



College Open Days

CONTEXT

College open days provide an ideal opportunity for families to see for themselves what facilities are available for their child, as well as having their questions answered and concerns alleviated.



This briefing sheet uses findings from a pilot study reported on in Briefing Sheet 4 – Engaging Families in College Open Days: A Pilot Study.



N.B. The term Open Days used within this document refers to open day or evening events at college that are open to families of school aged young people.

PLANNING OPEN DAYS

Timing

Time of Week:

- ✓ Mondays – Thursdays were the most popular days
- ✓ Fridays to Sundays can clash with many religious Sabbath's e.g Muslim's on Friday, Seventh Day Adventist on Saturday, and the majority of Christian denominations on Sunday

Time of Day:

- ✓ Evenings are more convenient for working families to attend
- ✓ When organising school trips, schools often need at least 4 weeks prior notice to organise parent consent forms

Time of Year: Open Days organised in:

- ✓ Autumn term – to provide prospective students and parents with an opportunity to gain information to enable them to fill in application forms
- ✓ Spring term – to reinforce information for those who need it. For some colleges it coincided with their interview cycle
- ✓ August - useful for students, who did not get the results they expected, to review plans

Practical Considerations

- ✓ Important to check on staff and volunteer availability
- ✓ Classroom and equipment availability



Briefing Sheet 2 – Families on Campus includes a list of resources you might use during an Open Day, in particular Lancashire Aimhigher - Family Activities, Parent Leaflets or Parent Presentation.

ACTIVITIES RUNNING WITHIN COLLEGE OPEN DAYS

Young people and colleges practitioners have found the following activities to be popular with families:

Activity	📘 Comment
✓ College Tour	This includes subject tour as well as tour of general college facilities.
✓ Talk to students studying in college	Use students to carry out college tours, be involved on interactive stalls, or within work-based classrooms– all of these encounters provide an opportunity for families to informally ask relevant questions.
✓ Talking to course tutors	Young people in particular reported that they liked help from tutors in choosing course subjects
✓ Asking course tutors questions	Open Days provide a valuable opportunity to have questions answered thereby enabling parents to feel more confident about helping and supporting their young people
✓ Written information about courses	This includes prospectuses and leaflets. Literature helps to re-enforce key messages as well as provide further information.
✓ Financial information explained	Finances are a common concern for both young people and their families.
✓ Availability of study support	Incorporate information about study support within the literature as well as highlighting features within college tours or discussions with tutors.
✓ Samples of student course work	This provides a visual insight into the standards and types of work that would be expected from them.
✓ Sampling activities that students do on courses	Young people find taster activities the most useful and popular activity within an Open Day. They also provide families with an insight into how well their child would fit into college life.
✓ Information about higher education	Studies have shown that it is never too early or late to talk about HE. Subjects chosen at college have a bearing on future progression pathways. Try to provide general Aimhigher materials or prospectuses from local HE providers, as well as promoting college HE opportunities.
✓ Information about Modern Apprenticeship	Apprenticeships provide alternative educational routes – for further information about work based learning opportunities see the Learn and Earn Website.
✓ Connexions (Careers Advice & Guidance Service)	Connexions generally work with young people. Open days provide a valuable opportunity for Connexions staff to access parents/ guardians. Make sure Connexions know when Open Days are taking place.
✓ Senior Manager presentation	Not all families recognise the full value of Open Days, it is therefore important to highlight the purpose and opportunities available .
✓ Parent Workshops	Different colleges have tried these with various successes and challenges. The main challenges faced by colleges included classroom space for workshops, staff availability for workshop facilitation, timing issues and interruptions from late arrivals. Very important to include plenty of opportunities in workshops for families to be able to ask questions
✓ Refreshments	Having tea and coffee available helps to create an informal, friendly atmosphere. Consider involving catering students in making refreshments or serving visitors.

COMMUNICATION

Via young people

Colleges have an opportunity to promote FE and their open days at school via:

- Talks in assemblies
- Activities in PSHE lessons
- ✓ Letter of invitation to young person or parent / guardian is more likely to attract the attention of a parent rather than a standard leaflet.
- ✓ Delivering school talks just before college open days, keeps the information fresh in young people's minds and allows them to follow up information
- ✓ Providing written materials helps to get messages across to family members.

Communication with school:

Schools play a vital role in helping to promote college Open Days, it is important to keep in close contact with schools. The relationship between college and school influences how much time the school is likely to invest in encouraging parental involvement.

- ✓ When posting out mail shots send them directly to the career teachers, year 11 teachers and Head teachers to remind them to encourage students to attend.
- ✓ Encourage school teachers and parent governors to attend open days to ensure that their knowledge of opportunities and facilities available in college are up to date.

Direct Communication to parents:

Letters and invitations

- ① Due to data protection regulations, it is becoming increasingly difficult for schools to pass on pupils' addresses. Options used by colleges include:
 - ✓ Posting letters directly to parents / guardians home address, if known
 - ✓ Paying the Connexions Service to post out invitations on behalf of the College
 - ✓ Asking schools to send letters; however they often send via the young person, rather than post directly to home addresses so invitation may end up in bottom of a bag!

Parent Evenings and Career Events

Colleges report that regular attendance at school events allow college staff to:

- ✓ become a familiar face, which helps to build a positive relationship with families
- ✓ create opportunities to encourage family attendance at a College Open Day
- ✓ answer parent questions, reassure families and engage in quality communication.

Parents' workshop within school

Although they tend to attract small numbers, they provide a valuable opportunity for in depth interaction with parents to clarify changes in the education system e.g. different types of qualification and alternative progression routes

Parent Newsletter

- ✓ Producing a family newsletter and posting to all year 11 pupils' families, can develop general understanding about FE and HE as well as promote open days.

PROMOTING COLLEGE OPEN DAYS

- ① Using a multiple approach to contact parents allows you to build up relationships with families and supply information on a regular basis; this helps to reinforce educational messages throughout the year.

College Literature:

- ✓ Check that college publicity and promotional tools, prospectuses and web sites advertise open days
- ✓ Distribute specific materials such as postcards at promotional events
- ✓ Use internal bulletins and display boards to encourage word of mouth publicity

Media:

- ✓ Advertisements via local radio stations or newspapers and student success stories

Community venues and other agencies:

- ✓ Send out posters and flyers to youth and community centres, libraries, GP surgeries, notice boards in supermarkets, and ask Connexions Services to publicise events.

EVALUATION OF OPEN DAYS

It is important to evaluate open days to help with future organisation, ensure their continued success and to meet the needs of young people and their families. For effective evaluation, it is important not to just rely on one evaluation tool but to adopt a few methods and use evaluative reports to review progress and inform future events. Methods include:

Participant Evaluation questionnaire

Give these out as families arrive and if funds permit to encourage people to fill in the evaluation form use a prize draw e.g. win a CD player

Staff Feedback– general reflection

It is important to also gain the viewpoints of the staff and volunteers involved on the day e.g. of what activities are popular and when was it busy

Informal chats with young people, families, members of staff and volunteers.

Informal chats can provide qualitative information from participants as they allow you probe deeper with questions. These can be integrated into activities e.g. campus tour.

Annual publicity and admission survey

Asking new students as they enrol at college to ascertain how they found out about the college can provide a comparative insight regarding college promotional activities.

Prepared on behalf of Lancashire Aimhigher

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

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4

Sethi, J., Houghton, A. (2007) 'College Open Days' *Aimhigher Lancashire Families Briefing Papers*
<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/reap/Documents/Briefing%20Sheet%203.pdf>