



A Report for the Building Pathways Project on the Role of the Advocate

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Contents

	Page Number
Executive Summary	2 - 4
1. Introduction	5 - 6
2. Limitations of the Research	6 - 7
3. Aims of the Research	6 - 7
4. The Choice of the Advocates within the Colleges	7 - 8
5. The Character of the Advocates	8 - 9
6. The Advocates and the Fulfilment of Targets	9 - 21
7. The Advocates and the Outcomes of Implementing the Targets	21 - 24
8. A Model of Advocate Implementation	24 - 25
Conclusion	25
Acknowledgements	26

Executive Summary

Building Pathways is a widening participation partnership project, which includes all the Further Education Colleges and Higher Education Institutions in South Yorkshire plus some colleges, located in neighbouring areas. Sheffield Hallam University is the lead institution for the Project. In November 2004 Building Pathways secured Aimhigher funding for a number of part-time posts at associate Further Education Colleges. These posts are to be known as Building Pathway Advocates.

Each college responded differently when identifying the person who would undertake the Advocate role and each Advocate had to respond to the different circumstances and challenges of their institution. There were delays in ensuring that all Advocate roles were up and running at the same time. This meant that the implementation and embedding of the role within colleges varied. Some Advocates were operating in restructured college environments with new demands whereas others had more stable conditions within which to develop their role. Their effectiveness was also shaped by other college commitments and responsibilities.

The aim of this research, undertaken mainly between May and July 2006, was to gauge the impact and outcomes of the Advocate fulfilling a commonly agreed framework of target objectives. It is the experiences and perceptions of the Advocates ascertained through informal semi-structured interviews that provide the primary source of information. Two main questions were addressed:

- What has been the experience and response of the Advocates in undertaking this role?
- Is there any evidence that some models of implementation work more effectively than others?

The effectiveness of the Advocate was influenced by the attitude of tutors toward learner progression and transition. In colleges or departments where the widening participation agenda and learner progression and transition had a high profile the response amongst tutors tended to be more positive and enthusiastic. In some colleges

staff were less keen, considering existing training and qualifications adequate or that students may be lost to other institutions and/or courses. Also problems of communication and the competing demands on tutor time did undermine attempts to form links and develop programmes of learner involvement. In these situations the Advocate had to work with diplomacy to achieve their Targets.

Enthusiasm amongst learners depended on their age, course, responsibilities and their understanding of the value associated with progression. Mature students, unlike younger learners, were constrained by personal commitments and what they regarded as feasible study time. In some vocational areas, such as construction, engineering and childcare, learner progression and transition were not necessarily regarded as a priority amongst learners while in newer vocational occupations, such as media and computing, progression and transition were considered as necessary. Consequently the success of engaging students between colleges and within specific vocational routes was uneven.

The overall effect of the Advocate role has been very positive. Those Advocates whose responsibilities already encompassed learner progression or were associated with student development and/or careers were able to highlight and then connect the Building Pathways Programme with other progression activities and events. Overall Advocates have:

- Instigated new activities and/or activities complementing existing projects.
- Connected with external agencies/activities to promote progression.
- Begun a process of developing and embedding strategies within colleges
- Have raised the profile of vocational progression and transition within their colleges
- Have started to build and sustain connections with vocational areas
- Started to develop new databases on student progression

The process of creating databases and tracking/recording systems are in their infancy and consequently the ability to record whether there has been an increase in learners into under-graduate programmes was at the time of the research unknown.

Conclusions

The Targets as well as the support and guidance given by the Building Pathways team provided a framework from which to develop individual strategies. Vocational progression and transition has had its profile lifted and different activities to promote this have become embedded within the programmes of the institutions. The role of Advocate influenced some in their existing teaching roles by making them direct their energy and resources towards the Targets and new priorities.

- All Advocates attempted to impress on vocational tutors and /or management what the Building Pathways programme was and how it related to other progression strategies such as 'Aim Higher'
- The consciousness raised amongst staff directly involved with activities and events has led to recognition of the benefits that can accrue not only for the learners but the quality of their courses
- There has been both a positive response and practical support for the programme objectives from staff. The networking with staff has created an effect which will inform future activity
- What the Building Pathways programme is and what it means is confined to those tutors directly engaged in activities. A general awareness within the college environment has not been achieved
- The role of Advocate has made a significant improvement in at least raising the consciousness of vocational students to the possibilities of progression
- The role of Advocate has provided a space within which to reflect upon what activities and events work best for learners
- Individual events such as 'opportunity' evenings or careers fairs are useful and informative but of relative short-term value
- What has made a qualitative difference for learners is the opportunity to engage in *structured programmes* which over time develop and sustain awareness and enthusiasm for further training and education
- By far the most successful activities were those associated with the practical world of work and the opportunity to become actively involved in projects with concrete achievements

- The most effective Advocates were those engaged in activities on single-site campuses with close links with management and college wide systems of student support and progression.

Recommendations

An effective Advocate model requires an individual who can focus upon *networking* within and outside college to develop *sustainable* activities that encourage participation with a vocational orientation. The individual should:

- build links between college vocational areas, higher education institutions and higher education provision within the college.
- be able to access college data systems and *communicate* with the various learner support and management systems within the college.
- promote and *facilitate* activities beyond single events to become part of vocational course programmes.

The Advocate may not necessarily require an intimate knowledge of the learner but must have an understanding of the issues and barriers facing learners and be able to advise and direct them to the appropriate individuals or activities from which they may benefit. It would be desirable for any incumbent to be a dedicated member of staff who could offer:

- a good knowledge and understanding of the relevant college management systems and courses associated with the promotion of learner transition and progression:
- a good knowledge and understanding of participation in regional activities and developments in learner support, transition and progression between F.E. and H.E.
- good organisational and communication skills: to initiate, communicate and develop ideas and activities with managers, careers tutors, subject tutors and learners within and across the FE/H.E.
- be able to develop a programme of sustainable activities that would become embedded within vocational courses and lead towards the opportunity for further study.

- be able to develop recording mechanisms and databases which focus on transition and progression.

Further research is required into the perception and participation of the various internal and external actors – tutors, learners and managers - to gain a broader and more balanced appreciation of the impact and value of the Advocate role

1. Introduction

This is a report of an evaluation of the Advocate role in the Building Pathways project carried out by the University of Sheffield with funding from Building Pathways. The Building Pathways (BP) Project is one of a series of projects in South Yorkshire concerned with learner progression and transition funded by Aim Higher. It is part of a broader widening participation and life long learning remit within the region. This element of the BP programme has focussed on the funding of the distinct role of an Advocate within a number of identified colleges in the South Yorkshire region. The role of the Advocate was to identify Level 3 learners on a variety of vocational courses who may not have considered the idea of progression and transition to higher levels of study and encourage them to consider and then apply for opportunities in local universities to upgrade their skills and qualifications.

The programme included a series of identified Targets which Advocates were expected to meet. The Targets included the need to engage with a specified number of students within at least three different vocational areas. Depending on institutional circumstances it required the Advocates to encourage and promote amongst learners and staff a better understanding of the possibilities of progression and transition. This required the Advocates to engage both staff and learners in a variety of activities and events designed to raise awareness, encourage participation and allow learners to realistically consider possible progression towards under-graduate study.

The Advocate role required the incumbent to develop a network of communication based on events and activities in order, for example, to disseminate information and provide opportunities, to give advice and guidance. The aim was to increase the number of vocational learners who could realistically consider and then apply for courses beyond Level 3.

The Duties and Responsibilities of Advocate Role: The Targets

The Advocate role was designed in consultation with the partner colleges. Potential post holders were expected to have:

- Experience of vocational learning and older learners
- Empathy with the agenda for widening participation
- Some knowledge of the widening participation agenda

Colleges were given a commonly agreed framework of Target objectives that each Advocate was to work towards. Although Targets were specified the Advocate would adopt a response suitable to the circumstances of their specific institution. These Targets were designed to promote three areas for learners and staff. These were: to encourage a better understanding of progression and transition; to engage staff and learners in a variety of activities and events designed to raise awareness and allow learners to realistically consider possible progression towards under-graduate study; to develop systems that would record and monitor learner progression. The specified Target objectives were as follows:

Target Code	Target Objective
T1	Engage with 150 learners in each college to raise awareness of progression opportunities in at least 3 different vocational areas.
T2	Coordinate an agreed programme of events for L3 learners.
T3	5-10% increase in learners from vocational programmes into under-graduate programmes.
T4	Hold at least 2 staff development events..
T5	Raised awareness of HE progression opportunities through work-related learning routes following focussed activity directly with learners
T6	Raised awareness of BP aims and objectives amongst staff
T7	New recording mechanism for monitoring progression of learners from Level 3 WRL/WBL to HE in local FECS in partnership with other AH projects.

The BP team provided the following in order to provide immediate and long-term support for the Advocates and to help with their personal development within the role:

- An Internet share point and web mail to allow Advocates to access each others ideas and a broad range of organisations engaged with widening participation.
- Face-to-face meetings with Advocates including:
 - An initial group away-day to discuss issues and to encourage communication amongst Advocates.
 - Meetings once a term to inform Advocates about the progress of the project.

Contact via BP planning group.

College visits from one of the BP team.

2. Limitations of the Research

Because of the timing of the research this report is substantially based on data drawn from semi-structured interviews with Advocates, two interviews with managers at separate colleges and questionnaire returns from learners (See Table 1).

Table 1: Advocate Interviews and BP Questionnaire Returns

College	Number of Advocates	Interview	Questionnaires Returned	% of total sample returned
Longley Park	1	Yes	82	37.3
Thomas Rotherham	1	Yes	22	10
Barnsley	1	No	23	10.5
Sheffield: Castle	1	No	51	23.2
Norton	1	No	12	5.5
Hillsborough	1	Yes	22	10
Northern	1	Yes	8	3.6
Doncaster	1	Yes	-	-
Rotherham	1	Yes	-	-
Dearne Valley	1	Yes	-	-
Total	10	8	220	100

What is clear from the table is that feedback from the Advocates forms the primary source of information. Therefore it is the perspective of the Advocates that this research explores. There is no input from tutors and the questionnaire returns have limited value because of the small number of the returns (only 220 from potentially over 1500+ respondents). These returns are drawn disproportionately from two colleges (Longley Park and Sheffield).

The reason for the low return rate can be explained in part by the timing of the research which occurred when most learners were absent from college. This made distribution and return of questionnaires problematic for many of the Advocates. The

resulting returns vary in number both between colleges and in response rate within each college. Therefore it is not possible to provide an accurate percentage response rate for the total number of learners who participated in events and activities in each college.

Any interpretation of the data from the learner questionnaires is impressionistic. The results reflect the opinions of a predominantly white 16-19 age group almost equally divided between males and females. Therefore the demographic of the respondents in this small sample may not be representative of the learners as a whole or within particular vocational areas involved in the BP project. (See Table 2)

Table 2: Demographic of Learners Returning Questionnaires

Total Respondents : 220		Number of Respondents	Percentage of Total Respondents
Age	16-19	200	91
	20+	15	7
Gender	Male	111	51
	Female	104	47
Ethnicity	White	139	63
	Pakistani	19	9
	Black African	18	8
	Asian Other	7	3
	Mixed	10	5
	Other	23	9

3. Aims of the Research

The primary aim of this research is to gauge the impact and outcomes of the Advocate role on vocational tutors and learners from the perspective of the Advocate.

Two questions will be addressed:

What has been the experience and response of the Advocates in undertaking this role?

Is there any evidence that some models of implementation work more effectively than others?

Given the wide variation in college environments and the situations of the Advocate these questions will be addressed by considering how each Advocate responded in their attempt to achieve the Target objectives:

Engaging with Learners and Vocational Areas

Is there evidence that the Target objectives for learner engagement have been reached? (Target 1)

Communication and Involvement of Staff

Has the Advocate achieved the Building Pathways Target of holding at least 2 staff development events? (Target 4)

Has the Advocate raised awareness of Building Pathways aims and objectives amongst staff? (Target 6)

Impact on Vocational Learners

Has the Advocate achieved the Building Pathways objective of a qualitative improvement in the communicating of information and co-ordinated an agreed programme of events for L3 learners? (Target 2)

Have learners participated in activities and events in such a way that their perceptions about the possibility of progression have been altered for the good? (Target 5)

Has awareness of the Building Pathways aims and objectives been raised amongst learners?

Recording Mechanisms

Have new recording mechanisms for monitoring progression of learners from Level 3 been created? (Target 7)

Is there a record of a 5-10% increase in learners from vocational programmes progressing into under-graduate programmes. (Target 3)

The research will conclude with an overall summary of how the Advocates responded when engaged in their roles. Based on the findings consideration is given to the type of qualities required with some suggestions for potential 'best practice' in the choice of individuals to fulfil any future Advocate role.

4. The Choice of Advocates within the Colleges

The choice of Advocate within a college was influenced by a number of factors. These included:

Delays in implementing the role in the colleges

Initially drawing up the appropriate job specification and then its approval by partner colleges took time. Unfortunately this process did not synchronise well with the overall planning cycle of the college academic year. Once the job specification had been accepted and the post advertised in colleges applicants were already committed in terms of contracted hours of work. The identification of personnel and role implementation did not allow some staff significant lead in time in their development of strategies for implementation. Some colleges responded more quickly than others in getting the Advocate in place while in some instances identified personnel subsequently withdrew from participation which required other individuals to be identified. Therefore across the region there were delays in ensuring that all Advocate roles were up and running at the same time. Consequently the timing of the implementation and the embedding of the role within the colleges varied.

College Organisation and Restructuring

An associated problem for some of the participating colleges was that this new role was introduced as colleges themselves were in the process of re-organising and restructuring and/or developing new programmes of study. Some of the Advocates therefore were operating in new college environments with new demands on their time while others had more stable conditions within which to develop their role.

The Nature and Character of Partner Colleges

The participating institutions vary in size and diversity. They include a very large multi-campus Further Education College, an Adult Education College, a specialist

vocational Further Education College and a new relatively small single campus 6th Form institution with a distinct widening participation agenda. Each institution had a distinct management structure, tradition, ethos as well as having different approaches to the issue of learner progression and the widening of student participation. Each college responded differently when identifying the relevant personnel to undertake the Advocate role and each Advocate had to respond to the different circumstances and challenges of that institution.

Together a delay in the implementation of the role in the colleges, the varying organisational conditions and the nature and character of each college would shape the experience and effectiveness of the Advocates would be in their role.

5. The Character of the Advocates

In some institutions the choice of incumbent was defined by the way the Advocate's responsibilities complemented existing roles around student progression. Some Advocates already had college wide responsibilities for student progression and the widening of participation and this work was regarded as a natural extension of their existing responsibilities. Others were lecturers or tutors who were interested in and enthusiastic about encouraging student progression in general.

- Some Advocates were involved in both Aim Higher and Building Pathways Activities.
- Some were involved with broader careers guidance and widening participation activities and policies within their institution.
- Some were lecturers and/or course tutors within specific departments with specific responsibilities.
- Some had previous experience of widening participation activity others had not

Therefore in some colleges there was a natural overlap between the existing and the advocacy role while in others there was not. The clarity in the funding of the role meant labour costs and time allocation differed for Advocates. The money allocated to fund hours to develop and embed the role within the college structure varied considerable between institutions. When combined with the nature of the Advocates

existing role this meant the extent of input varied between Advocates. This created different models of implementation and levels of participation.

Therefore the relative effectiveness of the Advocate was shaped by the existing commitments and responsibilities of the chosen individual, the management of the funds and by the character of the institution within which they were operating. This in turn influenced the Advocate’s perception of what was feasible and consequently their actual engagement with the designated Targets.

6. The Advocates and the Fulfilment of Targets

Engaging with Learners and Vocational Areas

Is there evidence that the Target objective of the Advocate engaging 150 learners in at least 3 different vocational areas has been achieved? (Target 1)

The following table summarises data collected from Advocates sampled and indicates that the overall Target 1 of engaging with 150 learners on at least three different vocational areas was successfully achieved.

Table 3: Number of Students and Vocational Areas Addressed

College	Number of Learners Engaged	Vocational Areas
Northern College	150+	Community Regeneration Trades Union Studies Computing
Longley Park	150+	Health and Social Care Business Finance Economics
Doncaster	150+	Engineering Construction Inter-media and Performing Arts
Sheffield Hillsborough College	150+	Business Diploma I.T Tourism and Leisure.
	150+	Health and Social Care Childcare Media
	?	Mechanical Engineering Construction

Thomas Rotherham	150+	Health and Social Care Sports Applied Business Applied I.T.
Rotherham College of Arts and Technology	150+	Art and Design Business and Management (Computing) Engineering and Construction
Dearne Valley	150+	Travel and Tourism Public Services Computing Business
Barnsley	?	Electrical Business

The type of vocational courses identified and the type of students engaged varied between colleges. Generally the mixture of courses targeted within and between colleges reflected contemporary developments in service orientated vocational studies (including social welfare, media, leisure and computer studies) as well as the more traditional vocational routes found in the engineering, construction and electrical industries. The differences between the service and manufacturing areas in their attitude to widening participation and learner progression resulted from their past experiences, opportunities and views about the value and possibilities for progression. Within the vocational areas of construction, engineering and childcare learner progression to higher education may not in the past have been regarded as a high priority amongst learners and tutors while in the newer forms of vocational occupations such as media and computing progression a step towards higher education is often regarded by learners and tutors as a necessary in further training and education. In some colleges the relative success of engaging students within specific vocational areas was not as successful as was hoped. Changes in personnel, problems in timing or communication sometimes undermined attempts to form the links and develop meaningful programmes of learner involvement.

Communication with and the Raising of Awareness of Tutors

Has the Advocate achieved the Building Pathways of holding at least 2 staff development events? (Target 4)

Has the Advocate achieved the Building Pathways objective of raising awareness of Building Pathways aims and objectives amongst staff (Target 6)

All Advocates interviewed had attempted to impress on vocational tutors and sometimes management what the Building Pathways programme was and how it differed from other progression strategies such as 'Aim Higher'. They responded to meeting this target in ways which depended on their particular college circumstances.

In those colleges where either the number of tutors involved in vocational courses was relatively small or based upon a single campus the opportunities to initially disseminate information came through existing channels of staff communication such as staff and management meetings, staff inset day programmes or by face-to-face discussion with tutors. In a large multi-campus organisation which did not provide such opportunities the Advocates adopted different strategies:

The college is organised around tutor groups, so each personal tutor has 20 students . . . so I went through them. So they organised the sessions for me to attend and I just went basically and did it . . . There are 80 personal tutors...that's vocational ones . . . that's at this centre. . .So it's a big operation and I couldn't hope to know. [A3]

I took on curriculum areas where I already knew tutors . . . contacting people who already knew me with other hats on. [A4]

Advocates had to be aware of the other demands on tutor time such as the teaching workload. Depending on college policy staff had identified periods for development on their timetables within which Advocates could access them while staff in other institutions did not. In those situations the Advocate had to work with diplomacy around the constraints to achieve their Targets:

I have to push a bit to get slots on the timetable because the timetable is very precious. [A5]

The main obstacle was the lack of other staff having time. . . you can very easily get peoples' backs up, because they're just very busy. They haven't got the head space for it. So I decided I was going to try and offer something, I was going to be helpful, hence going into tutor groups. [A3]

The effectiveness of the Advocate was directly affected by the general attitude of tutors towards learner progression. Initially in two colleges this meant working against resistance from tutors involved with traditional vocational courses. This seems to have derived from the competing demands on their time and the novelty of what was being proposed. Some staff were dubious about the need for progression when the existing training and qualifications were regarded as adequate.

I had to chase them. More so with the Building Pathways than the Aim Higher, because it is vocational. And the Lecturers working in vocational areas, particularly engineering, plumbing, construction, all that, they do tend to resist because they're not academic, they're grafters, and they feel that you learn how to do the job, and then that's it. They don't value, as much as academics, higher education. This is what I've found. And also, I found another drawback is because I'm female. Now that was a big one to get over. But saying that, they've all come around. [A6]

I: They [the tutors] see them as here to do this qualification and then go out and get a job. Is that the type of thing you're talking about?

That's one element of it . . . the view of tutors and the students are actually self-reinforcing in effect . . . The students want to come in because they want to get a qualification and so they can get a job, and that's it. [A5]

Finally a perception that through participation in the activities and events students may be lost to other institutions and course, had to be overcome:

The responses were very different from Senior Management team down to Lecturers. Basically I told them what Building Pathways was about, what I was expected to achieve in the year, what my Targets were etc. And initially there was quite a lot of, I wouldn't say negativity but...

I: Resistance?

R: Resistance. Yeah. They seemed to think that I wanted to get hold of the students and take them to another establishment. That's what they thought. [A6]

In contrast, where the widening participation agenda has a high profile in the college and the vocational courses on offer were orientated more towards the service sector, the response amongst tutors was positive and enthusiastic:

I've been inundated with requests . . . At lot of health and social care staff, IT staff, dance and media, came straight to me to request, in terms of activities, productions, trips out, wanting help and funding, and it's just grown since then . . . it really opened the eyes of our vocational staff . . . and then from that day. . .staff themselves began to use the term 'Building Pathways' . . . the handful that actually partake in activities. [A1]

I: How did the tutors respond to this, when you sent it round to them?

R: Well everyone was really positive . . . I just explained about the project and what the aims of it were and what I was hoping to do, asked them if they had any suggestions of ways in which they thought I could help, and I gave them examples of things that I could go in and help with...and then along the way I sent a few emails out saying you know 'I came to see you, have you thought of what I could come and do? What about if I come and do this...?' kind of thing, and in the absence of a suggestion from them I made them.

I: And did you get good feedback?

R: Yeah, well they've all been involved, I've been involved in all of the groups, perhaps bar the health and social care one as much. [A2]

Despite some Advocates encountering an initial lack of enthusiasm, once engaged with the practical aspects of the programme, the effect has been very positive. Because the Advocate has had a specific Target to co-ordinate a programme of events over the life of the programme it has required relatively consistent proactive engagement with tutors. Advocates have often suggested, supported or helped develop practical strategies that the tutors can be involved with, provide input into and directly benefit from.

[With] engineering because they are really progressive anyway, but there were still areas that they didn't realise they could, you know. Like going out on trips and things like that. They didn't think that was really them, and I said well, you know, if it's going to assist them in the work area, if they're just going to go and see another environment, see if it's done different there or whatever, and that's what they did, they started going out more. [A6]

I've had a lot of contact with the tutors on the pathways that I've identified . . . Whilst I've written [the handouts] I did them very much in tandem with the tutors, because the tutors are experts in their own right and have a lot of links and a lot of knowledge themselves and in some ways much more knowledge than I've got. And so it's quite complementary. [A5]

Consequently in many cases contact between the Advocate and tutors has led to tutors recognising the benefits that can accrue not only for the learners but the quality of their course. This seems to have raised the consciousness of those staff involved with the vocational courses which were identified by the Advocates in the objectives of the BP programme.

at the end they usually said, 'well I really thought I knew what this was going to be about and I didn't' you know, so that was quite good . . . they all did say to me afterwards that they were glad that they had [stayed in the tutorial], and they wouldn't have done if I had not made that comment, because of those sorts of pressures. [A3]

after working with the different departments, that [resistance] has changed. They realise now that it's just for the benefit of the students, and it's not to move them from [the college] and that is not my aim...but if a different establishment is better for the student then they will be told about it.

I: And that change in consciousness came through actually practical activities with them?

R: Yeah. [A6]

I: Do you think that helped reinforce or raise their consciousness about getting students involved?

R: Yeah, I think certainly in terms of information about things like the foundation degrees and things like that and local provision. And we had a number of them who did come to the opportunities evening as well which was really good. So certainly those from the ICT route came and listened to the talks, and they said that they found it really informative, especially things like the industry and where the opportunities are and things... [A2]

The recognition of the value of the programme has been translated into both a positive response and practical support for its objectives. Regardless of the nature of the

activity or event Advocates have reported that the networking with staff has created an effect which will inform future activity:

The contact has been maintained, yes. They've said, 'you know so-and-so who you spoke to, they are now applying, can you look out for the application form'. That kind of contact. Or I might get a phone call where they will say 'my tutor said I had to ring you about this' and ask a question. So it has made an impact. [A3]

I: So the relationship would be getting stronger through the BP work?

R: I've already been asked from like the ICT tutor and the travel and tourism tutor...who said that they were pleased with the work I've done this year and can I come back and so the same, so I've already got stuff lined up ready for next year. [A2]

The tutors that I've worked with on all Aim Higher and BP have all been very enthusiastic and they've all been interested enough to stay in the classroom. If we've had an external speaker in, they've attended. If it's just been me delivering extra information, they've been there. Student conferences, they go to. I've had lots and lots of tutor participation . . .

I think they're taking on the idea. They can see the value in it now. They've got over the nervousness bit which they did initially... but yeah, they can see the value in it and they can see that if there's anything extra that we can do for the students, that they've previously not been able to do within their school, then it's got to be a good thing. And that's the feedback that I'm getting now.

I: And they want to carry on?

R: Yes. Performing arts are already booked up,

I: And how about the upper Management in relation to that? Have you had any feedback from them?

I've had great feedback saying 'well done, that's been very useful' and 'do you think you could include this school, as well as doing it with that school, if you're going to do it anyway?' So yeah, I've had some really good feedback.

I: So generally you think that over the year through the Building Pathways project you've been able to develop quite good links with areas that you wouldn't have done before in many ways?

R: Yeah definitely. Definitely. . . raised awareness is like 100 percent. [A6]

From the Advocates point of view there appears to have been a positive impact on the perception of those tutors who have been directly involved with the activities and events they have promoted over the life span of Building Pathways programme. However a knowledge of what the programme is and what it means is confined to those tutors directly engaged. A general awareness within the college environment has not been achieved.

with a lot of staff they would have a hazy notion [of BP], they would know it's to do with me and they would know it's mainly vocational, but I think if you asked them anything more in depth than that then they probably wouldn't know. Apart from the people who've had direct contact either with myself or Judy. [A5]

If I were to walk around the college and ask which of the staff know what Building Pathways is, I think 75% would say 'we're pretty sure' and 25% wouldn't have a clue. Just because Aim Higher has always come first. [A1]

Impact on Vocational Learners

Has the Advocate achieved the Building Pathways objective of co-ordinating an agreed programme of events for L3 learners? (Target 2)

Have learners participated in activities and events in such a way that their perceptions about the possibility of progression have been altered for the good? (Target 5)

The success of Advocates to engage and then sustain enthusiasm within the learner about progression and transition to higher education depends on their age, commitments and responsibilities. The opportunity to consider any realistic progression for the mature student can easily be outweighed by the immediate demands on their lives. If already committed to a course of study they can be highly instrumental in their attitude. It was clear for the Advocate operating within a local Adult Education College that with limited time of attendance at the college the objective for many of the vocational learners was to concentrate on and achieve their

immediate learning goals, namely to improve existing or immediate future employment opportunities:

it's very difficult to get attendance on anything here that's not timetabled and hasn't got a credit attached to it. Because mature students, like adults generally, have very busy lives, and they're trying to balance studying with working, with children, with looking after elderly parents and so on and so forth. . . what they want to do is just focus on their learning, and they're not ever so keen on other things coming in. And I suppose they're working during the week so they want to make the most of their time...so they've got a particular focus. [A5]

Such a situation makes the job of the Advocate difficult because the programme of events and activities are constrained by the external demands on the learner and what they regard as of value.

the mentoring scheme didn't work as successfully as I would have liked. . . it was partly a thing about being labelled...and there was a feeling that if you ask me if I need support then it meant that you're seen as not capable and may be struggling. So there was a real element around that and also there was a feeling that there was enough support in the college generally from personal tutors and so on [A5]

Their study horizon may for many not realistically include further progression in the immediate future. Also the participation in voluntary activities connected with progression and transition has to be weighed against existing commitments and study time. Consequently the type and nature of activity have to be tailored to the situation:

The ones that worked best were the ones that went into timetabled slots. Because it was like a captive audience really. . . I've done... general things around talking about higher education generally. . . I've done specific things on student finance, things like budgeting, things like life at university, part time higher education options, I've done three visits [and] I'll tell you [the] attendance was poor.

I: What else did you do?

R: I did individual interviews with students...and again the feedback there has been pretty positive . . . helping with progression, that's worked quite well, so that's not been mentoring in the formal sense but instead it's been linking people up [A5]

Even though the form and range of activities was limited to small group and one-to-one activities the opportunity for learners to be exposed to information about, for example, the costs and value of higher education were beneficial. The new role of Advocate in the college has made a significant improvement in at least raising the consciousness of vocational students to the possibilities of progression:

the feedback that I've had from the students [about seminars in student finance] they actually feel more positive about it, and certainly more positive than people in previous years with the old system.

I: Did you get much feedback [about the seminars]?

R: Variable. . .because the sessions were quite different and were looking at different things . . . where I actually did the measurement of whether it changed their perceptions about HE....the community regeneration, where I actually went in and saw them as a timetabled group, 46 percent of them said it made them think more about applying to HE, and that was a group of 13 students. With the trade union, actually 100 percent, all of them said that it made them think more about going onto HE. That was a group of 15 students. And within those, the majority would be part time study rather than full time although some are thinking about full time, which is quite interesting. [A5]

Learners in adult education fit well into the widening participation, progression and transition agenda however they are not typical of the predominantly younger students that most Advocates in this study have been engaged with. The relative success of an Advocate to introduce learners to the benefits of progression and transition to some extent echo the concerns of tutors when they were initially approached. The perception of the learners varies and can be influenced by factors such as home background. Approximately 52% of the learners who responded to the questionnaire had family members who held a higher education qualification while 69% had considered the idea of applying to Higher education.

Question	No. of Responses and approximate % of Total Sample (220)		
	Yes	No	Don't Know
Has any family member studied for a degree in H.E?	115 (52%)	86 (39%)	18 (8%)
Has any family taken an HE Vocational course?	48 (22%)	95 (44%)	75 (34%)
Before attending college have you considered applying for a HE course or qualification	152 (69%)	31 (14.%)	35 (16%)

Although it is not evident from the responses to the question, the inference could be that the high percentage of learners who already had a perception of progression to Higher Education had come into contact with progression strategies such as 'Aim Higher' which in collaboration with colleges and universities, have created links that enable networking between the different levels of the education system. Learners exposed to these types of projects and positive peer pressure may be more receptive to the idea of progression and transition than those who have not. The initial introduction of learners to the objectives of the programme would be significantly enhanced when on joining a vocational course at a college they were familiar with the idea of extending education and training. This may help cultivate an environment within which peer support as well as Advocate efforts can sustain the idea of progression and transition.

I introduce myself to them, have a meeting, and it's when we talk about various activities they go on that they get really enthusiastic about it. So it's not sold as in, 'you need help', clearly not . . . if they didn't like what I was saying or if they weren't sure about what I was saying, they would talk to other Building Pathways students from last year, 05 and 06 and say 'well what happens, what do we do?' and that's all been in the main, so they can do that... 'cos as soon as you talk about trips and things they're quite happy with that. [A1]

Learners on particular vocational routes were more likely to have some understanding of progression and transition than others:

Not many of them, at the beginning, asked for anything to do with Universities. They were more concerned about the workplace, wanting to know how that worked.

I: That was across engineering, arts and media and childcare?

R: It was across two. The engineering and the childcare. The performing arts were more interested in how to get onto University to progress.

I: Did you give them an introduction as to what the costs would be to go onto higher education?

R: Yeah.

I: And what was the response?

R: Very mixed. A lot of them seemed to think that spending that money to be able to go onto HE, and going to open days and things like that, would be a waste of their money. But a lot of them were quite interested and said 'well if I wanted to progress to...I don't know...Director, then I would need to go to University and get different qualifications' and they were interested. [A6]

Therefore the opportunity for Advocates to effectively achieve Target 5 relies upon a combination of external influences and the internal policies of the college including:

- Whether learners who arrive on vocational courses have previous knowledge about the possibilities and benefits of progression and transition.
- Whether learners are receptive to the idea and recognise the value of progression and transition.
- Whether learners have the opportunity to engage with activities and events that are part of a *college strategy and culture* which supports and encourages progression and transition

All Advocates achieved Target 2 by implementing or facilitating a variety of activities and events within their respective colleges. Issues surrounding initial implementation of the role and their existing responsibilities influenced the effectiveness of Advocates. Those Advocates whose responsibilities also encompassed broader college progression strategies such as 'Aim Higher' or whose role was associated with college wide student development and progression or careers were able to highlight and then connect the Building Pathways Programme with other progression activities and events held within their colleges thereby helping to facilitate the targeted vocational students into new and existing projects. Linked to this were those who allowed learners to participate by allowing them to voice their concerns and interests.

If it's a bit of paper some information yes its useful, but we've seen ourselves when we have activities . . . its more effective to talk to somebody and have that time to discuss, find out more information and get a different viewpoint. [A7]

to go in and do the general briefings [or] a power point presentation . . .I don't think . . . had as much impact as individual [interviews], only talking to that person and finding out...because they've all got different barriers and different questions. . . I gave them additional support and spoke to the tutors so we got them moved on. So I think that made a difference. [A2]

Well they wanted to know what Building Pathways was. Some of them had already heard of Aim Higher, but not many, and some of them thought that it was connected to Aim Higher. The response was really good. I mean, I told them who I was, what the situation was, where the money was coming from, and the whole global view of it. And then asked them what they thought would be the best way to spend the funding.

I: And what sort of feedback did they give you?

R: some of them came up with some really good ideas and. . . what would have been really helpful to them would be to go out to a real live company and see how they really do it...because they thought that within college, it was simulated, and they would like the opportunity to see how it was done in a proper industry. . . Others said that they would like to speak to somebody who actually knew the industry rather than a Lecturer . . . [A6]

By responding to the suggestions of specific groups of learners this Advocate introduced external speakers who addressed their interests with significant results:

they were told about how to progress to Foreman and how to progress to Site Manager, and what qualifications and which areas they needed to go to, and that proved to be really beneficial . . . approximately 30 students attended, and out of that 25 stayed behind and asked questions of the people that had come. Out of those 25, I think it was 15 I would later be quoted to, to actually progress onto the next course. [A6]

What made a qualitative difference in fulfilment of Target 5 however have been the opportunities open to the Advocate to offer a learner a *structured programme* that would develop and sustain awareness and enthusiasm for further training and education. By far the most successful activities engaged learners with the practical world of work and the opportunity for them to become actively involved in projects with concrete achievements and outcomes.

I think what's happened best out of all of it, for me, that I feel the students gained most out of, is the performing arts one. Because it was constructed for a full year, and it had everything in it, it had visits, it had external speakers, it had connections with Universities. . . I think the whole thing together works much better than a trip to London that's a one off and they've been back a fortnight and they've forgotten what the benefit was. I think a whole year's project with everything combined is the best way that it can be. [A6]

We got Sheffield Hallam Volunteering. . . with a target bunch of students who they taught how to design their own website. And at the end of that, all the students went to Sheffield Hallam, had a tour and saw their website uploaded on the system. Great success. . . Apart from having an end product . . . all those students, all 16 students, had not thought, or so they said, had not even thought about University at the start, before Christmas. So after that, especially having then been to Sheffield Hallam, seeing that it's not a scary place, and seeing the IT department, they have all said they are now going to apply...locally. I think 100 per cent have said they are going to apply. . . Other highlights have been...the B-Tech Forensic students going on workshops to. . . put the theory of forensic science into practice. And this is where Building Pathways has been really useful. . . they actually sat down, were presented with talks on forensics in University, workshops which involved interviewing ex-criminals etc . . . which was quite different but it worked very well. [A1]

inter media and performing arts . . NVQ level 2 and level 3. And they've done remarkable things. They've been connected with Leeds University . . . a group called **Tie-Dye** . . . they give you information on HE . . . deliver maybe a session in the HE format. And then they'll take them to the University and show them around. They'll have postgraduates coming in and discussing their experiences etc and they also help with things like filling in the UCAS,

you know the personal statements and things like that, which has been really helpful. [A6]

Individual events such as opportunity evenings or careers fairs are useful and informative. It gives the opportunity for staff to be engaged in activity they may not have been involved with before and may encourage some students who wish to return to study to take the necessary steps. Both for the staff and learners these types of events are useful in helping to raise the profile of learner progression and transition. However they do rely on appropriate timing and learners volunteering attendance.

The only other thing that I would say is not successful . . . would be the fair we had at the hut. We had a Building Pathways / Go Higher / Stay Local fair . . . where you have lots of stalls, lots of exhibitions, from all the lead players. So all the colleges in the locality, all the local Universities, as far as Huddersfield, Barnsley, Doncaster. So all the big ones are there, but it was poorly attended. [Also] we tried to organise...a big media project we had, what we had planned with the media students, so we're talking a big cohort here, B-Tech media, B-Tech performing arts, dance and drama. . . That fell through for various reasons. . . it never took off simply because of organisation I think, on staff and student's part. . . I think we tried to bite off more than we could chew with that one. [A1]

The only thing I would say with that was that we had hoped that more people would attend [the opportunities evening] than did. But you can't force people to go to them...so we advertised that everywhere but we didn't get as many people as we would have liked. [A2]

The following factors may have also influenced the achievements of the Advocates:

- The profile and weight given to the progression and transition agenda within the institution and/or vocational area addressed. If learner progression and transition is a central element in college policy and has a high profile amongst the staff of the institution.
- The character of the organisation within which they had to operate. In particular the mechanisms that exist within the institution that are designed to

fulfil the progression and transition agenda. If the college has within the management structure a system of cross college student support and development groups that can provide support for staff and learners.

- The degree to which the role of Advocate could complement their existing role within the institution. If the Advocate is directly associated with college support and progression systems they could integrate vocational activities within the context of broader college strategy.
- The opportunity for the Advocate to utilise existing and complementary progression activities which include a vocational dimension.
- The type of activities and events that engage and re-enforce the notion of the possibility and value of progression.

The number of campuses and the size of the college over which the Advocate needed to operate. The larger the college and more decentralized the campuses the greater the need for the Advocate to be associated with college wide support and progression mechanisms.

Has awareness of the Building Pathways aims and objectives been raised amongst learners?

Although there is some variation between colleges, the general response across the sample was that many learners were unaware of the Building Pathways initiative even though, as Advocates pointed out, they are told about what it is and may have been given literature that advertises the fact when they were engaged in the various activities and events.

Question	No. of Responses and approximate % of Total Sample (220)	
	Yes	No
Have you heard of the Building Pathways initiative?	74 (34%)	144 (65%)
Have you attended any Building Pathways events or activities?	62 (28%)	154 (70%)

Even though the learners may not have been aware of the name of the Building Pathways initiative a positive attitude was registered in approximately half the sample, with just under a quarter of respondents who did attend the events and activities organised feeling very positive, about progression and transition.

Question	No. of Responses and approximate % of Total Sample (220)				
	Very Positive	Fairly Positive	No Change	Less Positive	Negative
Have you become more positive about attending HE since attending the Building Pathways events and activities?	51 (23%)	64 (29%)	71 (32%)	7 (3%)	10 (4.5%)

In the longer term 86% of respondents who attended Building Pathways events and activities said that they would study for a higher education qualification or degree in the next ten years.

Recording Mechanisms

Have new recording mechanisms for monitoring progression of learners from Level 3 been created? (Target 7)

Is there a record of a 5-10% increase in learners from vocational programmes into under-graduate programmes. (Target 3)

At present new recording mechanisms for monitoring progress are in their infancy and consequently the ability to record whether there has been a 5-10% in learners into under-graduate programmes is as yet unknown. At the time of the research Advocates were waiting for the results of examinations before being able to assess whether or not learners had achieved the required qualifications in order to progress.

7. The Advocate and the Outcomes of Implementing the Targets

The instigation of the Advocate role in each college has provided a focus for thinking about vocational progression both for the learners, the tutors and managers involved.

What has emerged from the research is vocational progression and transition has begun to have its profile lifted and differing activities have been embedded within the programme of the differing institutions. The Targets and the support and guidance given by the Building Pathways team provided a framework from which to develop individual strategies:

These were given to us at the start, by Judy, and I can remember the meeting we had, there was some debate as to whether this was too prescriptive or whether it was helpful...and I'm one of those that find it absolutely necessary, because it guides me...even though I have my own ideas, as soon as I got that I thought 'right, I can now target these students that we've already got, in terms of the activities here'... [A1]

Similarly the extra time allowance for the role created changes in some of the Advocates' existing roles by directing their energy and resources towards the Target remit outcomes giving them new priorities:

For me personally it's been a success in the way that I've said, in that it's meant that I can earmark certain pieces of work and prioritise them and complete them. So I think that has been the success of it. . . it forced me to look at other areas which I knew I needed to look at but which weren't really the priorities. [A5]

I: By doing this project it's made you re-think your particular role?

R: Yeah. It has definitely.

I: So for you, in your role, it helps you to divide up and allocate time and energy.

R: Definitely it does. If it was all together under the Aim Higher hat and people in the college found that I had got 3 days to do Aim Higher, I would be pulled into the more academic side, and not given as much time to work with engineering, construction etc, that I would like.

I: So it ring fences that.

R: It does. [A6]

Advocates have used their time to raise consciousness and develop activities with vocational tutors and for learners in a variety of ways. The main consequence of this has been the creation of a series of events and activities that:

Include new activities and/or complement existing projects to overcome barriers of resistance amongst tutors and learners.

The full year project there was totally brand new for performing arts, they'd never done anything like it. So the engineering is basically complementing what they're already doing because they're really good at what they're doing anyway, childcare yes, brand new, motivational speakers . . . now that [BP] is up and running and people know what it's about and as soon as I say 'BP' they understand where I'm coming from, then I think it's great. It's valuable to members of staff, it's valuable to the students and everything...you can see it moving forward now, rather than...wading through treacle, as it was originally. So yeah, it's got a lot better over the year. [A6]

Connect up with external agencies via links such as 'Aim Higher' and other external activities such as the Ambassador project

I contacted the people at Leeds, we discussed it, and it was Leeds that delivered it, but we also had the Connexions person that is timetabled to work with IPA, he was involved as well, I got reports back from him, I got reports back from Leeds, and I also got reports back from the Course Leaders etc from IPA. So it was initially my idea, but I didn't deliver any of it, if you know what I mean. It was organised with the people that were needed to do it, and got them together. [A6]

Cause Advocates to reflect upon what activities and events work and what did not.

R: I think what we will look at is doing focused activity, as opposed to information sessions . . . events where they come in and are a student for the day. That kind of thing. I think we will look towards doing more of that in the future [A3]

we are thinking of doing [an opportunities fair] again this year, but doing something that's more on an afternoon through to teatime, so it's not in the evening, because a lot of the feedback we've had was from students who

said 'oh I'd like to come but I've got a job and I'm working' that kind of thing, so we're going to have a bit of a think about doing that perhaps at a different time this time around or maybe linking it in with some of the other events. [A2]

Have begun the process of developing and embedding strategies to target specifically vocational learners.

I know where the successes were this year and where the failures were this year, and I can address those in September. [A1]

we've never had open evenings for HE, we routinely do them for all the level 2 stuff, but we've never had them before for HE so that's a new development for the college, which will be sustained now that we've done it.. [A3]

a questionnaire . . . it links really well with the Building Pathways because it gives them a real idea of them as an individual, based on what they currently like and how they are doing in their subjects, what opportunities are out there that they could go for. So we are going to use that as a tool at the start. [A2]

Have raised the profile of vocational progression and transition within their colleges and started to build and sustain connections with vocational areas

in terms of spreading the word, and building those links in. I mean even the little things, like sending posters to people and knowing they're going to put them up...I can do with confidence now. Which might sound a minor thing, but it's all part of having a presence across the college.

I: Right. So in that sense BP gave you that space to actually create something like that?

R: Yes. [A3]

I think that the change in attitudes over the year, towards Building Pathways, that type of activity that is not the norm within the work based learning, I think that will continue. They won't go back to the preconceived ideas. So therefore any new activities that come up, they will be a bit more open minded about. And I think that's a huge step forward in that area.

I: And they want to carry on?

R: Yes. Performing arts are already booked up, I've got a meeting with that lady in a fortnight's time to just do the final details.

I: ...so they got to know you?

R: Oh yes, they got to know me. Everybody knows me...yeah they got to know me. [A6]

I've already been asked from like the ICT tutor and the travel and tourism tutor...who said that they were pleased with the work I've done this year and can I come back and so the same, so I've already got stuff lined up ready for next year. [A2]

Have begun the process of creating databases and tracking/recording systems.

What I've done as we've been going through is keeping data as we've been going on, on students as to where they are with their ideas. . .it's a new thing that's come as a result of this.

I: And do you think that you will build on that?

R: I will certainly use it from now on, yeah, because it means that I can keep tabs much more on students and identify potential problems, it means I can see people who are just drifting...it's more easy. [A5]

Target 7 is being worked on at the moment . . what I'm going to do is get the UCAS 3 report, that comes out in September, and the UCAS 1 and 2 that comes out prior, and then I will look at the data there, and look at the 7 partner schools, so we will have a 'how many came from our partner schools, joined the Building Pathways cohort, and have progressed to do what and on what course?' [A1]

one of the things we are now doing that we didn't do before...the college is now going to track AS completers. . . that's just not tracked. So that is going to be tracked for the first time this year, which I think could make a difference. [A3]

what I've decided, for my project this year, is to design a database that has all the activities on, the students that have participated and for each teaching area, the progression routes. [A6]

8. A Model for Advocate Implementation

Potential for 'Best Practice'

The role made each Advocate re-address how they operated and reflect upon past and possible future strategies. Taking into consideration the different models in operation it would appear that the most effective Advocate is someone who can focus upon *networking* within and outside the college. This involves

- building links between college vocational areas, higher education institutions and higher education provision within the college.
- being able to access college data systems and *communicate* with the various learner support and management systems within the college.
- promoting and *facilitating* activities that have a lifespan beyond that of single events and therefore become part of vocational course programmes.

Therefore to fulfil the Advocate role effectively it would be desirable that the incumbent was a dedicated member of staff who possessed at least the following attributes:

- a good knowledge and understanding of the relevant college management systems and courses associated with the promotion of learner transition and progression:
- a good knowledge and understanding of participation in regional activities and developments in learner support, transition and progression between F.E. and H.E.
- possess good organisational and communication skills: to initiate, communicate and develop ideas and activities with managers, careers tutors, subject tutors and learners across the FE/H.E. divide which promote, support and persuade participants that vocational progression is inherently valuable.
- be able to develop a clear programme of sustainable activities that would become embedded within vocational courses and lead towards the opportunity for further study.

- possess good administrative skills: to access college database systems, identify relevant data and develop recording mechanisms and databases that focus upon transition and progression.
- the Advocate may not necessarily require an intimate knowledge of the learner but have an understanding of the issues and barriers facing students and be able to advise and direct them to the appropriate individuals or activities from which they may benefit.

9. Conclusion

The experiences of the Advocates varied considerably between the colleges. What they share is a strong commitment to the learners and a desire to see them progress. The relative effectiveness in their role as Advocate was influenced by a variety of factors beyond their control including time allocated for the role, the relative size of the college within which they had to operate and their position within college organisational structure. Those Advocates within institutions which were relatively small and had a strong commitment to promoting student progression; whose existing position aligned closely with the needs of the role; who had access to other resources and immediate management support, tended to be more effective. That said all Advocates have had a positive impact within their individual institutions. New ideas and strategies have emerged that can be built upon in the future.

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Glossary

In order to ensure confidentiality participants have been identified by letters