential learners attended Higher Futures' specific vocational IAG and transition support sessions
- More than 50 learner group visits to HE providers have taken place
- More than 50 students have taken part in mentoring activity
- More than 300 partner institution staff (including academics and administrative staff) have attended Higher Futures information, development or training events
- Nearly 40 practitioners have attended research and evaluation workshops
- Devised and launched Activity Round-up to showcase innovation and good practice
- Progression agreements negotiated in 15 subject areas, supported by a statement of entitlements for students
- Stakeholder Forum attended by more than 40 employers and external organisations
- 71 students recruited to courses using Additional Student Numbers
- Commissioned the Interim Network Review
- FE partners developed common system for gathering benchmark data on vocational learners.

4000+

learners attended Higher Futures support sessions



Putting learners first

2007-08 has been the 'year of IAG' for Higher Futures. The team have posted impressive statistics and have put together a range of interesting and innovative events and activities.

Activities

With the initial IAG and transition team in place, induction sessions and team events have taken place. A **guidance resource pack** has been produced to support the delivery of professional services to learners, and assist work with tutors and other colleagues.

Significant learner support services have been developed and Higher Futures' specific vocational IAG and transition support sessions have been attended by **more than 4,000 potential learners**, of which more than 1,000 received one to one guidance. This has included assessing the HE options available, advice on financial support and even out of hours home visits to work-based learners. Application support has included help with UCAS form completion, late applications and the 'clearing' system, and mock interviews. The IAG team have also conducted group presentations targeted at potential Higher Futures learners, which have addressed the benefits of higher education, demystifying higher level qualifications, routes into HE, career options, and an introduction to Higher Futures.

More than 50 group visits to HE providers have taken place and IAG staff have also organised events at their own institutions. These have included careers conferences, open evenings, parent-targeted events, adult learners' events, sector-specific events and HE fairs.

For those who we have helped to access a higher education course, learner and transition support is vital to their retention. This has included study support and help with specific issues such as literacy and dyslexia. Several support programmes have been set up across our partner institutions and **more than 50 students have taken part in mentoring activity**.

The reach of the IAG and transition team extends beyond learners, and **more than 300 staff from partner institutions** (including academics and administrative staff) have attended Higher Futures information, development or training events.



A Higher Futures work-based learner event



Higher Futures helped Talissa Willers, 18, to access a Foundation Degree in Health-related Exercise and Fitness, to pursue her ambition to become a gym manager.

“The Higher Futures contact has helped me from the start and continues to be a point of contact for me. She has been a massive support and has helped me every step of the way.”

Curriculum development

If 2007-08 has been 'the year of IAG', then 2008-09 looks set to be the year of progression and sector development. The latter part of the 2007-08 year saw the curriculum development aspect of Higher Futures' work expand rapidly and begin to produce substantial results that will provide long-term benefits for learners and employers alike.

Foundation Degrees

Foundation Degrees (FDs) have been developed in three of our five priority sectors.

The engineering sector development team, working with employers, has responded to demand for higher level skills by creating a new engineering course. The **creation of a FD in Control Technologies**, by Sheffield Hallam University and Rotherham College of Arts and Technology, has provided Higher Futures with its first firm case study on the advantages of HE and FE institutions working together to benefit both employers and learners.

Early years FD provision has also been extended through HE/FE collaboration, with an **Early Years FD route now available at two FE partner colleges** - Chesterfield College and Dearne Valley College.

Higher Futures' two HE partners, Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield, have created FDs in the sustainable communities sector, with the FD Working with Communities and FD Sustainable Communities courses welcoming their first cohorts this year.

Enhancing provision

Work has also been completed by the University of Sheffield on the modules needed to **create a top-up year from the Working with Communities FD to undergraduate degrees** in the sustainable communities sector.

Staff working in the public wellbeing sector have been engaging employers to contribute to the development of a new work-based unit in sport at Foundation Degree level.



Supporting progression

70+

Facilitating progression is at the heart of all Lifelong Learning Networks and will be the ultimate test of our success.

Progression agreements

The 2007-08 year has seen the completion and signing of the first Higher Futures progression agreement (PA). This agreement, in the health and social care sector, was negotiated by nine FE college partners and will provide an opportunity for vocational and work-based learners to access the FD Health and Social Care at the Sheffield College. Work on PAs is now moving quickly and **further progression agreements are being negotiated in 15 subject areas**, supported by a statement of entitlements for students.

Data, mapping and additional student numbers

Initial mapping work on course options and progression routes has been completed in all of the Higher Futures priority sectors.

Our sound work on data gathering has been recognised amongst LLNs nationwide and, along with FE partners, we have **developed a common system for gathering benchmark data on vocational learners**. Through the efforts of the MIS (Management Information Systems) working group, we have pulled together initial data on learner numbers across all sectors - more than 8,000 students - to assist progression benchmarking.

Using Higher Futures' additional student numbers (ASNs), **71 students have been recruited to courses** across the network. Figure 1 shows the distribution of students across partners and subject areas.

Development projects

Several exciting development projects have emerged this year and will be ongoing into 2008-09.

A new **'Building Sustainable Communities' bridging module has been created** by Sheffield Hallam University, targeting women returners and developed in conjunction with WITBE (Women into the Built Environment). This will also act as a feeder for the Sustainable Communities FD.

A major maths development project has begun at the University of Sheffield, to enhance the teaching and learning of maths on BTEC Level 3 engineering programmes. Similarly, a scheme to integrate numeracy and literacy into the core curriculum for health and social care courses is being devised with Sheffield Hallam University and Sheffield Teaching Hospitals, which aims to remove barriers to HE for work-based learners in the NHS.

The progress of development projects can be followed through Higher Futures publications, such as the newsletter and Activity Round-up.

students have been recruited to courses across the network using additional student numbers

Figure 1: Distribution of Additional Student Numbers (ASNs) across the Higher Futures network 2007-08

Three of our partners recruited a total of 71 additional students across four sectors. These were a mix of full and part-time students studying foundation and undergraduate degrees in 14 different subject disciplines (see Figure 2).

Partner	Students	Sector(s)
Dearne Valley College	18	Public wellbeing
Sheffield Hallam University	35	Early years Engineering Health and social care Public wellbeing
University of Sheffield	18	Sustainable communities
Total	71	

Figure 2: Student subject disciplines

- Adventure sport management
- Engineering
- Exercise science
- Health and social care professions
- Physical education and youth sport
- Public service
- Railway engineering
- Sport and exercise science
- Sport and leisure management
- Sport development with coaching
- Sport management
- Working with children, young people and families
- Working with communities
- Youth and community work

Sharing best practice

Higher Futures has made a priority of sharing best practice across the partnership, the region and with other networks across the country. For examples of the Directorate team's collaborative activity and sharing best practice see 'Collaboration', page 16. Examples of activity at partner level are given in this section.

Internal practice

Embedding lasting changes to systems, processes and practices within our partner institutions is a key challenge taken up by both IAG and sector teams, who have worked with internal contacts and departments through meetings, workshops and training sessions. Work is ongoing to inform, educate and share best practice with partner staff, promoting joint activity and ensuring continuity and synergy. Transforming the progression opportunities available to vocational and work-based learners and effecting attitudinal change will be two key measures of our future success.

Working together

Staff have seized the opportunity to work with colleagues from other partner institutions and relished the chance to share and learn from each other. The sector team has produced tangible results through collaboration across HE and FE institutions to develop and validate new courses and progression routes. Cross-partnership working from the IAG team has highlighted effective and successful ideas and approaches to learner and employer engagement. Cross-team and cross-partnership working has been used effectively across the network and can be seen as one of the strengths and successes of Higher Futures to date.

External links

Aimhigher is becoming an important ally of Higher Futures (see 'Collaboration', page 16), at both Directorate and local level. Many members of the IAG team work closely with Aimhigher representatives within their own institutions to share information and collaborate in areas where the two initiatives overlap.

External links are not limited to Aimhigher, extending to many other individuals and organisations locally, regionally and nationally. More detail on these networking relationships can be seen under 'Regional' and 'National' activity, pages 17 and 18, but the range covers a diverse set of interests: careers and guidance services; other higher education partnerships; Sector Skills Councils (SSCs); local authority partnerships; employers and community agencies; skills training providers and sector bodies.

Stakeholder Forum

The second Higher Futures stakeholder event, and the first official Forum, was held at Whirlowbrook Hall, Sheffield, in February.

Attended by more than 40 employers and external organisations, the Forum provided the first opportunity to actively engage employers and discuss their concerns, requirements and experiences of their sectors, their workforce and their higher level skills needs. Productive discussions on the day and positive participant feedback have paved the way for future stakeholder events.



Stakeholder Forum discussion group

Higher Futures has made a priority of sharing best practice across the partnership, the region and with other networks across the country

Spreading the word

Communication and dissemination has been central to raising awareness of Higher Futures, effectively establishing the network and engaging with partners, learners and employers.

Directorate communications

Over the past year, the Directorate team has continued to develop its suite of communications targeting partners, stakeholders and other appropriate parties.

The fortnightly news digest, bringing together the latest relevant news, events and publications, continues to prove popular and has expanded its subscription base since launching sign-up on the Higher Futures website. Similarly, the biannual printed newsletter has grown in content and readership as the network has developed.

The first edition of the **Higher Futures Activity Round-up** was published in early 2008. This was a new publication designed to highlight interesting and innovative activities and projects taking place across the partnership, taken from partners' own activity reports and published every few months.

In addition to these communication and marketing publications, the Directorate team has attended or exhibited at relevant learner and employer-focused events wherever possible (see 'Events', page 15), supported by a raft of marketing materials and merchandise. The increase in awareness of the network amongst attendees has been both noticeable and encouraging.

The main sections of the Higher Futures website have been populated with basic information and some straightforward guidance has been added to the learners' section. Preparatory work also began on a database of progression pathways for learners and on a secure site for the wider network team, including features to facilitate greater information sharing, communication and collaboration.

Partner institutions

The profile of Higher Futures has been increased internally within all partners. General awareness-raising has included the submission of articles to internal publications and adding Higher Futures content to partner websites.

More developed activity has involved admissions training, updating careers and guidance publications to include information on Higher Futures, producing resource packs for tutors and other staff, and hosting briefing sessions, which have been attended by more than 300 staff from partner institutions.

Other efforts have ranged from launch events, open evenings and employer engagement events and visits, to joint publicity between institutions and identifying case studies of Higher Futures learners who have already been helped by the initiative.



Higher Futures marketing publications

The profile of Higher Futures has been increased internally within all partner institutions

Events

Throughout 2007-08, Higher Futures has attended, exhibited at, presented at, and organised many events targeted at learners, employers, stakeholders and the wider network team. Here is a flavour of the events the Directorate team has been involved in.

Learners

- Go Higher - Stay Local progression opportunities fair
- Local Adult Learners' Week Awards
- Partner institution open events
- Adult learning fair

Employers

- South Yorkshire Employers' Forum events
- Human resources and training fair
- Apprenticeships briefings
- Specialist sector-focused events

Stakeholders

- Stakeholder Forum
- LLN National Conference
- Yorkshire Universities Annual Conference
- Aimhigher CPD programme of events
- Associate Schools and Colleges Network Annual Conference
- eSystems and ePortfolios joint LLN event

Wider network team

- Wider team away day
- Research and evaluation workshops
- IAG team induction event
- Sector and IAG teams joint event



Higher Futures at the adult learning fair



A Higher Futures stakeholder event

Collaboration



The Aimhigher South Yorkshire team

The network's attitude to partnership and collaborative working has always focused on adding value to existing activity and provision, a concept at the very heart of Higher Futures' philosophy. This year has seen the expansion of our efforts and activities to support and complement current initiatives, locally, regionally and nationally.

Aimhigher...

Working with Aimhigher

Our co-location with Aimhigher South Yorkshire has helped to facilitate effective communication and opened many avenues for joint working, the fruits of which have benefited both learners and staff. We also welcomed the announcement, in late 2007, that funding for Aimhigher had been extended to 2011.

Go Higher – Stay Local

More than 700 students attended the 3rd HE in FE progression opportunities fair in April 2008, attracted to the HUBs (Sheffield Hallam University's Students' Union building) by the interactive experiences and performances. As in previous years, the event was successfully organised and funded by Aimhigher South Yorkshire, but Higher Futures played a central role in publicity and promotion, utilising the IAG and transition team to identify and enthuse the hundreds of local learners who came to find out more about their higher education options.

Research and evaluation workshops

The need to evaluate performance and achievements against business aims and objectives is a priority Aimhigher and Higher Futures both share. We recognised this mutual interest could benefit from combining energies to provide some practical help and support to practitioners across both networks. The result was a series of workshops focusing on the vital research and evaluation skills they would need to begin their own small-scale projects and analyse their own activity (see also 'Team development', page 6).

Nearly 40 Aimhigher and Higher Futures colleagues participated in the workshops, which were delivered by our jointly funded Research Development Officers.



Go Higher - Stay Local progression opportunities fair

700+

students attended the HE in FE progression opportunities fair

Regional work

Higher Futures contributes actively to regional dialogue around higher level skills needs. Working co-operatively with the three other LLNs - Higher York, West Yorkshire LLN (WYLLN) and Yorkshire and Humber East LLN (YHELLN) - the Directors meet regularly to map out areas where joint working would be advantageous. This has led to joint contact, communication and dialogue with regional bodies, including Foundation Degree Forward (fdf), the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Yorkshire Forward and Yorkshire Universities, to discuss regional skills policy, strategy and funding developments. Joint submissions have also been prepared in response to the parliamentary Innovation, Universities and Skills Committee inquiry, 'After Leitch: Implementing Skills and Training Policies', and the government's consultation paper, 'Higher education at Work - High Skills: High Value'.

At practitioner level, two groups have been set up to share practice and thinking on IAG and progression agreement activity, providing a vehicle through which proposals for joint action and cross-boundary matters can be considered. This led to the co-hosting of an eSystems seminar with YHELLN and Leap AHEAD (the LLN for Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire) in July.

Contacts continue to evolve with myriad organisations and agencies interested in the skills agenda. Higher Futures and WYLLN have been **training Train to Gain** by delivering a module on higher education that forms part of the 'broker standard'. The sessions provided a useful opportunity to discuss live issues concerning higher level skills and employer engagement with key sector brokers.

The network was invited into the **Sheffield Skills Strategy Group** to participate in a consultation to develop a new skills strategy for the city. Similarly, **Sheffield City Region (SCR) Skills Group** brought together a range of education, employment and local authority partners to work on development of a skills strategy for the SCR.



Joint eSystems event

© Andrew Chandler

National involvement

Like other LLNs, Higher Futures has been involved in national activity, but has also led the way on a number of issues and workstrands.

General national activity

The inaugural meeting of the LLN National Directors' Group took place in September 2007, and meetings have continued on a quarterly basis.

In November 2007, the Higher Futures Directorate team participated in the Lifelong Learning Networks National Forum annual conference for practitioners, based around 'The agenda for skills development'.

Peer evaluation work is ongoing with our paired LLN, Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire (GM&WL). Initial meetings between the two teams have taken place this year and the evaluation itself will take place in 2008-09.

National Engineering Workstream Group

The Higher Futures engineering sector development team has assumed responsibility for the LLN National Engineering Workstream Group, taking over from Yorkshire and Humber East LLN. Meeting quarterly, the Group utilises specialist speakers to present on generic issues and discusses the specifics of what Lifelong Learning Networks are committed to in terms of progression agreements, curriculum development and other activities. The Group seeks to assist and influence the activity of those national bodies with a major role to play in engineering, and bring together organisations that support engineering to address national priorities.

National communications workstrand

The Higher Futures Directorate team has been involved in setting up a national workstrand to bring together communications professionals from Lifelong Learning Networks across the country. The inaugural meeting was held in Sheffield, hosted by Higher Futures, in June 2008. The workstrand group meets quarterly, and aims to create a clear communications strategy to facilitate consistency in the key messages LLNs promote nationally. Higher Futures is also involved in the national public relations substrand.

Working with UCAS and SPA

The Higher Futures Directorate team has continued to work closely with UCAS on a variety of projects. The UCAS Curriculum Development Group addresses issues of ongoing curriculum change and the implications for progression to higher education, and has focused most recently on the new 14-19 Diplomas, introduced in September 2008.

The UCAS 'Myth to Reality' working group has completed a project to revise and rewrite the information given to students applying to university, with the aim of dispelling common myths about applications and making the electronic 'Apply' system more user-friendly.

Work is also ongoing with SPA (Supporting Professionalism in Admissions), a HEFCE-funded initiative closely allied with UCAS, which works with all higher education providers to improve course information and communication with potential learners. Along with Linking London LLN, Higher Futures will be taking part in discussions on the next stage of the initiative, focusing on part-time and work-based learners.



Finance and resource allocation

Funds carried forward from the first year have enabled Higher Futures to work closely with its partners and HEFCE to re-profile expenditure across 2007-08 and 2008-09 in a way that aligns spending with development and planning priorities. The year has focused on making a start on core priorities - progression agreements, curriculum pathways, IAG delivery and development projects.

Planned spending in some areas has been lower than forecast, while other funds have either been redistributed or deferred in the course of monitoring and dialogue with partners.

Figure 3 shows our expenditure and other commitments for the year, and carry forward to 2008-09.



Figure 3: Year 2 project costs summary

Item	Totals (£)
HEFCE grant	1,159,397
Expenditure	1,040,374
Carry forward	119,023
Partner contribution	235,223
Other income	19,000
Funding for ASNs	276,430



Conclusions

It has been an action-packed year of growth and major development for Higher Futures. We have successfully pushed on from last year's activity, where we established the infrastructure and focus of the network, to produce tangible results and forge constructive partnerships, allowing us to add value to the partners' existing provision.

Capacity building has been the key to this growth and the wider team has seen valuable expansion, in IAG and sector teams, which has facilitated important cross-team and cross-partnership working. The team has achieved excellent outputs in all areas and has completed a large number of significant activities from the year's ambitious Delivery Plan.

Higher Futures' collaborative work has progressed extensively and has galvanised the network's central themes of partnership and facilitating progression within the city region. We are now feeding into local, regional and national agendas on skills and vocational education in a way that will generate longer term engagement with learners, employers, partners and stakeholders.

What next?

As Higher Futures enters its third year, attention will be directed sharply to embedding successful practice and addressing 'sustainability'. Each topic is expected to feature prominently in network evaluation activity, both as a measure of performance and a signpost to further developments and opportunities. The delivery priorities for next year are already taking shape around seven main themes.

- Communication and dissemination
- Embedding systems, practices and processes
- Employer engagement
- Internal and external evaluation
- Learner engagement
- Staff development
- Sustainability

Activities will build on early developments to expand PA work and continue the excellent IAG and transition support. Additional development activities will also start in both sector and IAG areas, and there will be a variety of events and seminars to present, promote and disseminate Higher Futures to internal and external stakeholders. Capacity building and professional development for network and partner staff will be strengthened through extensive sharing of knowledge and practice.

Energy will be directed to ensure that systems, processes and practices developed and tested by the partners can be translated into positive changes in institutions, with a real and lasting benefit to vocational and work-based learners.



Glossary

ASNs	Additional student numbers
CPD	Continuing professional development
FD	Foundation Degree
fdf	Foundation Degree Forward
FE	Further education
GM&WL	Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire (Lifelong Learning Network)
HE	Higher education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
IAG	Information, advice and guidance
LLN	Lifelong Learning Network
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
MIS	Management Information Systems
OMG	Operational Management Group
PA	Progression agreement
SCR	Sheffield City Region
SMB	Strategic Management Board
SPA	Supporting Professionalism in Admissions
SSC	Sector Skills Council
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UCB	University Centre Barnsley
WBL	Work-based learners
WITBE	Women into the Built Environment
WYLLN	West Yorkshire Lifelong Learning Network
YHELLN	Yorkshire and Humber East Lifelong Learning Network

Directorate team

Director

Rob Harrison

r.p.harrison@shu.ac.uk

0114 225 3089

IAG and Transition Coordinator

Jackie Powell

j.powell@shu.ac.uk

0114 225 3627

Information and Communications Officer

Rachel Longstaff

r.longstaff@shu.ac.uk

0114 225 3626

Administration Officer

Christina Metcalfe

c.metcalfe@shu.ac.uk

0114 225 3628

The Directorate team would like to thank David Vickers and Dr Jeremy Agnew for their contribution to Higher Futures' sector development and progression work over the past year.



Back row: Rachel and Christina;
Front row: Jackie and Rob.

Chesterfield College
LearningMatters



DONCASTER COLLEGE



BARNSELY
College



Longley Park Sixth Form College



Funded by





Higher Futures
48 Howard Street
Sheffield
S1 1WB

T: 0114 225 3626 / 3628
F: 0114 225 4185
E: info@higherfutures.org
www.higherfutures.org

Published October 2008