

Action stations

As Higher Futures enters its third year of operation, we are looking to the future sustainability of our work, and the publication of our second Annual Report provides the opportunity to reflect on some of our major recent achievements.

The first set of Higher Futures progression agreements has been brought to fruition through the hard work of our sector development team, the IAG and transition team continues to post impressive figures for guidance activities and events, and partnership development has moved on significantly, with the practitioner research network and the second wider team away day. Collaboration with Aimhigher is growing, and curriculum work has generated new courses and modules.

Whilst these achievements are substantial, we must not become complacent, and there are plenty of exciting activities and development projects in the pipeline for 2009. Our focus must now turn to sustainability, and embedding the positive changes in processes and practices we have strived to create, to benefit employers and vocational and work-based learners beyond the life of the network.

Rob Harrison
Director



Rob Harrison at the network team away day

Progression milestone success

Higher Futures reached a significant milestone with the signing of our first workplace progression agreement on Thursday 27 November 2008.

Representatives from Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Sheffield Hallam University formally signed the agreement, which will give employees the opportunity to progress to the university's Advanced Diploma Nursing Studies (Adult, Child or Mental Health Nursing) from NVQ or Access courses.



Higher Futures' health and social care Sector Development Officers, based at the Sheffield College, facilitated the negotiation of the agreement in collaboration with staff from the university's Faculty of Health and Wellbeing and the Trust's Training and Development Unit.

Read more about our health and social care Sector Development Officers inside.

L-R: Jane Saunders, Sheffield Hallam University, and Linda Crofts, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Higher Futures is the Lifelong Learning Network (LLN) for South Yorkshire and its travel-to-study area, including North Derbyshire and North Nottinghamshire.

We are one of 30 LLNs nationally, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Our aim is to create a network to transform higher education progression pathways and opportunities for vocational and work-based learners.

Our principal partners are:

- Barnsley College
- Chesterfield College
- Dearne Valley College
- Doncaster College
- Longley Park Sixth Form College
- North Nottinghamshire College
- Northern College
- Rotherham College of Arts and Technology
- The Sheffield College
- Sheffield Hallam University (lead partner)
- Thomas Rotherham College
- The University of Sheffield

Smells like team spirit

Camaraderie and collaboration were the watchwords of the second Higher Futures network team away day at Ringwood Hall Hotel, Chesterfield, in October 2008.

Members of the Directorate, IAG and transition, and sector development teams joined with representatives from the Operational Management Group and other Higher Futures supporting roles to participate in a day which aimed to encourage cross-partnership working and provide a platform for planning and development throughout Year 3.

The morning session included group networking, an icebreaker quiz reflecting on Higher Futures' successes to date and a briefing presentation on the 2008/09 Delivery Plan, allowing colleagues to consider the year's priorities and think about how to take forward the different aspects within their own institutions.

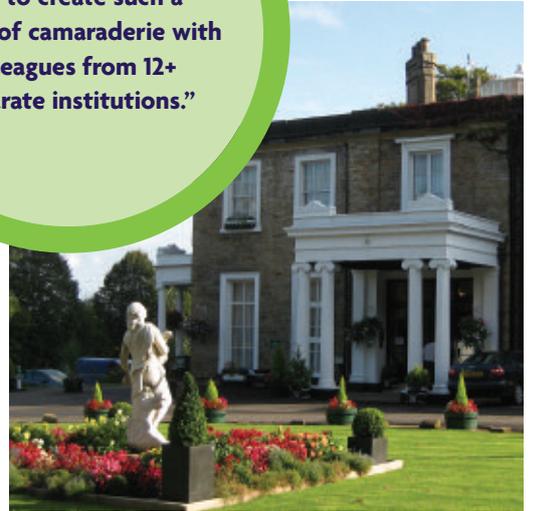
Partnership came to the fore at lunchtime, when teams battled it out for prizes and medals in the 'Higher Futures Olympics'. Colleagues joined together to conquer cerebral and creative challenges with dexterity and good humour, in a session that highlighted Higher Futures' team working success in its most literal form.

In the afternoon, attentions turned to employer engagement. We were fortunate to secure the time and input of three employer representatives, who took part in a discussion panel and question and answer session focusing on the main concerns for employers in upskilling their staff.

This informed a follow-on workshop, where participants discussed the key issues in engaging employers and identified some practical solutions.

We received some excellent constructive and positive feedback from the event. Thank you to everyone who attended for an enjoyable and productive day.

“Higher Futures has worked well to create such a feeling of camaraderie with colleagues from 12+ disparate institutions.”



**Top: Ringwood Hall Hotel
Centre: Morning session
Bottom right: Employer discussion panel
Bottom left: Higher Futures Olympics**

“Well planned day that met all objectives.”



“Very good fun and excellent team building.”

Sector updates

See the 'Contact us' section of the Higher Futures website at www.higherfutures.org to find contact details for the Sector Development Officers in your area of interest.

Early years

Excellent feedback was received from the first Higher Futures Early Years Forum, 'Raising standards through partnership working', which was attended by 30 delegates. The Forum allowed FE college staff to discuss the changes to early years training qualifications, workforce development targets and requirements for progression into higher education. A second Forum is planned for the spring term.

Engineering

Sector Development Officers at Sheffield Hallam University and Rotherham College of Arts and Technology held two successful employer events to introduce the new part-time Control Technologies Foundation Degree, which will be jointly taught between both institutions. The events gave employers the opportunity to speak with course leaders, tour the facilities and get advice and guidance from ECUK, Pro-Skills and SEMTA.



Health and social care

As well as ploughing ahead with progression agreements, the health and social care sector development team are planning a number of practitioner events, including a progression agreement briefing and a social care seminar in conjunction with Aimhigher South Yorkshire, scheduled for early 2009.



Public wellbeing

As part of a joint LLN initiative, Higher Futures has met with Podium, the further and higher education unit for the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, to discuss how Lifelong Learning Networks can support the successful staging and delivery of the Games. Funded by HEFCE and the Learning and Skills Council, Podium aims to develop partnerships and collaborations with universities, colleges, Regional Development Agencies and Sector Skills Councils to contribute to a sustainable and wide-reaching legacy for the Games.

Sustainable communities

Sustainable communities bridging modules at Sheffield Hallam University have welcomed their first cohorts with some instant success, after two participants immediately signed up for higher education courses. Sheffield Hallam University has also been developing a range of top-up routes to the Sustainable Communities Foundation Degree, including Housing, Planning, Environment and Geography courses. The University of Sheffield's work on a top-up year for the Working with Communities degree programme is nearing completion and they have begun business planning for a new Foundation Degree in Creative Industries and Landscape, Heritage and Conservation.

Spotlight
on..

Sector development at the Sheffield College

Together, Dave Dale and Sheila Hudson make up the full-time health and social care Sector Development Officer post at the Sheffield College.

Dave combines his role with that of Healthcare Partnership Manager, and Sheila's responsibilities run alongside those of her other Higher Futures function as IAG and Transition Officer.

Both joined the Sheffield College in 2004, Sheila as an Aimhigher Transition Adviser and Dave as the Manager of the Health and Social Care CoVE (Centre of Vocational Excellence), so their experience, knowledge and contacts made them ideal candidates for the sector development post.

"The role fits very well with our priorities of employer engagement," said Sheila, "And, as Dave was already the CoVE Manager and Healthcare Partnership Manager for the college, it dovetails very well."

Dave agreed, "The really interesting part of my multi-faceted job is that there is often a Higher Futures opportunity that comes out of other aspects of my role."

The two have worked hard to secure Higher Futures' first employer-based progression agreement (see cover story), a task that has seen them facilitate dialogue and collaboration between Higher Futures' university partners and a major local employer, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

"The by-products of working in partnership are great," enthused Sheila, "It's great to be able to see beyond your own institution and share ideas and initiatives with others in partner organisations."

Dave and Sheila have certainly embraced the spirit of collaboration. They have used their knowledge and enthusiasm to galvanise employers, stakeholders and partner institutions alike, tackling "thorny" issues such as Level 2 literacy and numeracy in higher education admissions, mapping clear progression pathways in the health and social care sector and providing vital links between learners, employers and providers.



**Health and social care Sector
Development Officers David
Dale and Sheila Hudson**

The pair is keen to create structures, networks and progression agreements that will outlive the project. Leaving a lasting legacy is important, and attention is now turning to sustainability.

"Higher Futures is now part of the fabric of the networks that exist across the sector," observed Dave, "Sustainability would be the real achievement."

Dave Dale and Sheila Hudson are based at the Castle Centre of the Sheffield College. Dave can be contacted at david.dale@sheffcol.ac.uk or on 0114 260 3622. Sheila can be contacted at sheila.hudson@sheffcol.ac.uk or on 0114 260 2448.

Collaboration breeds success

Annual Report highlights major achievements

Statistics published in the 2007-08 Annual Report revealed that our second year of operation has been a major success.

The Report, published in October, showed a story of 'action' and 'achievement' in a year where Higher Futures tackled an ambitious Delivery Plan to great effect.

Network Chair, Professor Rhiannon Billingsley, said, "It is really pleasing to see the growth and progress that has been achieved this year.

"It is particularly encouraging to see the effort that has gone into partnership working, team development and staff capacity building."

Our IAG work in particular has achieved notable results, with more than 4,000 potential learners attending Higher Futures specific vocational IAG and transition support sessions. Of these, an impressive 27 per cent went on to receive one to one assistance.

IAG activity was not limited to learners, and extended to more than 300 partner institution staff, including academic and administrative staff, who attended Higher Futures information, development or training events.

A number of important milestones have also been passed in curriculum and sector development. Negotiated by nine of our FE college partners, our first progression agreement was completed and signed. The

agreement, in the health and social care sector, will provide an opportunity for vocational and work-based learners to access the Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care at the Sheffield College.

Data gathering work has pulled together initial learner numbers of more than 8,000 students, a number of Foundation Degrees, top-up courses and bridging modules have been created, and several sector development projects are underway and ongoing.

Professor Billingsley added, "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."

The Annual Report 2007-08 is available in electronic or hard copy. To obtain a copy of the full report, please contact Information and Communications Officer, Rachel Longstaff, at r.longstaff@shu.ac.uk or on 0114 225 3626.



Sustainable futures

Partner seminar kicks off Sustainability Strategy

In late 2008, work began on creating a robust Sustainability Strategy that will continue Higher Futures' legacy in the years to come.

The Sustainability Working Group, comprising both Operational Management Group and Strategic Management Board members, met in September and October to develop a framework around which sustainability plans could progress. They defined 'sustainability' at three levels:

- Embedding processes and practices
- Sustaining or utilising models and structures
- Commitment to further financing or resourcing.

The Group's framework informed the first network-wide sustainability seminar, held on 22 October 2008.

All partner institutions were represented at the seminar, which was well-attended, well-supported and demonstrated a strong sense of institutional commitment. Constructive comments and feedback were received to allow us to plot the different stages of the

process and produce a plan detailing the key actions to implement, parties involved and timescale.

The first stage is an important information gathering exercise with partners, looking at the value-added benefits of the network and consultation with key external stakeholders. Initial proposals will be presented to the Strategic Management Board in spring 2009. Work will then continue on developing and

implementing the Strategy throughout Year 3 of the project.

As Higher Futures enters what could be our final year of operation, the theme of sustainability now permeates our activities. This begins an intensive period of work to maximise progression opportunities for vocational and work-based learners, but also to embed real and lasting changes to allow this work to continue beyond Higher Futures.



Symbol of sustainability: Royd Moor wind farm, Penistone

Working together: Higher Futures and Aimhigher practitioner research network

When Higher Futures and Aimhigher South Yorkshire recognised their mutual need for evaluation, the idea for a practitioner research network was born.

Margaret Lewis and Louise Ritchie were appointed as Research Development Officers in early 2008 and began to provide practical help and support to practitioners across both networks.

They launched the programme with a series of workshops, running between March and June 2008, which provided an introduction to research methods, showcased current research and evaluation activities and explored ideas for small-scale investigative projects. Nearly 40 colleagues participated.

“We are delighted that so many practitioners have become involved in the research network,” said Margaret, “And an impressively large number are undertaking their own small investigative project.”

“In particular,” added Louise, “We are enjoying the challenge of supporting practitioners from a wide range of backgrounds and organisations.”

They are currently supporting 16 projects, 11 led by Higher Futures colleagues, which are intended to complement and add value to the practitioner's existing work. These range from investigative projects, to evaluating activity, to impact assessment.

Projects currently underway include a study of the experiences of community researchers, an exploration of the impact of Higher Futures' activities on progression to HE, and an investigation into the experiences of work-based learners on Foundation Degree programmes.

Sector-specific projects include a study that will explore why learners on Level 3 Early Years CACHE courses at one FE college are not generally progressing to HE, and an investigation into how the Foundation Degree in Community Development impacts on the lives of undergraduate learners.

“Practitioners have told us that they appreciate the chance to take time out from their day to day activities to share thoughts and experiences around research and evaluation, and to reflect upon their own work, with other members of the network,” reported Margaret.

As well as sharing ideas and good practice with colleagues, enjoying ongoing one to one support and developing transferable skills and techniques,



Research Development Officers Louise Ritchie and Margaret Lewis

“We are delighted that so many practitioners have become involved in the research network”

practitioners also have the opportunity to gain accreditation for their work via the MA module in Applied Professional Studies in Education (APSE) at the University of Sheffield.

The practitioner research network is already being recognised as an example of good practice in staff development, and Louise and Margaret have showcased the scheme at two LLN National Forum events.

“This is an opportunity for us both to develop our own skills and expertise, and build upon our previous experience of supporting practitioners to conduct research in a wide range of settings,” acknowledged Louise.

“This very much aligns with our ethos of learning from and with each other.”

Margaret and Louise are based at the University of Sheffield. For further information on the practitioner research network, you can contact them at margaret.lewis@sheffield.ac.uk or l.e.ritchie@sheffield.ac.uk, or on 0114 222 8121.

Staffing update

Wider network team

The network is pleased to welcome back Cerise Walters from maternity leave, supporting IAG and transition at Thomas Rotherham College. Andy Parkes joins Higher Futures as Public Wellbeing Sector Development Officer at Dearne Valley College. We also look forward to appointing a sector development colleague in health and social care at Sheffield Hallam University.

Sector development

The decision has been made not to recruit to the vacant Access and Progression Coordinator position at this stage in our cycle. Progression and curriculum development work will now be taken forward in a way that maximises the strength and breadth of experience across our sector teams. The Directorate team, sector leads and coordinators from both universities will form the Sector Coordination Group, meeting regularly to review progress and coordinate efforts and activities.

Management and governance

We welcome Liz Downes, Chesterfield College, and Gill Reid, North Nottinghamshire College, as members of the Strategic Management Board (SMB). Sylvia Yates at Sheffield City Region and Sonia Sharp at Sheffield City Council also join the SMB. Cathy Doggett at University Centre Barnsley is a new addition to the Operational Management Group.

HEFCE

Matt Jennings moves from his role as Higher Futures' contact and Strategic Management Board member to join HEFCE's employer engagement team. We would like to thank Matt for his hard work and support, and welcome Stephanie Lynch as our new HEFCE contact.



Higher Futures is funded by HEFCE

Spotlight
on..

IAG at Barnsley College

Based at Barnsley College's Employer Response Unit, Dan Vodden divides his time between his position as Higher Futures IAG (Information, Advice and Guidance) and Transition Officer and his complementary role providing IAG support to the Unit.

His duties are varied and have included helping Apprentice applicants to secure employment, liaising with FE students and work-based learners, and providing guidance to employers. Dan describes thinking of ways to engage employers as the most challenging aspect of his job.

"I plan on being more mobile this year and providing more one to one visits to employers," said Dan, "We are also planning on running more targeted employer events to increase awareness of the progression opportunities available to learners and businesses."

Dan has also been keen to facilitate collaboration and joint working within Barnsley College, establishing himself as a referral point for the department. He has been justifiably proud of the positive feedback he has received on his impact on the early years and health and social care departments.

"We have had plenty of linking up opportunities with Aimhigher," recalled Dan, "I work closely with

academic staff in departments and provide a bridging role between our department and student services."

Dan will be coordinating activity with Aimhigher at Barnsley College for his next major project, a progression fair for learners setting out the options available to them. The event will be adapted to incorporate suggestions and feedback, following the success of a similar fair he ran in 2008.

Dan is enjoying working as part of the Higher Futures network, particularly having specific points of contact within partner institutions and the speed at which information and best practice is shared.

"It has been exciting and interesting to work on the Higher Futures project," reflected Dan, "In addition to the satisfaction I have from helping learners, it has been a worthwhile way to develop myself professionally."

Dan Vodden is based at Barnsley College and can be contacted at d.vodden@barnsley.ac.uk or on 01226 216 307.



Dan Vodden, IAG and Transition Officer at Barnsley College

BARNSELY
College

News in brief

Peer evaluation

Peer evaluation work is continuing with our colleagues at Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire LLN, with meetings set to take place in February and March to complete the information exchange process. A framework for discussion has been formulated, and the process itself has been mapped and scheduled, with the aim of producing our joint evaluation report in spring 2009.



HEFCE monitoring return

Higher Futures submitted its Annual Monitoring Return to HEFCE in October and received very positive feedback from the funding body. Evaluation, staff development, joint working and equality and diversity, in particular, were commended.

"The LLN has made very good progress over the last year, and it is pleasing to see that the business plan milestones, delivery and performance targets have been met or exceeded in most areas," said Claire Lester, Higher Education Policy Advisor, HEFCE.



Creative and media sector scoping study

The study will bring together desk research of skills demand across the sector with an analysis of supply side provision. This 'gap analysis' is designed to pinpoint new or emerging opportunities, which can be tested with employers and sector agencies. To bring both HE and FE perspectives into the study, a group including colleagues from Sheffield Hallam University, Chesterfield College and Doncaster College met in December to map out the work. Contacts within Creative Sheffield and West Yorkshire LLN have also been keen to engage with the process.

Higher level skills in the region

Higher Futures has been representing the region's four LLNs on the Higher Level Skills (HLS) Steering Group, which coordinates stakeholder links and provides strategic guidance on policy development and HLS initiatives. Higher Futures will be collaborating with Yorkshire and Humber East LLN (YHELLN) to deliver briefing events for HE providers on Train to Gain's 'Enhancement Fund', launched in October, which will make funds available for workforce skills and business training. The Yorkshire LLNs have also discussed collaboration on development activity, proposing themed regional 'practitioner seminars', and as part of the Yorkshire Progression Group, promoting progression routes from Foundation Degrees and supporting the introduction of 14-19 Diplomas.

Tracking progression

Benchmarking data gathered through the MIS (Management Information Systems) group allows Higher Futures to analyse HE progression of Level 3 vocational learners. The figures for 2007/08 entry have been collated, showing that 21 per cent of vocational learners in our target sectors progressed into higher education this year, and gathering the 2008/09 statistics will take place in due course. We are also considering back-tracking to 2006/07 entry to begin trend analysis. Further testing and discussion is required to develop sustainable systematised monitoring and reporting of vocational progression.



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 **higherfutures**
Creating pathways to lifelong learning