



Engaging Parents within a School Setting

Workshop Facilitators:

Tracy Scotland and Alison Webb, Family Advisors, Connexions Lancashire



tracey.scotland@cx-lancs.co.uk or alison.webb@cx-lancs.co.uk

 **Weblinks**
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Workshop Context:

Creating opportunities to talk with parents and discuss higher education and post 16 progression opportunities is an ongoing challenge. Schools offer access to parents of young people who might not have considered higher education as an option. This workshop outlined a range of different ways of engaging parents and guardians within a school setting in order to help address their concerns about their young people accessing higher education.

Connexions Lancashire have appointed Family Advisors in a project running from June 05 – March 07 to:

- ✓ Provide a more holistic support service, which engages with parents and their 14-19 year olds.
- ✓ Help parents to support their children.
- ✓ Support parents as individuals to re-enter the world of work and education to become positive role models for their children.



For information on the work of Connexions Lancashire Family Advisors contact:



Tracy Scotland and Alison Webb, Head Office, Connexions Lancashire Ltd., The Guide Business Centre, School Lane, Guide, Nr Blackburn, BB1 2QH



01254 685120



<http://www.cx-lancs.co.uk/>



For information on the Aimhigher Lancashire Families work and to download the Aimhigher Lancashire Families school workshop materials:



<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/reap/families/index.htm>



Top Tips & Key Issues

1. It is never too early to start introducing HE issues to parents.

Work with Year 6 and 7 can be a good age to start introducing the notion of Higher Education and raising aspirations. Information can be given to parents via specific workshops; campus visits, newsletters or information stands at parents' evenings or when Year 6 pupils and their families attend open days about local secondary schools.

2. Target specific groups of young people

To identify schools that would benefit from parent workshops it is important to contact the Local Education Authority or Aimhigher School co-ordinators to ensure that the workshops are organised in schools that would reach parents of learners that traditionally have a low representation in FE and HE. Some parents have specific concerns to consider offering targeted courses for parents who have a disabled son or daughter.

3. Contact schools in the first term to set dates for parent workshops

Schools often have a full calendar of events so it is important for FE / HE practitioners to contact schools as early as possible to arrange dates for parent workshops. Recommended times to contact schools include the summer term to agree a date for the following academic year or in the early months of the autumn term. This also gives you the option of negotiating whether you wish to deliver a stand alone parent workshop or combine a workshop and information stand within an existing school event such as parents evening, careers fair or subject option days.

4. Personal Contact With Parents

Whilst promoting a parent workshop a more personal touch encourages greater attendance. This can involve:

- ✓ Sending a written invitation with the parent / guardian or young person's name on the letter. **NB** A young person can choose whether they will pass on a letter from school to their parent, posting a letter direct to the home can be an alternative option if access to this data is available.
- ✓ The school telephoning parents to encourage attendance. This has an advantage as it allows a school to answer parents' questions, allay any fears, however, it can be more time consuming for the staff involved.

5. Think carefully about the venue for a parents workshop

Sometimes holding a workshop within a school is not always the best choice when working with parents from the widening participation target groups. For some adults secondary school can be seen as an intimidating environment and has negative connotations linked to their own experience of school. Examples of other venues used to deliver parent workshops include community centres and local libraries. Sometimes the venue you use can be an attraction to entice particular parents e.g. a women's organisation to encourage Asian mothers, mosques for Muslim men, a football ground to encourage dads and other family members who are football fans.

6. Using a motivational tool to encourage family involvement in HE

Advertising a parent workshop with an overt HE focus does not always attract parents from the Aimhigher target group. Ways of enticing parents include offering a reward for attending the parent course such as a trip out or free coaching lessons in a sport. Alternatively offer a course of interest to parents such as confidence building, ICT or family health which can include HE issues as part of the curriculum.

Recommended Further Reading



Sethi J and Houghton A (2005) *Lancashire Aimhigher Families Staff Development and Family Resource Portfolio*, Lancaster University, Lancashire Aimhigher.



<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/reap/families/SDBriefingPapers.htm>



Briefing Sheet 1: Engaging Families



Briefing Sheet 5: Working with Families in Schools



Leaflets and materials for use with parents, also available from the Aimhigher Lancashire Families Website include:



Preparing for Further and Higher Education whilst in the Primary School



Weighing up the cost of higher education – Thinking about the costs and benefits



Journey to Higher Education – Never too young to start



Connexions Service – including sections for young people, practitioners and parents or family members



<http://www.connexions.gov.uk/>



National Family Learning Network

The campaign for learning website of the National Family Learning Network provides useful information on how you can adopt a family learning approach to engaging families.



<http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/familylearningnetwork/index.asp>


Prepared on behalf of Aimhigher Lancashire

For other Information Sheets

This is one of 5 Information Sheets prepared following the 'Valuing Families, Valuing Diversity' Lancashire Aimhigher National Families Conference. For further details see:

<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/reap/families/Conference06.htm>

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

 Lancaster University, Department Educational Research, REAP: Researching Equity, Access and Participation, County South, Lancaster, LA1 4YD

 01524 592907

 Ann-Marie Houghton: a.houghton@lancaster.ac.uk

 <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/reap/families/index.htm>



Reference for this paper:

Sethi, J., Houghton, A. (2006) 'Engaging parents within a school setting to address parental concerns on accessing HE' 'Valuing Families, Valuing Diversity': Aimhigher Lancashire 2nd National Conference, 2006 <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/reap/families/Conference06.htm>