Special report

Higher education engagement with schools and colleges: partnership development
Contents

2 Foreword
3 Summary
1
4 Introduction
2
5 Types of engagement
3
16 Successful partnerships: what works?
4
19 Reflections and conclusions
Universities have long been committed to engaging with schools and colleges. They have established strong and enduring partnerships over many years, playing a central role in the drive to widen participation.

We welcome the fact that the National Council for Educational Excellence (NCEE) provides a forum that will increase understanding of higher education among those who influence prospective applicants to the sector, such as teachers and advisers. This initiative provides a valuable opportunity for us to demonstrate the scale, range and depth of links that have already been established with other parts of the education system. It also offers the opportunity to improve the understanding between higher education and schools and colleges and a means of reflecting on what works well and how existing links can be strengthened. The involvement of other sectors, including business, on the Council provides an opportunity to enhance their contribution to the development of the schools system.

This report is an updated version of the evidence submitted to the Council last year by every English university on how they work with schools to raise awareness of higher education, identify the potential in students and improve attainment in schools. A wide range of university activities is described, illustrating that ‘one-size does not fit all’. However, it is encouraging to see that there is a degree of consensus on what works well, as is illustrated in this comprehensive review of effective links between universities, schools and colleges. It is evident from this review that a strategic approach to widening participation, an appreciation of the resource that needs to be allocated in order to ensure success and ensuring that there is a mutual benefit are all critical to successful partnership development.

We welcome the recognition that schools, colleges and universities must all take ownership and share responsibility for pursuing this agenda. The Prime Minister’s vision for all primary and secondary schools in England to engage with higher education institutions represents a significant resource demand for universities although, as this report demonstrates, the two sectors are already working together in many ways to ensure that those who can benefit from higher education are offered the opportunity, regardless of background.

The sector is delighted to be working with the Council, through the ambassadors’ group, to take forward its recommendations. We hope that this report will complement the work of the ambassadors’ group in enhancing partnerships and facilitating cross-sector collaboration, with a view to building on the excellent work that is already in progress.

Professor Rick Trainor

President, Universities UK
Summary

The National Council for Educational Excellence (NCEE) was established by Gordon Brown, Prime Minister, in June 2007 to act as a sounding board about strategy and measures to deliver a world-class education system for children and young people up to the age of 19, with the support of education, business and the voluntary sector.

The Council asked universities to explore the part that they can play in supporting the development of educational excellence. Working with Universities UK, Professor Steve Smith, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Exeter and a member of the Council, presented a report in November 2007, summarising the many ways in which universities engage with and support schools and colleges, based on the responses to a survey of all vice-chancellors in England. One of the recommendations in the report was that Universities UK should build on the evidence provided in the survey responses to progress this agenda.

In response, Universities UK has produced this further report with support from Action on Access, the national coordination team for widening participation, which provides a typology of activities in this area, mapping out thematically the range of activities, links and interventions between schools, colleges and higher education institutions with examples of practice and reference to what we have been told works well. Attention is drawn to the familiar outreach activities that have been developed over a number of years, as well as to more recent innovative activity such as the establishment of learner progression frameworks and the delivery of university models in schools and colleges.

In addition, the report draws attention to the outcomes of a further survey undertaken by Universities UK on the continuing professional development opportunities provided by universities, with the aim of raising attainment in schools and colleges. The responses illustrate the range of continuing professional development opportunities available to schoolteachers, trainers and lecturers and provide examples of tailored programmes that support the aim of raising attainment in schools and colleges. This agenda is also supported by the research undertaken by many university education departments on a number of topics, such as strategies for including reluctant learners and supporting headteachers in areas of low achievement.

It is clear from the survey of the links provided by higher education institutions that partnerships are only successful where both parties gain from working closely together. This will be important in ensuring a commitment across all parts of the education sector, which will be vital in ensuring delivery.
1 Introduction

1 The National Council for Educational Excellence was established in 2007 to advise on how to develop a world-class education system in England to support educational excellence for children and young people up to the age of 19 and to explore how higher education, business and the voluntary sector can work more closely with headteachers, teachers and parents to achieve this aim.

2 Professor Steve Smith, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Exeter and a member of the Council, was asked to explore the part that universities can play in developing a world-class education system for children and young people up to the age of 19. Working with Universities UK, Professor Smith presented a report to the Council in November 2007, summarising the many ways in which universities engage with and support schools and colleges, based on the responses to a survey of all vice-chancellors in England. One of the report’s recommendations was that Universities UK should build on the evidence contained in the survey responses to progress this agenda. In response, Universities UK has produced this further report which maps thematically the range of activities, links and interventions between schools, colleges and higher education institutions, with examples of practice, and some recommendations aimed at producing further progress in this area.

3 In addition to the evidence provided by the original survey, this report includes information gathered through a separate survey of universities with teacher education departments. This survey was circulated in February 2008 and requested information on the work that had been done to raise attainment through continuing professional development and research activity. The information gathered through this survey is referred to in the section of this report on curriculum and staff development.

4 The body of this report is drawn from responses to the survey of vice-chancellors in England. The report does not cover activities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The report is not intended to be a good practice guide. Good practice guidance on different aspects of engagement and partnerships, such as widening participation activities, engaging with local communities or curriculum developments, is already available from a number of different sources, including expert organisations such as Action on Access, Aimhigher, Lifelong Learning Partnerships, the Higher Education Funding Council for England’s good practice guides and other bodies such as the Higher Education Academy and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.

5 The report does not make reference to the reform of the higher education applications process, which is being taken forward by the Delivery Partnership based at Universities UK and Guild HE and chaired by Sir Graeme Davies, Vice-Chancellor of the University of London. These reforms sit at the heart of any effective engagement with schools and colleges and are aimed at improving the transparency and effectiveness of the higher education applications process. A series of changes has been implemented, such as making it easier for applicants to understand the entry requirements of the courses available, giving applicants better feedback on their applications and allowing them to make better informed decisions about their higher education options. For further information on the reform programme see Admissions: the higher education sector’s plans for change [Universities UK, 2008], http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Documents/policybrief_admissions.pdf.

6 Neither is reference made to the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) programme set up in 2006, which provides an opportunity for schools and colleges to engage with higher education institutions on the issue of fair admissions to higher education. Details of its activities are available at www.spa.ac.uk.
The ways in which schools, colleges and higher education institutions interact varies enormously, covering a wide range of activities. Certainly no ‘one size fits all’, and any attempt to prescribe certain forms of engagement in preference to others might well stifle the innovation and creativity that is going on. Universities’ distinctive approaches may reflect their diverse missions, with small, specialist institutions playing a very different role to larger, more ‘typical’ institutions. However, as this section shows, there is also a great deal of consistency across the sector, with most respondents mentioning some or all of the activities listed below. The following pages summarise what universities have told us they are doing to engage with schools and colleges, and give some typical examples of their responses under the following headings:

i Widening participation: aspirations, attainment, access and higher education awareness:
- campus visits and taster days
- mentoring and e-mentoring
- student ambassadors
- masterclasses
- summer school and related higher education residential experiences
- activity in schools and colleges – conferences, study days, presentations, workshops, revision days etc

ii Student progression and transition to higher education:
- special entry pathways
- gifted and talented students
- information, advice and guidance and facilitating transfer to higher education

iii Curriculum and staff development:
- curriculum enrichment and support
- the higher education contribution to the 14–19 agenda
- initial teacher training
- continuing professional development for teachers, lecturers and trainers
- research on raising attainment

iv Partnerships:
- engagement with networks and specific groups
- membership of school governing bodies and relationships with academies and trusts.

**i Widening participation: aspirations, attainment, access and higher education awareness**

**Campus visits and taster days**

Typically these involve campus tours and talks giving an introduction to the university. Some institutions state that they focus on activities based on challenging students’ perceptions about higher education and the people who have been, or aspire to going to, university. In many institutions, campus visits involve subject tasters or are themed around specific subject areas. Many respondents mentioned the value of providing a ‘real’ experience of higher education, including short research projects, masterclasses (see paragraph 11 below), first year contact with academic staff and lectures. Elsewhere, campus visits include study skills and revision sessions, help with writing personal statements, information about financial support or applying through UCAS, careers advice or sessions aimed at parents.
University College London: each Wednesday afternoon up to 50 Year 9 students from local state schools and colleges visit University College London for a 45-minute presentation introducing the university experience and student life, followed by a tour led by student ambassadors. This year the programme has been supplemented by master lectures delivered by University College PhD students.

Anglia Ruskin University: offers three one-day subject-specific programmes: The law and you; Our place in society; and Politics and power, as well as three two-day programmes: Urban design; Crime and punishment; and Introduction to the law.

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine: every year up to 40 disadvantaged young people from schools in London and the south east are offered two-week work experience placements as ‘scientists’, working alongside school staff and postgraduate students, developing their own hypotheses and presenting their work in seminars to scientists and their parents.

Mentoring and e-mentoring

Many universities have long-established schemes that involve current students or recent graduates as mentors to work with students in target schools and colleges with the aim of encouraging and inspiring them to consider university. Mentoring is often on a one-to-one basis and may involve university students going into schools and colleges and being in regular contact by email. The recently announced ‘Aimhigher Associates’ scheme provides a welcome extension to this existing activity.

University of Birmingham: undergraduates are recruited and trained to work in schools and colleges as mentors (providing face-to-face support for organising school work, motivating and acting as role models) and subject-specific tutors (to support GCSE and A-levels). They provided 649 mentoring sessions and 635 tutor hours to schools in 2006–07.

Student ambassadors

In addition to involving current students as mentors, many universities recruit student ambassadors to promote their institution and higher education more generally. Ambassadors often perform a key role in widening participation activities such as open days, summer schools, presentations and workshops, parents’ evenings, higher education and careers fairs.

Birmingham City University: student ambassadors support widening participation activities and ensure that student experiences are shared. There are about 40 active student ambassadors each year.

Newcastle University: under the graduate ambassador scheme, a team of four recent Newcastle graduates is appointed annually to work with schools and colleges across the north of England. The work of the team includes talks and interactive workshops in over 150 schools on subjects such as Why higher education?, Student finance and Making the transition to higher education.

University of East Anglia: there are 220 students on the university’s student ambassador scheme – all are trained and CRB-checked. The university comments: ‘They are involved in all the activities we run. Their contribution is one of the key reasons for the success of our activities’.
Masterclasses

One of the ways in which many universities attempt to enthuse school students about the higher education experience is by providing contact with university professionals and real learning experiences. This often forms a key strand of campus visits [see above] and may also form part of the institution’s curriculum enrichment activities by providing theoretical and practical lessons aimed at enhancing young people’s understanding of national curriculum subjects. STEM subjects [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] feature frequently in descriptions of this type of activity, as do programmes focused on gifted and talented young people. Small, specialist institutions are also particularly heavily engaged in this form of activity.

Royal College of Art: in 2006/07 workshops included sculpture, drawing, design interaction, graphic design, photography, ceramics and glass and architecture. They took place in schools and in the Royal College of Art. The workshops are inspired by their leaders’ own practice and passions and they are fully supported by ReachOutRCA during their development, delivery and evaluation.

University of Leicester: in 2008/09, masterclasses are being organised across a wide range of subject areas including: American studies, archaeology, biological sciences, computing science, criminology, English, geography, geology, law, management and physics. Over 500 places will be available across the range of disciplines.

University of Wolverhampton: has pioneered the development of a learner progression framework known as Choose A Real Deal (CARD) and higher education modules in schools.

Summer school and related higher educational residential experiences

In addition to work done by the Sutton Trust over the last decade in a selection of research-intensive universities, residential and non-residential summer schools are now a well-established part of most universities’ widening participation work and are a funded element of Aimhigher. Some are subject-specific, while others focus on a project (for example, creating an ideal university, including marketing and designing a website and prospectus).

Birkbeck College: participated in a summer school with the University of East London and the University of Essex in the low-participation areas of Thurrock and Basildon. It worked with Year 10 students who participated in activities focused on creating an ideal university, which included marketing and designing a website and prospectus.

Brunel University: for the past three years, Brunel University has offered 25 Year 12 BTEC National Diploma performing arts students from Harrow College a one-week drama summer school. This now forms an integral part of the college course and has enhanced progression to higher education.

Activity in schools and colleges – conferences, study days, presentations, workshops, revision days, etc

In addition to, or alongside, the activities described in this section, universities report that they go into schools and colleges to support or provide a wide variety of events. These include: participation at school and college events such as parents’ evenings; awards ceremonies; careers fairs; school visits; talks and workshops; revision classes; events for parents of higher education applicants; support for after-school and homework clubs; and Saturday school classes. Some of this work falls into the category of information, advice and guidance [see below].
Opportunities for schools, colleges and universities and employers to work together in aspiration-raising activities have existed through various forums including, for example, the education business partnership schemes. Attention is also drawn to the importance of professional organisations in the outreach field, such as the Institute of Physics, the Royal Society, the Institution of Engineering and Technology and others that have significant educational interests. The Association for Science Education is a significant resource, particularly for the continuing professional development of school teaching staff.

**London South Bank University**: Lambeth and Southwark Aimhigher school coordinators have prioritised their Aimhigher funds to pay for London South Bank University student ambassadors to work in homework clubs that target English and Maths GCSE students with borderline C/D grades on the basis of a successful pilot carried out in Southwark last year.

**Liverpool John Moores University**: working with the Education Business Partnership Liverpool Compact, staff volunteers go into primary schools to act as reading partners, supporting children with their reading, passing on an enthusiasm and love of books and building self-confidence and reading skills.

**University of Oxford**: participated in giving joint presentations across the UK with colleagues from the University of Cambridge and with the University of Edinburgh on a tour of schools in north-east England. The university also offers workshops to students and advisers on interview skills, personal statements and the application process (including admissions tests).

---

**Student progression and transition to higher education**

**Special entry pathways**

Compact schemes and supported entry routes provide special entry pathways to potential students in a variety of ways. In some cases, the focus is on providing advice and support for applicants but, in many cases, institutions give credit to prospective students either guaranteeing them an offer of a place on successful completion of a programme of activity, or awarding credit in terms equivalent to UCAS points or by giving special consideration to a student’s achievement and potential. A number of universities mention work with particular groups, for example black and minority ethnic students, students with disabilities and care leavers in this context.

In addition to formal work to facilitate transfer to higher education, many universities help students to prepare for the transition from school as part of their programme of outreach work, for example as part of talks in schools and colleges, or campus visits.

**Canterbury Christ Church University**: awards up to the equivalent of 40 UCAS points to students who successfully complete a range of enrichment modules in participating schools. The scheme also brings large numbers of students to the university each year for a series of organised events and activities. Each year increasing numbers of students progress from participating schools to the university.

**King’s College London**: the extended medical degree programme is the UK’s first widening participation medical degree course and enrolls pupils from low-achieving schools in London who have the ability and desire to become doctors. These students now perform as well as other students taking medical degrees.

**University College London**: is rolling out a transition programme across all academic departments. While much activity is focused on students after they arrive at University College, the programme also entails working with schools and colleges to ensure that students are fully aware of what awaits them at university.
**Gifted and talented students**

17 Alongside taster days, workshops and summer schools aimed at widening participation, many universities provide activities specifically for gifted and talented students. These include masterclasses, interactive workshops, residential courses and equipment loan schemes for schools and colleges. In addition, there are now nine regional excellence hubs established as part of the new young, gifted and talented programme managed by the CfBT Education Trust on behalf of the Department for Children, Schools and Families. This is also an area in which small, specialist institutions make a distinctive contribution by supporting school pupils in, for example, music, drama and art.

**Aston University:** has regularly provided inspirational activities for gifted and talented schoolchildren, including residential, hosting online discussions, ‘experts in action’ days and masterclasses. During the academic year 2006–07, Aston University hosted four ‘experts in action’ lectures, a science and engineering residential, a languages residential and a languages day, aimed specifically at gifted and talented students. Aston was successful in its bid to lead the West Midlands’s excellence hub for a consortium of universities in the region.

**Royal Academy of Music:** the Vocal Summer School aims to attract singers from all sectors of the community. The annual two-day course gives aspiring singers the opportunity to meet professionals for consultation lessons, workouts and ‘snapshots’ of different vocal applications.

**Information, advice and guidance and facilitating transfer to higher education**

18 Universities contribute on a large scale to careers-focused activity in schools, colleges and elsewhere as part of their outreach work. Most universities also report on the work that they do to provide information relating to higher education, including on applications, finances, student life, and so on. Alongside generic contributions to information, advice and guidance, universities report working to encourage students to choose specific careers or subject groups, for example STEM subjects and medicine. A number of universities also host events or subject-based sessions for careers and personal advisers. Specific attention is drawn to the Lifelong Learning Networks which provide a significant contribution in terms of information, advice and guidance and progression for applicants transferring to higher education through vocational routes. Universities also reported that the provision of higher education-related information, advice and guidance from primary level upwards can be usefully combined with targeted activities to pupils and parents to support secondary school transition.

**University of Bristol:** offers UCAS masterclasses, student life sessions and information on student funding to all schools and colleges in the locality. A teachers’ and careers advisers’ event is now in its second year.

**London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE):** a higher education advisers’ conference brings together those who deliver advice and guidance in schools with admissions professionals within the LSE. The day centres on the university application process and what universities are looking for in the personal statement and teachers’ reference. It is aimed specifically at teachers and advisers from non-selective schools where there may not be a strong history of sending students to the most competitive universities. The conference looks at the applications process from a Russell Group point of view – competition for places, A-level subject combinations – to give advisers a view from ‘the other side’.

**University of Oxford:** the further education college access scheme offers interview training for Oxford to applicants who are from further education and sixth-form colleges.
### iii Curriculum and staff development

#### Curriculum enrichment and support

19 Universities make a substantial contribution to curriculum enrichment through the provision of support to schools and colleges in a range of subject areas, sharing specialist facilities, providing access to libraries, developing modules to be delivered in schools and colleges, guest lectures and, as outlined below, by sending university students into schools and colleges to provide subject-specific support in the classroom. Masterclasses and ‘experts in action’ events (see above) are also frequently intended to give students an experience beyond the national curriculum to develop enthusiasm for the subject area in question. Again this is an area in which small, specialist institutions play a distinctive role. In working with younger students, some universities reported that this was often easier to achieve through engagement around a subject and the curriculum instead of explicitly focusing on widening participation activities. These links can then be built on during a student’s school career as the student becomes more familiar with higher education.

20 Alongside other curriculum enhancement activities, many universities provide support in specific areas of the curriculum by sending current students into schools and colleges. Such students – sometimes volunteers, sometimes paid – may formally fall within the university’s mentoring or student ambassador schemes, but in other cases this forms part of a distinct category of activity which may or may not also have widening participation as a secondary goal.

**Open University**: the young applicants in schools and colleges scheme offers higher education modules in schools. It ‘provides a real experience of higher education, not just a taste... The courses studied offer both breadth and depth to the school curriculum’.

**Liverpool John Moores University**: the university’s Astrophysics Research Unit is committed to advancing public understanding of science and donates a proportion of its observational time for use by UK schools. Over 500 schools are currently members of the unit’s National Schools’ Observatory, giving thousands of primary and secondary school pupils access to their own, high-quality astronomical images and a range of related resources.

**Middlesex University**: provides specialist student support in target subject lessons in around 30 schools across north London – in sciences, maths, modern languages and in sport (including coaching and refereeing).

**University of Cambridge**: provides a wide range of subject-focused events and web-based resources designed to support learning, stimulate interest and raise students’ aspirations, including online resources, events, visits, roadshows, and Easter and summer schools in subjects ranging from archaeology to zoology, including maths, natural sciences, modern languages, history, law, English, physics and classics.

---

### The higher education contribution to the 14–19 agenda

21 In their responses to Universities UK’s survey, a large number of universities explained how they are working with local partners on 14–19 curriculum development, and working with their own teaching and support staff to raise awareness of the new diplomas. Several institutions report that their staff are also involved at a national level on the development of level 3 content, to ensure that the new diplomas are compatible with higher education and provide routes through for students. Reference was also made to the opportunities for extending activities such as masterclasses with school students as a consequence of 14–19 curriculum reforms, for example, in relation to project activity, specialist learning and collaboration for delivery of the diplomas.
**Thames Valley University:** is involved in the development of 14–19 diplomas. Working with Reading Borough Council, the university hosts a 14–19 partnership manager leading local delivery groups, following the approval to run five diploma subject areas through Gateway 1 and the development of new subject area submissions to the Department of Children, Schools and Families through Gateway 2. The university is a key partner in diploma work with schools in the Slough and west London areas and is leading the development of the diploma in hospitality and catering across three local boroughs. In total the university is leading or involved in the development and/or delivery of 16 different subject area partnerships related to this high profile area of 14–19 reform.

**Lancaster University:** has been involved in developing and running a summer school to show young people on vocational courses and apprenticeships that academic qualifications are not the only way into higher education. The programme provides tasters for the first 14–19 diploma subject areas and support for school students on all aspects of considering higher education as a future option.

**Initial teacher training**

Initial teacher training is delivered by 62 higher education institutions. As well as contributing directly to the health of the school system, this activity also provides a catalyst for forging links with schools and colleges in other ways. Several respondents mention that, as part of their wider programme of sending university students into schools and colleges, they operate schemes that aim to allow students to experience the teaching profession with a view to encouraging their progression to teacher training.

**Institute of Education:** through its initial teacher education programmes the Institute is in partnership with over 600 schools regionally and, through continuing professional development, leadership and postgraduate programmes, it makes ‘a significant contribution to the progress and development on education in thousands of schools and colleges’.

**Keele University:** the university’s undergraduate placement scheme offers undergraduates placement opportunities in local secondary schools and colleges which allow students to experience both the teaching profession and working with young people. The main scheme available is the Training and Development Agency-funded student associates scheme that promotes science and maths in schools. One of the aims of the scheme is to raise aspirations and to provide positive role models for higher education. This year there will be over 120 students on placements in 35 secondary schools.

**University of Sunderland:** the university is a major provider of teacher training and has links with over 140 secondary and 600 primary schools that provide placement opportunities for its students.
Continuing professional development for teachers, lecturers and trainers

The continuing professional development provided by universities has been proved to be of high quality and to have had an impact on raising attainment in schools and colleges. Universities provided evidence of a vast range of opportunities for teachers, lecturers and trainers and examples of tailored programmes to meet local school or college needs aimed at raising attainment. This provision includes subject-specific courses, for example, several universities are actively involved in the regional science learning centres in England, which are a national network for professional development in science teaching. Other activities focus on priority groups such as looked-after children, on those aimed at enhancing strategic leadership and management and on courses evaluating the potential for parent involvement. There are examples of courses that have been developed to support schools and colleges with particular challenges such as raising achievement in city schools and those in special measures following an Ofsted inspection. Many institutions include a module on action research within their continuing professional development provision, equipping teachers with the skills to evaluate the needs of specific groups of students and develop solutions in order to raise attainment.

Birmingham City University: has organised significant numbers of teachers into action research groups with an impact on learning (and hence achievement) as a prime focus. The groups are operated with partner organisations including schools, school consortia and local authorities. Participants plan and implement improvement strategies that include a practical intervention aimed at raising achievement as part of an ongoing improvement cycle. Strategies ‘should be linked to the school improvement plan and must be evaluated using quantitative and qualitative evidence with recommendations for future changes in practice. The results of the project should be disseminated at least within the school, and preferably beyond’.

University of Exeter: ran the ASPIRE project in 2007. ASPIRE was funded by QCA and SWGate and involved around ten schools in the south west, fostering and researching student-led school transformation, and focusing on raising aspiration in the community (thus involving parents as well as students and teachers).

University of Cumbria: is involved in a large number of projects which aim to secure school improvement and enhanced educational attainment across the country. Much of this activity is housed within a specialist education development unit within the Faculty of Education, which works at local, national and international levels. Small projects include the delivery of a continuing professional development package to a school in special measures following an Ofsted inspection, while larger projects involve work with local authorities to support school improvement. Typically this involves the development of bespoke professional development for a variety of school staff, including teachers. The university has a well developed postgraduate qualification in education and this has been devised in a way that recognises the need for academic rigour and the reality of teachers’ professional lives.

Liverpool Hope University: works with local schools supporting non-specialist maths teachers through the mathematics development programme.

University of Southampton: runs the Science Learning Centre South East.

Research on raising attainment

University education departments provided a wealth of information about the research that had been completed specifically on raising attainment. Research activity has addressed a range of societal and managerial issues and often takes a practice-based approach in order to test findings and solutions. Among the wealth of material available for policy-makers and schools and colleges, research findings have been published on issues such as gender and educational attainment, strategies for including reluctant learners and leadership in areas of low achievement.
University of Manchester: some groups experience disproportionate numbers of permanent exclusions from school, including those living in poverty and black and dual-heritage children and young people. A research project on learning partnerships outside mainstream education at Manchester University looks at possible reasons for this and examines how education and other services can work productively with students and parents who are most directly affected.

Roehampton University: Roehampton University has developed a range of continuing professional development courses in partnership with local education providers in south-west London and is working with local young people with the aim of widening participation. The university recently held a successful development conference for further education and higher education sport science and admissions staff, designed to help college lecturers and careers advisers better prepare BTEC students for the transition to higher education and to help university lecturers and curriculum development staff be better prepared for those students when they arrive.

Plymouth University: is carrying out research on school improvement. A significant body of research by Professor David Reynolds with a focus on ‘within school variation’, which encourages schools to learn internally from their best staff members in order to raise educational attainment and develop standard operating procedures to support this educational endeavour.

iv Partnerships

Engagement with networks and specific groups

25 Almost all respondents to the survey referred to the formal groups and networks of which they form part and through which they organise some or all of their work with schools and colleges. There is much evidence of universities working with a range of local partners, including schools, further education colleges, local authorities including children’s services, public, private and voluntary sector organisations and other higher education institutions in order to coordinate activities and maximise the benefits of engagement. In some cases formal partnerships confer particular benefits on participants and encourage progressively deeper engagement. Aimhigher partnerships are frequently cited as the main vehicle for forming local and regional links as well as allowing institutions to coordinate their approaches to schools and colleges, which can facilitate the more effective targeting and efficient use of resources, as well as supporting innovation and driving effective partnership engagement. The Aimhigher instructions for 2008–11 emphasise the importance of a learner progression framework highlighting the need to ensure a more coordinated, planned and integrated approach to widening participation provision.

26 Universities also coordinate their activities through organisations such as the Higher Education Liaison Officers’ Association (HELOA). In addition to local networks, many universities mention their membership of regional and thematic partnerships. This is in addition to partnerships formed around initial teacher training and continuing professional development for teachers, lecturers and trainers (see above).

27 The importance of the role of Lifelong Learning Networks was highlighted by a number of universities. These were considered essential in bringing together schools and colleges and universities with other stakeholders and working on transition issues, information, advice and guidance issues linked to Aimhigher, and entry requirements, bridging programmes diploma developments and encapsulated in a progression agreement.

28 Many successful links are built on personal contact. More opportunities for networks between staff in schools and staff in universities could be useful. The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust was noted as providing useful networking opportunities such as the Higher Education Affiliation Programme.
Southampton Solent University: has played a key role in the formation of the Southampton Education Trust. The trust has been formed by bringing together both of the city’s universities, the three main providers of further education in Southampton, key stakeholders in the private sector, the public sector (for example, the local health trust) and voluntary sector (including faith organisations and those working with disadvantaged groups). The trust aims to bring the considerable expertise of partners to bear on raising attainment and performance in schools in Southampton, providing governors to trust schools and giving concrete support to schoolchildren with regard to curriculum and career opportunities.

Leeds Metropolitan University: the university is in partnership with 18 regional colleges. It uses the network to provide seamless education with levels 1 and 2 being delivered at the colleges and level 3 being provided as a top-up at the university.

University of Cambridge: works with other higher education providers, offering a full programme of events to raise aspirations and encourage both young and adult learners to participate in further and higher education. Partners include the University of Oxford (conferences, school and college visits and regional information days), Aimhigher, Eastern Region universities (for example, as co-leaders with the University of East Anglia of the East of England Excellence Hub, working with gifted and talented young people), schools and colleges (study days, Aimhigher days, Easter school).

Sussex liaison and progression accord: although this is a partnership between the Universities of Sussex, Brighton and Chichester which offers groups of participating schools and colleges a joint set of special admission arrangements, it is not exclusively about widening participation. The partnership also provides opportunities for staff liaison and development links.

University of Westminster: ‘we are actively working with local authorities and our feeder institutions to develop a clear strategy for engagement on a cluster school basis and a bilateral basis with post-16 providers. This includes bilateral progression agreements which incorporate an agreement of services to be provided by both partners. This means that it is essential that our feeder schools and colleges needs are listened to.’

Membership of school governing bodies and relationships with academies and trusts

A large number of universities reports on their engagement with local school governance, management and development and through university staff membership of school governing bodies and sponsorship of schools to gain trust or academy status. A significant proportion mentions working with other partners to put forward proposals for new trust schools or academies, while others mention supporting schools in attaining specialist status. Some universities acknowledged that working with an academy had yielded closer working relationships with the local council and the prospect of further strategic alliances with business and the independent sector. Supporting academies can also be a powerful way in which an awareness of higher education can be brought into a community which otherwise may not have had any involvement with a university. Further information on universities’ engagement with academies and trusts can be found in Universities UK’s publication Academies and trust schools: where do universities fit in? published May 2009.
Nottingham University: is co-sponsoring a city academy in partnership with local businessman David Samworth. The Nottingham University Samworth Academy is due to open in 2009 for pupils aged 11–19. The university is also piloting a trust school partnership with a nearby school.

Nottingham Trent University: staff governor support scheme – encouragement, support and recognition for staff becoming school governors.

Sheffield Hallam University: has strong relationships with children’s services in the region, with staff on strategic planning groups including those relating to trusts and academies. ‘We are working with Sheffield and Derbyshire children’s services to support academy and trust development. Over 300 staff are governors in local schools.’

University of the West of England: has become a partner in a trust arrangement, with the City of Bristol College and the local authority, for a new campus, ‘The Bridge Learning Campus’. This development involves secondary, primary and special schools and will be the first all-through campus in the city. Higher Education Funding Council for England-funded research, conducted by the University of the West of England, is informing the development and illustrates how such a partnership can enhance the immediate impact of research and knowledge exchange. ‘This development has provided us with an exciting opportunity to work in enhanced ways with schools in the South Bristol constituency which has one of the lowest participation rates in higher education in the country. There are a number of other positive aspects for us. We are able to contribute to the evolution of the campus in a longitudinal way; the creation of a genuinely inclusive learning environment involving both pupils and students with a range of differing educational needs; and the provision of new approaches to personalised learning with a diverse range of options and pathways for post-14 pupils.’

University of Sunderland: is a member of the Sunderland Educational Leadership Board, is the university partner to Sunderland’s three city academy projects and formally co-partners one of them, Red House Academy, with the Leighton Group. Within the Sunderland area we have worked closely with the new sixth form developments and host a new sixth form academy on our St Peter’s Campus. We have recently become a trust partner of Chester-le-Street Learning Partnership Trust and, in train, is trustee status on a further trust – the Houghton Kepier Foundation Trust.
The overriding message from the survey responses is the consensus that emerges in terms of what works and what does not. In the field of widening participation, the messages are consistent with what other expert bodies – notably Action on Access and Aimhigher – have found. We would draw attention to the Action on Access interim report on the higher education progression framework feasibility study, which draws on considerable experience and reports on work to test moves from an approach which involves offering a ‘menu’ of individual activities towards a more planned, integrated, sequential and progressive approach to widening participation.

With regard to successful engagement several key characteristics can be identified:

**Strategic leadership**

- Ensure that there is a culture of active engagement with schools and colleges that is led from the top, with senior staff involved in partnership activity;
- To ensure continuity it is important that engagement activities are embedded in the strategic priorities of the institution, with a defined place in the structure of the organisation and a named contact;
- The most productive engagements ‘are formed when they meet multiple and complementary partner needs’ or have ‘an explicit subject-focus/clearly expressed aims/outcomes’. One university noted that ‘the subject-specific programmes we deliver offer greater impact and have more demonstrable links to progression to higher education’ and another said that it must ‘fit with the curriculum to be successful’;
- Commitment of time and resources by management is key; one respondent mentioned that mentoring takes ‘more of our energies to keep on an even keel than other [activities]… It works well in schools where they have assigned a non-teaching administrator to coordinate the scheme’. Ensuring sufficient time for joint planning and closer working between staff in schools and colleges and universities can be beneficial in terms of the appropriateness and quality of interventions and facilitate an improved coordination of activities;
- Several responses commented on the need for universities to be aware of the school and college staff workloads which can impact on the amount of time available for link activities. Schools ‘have a plethora of national initiatives as well as the workforce reform and Ofsted agendas to address’;
- Several universities highlighted the importance of listening to the needs of schools and colleges as these vary enormously;
- Successful partnerships are based on each side having something to offer and something to gain. For example, if schoolteachers, lecturers, trainers and university teachers had more opportunities to work together this would raise their joint understanding of what their students may aspire to as well as providing a method of updating their own subject knowledge. University lecturers would benefit from schoolteachers’ expertise in pedagogy with reluctant learners as well as their understanding of the context and circumstances of their pupils’ families and communities;
- Involving parents in plans for partnership working is important, particularly in relation to the preparation for university and in terms of widening participation activity and raising aspirations for younger people;
- Ensuring that there is a critical mass of staff within a university that is willing to support working with a school; this can be facilitated by having a coherent cross-university approach to all partnership work with schools and colleges. This ensures cross-faculty inclusion in each partnership agreement as well as integration of other offices such as widening participation, research and admissions;
- Having a memorandum of understanding to ensure clarity in terms of expectations, roles, costs and responsibilities throughout the partnership.
Appropriate targeting

- Having a targeted approach can provide the foundation for deeper and richer relationships at all levels;
- Events which have a particular focus, often linked with future employment, appear to be particularly successful, although not to the exclusion of other more general initiatives;
- ‘Attainment-raising activity must fit with the curriculum to be successful’;
- Providing opportunities for pupils to engage with engineers, doctors and other professionals, especially those from similar backgrounds, as a means to helping to break down perceived barriers to professions;
- To facilitate the success of widening participation events it is important that children of different ages are targeted with appropriate material and that groups are generally kept small as opposed to bringing whole year groups together;
- Timing of interventions is important. One respondent described ‘an incremental and progressively intensive progression package that systematically builds student attainment through early targeting and participation in a series of programmes from Years 7 to 11. Students are initially targeted (low income and first-generation higher education) in schools to participate in the Islington Summer University in Years 6 and 7, then encouraged to attend open/taster sessions in Years 7/8, selected to join the Saturday club in Year 9 (16 weeks) and then invited to join the two-year Upward Bound School in Year 10/11 (26 weeks a year) ... Initial impact assessment demonstrates increased attainment at Key Stage 3, and we expect to see that duplicated at Key Stage 4 (July 2008)’;
- Local authorities have access to detailed information about schools and students which can help in the process of targeting activities appropriately.

Sustained engagement

- Successful relationships develop when they are gradually built up in a strategic and sustained way and support the priorities of universities, schools and colleges;
- Ease of access into schools, colleges and universities for their respective partners, and continuity of the contact is key to the success of long-term, structured engagement;
- A large number of responses agreed that ‘one-off visits to the university were less effective than serial engagements which allow for follow-up and reinforcement of key learning points’;
- Several responses pointed out that sustained activities need sustained funding. For example, ‘progression packages need full and secure funding for 7–10 years if they are to be properly assessed and evaluated’. One said that ‘two-year short-term initiatives are just too short and run out of funding/favour before their impact can be effectively and appropriately measured’;
- Developing a relationship with staff and pupils is more successful where universities can support curriculum development, attainment and high-quality and timely information, advice and guidance;
- Sound communication strategies to ensure that teachers, trainers and lecturers are aware of all types of intervention are important, drawing on the expertise of university departments and external groups;
- Concerns have been expressed about the large number of students moving from schools to further education and sixth-form colleges who may be ‘lost’ to sustained widening participation programmes that target the schools they formerly attended.
Use of role models and experts

- A number of institutions mentioned current academic role models and experts as key to inspiring potential students, either to progress to higher education, or with enthusiasm for a subject of study. This was mentioned in relation to teachers as well as students;
- Student ambassadors were cited by several respondents as one of the most effective ways of engaging with school and college students;
- Masterclasses are cited by one university as one of its most productive activities. They are 'heavily oversubscribed and highly valued by students, parents and schools alike. They deliver a highly focused on-campus experience and have grown in size by over 300 per cent since 2003';
- Small specialist institutions have a distinctive role to play, in particular in relation to curriculum enhancement, gifted and talented youth and information, advice and guidance.

Evidence of success

- Partnerships need to deliver results and be measurable in impact, particularly through feedback (from students, parents, teachers, lecturers, trainers), measurement of progression and retention of participants.
Universities UK’s survey of the links between universities, schools and colleges demonstrates that there is a wide spectrum of engagement, highlighting the many interesting and innovative ways in which they are now working together. This reflects not only the diversity of the higher education sector but variations in the purposes of engagement, which range from widening participation and outreach activities to other considerations such as the need for mutual understanding of the curriculum, modes of preparation, teaching and learning styles, subject specialism and training of the school and college workforce. It is also clear that there are interactions and overlap between different types of engagement, for example, between widening participation and curriculum and staff development links, particularly those focused on school improvement and raising attainment. Although some forms of university engagement target specific groups, there was also significant support for ensuring that engagement involved all potential higher education applicants in schools and colleges and the importance of having a continuum of experiences and interventions.

Drawing on the exemplars listed in Section 3, and the evidence provided by universities, a number of suggestions for enhancing partnership development and facilitating cross-sector collaboration are identified below. Many of these activities are either already in place or being taken forward by the different stakeholders.

### Schools and colleges

- Identify a key person to manage school links with a university and find effective ways of passing on his or her knowledge to the wider school workforce (both teaching staff and those providing personalised learning support). This may not necessarily mean appointing a single contact – there is sometimes a need for both a ‘leadership’ role and a distinct operational role. The staff identified also require planned updates on a consistent basis to keep their knowledge fresh;
- Ensure that there is a good general level of awareness of higher education amongst all staff including those at primary level and expert careers-related guidance with specialist training;
- In view of the number of schools and colleges, consider working in groups and clusters to facilitate strategic engagement with universities;
- Allocate some dedicated staff time so that they can undertake continuing professional development activities;
- Consider whether dedicated activities to promote participation in STEM subjects and modern foreign languages can be provided;
- Consider how university-supported activities designed to raise aspirations and improve progression can be built into school progression plans;
- Consider having a university representative on the school board of governors, including at primary level. It may be beneficial for university governors to be linked together (for example by subject, by geographical area, or responsibilities within the governing body;
- Consider how parents can contribute to widening participation activities and how parents’ aspirations for their children can be raised by enhancing their knowledge of higher education. There may be particular opportunities for engagement with parents at the transition from Year 6 to 7;
- Promote the need for schools, universities and employers to work together in aspiration-raising and attainment-raising activities. Identifying ways in which parents of younger pupils could have contact with universities could be powerful.
Universities

- Continue to embed widening participation and other school engagement activity in strategic and management structures and illustrate commitment to this strand of activity in strategic plans;
- Sustained engagement with schools should lead to improved longer-term planning and more stability in links with less reliance on personal relationships. This could also encourage more evaluation and feedback on events and interventions to take place;
- Adopt a coordinated strategic approach in providing advice and guidance with relevant sector bodies – principally Action on Access and Aimhigher, and Lifelong Learning Networks;
- Consider how to support schools’ efforts to provide better and more comprehensive information to students, in a consistent and appropriate form, from primary school upwards;
- Ensure that information about the wide range of pathways from lower secondary school to higher education is clear to all potential applicants. Universities need to be as transparent as possible about the entry requirements of courses. This has become increasingly important given the wide variety of qualifications, including diplomas, that are now available;
- Ensure a strategic approach to working with partners in business and the voluntary sector, so that their local activities with schools are appropriately coordinated. This could be achieved through a local network or organisation such as Aimhigher, or Lifelong Learning Networks;
- In recognition that attainment is the principal barrier to participation in higher education, an explicit focus on raising attainment particularly at Key Stage 3 could be useful. This could be achieved through widening participation channels, or through curricula enhancement, school improvement and continuing professional development for staff in schools and colleges;
- Give further consideration to how to encourage and reward university staff to take part in schools, for example by attending or becoming members of boards of governors;
- Consider how the provision of continuing professional development might further support schools in raising attainment and in information, advice and guidance activities;
- In partnership with local authorities, target areas where students have low participation and progression to higher education, particularly with hard-to-reach groups such as care leavers;
- In view of the plethora of approaches, different methodologies and data sets used to evaluate the impact of engagement, it may be beneficial for universities to share good practice. This could promote a greater understanding within the sector of the different approaches;
- Consider whether there would be benefits from developing a consistent approach to assessing impact. This could result in greater understanding across all parties of what is accessible and available.

Local authorities

- Local authorities need to be encouraged to plan strategically with universities;
- Their education strategies should include a commitment to enhancing progression to higher education; this could be achieved by supporting schools to incorporate relevant strategies and initiatives within development and improvement planning processes;
Consider how students moving from schools to further education and sixth-form colleges can also be encouraged to aim for higher education. This is particularly important when there is a break between secondary school and college;

Support schools and colleges in ensuring that they have the infrastructure and organisation to take advantage of what a university has to offer.

**Government**

- Consider how it can further help universities and schools and colleges to ensure that partnerships are sustainable in the long term, particularly in regard to funding levels;
- Ensure a continued commitment to a specific level of funding for Action on Access, Aimhigher and the Student Associates Scheme in order to support universities in their planning and long-term commitments – both of which are key components of effective management;
- National policy development needs to recognise that engagement with schools is a key element of universities’ strategies to widen participation;
- Should support schools and colleges in improving their provision of STEM (particularly mathematics) skills, so that pupils have the option to apply for these courses at a higher level;
- Work with schools and colleges to establish the cost of the staff time needed to engage more fully with universities, and to undertake continuing professional development;
- Consider how schools and colleges, and their staff, can be given greater incentives to engage with universities;
- Conduct an annual survey of the attitudes of schools and colleges and their pupils to higher education;
- Consider how the wealth of research material available on raising attainment can best be exploited to inform policy.
About Universities UK

This publication has been produced by Universities UK, which is the representative body for the executive heads of UK universities and is recognised as the umbrella group for the university sector. It works to advance the interests of universities and to spread good practice throughout the higher education sector.

Universities UK
Woburn House
20 Tavistock Square
London
WC1H 9HQ

telephone
+44 (0)20 7419 4111

fax
+44 (0)20 7388 8649

email
info@UniversitiesUK.ac.uk

web
www.UniversitiesUK.ac.uk

© Universities UK
ISBN 978 1 84036 203 9
May 2009