



# Working with families in Schools

## WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH SCHOOLS

Lancashire Aimhigher worked on a number of projects with around 64 schools located in Lancashire, Blackburn and Darwen, and Blackpool Education Authorities. These included:

- Enhancement to Increased Flexibility Programmes
- Primary Pilot for pupils in year 6
- After School Study Skills Support and Enrichment Activities for Post 16 students
- E-mentoring

As this briefing sheet shows, it can be beneficial to build in a family component to activities that encourage pupils, parents and the extended family to share common experiences.

Schools are an ideal avenue for FE and HE institutions to access parents in both a targeted and / or generic way. Schools will have access to personal details that help to target pupils such as addresses, ethnicity, disability, who has free school meals and achievement levels of pupils.

## Summer Schools

Many HEIs continue to deliver summer schools as part of their widening participation provision (For example, Lancaster University <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/schools/summer-schools/>). Features of Lancashire Aimhigher Summer Schools included:

- Free and fully funded places (HEFCE and ESF funds)
- Opportunities for young people to explore a range of HE subjects and courses
- Provided an opportunity to experience university life
- Increased confidence and raised aspirations
- Prepared young people for HE.

Summer schools provide an ideal opportunity for:

- Encouraging young people to talk about their experiences of HE to their parents
- Alleviating parental concerns and fears that their child will not fit in
- Providing an opportunity for families to ask questions about HE
- Providing guidance to families about how they can support their child to access HE.

## Ways of Working with Schools

There are many ways that FE and HE organisations can work in partnership with schools to raise parental aspirations and awareness about educational progression opportunities. A few examples include:

- ✓ Sending material, or attending school events where parents will be present e.g. parent evenings, and careers fairs
- ✓ Delivering a parents course e.g. Your Child's Future
- ✓ Delivering parent workshops and presentations at school
- ✓ Organising family campus visits with schools
- ✓ Sending out a family newsletter or sending articles for school magazine
- ✓ Summer schools
- ✓ Family residential on HE campuses
- ✓ Family Learning Fun Days in partnership with schools



Briefing Sheet 1: Engaging Families for further details

### WORKING WITH SCHOOLS:

#### Case Study 1: Preston Aimhigher Partnership: Cragrats Theatre Performance

Preston Aimhigher Partnership hosted an information event at UCLAN with a difference. Parents and pupils from Ashton Community Science College, Christ the King, City of Preston and Moor Park High Schools watched Cragrats Education Theatre Company Show, designed to encourage young people to Aimhigher. The evening was very popular with parents. It included presentations on the benefits of Higher Education; the different ways in which pupils can gain a place at university, and Connexions gave details about the educational and training routes available to pupils post-16.

A parent at the end of the evening shared:

"I didn't know what to expect before I came, but I am glad I did. I learned a lot to help my son, and it was great fun as well."

#### Enabling Features:

- ✓ A school based pupil activity, in which young people watched the Cragrats theatre company performance, motivated pupils to encourage their parents to attend the evening event
- ✓ The relaxed atmosphere and social focus for this event attracted parents who would not necessarily attend an event with an overtly HE focus
- ✓ By holding the event on a HE campus, parents indirectly gained an insight into the facilities and feel of a HE institution
- ① Some parents perceive college and higher education as an intimidating environment. A way to avoid this obstacle is to organise transport from the school to the University / College, so that families travel and arrive together.
- ① The time of year can influence whether families attend evening events - wintry months when it is dark, wet and cold can deter families leaving the warmth of their homes. Similarly, religious festivals or major sporting events can affect attendance.
- ① Increasingly, schools have a calendar of events – this can help with planning a programme and making sure organised activities complement the school.

## Primary School – It is never too early to start thinking about FE and HE

Traditionally the majority of work about Higher Education targets secondary aged pupils and their families. However there is growing evidence about the benefits of working with primary aged pupils to raise educational achievement.



See Primary leaflet on Aimhigher Families website resources

Generally, whilst working with parents of primary aged pupils, the main messages to send out relate to how parents can support their child's education and independence skills.



For ideas see Leaflet 1: Preparing for Further and Higher Education whilst in the primary school: It's Never Too Early To Start

### Case Study 2: St. Martins College Of Higher Education, Primary Project

On behalf of Lancashire Aimhigher, St. Martins College Of Higher Education piloted mathematics Primary Project with Primary Schools in Lancaster. This included a day of workshops focusing on numeracy delivered by PGCE students to a cohort of Year 6 pupils. In the evening, parents came to the college to: view things children produced, have a go at the maths challenges and meet HE Staff. To complement this work, Lancaster University produced a leaflet for parents with top tips for helping children. An art competition asked children to draw 'What you want to do when you leave school'. This encouraged pupils to think about how HE can help them achieve their career aspirations. The final leaflet incorporated the four winning designs; and competition winners received book tokens presented by St Martins and Lancaster University staff at three whole school assemblies at which parents attended. This provided another opportunity to encourage children to Aimhigher.

#### Enabling features:

- ✓ There was a clear attainment focus for the primary project, which made the activity appealing to schoolteachers and parents concerned with improving SAT scores.
- ✓ The activity brought teachers from different schools together and gave them the chance to find out more about higher education as well as observe children from their school learning in a different environment. The Primary Maths Day provided an excellent stimulus for motivating children.
- ✓ Incorporating images from the target group of year 6 children within the leaflet made the leaflet special, it also increased families and schools sense of ownership, and prolonged their overall interest in the activity.
- ✓ By prolonging what was initially organised as a one-day event over a period of term the competition meant that the issue of Higher Education remained at the forefront of everyone's mind for a longer period of time.
- ✓ The leaflet and the children's involvement in its design encouraged discussion within the home environment about education. It provided a stimulus for discussion between parents and HE staff during the primary maths evening.

# COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS IN SCHOOLS

## Preparing Written Information:



Briefing Sheet 1: Engaging Families includes a list of websites to assist in preparing material in plain English and in alternative formats.

When sending information to families it is important to ensure it is inclusive and responds to cultural and linguistic issues as well as different literacy levels. Top tips include:

- ✓ Using simple language wherever possible avoids jargon; if it is used, explain it!
- ✓ Keeping sentences and messages short and snappy and thinking about the purpose of the flyer / poster
- ✓ Providing all relevant details e.g. date, time, place of events
- ✓ Personalising letters and invitations, using child's details or a 'special invitation'
- ✓ Choosing the right font and size, colour of paper
- ✓ Find out from school partners if invitations need preparing in languages other than English. Even if a parent speaks a language, it does not mean that they can read it.
- ✓ Offering to fund or provide access to FE / HE print units or seek sponsorship if professionally produced promotional material is required.

## Sending information:



See Briefing Sheet 1: Engaging Families, for additional ideas



Who sends the letter out often influences who responds to an invitation, make sure letters sent from a known contact e.g. Head Teacher, Community Liaison Teacher and ask schools to help manage replies from parents

- ✓ If posting information to the parents, remember this has financial implications – make sure that a personal message or logo appears on the envelope - too many brown envelopes end up in the bin mistaken for junk mail.



**Confidentiality** – although a school may have useful information to help in identifying a target group and / or contacting a family, data protection regulations mean that FE or HE partners do not have automatic right to access this information.

- ✓ Short term solutions: Ask the school to send information on your behalf or pay Connexions to post letters directly to pupils' home address.
- ✓ Long term solution: gain parental consent via the school through consent forms.

### Prepared on behalf of Lancashire Aimhigher

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

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