

aspire



Showing students the path to higher education

From east to west, north to south, an exciting and diverse programme of activities in schools, further education colleges and universities is taking place across the East of England.

The programme is designed to support the aims of Aimhigher, a Government-funded nationwide project. Aimhigher aims to raise the numbers of people successfully completing a higher education course and widen the participation in higher education to include people from backgrounds and areas where there is little history of post-16 education.

The East of England currently suffers from a low skills base, with less than 24 per cent of the population having level four qualifications. This impacts on the region's ability to develop and grow economically and is part of a national problem. Aimhigher's task is to look at where the problem of low qualifications lies and design innovative and successful plans to help change attitudes and outcomes.

Partnerships

Aimhigher exists at national, regional and area level and in the Eastern region is made up of Aimhigher East of England which represents cross-region issues, and six partnerships — Bedfordshire and Luton, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk.

From area to area, activities are created to meet local needs, ranging from raising achievement at GCSE level and mentoring schemes, to summer schools and improving access, to advice and guidance.

It's inspiring and challenging work which will continue to grow and develop as practitioners work to reach the Government's target of increasing participation in higher education to 50 per cent of the 18–30-year-olds by 2010.

Aimhigher really works...

Degrees of Success — Aimhigher East of England Disability

■ **AIM:** To find ways to increase the number of disabled young people enjoying higher education and qualifications.

A CASE study tool kit is helping disabled students in the East of England 'Aimhigher'. The kit has been created following the success of a regional conference, Degrees of Success, held to find ways to attract disabled students into higher education.

The conference focused on improving access for disabled students and raising awareness of disabled students' rights, as well as working with students with hidden disabilities such as dyslexia.

As a result, a part-time Disability Project Worker, Jane Spirit, was employed to help students bridge the gap between school, further and higher education.

Her job involved creating a case study tool kit for disabled potential students, showing how their peers cope. The kit tackles issues such as accessing the Disabled Students' Allowance and the students' rights to support. Jane said: "The students said the case studies would be valuable in offering encouragement in 'persisting', in 'sorting it out' and 'not lying down and taking it' and in encouraging them to aspire."

The tool kit will be adapted by Aimhigher for use on posters, in brochures and on its websites.

Great Yarmouth NHSU Academy

■ **AREA:** Norfolk.

■ **AIMS:** To encourage teenagers from a deprived area in Norfolk to consider careers in the health profession, and raise teenagers' aspirations and boost their social and personal development.

A PIONEERING project is encouraging teenagers in Norfolk to opt for a career in health.

The scheme involves placements, job shadowing, visits, and skills development and is designed to give students 'hands-on' experiences of the profession.

Medical students from the University of East Anglia also become 'e-mentors' to pupils, answering their questions and providing a taste of university life.

Participants remain anonymous and a special computer programme has been set up to monitor the scheme.

By the end of February 2005, 214 emails were exchanged between students and their mentors, and this figure increased again in March with more than 550 emails being exchanged.

One student said: "Being a member of the Academy is fantastic. It has given me guidance to my future career."

It is too early to measure any impact of the e-mentoring scheme, but the Academy is said to be having a positive effect on students. Monitoring of the students' achievements, and where they go after school, takes place on a regular basis.

Funding through Aimhigher will be available to support these students for another year and it is hoped that more students can join the programme in September 2005.

The Fenland Community History

■ **AREA:** Cambridgeshire.

■ **AIM:** To increase the number of people living in rural Fenland who enter part-time higher education and give students skills that they can use at work, at home or on other courses.

TALKING about the past can equip students with skills for the future — an Aimhigher project has revealed.

Oral history courses were staged in local communities as a way of learning skills such as communication, information technology and working with others.

Courses focused on topics such as: 'Local History in East Huntingdonshire' and 'Cathedrals of East Anglia'.

In a survey of students, 35 per cent of the respondents believed that they spoke more confidently in groups, 60 per cent believed that they had become better listeners and 40 per cent believed that the presentation of their written work had improved.

One student said: "As a result, I will be pursuing this new interest further, and hope there might be opportunities to do this under your study programme schedule."

"I thoroughly enjoyed working on this course and hope by doing so we have encouraged further courses in our village."

The project ran from 2001–3 and has not subsequently been repeated, although consideration to this will be given.

Young People into Higher Education

■ **AREA:** Norfolk

■ **AIM:** To raise the aspirations of students from families with no experience of higher education.

HOOKING parents in Norfolk into looking at higher education as a genuine option for their child is reaping results.

The Young People into Higher Education Project aims to reduce the 'fear of the unknown' for families with no experience of higher education.

Pupils from Year 8 take part in a three-day event at Great Yarmouth College and the University of East Anglia and are involved in practical activities based on college courses. At the same time, parents have information sessions about aspects

of higher education, including finance, support and accommodation. Of the 26 original students who started in 1999, 24 of the group have gone on to advanced level studies, 20 students have moved up to their local school sixth form, four elected to go to further education colleges and the remaining two students chose to go into employment.

Parents who visited Cambridge University said: "I could understand the lectures myself — it's not as high-powered as I thought." "I really do think my youngster could go here."

The number of local high schools taking part has now increased to five from four and the project will involve 50 youngsters this summer.

Aimhigher: working for you

Summer College

■ **AREA:** Bedfordshire and Luton.

■ **AIM:** To provide young people living or going to school in Bedfordshire with a range of summer holiday courses held at local colleges and schools.

A PROGRAMME of summer courses is giving students the chance to get a head start on planning their career. Courses take place during the holidays and students can gain recognised qualifications, get a taster of learning at a further education establishment, learn a new skill or simply make new friends and raise their self-esteem. The students get a real

taste of life at a college and the project helps to raise awareness about opportunities available and how to make the most of them. Ninety per cent of students come back every year. Last year the Summer College attracted more than 760 students and could have taken on more. Seventy-three courses were offered in 2004 and 56 ran.

One student said: "The teachers had almost boundless patience, taught really well and were informative."

Students' evaluation forms give an indication of what kind of courses they would like to see in the future and these will be used to influence planning for the next year.

Summer schools

■ **AREA:** East of England.

■ **AIM:** To increase the number of students entering higher education, particularly in areas where take-up is low.

MORE and more pupils are getting the chance to find out if higher education is for them thanks to Aimhigher's Summer Schools programme.

Many residential summer schools are held across the region. Both Anglia Polytechnic University and the University of Essex run more than one summer school and the University of East Anglia runs several parallel programmes. In addition, two specialist (national) summer schools take place at Norwich School of Art and Design and Cambridge University.

More and more regional funded places are available each year, with students being recruited from areas identified as higher education participation cold spots.

The summer school programme in the East of England is well established and covers a variety of subjects including Arts, Humanities, Sports Science and Web Design. Murder mystery and forensic science techniques have been very popular.

Students take part in workshops and lectures as well as social activities.

Team Research Project

■ **AREA:** Suffolk and Cambridgeshire.

■ **AIM:** To increase the number of sixth-form students from large rural catchment areas in Suffolk entering higher education and give them confidence to apply for a place.

STUDENTS are using teamwork to discover if their future is in higher education.

The Team Research Project is delivered by Anglia Polytechnic University and involves students carrying out a year-long research project on a topic of their choice.

It is designed to give the teams a taste of higher education and equip them with skills such as research, teamworking and independent study.

Certificates of credit, which they can use towards an honours degree, are presented at a graduation ceremony. No student has used the credit gained towards an honours degree yet, but having some credit already in 'the bank' could influence a young person to progress to higher education.

In rural areas, where higher education participation rates are lower than average, it is thought this type of programme can give young people the confidence to apply for a place.

The former Vice Chancellor of Anglia Polytechnic University said: "This award gives students an opportunity to develop the independent study skills they will need in higher education and employment."

The scheme has spread to Queen's School in Wisbech. Here the programme is delivered through Isle College. There are plans to roll out the scheme to other schools, and other higher education institutes in the region have considered adopting it.

Vocational taster day at Colchester Institute

■ **AREA:** Essex.

■ **AIM:** Make students aware of the range of post-16 vocational opportunities available and show them how to progress into higher education.

HAVE-a-go learning may help direct students into higher education — an Aimhigher project has revealed.

A vocational taster day was held targeting Year 11 students from The Harwich School, Clacton County High School and Colbayns High School.

The students were split into groups and each sampled different vocational taster activities on Music and Performing Arts, Health and Care, Engineering, Hospitality and Food Studies.

Each activity lasted an hour and involved tours of the facilities, talking to students, interactive demonstrations and quizzes.

The activities raised awareness of the vocational opportunities on offer and of vocational higher education. Visitors learned that students on vocational courses are focused on a career path post-16 and many will move on to vocational degree courses such as foundation degrees.

The sessions also raised awareness among school staff of the range of vocational courses and the facilities available, and routes of progression.

One student said: "I liked the chef man best — I didn't know you could work all over the world."

Artists in Residence

■ **AREA:** Cambridgeshire.

■ **AIM:** Inspire students to consider a future career and qualifications in the Arts.

TOP artists were called in to inspire students in Cambridgeshire to take up a career in the Arts. The Artists in Residence, members of the Cambridge-based 'Artists in Schools' organisation, were invited to work with local schoolchildren in the grounds of Long Road Sixth Form College in Cambridge.

Pupils had one day to work with them and leave with a piece of work which they had created.

They were also given the opportunity to see the facilities in the Art department and were invited, with their parents, to an art exhibition to look at the range of work by students who had just completed their Advanced Level/AVCE courses.

Parents and visitors were also able to talk with the artists about their own career paths and experiences of the artistic profession.

Younger children (pre-Year 7) who were visiting the exhibition were even allowed to make casts of their hands to take away and, perhaps, were inspired for a future career in the arts.

Excellent links have now been made between the art teachers from the schools and the staff at the college, which have enabled both groups to understand the experiences available pre- and post-16.

Mentoring Transition

■ **AREA:** Hertfordshire.

■ **AIM:** To make primary schoolchildren feel confident about moving into secondary, further and higher education and encourage them to believe in themselves as successful learners.

TEAMS of undergraduates are successfully inspiring primary schoolchildren to aim higher.

The Mentoring Transition programme was set up to help pupils make the move from Year 6 primary to Year 7 secondary school.

Undergraduates are recruited to mentor the children and encourage their abilities, improve their performance and boost their confidence.

The programme is currently running in five primary schools serving communities with low take-up levels in higher education.

Some 40 undergraduates, who have an interest in working with children, take part from across the University of Hertfordshire.

The scheme is now in its fifth year and feedback from the mentor team has been extremely positive. Last year, mentors said that: "The children seemed very interested in university, especially after the [secondary] school visit and many aspired to university."

More than 70 per cent of the mentors also said they had gained skills thanks to the programme and half of them are now considering a career working with children.

The programme will continue to be offered to selected schools in the future.

Next Steps Progression Guide

■ **AREA:** Bedfordshire and Luton.

■ **AIM:** Ensure learners and potential learners in the area know about the variety of routes into higher education and provide comprehensive guidance material.

A 'NEXT STEPS' guide has been drawn up to answer the most frequently asked questions from families with little experience of higher education.

It also contains information essential for all young people considering their next steps in education.

'NEXT STEPS', which uses road directions imagery, provides a useful tool for learners and their advisers. Admissions staff in higher education institutes in Bedfordshire found NEXT STEPS a very clear, easy-to-use guide to the options available and a source of information that shows that there are many other alternatives to the more commonly recognised A-level entry.

University of Luton Careers Advisor Arti Kumar said: "The guide is clearly set out, easy to read and understand, with some inspirational case studies and practical advice."

There are now plans to create a web-based resource. This will allow for regular and easy updating of information and provide the user with access to local higher education providers' websites.

Mapping vocational routes to foundation degrees

■ **AREA:** East of England.

■ **AIM:** Encourage learners on work-based routes of study, such as Apprenticeships and NVQs, to progress to a foundation degree.

LEARNERS studying 'on-the-job' are being shown a path into higher education. A work-based progression guide is being drawn up to provide them with information on opportunities that are available locally.

The guide is now reaching completion. It will provide detailed information for a learner who has completed an NVQ3 and/or an Advanced Apprenticeship, about the foundation degrees available to them in the East of England. It should prompt people on vocational programmes at level 3 to consider the option of continuing into higher education, even if this step is not taken immediately.

Stella Benton, Work-Based Assessor in the Health and Care Sector, said: "Higher education has given me the confidence and esteem that I never experienced in school life . . . I am going to continue my learning and take the next step into gaining an adult teaching and training qualification."

The progression guide is available with case studies and other information on the Aimhigher East of England website.

'What on Earth' and 'Land Learn'

■ **AREA:** East of England.

■ **AIM:** To provide easy-to-read information on land-related courses, explain modes and levels of study, progression routes and career opportunities, and reduce confusion about the options available.

NEW booklets are out now to encourage more people to consider a career working in land-related industries.

Both the 'What on Earth' and 'Land Learn' information booklets have been updated and redesigned in a bid to reduce confusion about what courses are on offer.

'What on Earth' is aimed at students who want a general overview of the land-related courses that can be studied.

'Land Learn' targets potential students who want more detailed information on course content, qualifications and entry requirements. Information can now be obtained more quickly, saving time for students and the career services.

In the 'What on Earth' booklet there is now a detachable form that students can return to get more information or a college prospectus.

All the case studies published here are taken from full reports. If you would like to see a copy of these, please visit www.aimhigher.ac.uk/eastofengland

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