



Engaging Families

OVERVIEW

There are many ways of working with families to foster discussion at home, dispel myths about who HE is for, and help answer practical questions about topics such as finance, safety, HE opportunities and how it is possible to retain one's own culture and faith.

Examples of ways you can engage families include:

1. Parent workshops e.g. within a school or college parents' evening
2. Parent Courses e.g. Your Child's Future, FAHED
3. One-to-one advice e.g. at a stall within a school event
4. Family focused college or university campus tour
5. Interactive presentations e.g. at a college or university open day
6. College or university written resources e.g. prospectuses, leaflets, family newsletters, internet resources
7. Using college or university facilities e.g. library, art gallery, sports or computer facilities

1. Parent Workshops:

There are a number of benefits in offering parent workshops. These include providing qualitative time with parents and an opportunity for parents to ask questions, share their concerns and explore issues in more detail.

- Common concerns that parents have about HE include: finance, student support, safety, and admission procedure – when, where and how to apply for courses.
- Take advice from the school about timing workshops. If planning a course try to ask parents what are the most convenient times for future sessions.
- It is important to start off with an icebreaker, as parents will not necessarily know each other. Icebreakers give parents a chance to introduce each other as well as create a more relaxed and informal environment.
- It is important to include interactive exercises to allow parents to raise their concerns, share their experiences and enable them to realise that they are not alone.
- Use small group or paired work. This will provide opportunities for parents to raise their concerns and share experiences with other parents.



See Lancashire Aimhigher Portfolio for Family Activity Sheets (contact details at the end of this briefing sheet)



Remember this advice for workshops applies when offering a parent course.

2. Parent Course:

'Your Child's Future' is a flexible discussion based course developed and delivered in partnership with schools as part of the Families and Higher Education Decision Making (FAHED) Project. Typically, a course includes 3 – 6 workshops that last about 2 hours each. Although a course is more time consuming than a single workshop in terms of preparation, promotion and evaluation - persevere, the time and effort is worthwhile!

- ✓ Delivering a short course for parents in parallel with activities for young people and including a campus visit to an FE College or HEI encourages family discussion.
- ✓ Use a short introductory meeting to explain the course benefits to parents and find out their main concerns. You can then tailor the length and content of your course to their needs. Listen to parents' needs and be prepared to be flexible and responsive.
- ✓ Parents attending 'Your Child's Future' in the past reported increased knowledge, greater confidence to ask questions and assist their child with future plans.



Briefing Sheet 5: Working with families in schools



FAHED Your Child's Future course materials (contact details at end of this sheet)

3. One-to-One Advice

One-to-one advice to a parent is invaluable at answering parents' immediate questions and allows you to tailor your answer specifically to the family's circumstances. Make a note of the questions families ask to use as a basis for discussion during staff development sessions and to help you produce 'Frequently Asked Questions' handouts, gather resources for future advice sessions and prepare for them.

- ✓ Ensure you have a range of resources available to give to parents to remind them of key facts. Although some parents will follow up references for additional information, for those parents who are unaccustomed to this task this can be a real barrier.
- ✓ If possible, arrange for the same member of staff to attend events for a particular school or community organisation, this provides a friendly familiar face that families are more likely to recognise and thus approach with queries.
- ✓ Actively listen to parents. 6 non-verbal listening techniques include:
 - L**ean towards the parent
 - I**nvolved posture. Turn towards the parent; face the person. Avoid folding your arms and crossing your legs.
 - S**mile appropriately
 - T**erritory - avoid putting a desk between you and the parent. Too much distance impedes communication; too little space increases anxiety.
 - E**ye contact. Have good eye contact 60% of the time.
 - N**on-distracting movement. Nod your head, move your body comfortably when the parent moves. Avoid distracting movements. (CEAA, 1998)

Active Listening Skills from Skills you need website



<http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/active-listening.html> accessed 2015

4. Family Focused College or University Campus Tour

Campus tours provide families with a multi-sensory experience that allows them to see, sample, listen, as well as get a feel for the facilities, resources, and support a college or university has to offer their child. This can give them a more realistic idea to whether their child will fit in and be happy within an institution.

- ✓ If you have carried out a course or workshop before the campus tour, tailor the tour in response to parents' requests and try to include areas of interest that parents mentioned. For example, a tour of the mosque for Muslim parents, organising separate tours for parents and young people.
- ✓ Typically, parents are keen to see the following on a tour: accommodation, catering and sports and leisure facilities, student support facilities, and security measures.
- ✓ Current students are extremely useful on campus tours as they can answer questions and share real life experiences. Whenever possible recruit role model students matched to the target group of parents.



Briefing Sheet 2: Families On Campus, includes a list of resources you might use during an Open Day. Also refer to Lancashire Aimhigher Portfolio - Family Activities, Parent Leaflets or College Parent Presentation.

Parent and Pupil Feedback

I found it very informative and have learnt that there is a "safe" environment at University, which as a parent, is quite a large concern. It's obvious that there is help if they need it. As a parent on a low income, I have been made aware that as long as my child has the ability, then there is a place in University for him and it can be affordable, as long as the student is prepared to budget, etc. This should be a big issue discussed with the student while they are preparing for Uni life. *Parent*

"It was better than I expected it to be. ... There is something for everyone here and the range of subjects was endless, weird and interesting to look at, so you'll never have an empty choice! *Pupil*

5. Interactive Presentations

Presentations can be useful to convey lots of information to a larger audience of families. Be aware of people's concentration spans, it is advisable to keep presentations to 10 – 15 minutes.

- ✓ Power Point is useful for developing presentations as it allows you to include colour and sound within the slides. However, be aware of making things too distracting. Use colour contrasts for those with visual impairment and think about font size.
- ✓ Provide a handout of the slides for parents to take home for future reference, include contact details of who they can talk to for further information
- ✓ Allow time for questions from parents – this can be done in an informal way such as writing questions down onto post-its in pairs or small groups.
- ✓ If time allows, supplement the presentation with other group activities



Chapman A (2005), *Presentation Skills, Businessballs*, available online, accessed 2015:



<http://www.businessballs.com/presentation.htm>

6. College or University Written Materials

College and university written materials provide a helpful reference guide for families. For families with limited experience of higher education existing materials include jargon and terminology, which may be unfamiliar and off-putting.

- ✓ If possible, use or prepare materials specifically produced for parents
- ✓ Be aware of literacy levels and the format of information:
 - ? How user friendly is the information
 - ? Is it available in alternative formats e.g. large print
 - ? Does the person need specific skills to locate follow up information e.g. information on the Internet requires a computer and basic computer skills

i Preparing Written Information:



For advice about Plain English - <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/>




For advice for making print accessible for people with visual impairments - <http://www.abilitynet.org.uk/quality/documents/StandardofAccessibility.pdf>



For advice about printed material for people with dyslexia - <http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/educator/additional-resources-for-educators>

7. Using College or University Facilities

College and university facilities offer enormous potential for innovative and creative family friendly activities. By encouraging families to use college and university facilities for informal events and celebrations it is possible to begin to remove the stigma and perception of HE institutions being an 'ivory tower', and reduce the number of people who feel "it's not for the likes of us".

- ✓ Invite schools or community groups to use your general facilities such as conference hall for a school play, sports facilities for a sports day or art gallery/display area for showing pupils work
- ✓ Often universities have performances from artists and bands – promote these amongst school and community groups.
 -  Give out free tickets for college/university events for a school or community to use as raffle prizes

Prepared on behalf of Lancashire Aimhigher

For further information about working with families, or copies of other briefing sheets, contact:

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<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/reap/Documents/Briefing%20Sheet%201.pdf>