

So, what next?

After reflecting on achievements in the latest Annual Report 2008–09, and evaluating the impact of the network, I am delighted to report that Higher Futures is now embedding valuable areas of work with strong commitment from partners.

Although funding ceased in December 2009, activity has been rolled out into spring 2010, allowing existing work, as well as new projects started last summer, to continue. As you would expect, many members of the team have moved to new roles and new organisations, but many are still in post and committed to promoting the progression of vocational learners.

The HEFCE Economic Challenge Investment Fund (ECIF) initiative is now fully operational, with practitioners across the network providing tailored information, advice and guidance (IAG) services to individuals affected by the economic downturn. This is enhancing the support provided by Jobcentre Plus and other external partners such as Business Link, and providing an important platform for continued partnership working.

It's great to see the continued enthusiasm of colleagues and teams across the network and I look forward to continuing our activities through 2010.

Rob Harrison
Director



The Directorate team

Higher Futures Presents... the Past, Present and Future

Last October, Higher Futures held a major conference to celebrate achievements and look to the future sustainability of the partnership. The event was a huge success, attended by nearly 90 delegates, including the wider network team, employers, regional bodies and our partner stakeholders.

Magna Science Adventure Centre provided an appropriate setting, with background sound effects and an opportunity to experience what it was like when it was a booming steel manufacturer.



Steelworks tour at Magna Science Adventure Centre

Read more about the event, inside.

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

Higher Futures Presents... the Past, Present and Future

Continued from cover

Over 90 delegates joined us on Thursday 15 October to celebrate achievements and look to the future sustainability of the partnership, in the appropriate and intriguing setting of Magna Science Adventure Centre.

"It was good to have a range of learners sharing their experiences."



**Magna Science
Adventure Centre**



Rob Harrison, Director of Higher Futures set the scene by giving a background to the network, providing a sense of its main achievements and touching on the theme of sustainability. This was followed by a presentation by Sue Ransom, Principal of Dearne Valley College, who shared her experience of partnership working.

Delegates were then given the opportunity to tour a poster exhibition of some of Higher Futures' key achievements, providing a valuable opportunity to network and meet colleagues from a variety of sectors and institutions, as well as get an overall picture of the work of Higher Futures.

Following lunch, which included homemade treats such as steamed hot chocolate sponge with chocolate sauce and cream, delegates rejoined to witness an on stage interview by Rob Pittam from the BBC, with four vocational learners, each with different stories to tell. One delegate commented, "It was good to have a range of learners sharing their experiences."

The afternoon saw presentations from two employers, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals and Sheffield City Council, who shared their experiences of working with Higher Futures and the benefits to their organisations.

Rhiannon Billingsley provided reflections on her time as Chair of Higher Futures before the conference concluded with a thought provoking input from Paul White, Pro-vice Chancellor at The University of Sheffield, looking at the future context for higher education and the network.

The day was a huge success with very positive comments from delegates including, "The programme provided an excellent mix of context; facts; real stories; and a relevant tour (considering the vocational nature of the event)" and, "I had a fabulous day, thoroughly enjoyed myself – thank you!"

Other feedback requested that copies of the posters were made available online. To view the posters visit the news section of our website at www.higherfutures.org

**Vocational learners share
their experiences at our event.**

Sustainability update

Since the Higher Futures Board approved our 'sustainability model' in June 2009, we can report real progress on making good intentions a reality.

Our lead partner, Sheffield Hallam University, has created a new post to take responsibility for the continued strategic co-ordination and engagement with network partners. This is being combined with additional responsibilities for leading the University's UK collaborative relationships with colleges, and working with senior managers and faculties to oversee widening participation strategy and policy, and the co-ordination of wider corporate educational collaborations. The Director of Higher Futures, Rob Harrison, took up this post on an interim basis in January 2010.

The external evaluation of Higher Futures between June and November 2009 focused on evidence of 'cultural change', identifying the positive impact of our work on learners, staff and partner institutions themselves. The findings, presented to the Board in December, received an enthusiastic response, stimulating debate

about how best to 'protect' staff time for high quality information, advice and guidance (IAG) with learners, and facilitate professional inter-working between higher education (HE) and further education (FE) colleagues that has proved so beneficial.

Most partners have already embedded IAG posts and functions within their structures, and Higher Futures is now concluding its review of best practice and will be publishing advice on sustaining IAG delivery and tracking for vocational learners into the future. The Economic Challenge Investment Fund (ECIF) initiative continues to grow and shape network activity with employers and individuals facing recessionary pressures into 2010.

All partners have already agreed to provide senior level input to continued development of the network. Now that HEFCE funding has ceased, dialogue is shifting to the type and nature of organisational and governance arrangements we need to maintain the network in a changing policy and funding environment.

Economic recovery in the City Region

After a successful joint bid with Sheffield Hallam University and The University of Sheffield, the Economic Challenge Investment Fund (ECIF) scheme is now up and running, with Higher Futures leading on the information, advice and guidance (IAG) strand of the project.

The ECIF scheme was introduced by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to enable higher education institutions to respond rapidly to the needs of employers and individuals affected by the economic downturn. Sheffield Hallam University and The University of Sheffield, together with Higher Futures are delivering four strands of activity.

As Higher Futures already has an IAG infrastructure in place, it is logical that the network should continue to provide information, advice and guidance for individuals that have been made redundant or at risk of redundancy. Higher Futures is working with Job Centre Plus and other external partners to enhance the support for both individuals and employers at this difficult economic time.

IAG and Transition Officers have already visited a number of employers and provided over 120 one to one interviews with individuals at risk of redundancy, assessing their needs and directing them to the help and support they need. This could include information, advice and guidance about:

- Study options
- CV enhancement
- Job search techniques and resources
- Exploring other careers
- Tasters, short courses and retraining available locally

Higher Futures is currently planning a drop in event for individuals, to allow them to gain support from a variety of organisations. This will take place during the afternoon of Thursday 22 April at Cutlers' Hall, Sheffield. See our website for details.

Adviser contact details and further information about the ECIF project can be found on the Higher Futures website at www.higherfutures.org/redundancy. To request copies of the promotional flyers please email info@higherfutures.org



ECIF promotional flyers

Learner benchmarking and tracking

Significant effort has been co-ordinated between the college partners and universities to build a picture of the 'progression profile' of vocational learners from further education (FE) to higher education (HE) programmes since the inception of Higher Futures.

This work has generated an impressive database of all learners who completed their Level 3 course from 2005–06 to 2008–09, and subsequently progressed to HE programmes within the network.

This data can be interrogated by institution, sector, course of origin and destination, in addition to the 'Equality and Diversity' profile. This allows Higher Futures and its partners to analyse trends and patterns in the progression of vocational learners. We are proud to announce that vocational progression within our network and across our target sectors has increased from 22% of successful completers in 2006–07 to 30% in 2008–09, exceeding our key performance indicator set at 5% in 2006.

Learners	FE Funding Year →		
	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Completing levels	1220	1237	1414
	↓	↓	↓
	HE Funding Year		
	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Numbers progressing to HE	269	352	421
Proportion progressing to HE	22%	28%	30%

Source: Level 3 learner registration, completion and HE progression data. Higher Futures MIS Group 2009.

Spotlight on..

IAG at Longley Park Sixth Form

Laura Gibbons qualified as a Careers Adviser in 2007 and worked at Thomas Rotherham College, before joining Higher Futures as Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) and Transition Officer.

Laura is now based at Longley Park Sixth Form College and is part of the Careers and Progression team, advising and supporting students with their Higher Education choices and applications.

"As my role is quite varied no day is the same!" said Laura. However, a typical day for Laura always involves contact with students, usually on a one to one basis, supporting them with their UCAS applications and personal statements. Laura also arranges group activities and trips such as university visits, special subject events, and for guest speakers to visit the College.

The most gratifying part of her job, Laura argues, is seeing students progress. "The success of students is one of the most rewarding aspects of my job, I would like to see the students who have applied for university in 2010 gain places on their chosen courses and make the transition to higher education."

Laura comments on the benefits of working with Higher Futures, "Working as part of a team of IAG and Transition Officers means that it is easy to share best practice, ideas and information to support students. Working closely with Sector Development Officers means there is always someone on hand with specific knowledge and expertise to assist in the vocational areas."

Longley Park Sixth Form College has been awarded the Sheffield Quality Standard for Information, Advice and Guidance, demonstrating the high standard of and their services for students.

Laura Gibbons is based at Longley Park Sixth Form and can be contacted at laura.gibbons@longleypark.ac.uk or on 0114 262 5757



IAG and Transition Officer, Laura Gibbons



Longley Park Sixth Form College

Spotlight
on..

Spotlight on Sector Development at Chesterfield College

Working in education for over 30 years, Fiona Langridge brought a wealth of expertise and knowledge to her role with Higher Futures as our Early Years sector development lead. Two of her key achievements have been the formation of the Early Years Forum and promoting the Forest School concept.

As Early Years sector development lead, Fiona worked in close partnership with colleagues at Sheffield Hallam University and the regional further education colleges, with the aim of developing and enhancing the curriculum for Child Care practitioners. Her role at Chesterfield College spanned across directorates and acted as a conduit to facilitate the exchange of information.

Fiona has been encouraged by the increased interest in continuous learning in the Early Years profession. She attributes this to the support from Chesterfield College and the changes they made to accommodate her role. "Changes were made in the way the IAG team, lecturing staff and sector development team work together to raise awareness of progression pathways", said Fiona.

Establishing an Early Years Forum comprising teaching staff from all the regional colleges and SHU has been very gratifying for Fiona. Fiona comments, "Colleges were previously working in isolation and since the forum has met regularly there has been the opportunity to share best practice and keep updated on curriculum changes and delivery methods. Tutors now have a wide network of contacts to discuss ideas and issues arising in the training of child care practitioners."

Fiona has enjoyed planning practical experiences for learners through Forest School training, which brought together learners from three colleges. "It has been great to see the change in attitude and aspiration of some learners who are now confidently aiming high in wanting to provide the best quality provision for young children in our region."

The biggest challenge for the future, Fiona argues, will be liaising with universities to ensure there is full understanding of the academic content of the new Level 3 Diploma for Children and Young People's Workforce and working with Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) to ensure progression to university will still be possible for learners with the new diploma.

Fiona Langridge finished her role at Higher Futures at the end of December 2009. She now works at CACHE on developing new assessment methodology for the level 3 diploma.



Staff at an Early
Years forum meeting



@ Chesterfield College
LearningMatters

Early Years Sector Development
Officer, Fiona Langridge

Practitioner research stories

A total of 11 research projects are now nearing completion, boosted by the unstinting support of Research Development Officers, Margaret Lewis and Louise Ritchie. Eight of these projects have been completed by Higher Futures practitioners and three by colleagues at Aimhigher South Yorkshire.

The research projects are:

- The preparedness of Level 3 students commencing onto Level 4 Foundation Degrees within a South Yorkshire Further Education College
- Learning from adult students: inclusion, flexibility and blended learning
- Vocational learning – what can we learn from employers? Revisiting the construction and engineering sector for their views about higher level skills
- The impact of the Higher Futures Programme on the progression and transition into higher education of Northern College Diploma Students
- Non-progression to HE among Level 3 Early Years students
- Engaging with the Somali community
- Return to Learn Project: report for Higher Futures
- Student perceptions of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)
- The Reconnect Project: An analysis of feedback from the community researchers
- Assessing the effectiveness of the parents' forum at Longley Park Sixth Form College
- The IAG needs of part-time work-based Foundation Degree students at Sheffield Hallam University.



Margaret and Louise have worked very closely with practitioners, providing one to one support and encouraging them to showcase their work at a number of external events in 2009, including the National LLN conference in Birmingham in November and the LSRN/NIACE conference in London in December.

Participating in the practitioner research programme and developing individual research projects has given colleagues the opportunity to share best practice and develop transferable skills and techniques.

Practitioners have found the support offered by the research officers extremely valuable and have reported that the experience has enabled them to take a step back from their day to day duties and reflect on their work and, in some cases, make changes to their practice:

“It's something different to what I do in my daily role it's made me feel different about what we do and how we collect information”

“My whole approach to teaching and learning has changed – I have reflected very deeply on what I am doing and have made changes”

“The things I have found out I can implement professionally in my practice”:

Practitioners report other positive outcomes in terms of professional and personal development, including gaining and enhancing research skills and increasing confidence:

“It felt rewarding to have something like that under my belt and rewarding to put it on my CV”

“It has stimulated my critical thinking, has developed my research skills and restored my interest in learning”.

The research is being published in a digest and will be made available on our website at www.higherfutures.org this spring.

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.



Creative and Media Industry Projects

In the last newsletter we reported that proposals for projects in the Creative and Media sector had been submitted and approved. A total of five new projects commenced in summer 2009 and are ongoing through 2010. Here is a short description of each project.

Sheffield Hallam University

A professional development initiative offering internships and mentoring to level 6 students in connection with Warp Films and Third Angel, a theatre and visual arts company. Students will work with the production teams for 4–6 weeks, increasing both their knowledge and employability. It is anticipated that an established scheme for 10 placement opportunities a year will be developed for the future.

University of Sheffield

An initiative to identify, build and develop a Sheffield based creative and media network to link FE and HE institutions and other relevant organisations in the city-region. Information will be shared through web links, a digital newsletter, events and meetings. Among the many advantages to partners will be a better awareness of career opportunities for students in both FE and HE.

Chesterfield College

An 'Employability Toolkit' of bite-sized professional development units for students on the FdA Creative Practice course. The proposal has been developed in conjunction with the industrial liaison committee to provide contextual industry knowledge and broader employability skills so that new graduate employees are able to contribute immediately to employer needs.

Barnsley College

Progression to HE taster courses for 19+ community learners were developed and delivered in summer 2009, in partnership with University College Barnsley (UCB). Adult learners had the opportunity to sample a range of subjects in the Creative and Media sector and to develop skills required for higher education. The materials developed will allow the tasters to be repeated in future years.

Barnsley College

E-learning materials, including video podcasts were used to develop music skills and knowledge through self learning and research. The materials covered several instruments, vocal exercises, mastering and music theory. They were advertised via Facebook and available on YouTube as well as being embedded in course materials available to students on Moodle, Barnsley College's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).



Thanks team-mates

It's incredible to think that 59 colleagues have been part of the Higher Futures network team since 2006. We just wanted to say thanks to all of you for the effort, enthusiasm and energy, which has characterised the last three years. Many of you are closely involved, while others have moved into new roles or to other organisations. Here's the roll-call!

Who's new?

Lucy Marris

Who's still around or in a new role?

Sarah Adams, Michelle Agate, Sylvia Ashton, Sue Armstrong, John Bell, Alison Boydell, Mike Bruce, David Dale, Kathryn Dixon, Dr Anita Franklin, Justin Gollan, Graham Jones, Sue Fellowes, Anita Franklin, Olive Freeman, Laura Gibbons, Matt Haines, Rob Harrison, Mary Haynes, Anna Hawkins, Tracy Hewitson, Charlotte Hobson, Dr Mark Hobson, Chris Hodgkinson, Sheila Hudson, Graham Jones, Sally Larkin, Margaret Lewis, Linda Mason, Christina Metcalf, Tony Oakley, Dr Jenny Owen, Andy Parkes, Jackie Powell, Louise Ritchie, Catherine

Ross, Laura Schofield, Geraldine Shaw, Anne Spencer, Tom Spreyer, Dr Mark Thompson, Dan Vodden, Cerise Walters, Jane Weatherby, Katharine Westwood, Adam White, Omari Williams, Amy Woolley.

Who's moved on?

Jeremy Agnew, Marie Blackburn, Freda Chapple, Derek Freeborn, Fiona Langridge, Rachel Longstaff, Judy Smith, Hayley Snowden, David Vickers.

...and of course, fond memories of John Chapman.

News in brief

Peer evaluation

As part of HEFCE's evaluation strategy for the LLN initiative, Higher Futures took part in a 'peer evaluation' process, paired with Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire LLN. The exercise enabled both LLNs to ask tailored and joint questions with the approach of a 'critical friend'.

Through the evaluation process, Higher Futures was able to share good practice and express the challenges it has faced, as well as look at the pressing theme of 'sustainability'. The report highlights key conclusions on each of these themes, as well as a record of the journey both networks have experienced.



Director meets with Minister of state for Higher Education

A delegation of five LLNs, including Higher Futures, met the Minister of State for Higher Education and Intellectual Property, David Lammy, on 3rd March. The meeting follows a previous visit to Higher Futures and the offer of further dialogue around achievements and future partnership potential of the 30 networks set up across the country.

Impact assessment

Our external evaluation report, 'Higher Futures: Activities and Cultural Change', compiled by the Education Research Centre, University of Brighton was received in December 2009. The report looks at the theme of cultural change and evidence of its impact on learner journeys or activities and their outcomes.

Carried out between July–November 2009, the evaluators met with 72 learners, staff and employers, commenting that "three stages of culture change have been apparent". They relate to: the value-added benefits of investment in a national initiative; putting LLN issues on institutional agendas; partners making their own investment commitments for the future.

The conclusions and recommendations look at the types of change and their sustainability, both within institutions and across boundaries, suggesting continued investment in staff roles and staff time is critical to supporting vocational learners and embedding the Higher Futures legacy.

Full details of both the peer evaluation report and the impact assessment report can be viewed on our website at www.higherfutures.org

Annual Report

Higher Futures' third annual report highlights key achievements and success stories of 2008–09. Sustainability was a key theme for the year, enabling the network to continue into 2010 and deliver impressive results across information, advice and guidance (IAG) activities, progression agreements and curriculum developments. The report also illustrates the strength of the Higher Futures network team to work together to share best practice and deliver valuable staff development activities across the network.

The Annual Report 2008–09 is available in electronic or hard copy. To obtain a copy of the full report, please email info@higherfutures.org or telephone 0114 225 3626.



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This newsletter
is available in
alternative formats.

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Creating pathways to lifelong learning