

Project funding proposal to the Higher Education Funding Council for England

'Improving the HE/FE progression interface through Excellence Challenge: useful lessons for partnerships'

Submitted by: the London Aimhigher:P4P Team on behalf of the Central London Partnership (lead institution: University of Westminster), July/August 2003

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Context and purpose of the proposal

The proposal addresses two issues: first, the need to find effective methods of bringing HE and FE together to encourage progression and retention for FE students. The second, the need to bring staff from FE and HE together in order to ensure mutual understanding through curriculum development and the identification of staff development opportunities.

The proposal is for work in central London, north of the Thames (the boroughs of Camden, Islington, Kensington & Chelsea, and the City of Westminster). It will build on the findings of previous projects undertaken jointly by FE/HE. (*see, for example, 'Widening Participation into Higher Education- An interim report by Paul Smith for the Learning and Skills Council on the 2001 Further Education College -led projects'*). Particular attention will be given to generating lessons and learning materials of wider applicability to Aimhigher practitioners in London and nationally, the dissemination of which will be arranged in partnership with Action on Access.

The proposal utilises the close links made between HEIs, FECs and Excellence Challenge Co-ordinators, all of whom are involved in the Central London Partnership. The detailed planning and implementation of the various phases of the project would be overseen by a strand steering Group which would draw together the planning and experience of FE, HE and Excellence Challenge. Delivery of projects will be embedded within joint P4P/Excellence Challenge planning.

The importance of finding appropriate and effective methods of facilitating progression from FE to HE is clearly vital to an effective widening participation strategy (especially so given the development of Foundation Degree work). 43% of all those currently progressing into HE do so from the FE sector. They are often students from disadvantaged backgrounds or under-represented groups. (Their socio-economic profile is skewed towards the manual working class than is that of school students.) They face greater challenges in gaining entry to HE and in remaining there. Strong perceptions exist both in HE and FE about the difficulties of FE students gaining entry and about the need for greater skills development when they do enter HE. In addition, most WP practitioners agree that work in FE requires greater planning and resources if it is to succeed. Pupils in schools are often a 'captive audience' for events. This is not so for pupils in FE. Specific methods need to be developed both to engage the students and to encourage dialogue between staff in the two sectors.

Central London has a long -standing link between HEI's and Excellence Challenge co-ordinators. Areas of common work have included: raising awareness of HE. Provision of information and guidance, preparation for HE study, raising aspirations and motivation, raising attainment and enriching the curriculum, facilitating progression routes, sharing access to HE facilities, developing partnerships and disseminating good practice. Due to this existing excellent partnership work, the CLP HE/FE progression interface proposal would enable good practice to be built on. It would aim to generate results that could be usefully disseminated on a national basis.

Project elements

1 Planning of Programme- Year one. Research and dialogue to underpin activity

As it is important to have an evidence base from which to develop a planned programme of delivery, the preliminary stage of the programme will be devoted to research. This stage will pull together existing information from projects that have worked in the area of FE/HE to formulate best practice guidelines and to look at what does work in practice. The preliminary stage will take the form of the following:

- Dialogue with FE colleagues will be ongoing to identify areas of input with HE for the a) identification of the students most likely to benefit from activities b) teaching strategies for learning support and study skills c) staff development opportunities. This dialogue will include staff with HE/FE interface experience such as those FE staff who have taken part in the Excellence Challenge Fellowship programme of staff exchange.
- Research will include material drawn from previous and existing HEFCE (and other funding organisations) funded projects working in this field; guidance from Action on Access. Example: The Learning Brokers project funded by the Learning and Skills Research Centre and based at the Institute of Access Studies at Staffordshire University. This research work incorporates the Academic Literacy programme (Winter Schools) developed at the University of Westminster.
- From this research process there will be a programme of tailored activities drawn up that can be delivered to FE students. These activities will be tested, monitored and refined in practice. A pilot will be developed in this first year.
- From the pilot there will be an investigation of accreditation for FE students who would take part in the programme activities.
- A method of evaluating and monitoring the programme will be set in place.

2a Programme Delivery: Year 1 pilot activities. Year 2 & 3 delivery of programme.
Indicative activities that could be offered. This could be changed and redefined in line with the planning phase.

Curriculum Enrichment:

Intensive course to improve Communication skills for study.

It is the experience of WP practitioners that one of the barriers faced by FE students is that of under-developed academic literacy skills. This is often reported by academic staff teaching first year undergraduates and seems to particularly focus on those entering with vocational qualifications. The aim of this course would be both to prepare students for the rigours of academic study at HE and to improve their academic performance in FE.

This might build on the pilot Winter School programme which took place on Saturdays in 2003 (delivered by University of Westminster and Westminster Kingsway College). The

Winter School is a bridging course to HE enabling students to develop their learning skills for progression to University. Students were recruited through Excellence Challenge co-ordinators. Curriculum includes: Reading, finding information, listening/speaking, note taking, the language of discussion, academic writing: vocabulary, structure and style. Evaluation of the pilot programme demonstrated a need to refine and adapt the curriculum for the needs of ESOL students. During the course additional teaching was needed for reading skills and time was spent teaching the International Phonetic Alphabet. As a result the bridging course will now be amended to provide extra literacy support for those learners who do not have English as a first language. Refugee Council Statistics show there are 82,000 children of asylum seekers and refugee families in UK schools and there are many other for whom English is not the family language. Therefore, it is hoped that refugees /asylum seekers could be aided by this programme. The course would be delivered jointly by HE and FE lecturers and would have the effect of increasing understanding between the two sectors.

Target groups:

- Post-16 FE students; Year 12 and upwards. FE colleagues would be asked to identify those students who are close to achieving the necessary standards for HE entry but need additional support.
- Students for whom English is not their first language
- Teaching staff in HE and FE.

Outcomes for participating students

- Increased academic ability
- Improved study skills
- Greater likelihood of achieving entry to HE
- Greater likelihood of remaining in HE

Outcomes for participating HE and FE staff:

- Greater understanding by FE staff of admissions processes and entry requirements for HE; sharing of teaching materials and resources;
- Involvement of a wider group in curriculum design and development of material for accreditation.
- Greater understanding by HE staff with School subject specs at various key stages

Delivery:

The courses will be delivered by staff from HE and FE and Ambassador students to the target group of 50 students who have the potential to enter HE but need additional support both to gain the necessary entry qualifications and to successfully complete their university studies. This programme could run throughout the year. Other activities building on existing HE/FE links and experience would be incorporated. Subject specific work with FE students could be developed.

Activities and targets:

Year 1: planning of curriculum with FE and Excellence Challenge partners. Development of materials based on previous work with FE done in universities and on academic literacy modules delivered in HE.

Year 2: Delivery of the course (with possible accreditation as outlined above)

Partners: HEIs (University of Westminster lead incorporating other HEIs from partnership); Excellence Challenge Co-ordinators, FE college partners.

2b FE/HE staff collaboration programme. Year 2 and 3.

Components:

Partners for delivery: Aimhigher partners in the four boroughs; London Metropolitan University, Kings College London, University of Westminster, FE Colleges.

The purpose of this programme is to take forward discussion between FE and HE colleagues in the context of greater collaboration between sectors. It is our experience that progress is made when opportunities are created for dialogue across sector. To give one example when discussion took place at a recent Learning Exchange event involving FE/HE colleagues, a significant point arose. Colleagues felt that there was a contrast between a culture of directed learning in FE and the tendency for self directed learning in HE. The issue was how to prepare FE students for the different demands of this learning environment.

Staff Collaboration programme will be lead by Aim higher partners in collaboration with HEIs. The purpose to ensure that the programme is firmly embedded within HE and FE.

Year 1: Establish focus groups for lecturers and teachers; observation of teaching strategies; sharing of teaching provision and resources; establishment of a forum for discussion.

Year 2: Sharing of teaching resources to deliver academic workshops and master classes. Staff shadowing of activities to develop teaching tools and curriculum for progression. Incorporation of results into INSET days for FE colleges and into Learning and Teaching Strategy groups in HEIs. As advised by Action on Access.

Target group: Academic staff involved across HE and FE in selected departments.

Outcomes for participating HE and FE staff

- Sharing of expertise on relevant teaching and learning methods. FE colleagues are particularly knowledgeable about techniques of learning support. HE colleagues have strengths in new developments in subject areas.
- Updating on selected subject area developments. HE colleagues need to be informed about new qualifications and need to look at FE curriculum to ensure relevance for the first year undergraduate studies. The experience of Foundation degrees will be relevant.
- Greater understanding of the mechanics of curriculum design. Making the transition from FE to HE study a more structured process.
- Fostering lasting subject-level links across the sectoral divide; development of new ideas for teaching.
- Collaboration between FE and HE on INSET programmes.
- Greater understanding of qualifications and admissions to HE both by staff in FE preparing students for entry and staff in HE looking at admissions.

Outcomes for the Aimhigher target student groups:

- Move towards more seamless progression routes
- Subject area updating from HEIs with cutting-edge research
- Greater understanding of their needs by HEI admissions and student support staff

3 National dissemination programme

In January 2003 the DfES published the White Paper 'The Future of Higher Education' in which the Government reinforced its commitment to widening and increasing participation of young people in Higher Education towards 50% of those aged 18-30. The key task of the Aimhigher programme is to consolidate and improve the links between Schools, Colleges and Higher Education Institutions with the aim of raising young people's aspirations to HE. From April 2004 Aimhigher:P4P will form one national outreach programme. Operating intensively in the most disadvantaged areas.

The Central London Partnership is unique in the London region in having full Excellence Challenge coverage of its target area. The aim of this programme is to draw out useful lessons, fully engage Excellence Challenge in the management, planning and delivery of programme activities and to inform practice nationally.

Components:

Partners for delivery: Aimhigher Partners identified in HE/FE/ Excellence Challenge Co-ordinators.

Year 3: Establish findings from the FE/HE staff collaboration programme and HE Curriculum enrichment programme.

Publicise report.

Establish and publicise a series of workshops and other methods of disseminating best practice.

Organise a conference with academic staff and student Ambassador input.

Launch enhanced dissemination tools, including web pages.

Outcomes

- Greater mutual understanding of FE and HE pedagogy by academic staff
- Updating staff on FE and HE curriculum.
- Enhancement of progression routes.
- Development of shared materials and teaching resources.
- Dissemination of findings on a national basis.

Target group: All HE and FE staff in the two sectors seeking guidance on work in this area. WP practitioners, policy makers and researchers.

Overall project management:

Governance: Strategic planning will be steered by the CLP strand steering group.

Operational delivery to be managed by the P4P Manager. Project components set in place by the FE/HE Interface Programme Co-ordinator (0.5).

Monitoring and Evaluation: Monitoring will focus on reviewing the continuing appropriateness of the programme outcomes. Reviewing the allocation of resources. Informing future development work in the partner institutions. Evaluation will be concerned with the programme processes and outcomes. Methods used will include focus groups, feedback forms, data collection.

Progress reports will be sent to: London Aimhigher:P4P Team /HEFCE / Action on Access/LSC.

Contribution and relevance to national Aimhigher policy development and strategy:

- With findings drawn from the programme: to use new methods of teaching to enhance the delivery of Foundation Degrees.
- Better knowledge by each sector of the students' teaching experiences and syllabuses.
- Involvement of Excellence Challenge co-ordinators through research project work, delivery of activities and dissemination of findings.
- Greater importance of shared knowledge across the sectors: maintaining a collaborative partnership structure within the programme.
- The programme to be used as an exemplar by other geographical and thematic partnerships across London and more widely.
- To embed best practice across sector and so ensure sustainability of programme outcomes.

Indicative Costings:£180k- 60K each year.

Programme Co-ordinator (0.5) £16,000 pa. Total £48,000

The following costs will also buy time for Excellence Challenge Co-ordinators.

Curriculum enrichment programme 40k over a two-year period.

FE/HE Collaborative programme 40k over a two year period

National dissemination 52k in the third year. This will include :

6 Workshops linking WP and Teaching and Learning Strategies. Shared learning from opportunities for observation and shared teaching strategies. 30k

One Conference incorporating a student Ambassador panel (the student voice) 10k

Website development . Production and dissemination of report . 12k

Compiled by:

Circulation: Action on Access, HEFCE, Universities UK, P4P team.