

July 2006

Proving and Improving Success

This edition of the Newsletter contains information on the Aimhigher programme for 2006-08, details of our showcase event in June, some examples of success stories of individuals from backgrounds with no higher education experience who have reached higher education, information about this year's CPD programme and a report on the vocational teacher placement project. These reports show the success of current activities; our aim is to improve on these over the next two years.

Director's Update

I am pleased to report that the Aimhigher South Yorkshire strategic plan for 2006-08 has been approved by the Regional Partnership Board. The plan contains details of activities which will be funded throughout the period. There has been a reduction in funding for 2006-08 compared to the previous two years and some institutions will receive less than in the past.

The funding for South Yorkshire of £7.6 million will enable institutions to maintain activities which have proven to be most effective. Nevertheless, we must begin to think about a possible post-Aimhigher world - focus on the outcomes and the impact of activities during the next two years and how these might be sustained beyond 2008. Over the past 5 years, since the start of Excellence Challenge in South Yorkshire, there have been noticeable impacts of the additional resources for raising aspirations and widening participation activities. Firstly, there has been an increase in activities, better co-ordination across sectors and some changes in institutional activities e.g. identifying target groups etc. Secondly, local evaluations of activities show that there have been changes in attitudes and expectations of teachers, lectures and others with respect to widening participation learners. Thirdly, there have been improvements in some 'hard' measures such as GCSE attainment. The 5A*-C attainment figures have improved across the South Yorkshire local authorities by 14% - 30%; it is very difficult to say precisely how much of this is directly attributable to Aimhigher or Excellence Challenge but the improvements are very welcome.

The next stage in developing the impact/outcomes of Aimhigher is to ensure that successful activities and processes are embedded and sustained in institutional policies and practices. Examples of sustainability include changing current roles to include work currently funded through Aimhigher, or ensuring core budgets incorporate widening participation and raising aspirations activities.

Continuity

For 2006-08 the Area Steering Group recognised the need for continuity of activity from the previous phase of Aimhigher. This means that the following activity strands, projects and activities will continue, some with a slightly changed emphasis:

Raising aspirations; The Graduation Project, Y8 Roadshows, Mentoring, the South Yorkshire Fellowship (16-19 BME).

Information, advice and guidance; Influencing the Influencers (parents), Careers Education and Guidance - capacity building and support for attaining the Quality Award, Uniworks (graduate labour market information), Adult Guidance and Finance advice.

Vocational learning and progression; Vocational classes, Vocational Teacher Placements, Open Horizons (industry and HE visits), Professions Progression Partnership (law, accountancy, architecture, science and engineering), Pelican (support for 14-16 vocational learning through work placements).

There will also be support across South Yorkshire for professionals engaged in raising aspirations and widening participation activities through a programme of professional development, data analysis, a diversity and disability network, and through monitoring, evaluation and research. A compendium of projects, giving details of individual activities, will be produced in the autumn once plans have been finalised.

The South Yorkshire Strategic Plan is available at www.aimhigheryandh.co.uk

Jed O'Neill, Director of Aimhigher South Yorkshire

Success Stories

The success stories illustrated here indicate that higher education is opening up to groups of people who, not so very long ago, would not have considered pursuing their education.

Steve



Steve is currently in university studying BSc Computing and Statistics.

He was asked how he became interested in higher education. His response was:

"I did not know what I was going to do and I went to a parent's evening and

this woman was talking to my Mum and Dad. She was sort of saying that I was capable of doing well in university, that made me look into it a bit more. I came to an Open Day and I spoke to a person who I have no idea who it was. I sort of knew if I were to come [to higher education] I knew what I was going to do. I was not certain. I just knew I wanted to do computing. I had not seen my statistics course. They mentioned it. Once I got a place, I decided I will come."

He was asked about any barriers he foresaw in higher education:

"The main thing was having a natural anticipation because you are disabled there is going to be all these hoops to jump through and everything. But, it was mainly dead simple. There was nothing I really had to do. It was a very straightforward process to get here."

He was asked what he thought was necessary for disabled learners to pursue higher education:

"I would say more information about what the university can do. Basically, the university will do everything they can. This is what I have found and what I have heard from other people. But, I was not aware that the university did this kind of stuff. I, not knowing, I presumed it would be down to me. Like talking to able-bodied students, you have to find your own accommodations, whereas the university would help you if you are disabled. But, that is never made clear to you. You got to think where I can move around in my chair. You are probably going to make bigger stuff than what it really is... If people knew how much University is going to help you, then they will be more encouraged to go."

Graham



Graham has a visual impairment. He is a mature student as well.

On describing the idea of attending higher education:

"I did not know I could do it with my disability. So, in my first instance, I contacted Student Services at the university. They put me on to the Disabled Student Support Team. Initially, I asked what kinds of courses are available and unavailable and whether I qualified because of my lack of qualifications, such as GCSE... I had about an hour interview. They put my mind at ease about the course. They explained to me about the different courses I picked out. They did point me in the right direction of the course I am in now, communication studies... They told me about the support I will get, like readers, help with equipment that I might need."

On describing his impairment and its effect on his learning style:

"When I am trying to read, reading is very difficult. Having things enlarged does not make a difference, it makes it worse. But, at the moment, I got a little bit of central vision in my right eye. I can use that to read normal writing, but only a letter at a time... If I had to read one-page of work, it will take so long and will be very tiring. I would rather use a computer to read it to me or I will get someone to read it to me."

Celebrating Success 2003-2006 Showcase

As the current phase of Aimhigher funding came to an end a celebration of success took place at Sheffield Wednesday football club on 27 June 2006. The event included: exhibitions of the work which has been done over the past 3 three years; presentations by Rotherham College students and Sheffield Hallam Volunteers of the 3D animation project they had collaborated on; a musical performance of extracts from *Joseph and the Technicolour Dreamcoat* by Trinity Academy, Doncaster and, not least, an 'entertainment' from Ian McMillan.



Elaine Woodhams (Rotherham College), Ian McMillan, Jed O'Neill (Director, Aimhigher South Yorkshire), Clive Macdonald (Chair, Area Steering Group)



ROBOTICS - Campsmount and Ridgewood Schools



Kath Fitzpatrick (left) and Sally Bark (right) from Doncaster Council with Carol Colvin from Doncaster College



Ian McMillan with Barnsley College students and Kate Atkinson from Barnsley Council



Joseph by Trinity Academy, Doncaster

Poem specially composed by Ian:

AIM HIGHER!

(Chorus)

I'd be a liar if I said that aiming higher
Was a simple thing to achieve in;
I'd be telling porkies if I said that South Yorkies
Found all this easy to believe in!

I guess it's all a matter of history
Where a job was seen as better than a paper degree
Where getting your hands all covered in dirt
Was better than working in a crisp white shirt,
Where they siphoned you off to go down the pit
Or work in a foundry covered in *detritus*!
(Chorus)

So for years and years we were told this place
Was for the sweaty brow and the mucky face
And only the clever got education
Which, you'll agree, is a daft situation!
But now we're here to talk about success
South Yorkshire's achievements, no more no less
With kids deciding that aiming higher
Can be the spark that lights the fire
With teachers embracing the simple truth
That we shout from the streets
and proclaim from the roof
That life's a matter of aiming high
And from here we can reach up to the sky!
(Chorus)

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Vocational Teacher Placements

Over the past two years Aimhigher South Yorkshire has supported teachers and lecturers in vocational curriculum areas to develop teaching materials and to gain first hand experience of recent developments in the world of work. The scheme supports two staff per year from each local authority to engage in curriculum and professional development.

Last year both Barnsley and Sheffield local authorities focused on health and social care; Doncaster focused on business studies; in Rotherham there was a focus on digital industries. This year has seen Barnsley focus on business studies, Sheffield on leisure and tourism, Rotherham on multi-media and Doncaster on applied art and design.

These short term placements in industry allow staff time to think about their approach to teaching a vocational subject based on a real understanding of what is happening in the selected industry. Examples of activity include spending time with South Yorkshire Police human resources department, working with Doncaster racecourse to produce business case studies and developing a fashion show with Topshop designers.

The project has already produced excellent teaching materials and more are under development at the moment. For further details and copies of the materials please contact;

Business Studies and Art & Design; Sonia Czabaniuk, sonia.czabaniuk@doncaster.gov.uk
Health & Social Care, Leisure & Tourism; Helen Nichols, helen.nichols@sheffield.gov.uk
CDI and Multi-media; Barrie Morgan, barry.morgan@rotherham.gov.uk
Health & Social care, Business studies; Jane Fisher, janefisher@barnsley.gov.uk

A successful year of Continuing Professional Development and dissemination activities

During the academic year 2005-06 Aimhigher South Yorkshire has organised 14 events. The year started with 2 project management workshops for staff new to this area of work. The workshops take staff through the basic processes of managing projects from establishing aims and objectives to project closure, using such tools as PERT and Gantt charts.

These were followed by a conference on Inclusivity which encompassed disability, children in public care, black and minority ethnic groups and refugees and asylum seekers. The remarkable thing here was the extent which the same issues - of confidence, guidance, support - applied to each of these under-represented groups in higher education.

A workshop on recent research findings on widening participation in South Yorkshire examined the perceptions of apprentices and their employers and highlighted the barriers to progression faced by vocational learners. In addition, the database which Aimhigher has been developing was demonstrated. This contains, DfES performance data and UCAS data together with some national census data. This will enable us to identify 'hot' and 'cold' spots of HE participation down to neighbourhood level and will prove a very powerful tool for targeting future activity.

One barrier to progression is debt and the fear of debt. The Building Financial Futures conference enabled workers in the field of financial literacy to come together and exchange good practice. This conference reached out to sectors which are not normally a part of the formal education scene e.g. credit unions etc. A joint event with UCAS enabled those who advise applicants to HE on new developments and to make the most of the large UCAS fair which takes place annually at the Hallam Arena.

The Building Pathways project and the Open University put on 5 careers seminars which brought together guidance workers, academic staff and graduate employers to explore the latest developments in particular employment sectors. Employers outlined their current needs of graduates, HE staff described current HE provision, enabling the guidance workers to update their knowledge. This year the programme featured careers in I.T., Creative and Digital industries, Early Years, Hospitality and Catering and Engineering. In addition, there were programmes for staff to evaluate the use of outdoor education centres for motivating under-represented groups and a workshop on developing a progressive engagement framework for widening participation.

The 2006-07 programme will be discussed soon. We welcome any ideas from practitioners in the field of widening participation which they feel will aid their professional development.

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