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Aimhigher... Practitioner bulletin

Welcome to the June edition of the Aimhigher practitioner bulletin, designed to provide all those working for Aimhigher with relevant programme news and details of national resources.

If you have comments or suggestions on the content of the practitioner bulletin or website, or any other communications enquiries, please contact the National Communications Resource Team (NCRT) on 0117 929 7096 or email aimhigher@harrisoncowley.com.

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1. Student Finance campaign – evaluation results

Evaluation carried out on behalf of the DfES has found that the student finance communications campaign is meeting its overall objective of raising awareness and understanding of the new financial package amongst target audiences.

- Advertising tracking research has shown increased awareness of all the key messages. Awareness of the tuition fee loan has risen to 90% amongst students and 92% amongst parents. 72% of students and 82% of parents are aware that the tuition fee loan is not repaid until recipients are in work and earning over £15,000. There have also been increases in awareness of maintenance grants and bursaries, even though these messages were not featured in the advertising.
- Analysis of the media coverage shows more than 350 pieces of coverage were generated between August 2005 and March 2006, of which 92.6% were either strongly or slightly favourable.
- A total of 21 regional events ran between November and December 2005 and were attended by nearly 1,000 delegates. 92.5% rated the overall assessment of the events as very good or good. The vast majority of attendees felt that the overall aims of the events were met and that the presentation content was 'just right'.
- In terms of understanding the new student finance arrangements, 84% of advisors within school sixth forms, FE colleges or HEIs felt that they knew or understood all or most of the arrangements.

The Department's communications team is currently developing plans for student finance campaign activity for the 06/07 financial year. An outline of activity will be included in the practitioner bulletin once plans have been approved.

2. Aimhigher and the 14-19 Prospectus

As practitioners may know, local authorities and LSCs are currently developing a local 14-19 Prospectus for each area of the country. The 14-19 Prospectus is a statutory requirement which all areas will need to have produced by Autumn 2007, when they will be linked to a national website.

The web-based prospectus will set out the courses and programmes that each school, college and other provider wishes to offer to 14-19 year olds in a local area. This transparent provision of information should empower both young people and parents. Details of all available accredited courses for 14-19 year olds, along with information on course content, assessment, costs and quality indicators should be included if available. Additionally, the prospectus could incorporate progression pathways and opportunities, case studies, transport links, and available funding support. Rather than existing in isolation, the site should contain useful links to other related sites such as Aimhigher. In part, the prospectuses will help to support the new specialised diplomas.

The implication is that all partners should be involved in supporting the development of the prospectus – especially Connexions and Aimhigher. There is a specific role for Aimhigher practitioners in ensuring that any prospectus includes information which would serve to raise aspiration and provide details for the widening participation cohort. Further information, including a document providing national guidance, can be found at:

www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?sid=27&pid=259&ctype=TEXT&ptype=Single.

3. Aimhigher roadshow schedule published

By now, Regional Directors and Aimhigher roadshow booking contacts should have received a copy of the 2006-07 roadshow schedule, along with some guidance notes on booking in schools and colleges in your area. Practitioners can check when the roadshow is visiting their area by clicking on the following link.

www.aimhigher.ac.uk/sites/practitioner/programme_information/roadshow/2006_07_schedule.cfm.

Roadshow organisers, Geronimo Communications, are now in the process of contacting everyone involved in booking the roadshow to make sure they have all the information they need. If the roadshow is visiting your area for the first time, the contact for your area has changed, or if you haven't heard from them but expect to be involved in booking the roadshow, please contact Geronimo as soon as possible, using the details below.

Research shows that the roadshow has most impact when used in conjunction with additional events and sustained, individualised activities. The guidance notes also include ideas on how practitioners can work with teachers and tutors in their area to ensure the roadshow creates a long-lasting impression on students, based on good practice by Aimhigher practitioners in the past.

The deadline for supplying details of the schools and colleges that practitioners have booked in is Friday 14 July 2006. Geronimo is also operating a 24-hour helpline for those that need information or advice on booking schools and colleges, so practitioners should feel free to contact them with any queries. They can be contacted on 020 7299 8754 or 07816 676 545 (24 hours), or by email to aimhigher@geronimocommunications.com.

4. Practitioner website – new content added

The Aimhigher communications resource pack has recently been updated and now includes sections on knowing your audience, organising a press conference and touring theatre groups. The existing guidance on data protection has also been revisited and updated. In response to the feedback obtained from practitioners via HEFCE's communications survey, the NCRT has also developed some additional template materials – two further press releases and a letter inviting a local celebrity (or MP) to take part in a photo opportunity – which can be adapted for use by regional and area partnerships.

For more information, or to download the templates, click on the link below.

www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/communications_resource_pack.cfm

The Aimhigher induction pack – designed for practitioners who are new to Aimhigher – has also been updated. Click on the link below to download a copy in PDF format.

www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/programme_information/about_aimhigher/induction_pack.cfm

5. Development of Aimhigher student portal website

As practitioners may be aware, HEFCE have engaged HERO Ltd to develop the Aimhigher student portal website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk) over the next three years. Under this new phase of development the site will take on a much more holistic approach, targeting a wide range of audience groups.

The depth and breadth of the information on offer will be significantly expanded and tailored to specific groups, with key information presented in a number of languages, and these pages will be augmented by regular features and case studies. Partner and practitioner feedback has helped HERO to draw up a provisional site plan and development timeline.

HERO is also putting together a survey before finalising these proposals and details will be circulated in due course. Practitioners can also make their views on the existing site known by e-mailing editor@hero.ac.uk.

6. Aimhigher Evidence Programme – national seminar

Taking place in Birmingham on 4 July, this Action on Access seminar will report on the findings from the national research projects investigating the impact of Aimhigher. Much of the research is now complete and that which is ongoing will report substantive progress. The seminar will also share findings from evidence being collected at a regional and area level which may form a further phase of the programme. For further information or to receive a copy of the booking form, please email events@actiononaccess.org.

7. Aimhigher and Schools: A Partnership for Success – seminars

Action on Access will be holding two seminars to celebrate the continuing success of the partnership between schools and Aimhigher.

22 June – The Midland Hotel, Derby

30 June – Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, London

Both seminars will include short inputs on the New Relationship with Schools, the Gifted and Talented provision, and working more generally within schools. There will also be group discussion and a Q&A session with an expert panel, including representatives from HEFCE and the DfES. It is hoped that a working community of practitioners will be established through these events. To book a place on either of the dates, please email events@actiononaccess.org.

8. BME Education Steering Group conference

This one-day conference on 'Improving Choice and Opportunities for Black and Minority Ethnic Learners in Higher Education' will take place at the Barbican Centre in London on 21 June. The conference is the culmination of the work of the BME Education Steering Group – an Aimhigher national project to conduct research into widening participation in higher education among BME learners.

Trevor Philips, the Head of the Commission for Racial Equality, will provide the keynote speech at the conference, which will report on the project's findings and launch a development plan for the establishment of a new organisation to provide advice and guidance to the sector on improving educational opportunities for BME learners.

The conference and subsequent report will have a major impact on the future direction of interventions designed to assist BME learners at all levels of the education system. It will therefore be relevant to all Aimhigher practitioners who have an interest in these issues.

To find out more, or to register your interest in attending this event, please email scu@bradford.ac.uk. Further information including a programme, workshop details and the booking procedure will then be forwarded to you.

9. AchieveAbility conference

AchieveAbility, the Aimhigher national project to raise awareness and understanding of the needs of students with Specific Learning Differences (SpLD), is holding a national conference on 22 June at the University of Westminster in London.

The focus of the conference will be the potential loss of intellectual talent to both education and employment due to the challenges that SpLD learners face in progressing to higher education. This issue will be explored through presentations, seminar sessions and by the keynote speakers Bill Rammell, Minister for Further and Higher Education, and Shirley Cramer, Chief Executive of Dyslexia Action (formerly the Dyslexia Institute).

Further information and a booking form are available on the project website at www.achieveability.org.uk.

10. Student Survivor 2 to launch

UNIAID, the students' charity, will launch Student Survivor 2 – a new online learning game, on 28 June. In the sequel to the highly successful Student Survivor 1, users adopt a virtual student and must keep his or her life in balance until graduation. Workshop materials based on UNIAID's online tools are being developed by an Aimhigher national project to help students cope with the financial complexities of higher education. For further information visit www.uniaid.org.uk or contact Jemma Samuels on 0870 600 0858.