

# Engaging Men Through Local Learning Centres

## Executive Summary

### Background

The North Forum for Widening Participation in Higher Education (the North Forum) commissioned the *Engaging Men Through Local Learning Centres* project following the identification of the under representation of men in post-compulsory education in Scotland in a number of national reports. With a remit to work with communities across its region, the North Forum decided to use the existing network of learning centres at the heart of their local communities to address this lack of engagement in learning by men.

The project activities ran from August 2006 until February 2007 and encouraged the learning centres to use their local knowledge and experience to develop projects that would suit the needs of men in their own communities. They were encouraged to be innovative and creative in their approaches and the overall project was managed by UHI Millennium Institute's Learning Centre Unit. An invitation to bid was sent to all identified centres in the North Forum area and nine centres, or networks of centres, were selected in areas from Argyll to Shetland, following a carefully managed scrutiny process.

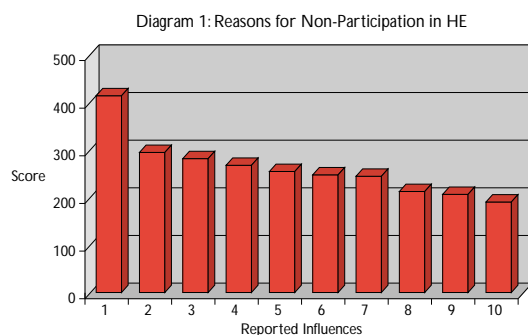
A wide variety of programmes were developed and implemented in a short space of time including: canoe building in Lochaber; golf tips and classes in the history of golf in Dornoch; events targeted at migrant workers in Dingwall; introductory IT classes in Aviemore, Shetland and Orkney; the history of sport in Cowal; a range of leisure classes in Skye and Lochalsh; and an intensive building craft practices programme to help address the shortage of apprenticeships in Orkney. Some centres took the opportunity to build and strengthen links with business organisations in their area, target specific industrial sectors and hold information sessions or open days. Many decided to take the learning to men in imaginative, proactive ways rather than wait for the men to come to their centres.

### Participants

A total of 339 men participated in project activities. The submitted learner profiles indicated that the courses attracted a wide range of ages, from 17 to 75 years, and 72% of the men had not yet participated in HE level study. Although the percentage of men who possessed HE qualifications was well below the current participation rate, the mean age of participants suggested that many respondents would have left school prior to the mass expansion of HE in the UK. Nevertheless, many who come on community-based programmes are very different to the people who usually participate in post-compulsory education and it is interesting to contemplate the reasons for these men not continuing into HE after they had left school.

### Influences on non-participation in HE

The men without an HE qualification were asked to indicate, using a Likert scale, the extent to which a number of factors had influenced their decision not to study for an HE qualification. The results are provided in Diagram 1 below:



The reported influences in Diagram 1 were:

1. I got a job
2. Lack of encouragement at school
3. The cost of being a student
4. I didn't know what I could study
5. I couldn't see the benefits
6. Qualifications I got at school
7. I wanted vocational training
8. Family commitments
9. Peer pressure at school
10. I didn't want to leave home

These results are very interesting. The high number of men who went into a job at the end of school is understandable and, as will be demonstrated below, does not necessarily indicate that they did not want to

study for an HE qualification. The challenge for educational institutions is to provide stronger links between work-based learning and HE and for the Funding Council to provide adequate support for part-time learning that would allow those who must or choose to work the opportunity to study at this level.

Non-participation in HE was not predicated solely upon the qualifications gained at school, as one might have expected. Rather there seem to be factors at play here about the expectations inculcated at school and the adequacy of guidance and provision. Schools need to ensure that all pupils are engaged with the idea of continuing into post-compulsory education and schools, colleges, universities and Careers Scotland need to ensure that adequate information tailored to the needs of males and females is available to allow them to make informed choices about their futures. Hopefully, schools liaison initiatives such as the North Forum's ASPIRENorth project will help to address the former in schools with a tradition of low progression into FE and HE in the North Forum area but there needs to be more cohesive partnership working between agencies if the latter is going to be achieved.

### Future intentions

Men were asked 2 questions about their current intentions: firstly, whether or not they would consider studying for an HE qualification. The response was as follows:

Percentage of all respondents interested in studying for an HE qualification	40.0%
Percentage of respondents without HE qualifications interested in studying for an HE qualification	43.7%
Percentage of respondents with HE qualifications interested in studying for another HE qualification	30.4%

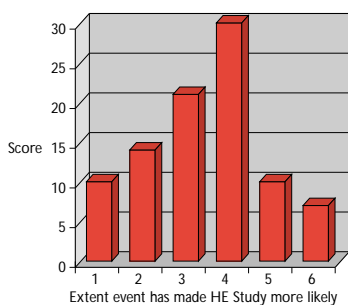
This indicates that there is significant latent demand for HE level study in the communities involved in the Engaging Men project. Not only are there many men who harbour thoughts about possible HE study that they have never pursued, but also a number who have been down that route and would like to study further at that level. The men were asked to provide reasons for their answers and some clear themes emerged: almost all of the men who commented on why they would pursue an HE qualification said that they would do so for reasons related to career advancement; there was a more mixed response from those who would not pursue an HE qualification but one significant factor was an expressed lack of time to do so due to work commitments. Interestingly, almost the same number of men considered themselves too old to study, even those who were only in their early 50s. This is resonant of the findings from other parts of the project that suggested that men are far more likely to consider themselves too old for studying or career change than women of the same age. Clearly there is work to be done on this issue if a lifelong learning society is to be created in Scotland.

### The impact on intention to study

The second issue concerning the respondents' intentions was to explore the extent to which this particular Engaging Men project intervention had made it more likely that the men would study for an HE qualification. The results are provided in Diagram 2.

It has to be remembered that most, if not all, of these men had come onto the Engaging Men programme without any indication that what they were going to participate in had anything to do with HE level study. Indeed, none of the interventions did involve HE level study. Nevertheless, after their experiences 51% of the respondents felt more inclined toward HE level study: that is, scoring between 4 and 6 on the Likert scale.

Diagram 2: Impact of EM event on inclination towards HE Study



This might be explained by a certain level of self-selection: it is quite possible that the men who completed the evaluation forms were those most interested in further study anyway and were using the form as a way of making that interest known to the learning centre staff. It might also reflect the careful, targeted marketing that took place, the encouragement and support offered by the learning centre staff and the project's requirement for signposting and referral onto other learning pathways for all those who participated.

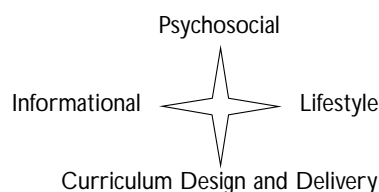
What can be stated is that for a project funded by a Forum whose aim is to encourage more people into Further and Higher Education, these community based interventions, using local learning centres that understand and are part of their communities, have at the very least tapped into a demand for more learning by men and encouraged a

significant number to pursue further learning at an HE level. This has been achieved by encouraging local people at a community level to adopt a flexible, creative approach to engaging men and it is important that the lessons learned from this sample of centres are clearly understood, disseminated widely and built upon in future projects.

### Reasons why men do not engage in learning

The following model has been developed using a grounded theory-based qualitative analysis of the project findings:

#### Barriers to the Engagement of Men in Post-compulsory Learning



The sub-themes contained within the dimensions of this emergent model are explained overleaf. It is hoped that subsequent projects will allow the model to be tested and developed further.

## Theme A – Psychosocial Barriers

### Sub-themes

- Ego and self image
- Fear of failure
- Lack of confidence
- Fear of appearing stupid in front of others
- Learning not perceived as cool
- Feeling that too old
- Perception that environment of education is female dominated
- Reluctance to seek assistance and admit weakness
- Bad prior educational experiences

## Theme B – Lifestyle Barriers

### Sub-themes

- Perception of lack of time
- Work commitments
- Family commitments
- Learning as low priority
- Learning as irrelevant

## Theme C – Curriculum Design and Delivery Barriers

### Sub-themes

- The cost of part-time learning
- Colleges and HEIs not offering sufficiently interesting or relevant curricula
- Need for institutions to stress benefits of learning
- Learning not seen as relevant to work or CPD
- Learning not delivered at flexible times or locations
- Institutions not marketing in ways that attract men
- Engagement through skills-based 'training' rather than 'education'
- Rural accessibility
- Creating and informing men about adult learning environments

## Theme D – Informational Barriers

### Sub themes

- Lack of knowledge of what learning is available,
- Lack of knowledge of where learning is available
- Lack of knowledge of when learning is available
- Lack of knowledge of benefits of learning
- Lack of adequate information and encouragement at school

## Recommendations

These recommendations are designed to provoke national, institutional, learning centre and North Forum responses although, clearly, such a complex issue will require an integrated and cohesive response that cuts across any such distinctions.

### National Level

- The SFC should commission research that will provide a better understanding of the reasons behind the gender imbalance in Scottish education. There should be two strands to this research: one that looks at the big picture in terms of socio-economic and demographic changes to identify strategic priorities; the other to collate, evaluate and disseminate the lessons being learned currently in projects such as Engaging Men.
- The Scottish Executive should commission research into the ways in which programmes targeted at specific under represented groups, such as males in learning, can be advertised and marketed effectively.
- The SFC should strengthen funding support for part-time learners.
- The Scottish Executive should commission research into the demand from, and experience of, males on PGCE courses to find ways to encourage more men into teaching. School pupils require male role models.
- The SFC and the new National Action Group should ensure that there is better evaluation and dissemination of the various gender-based Regional Forum projects.
- The SFC and local authorities should provide encouragement and funding to promote partnership approaches between schools, Colleges and HEIs to promote progression routes to boys and men.
- The Scottish Executive should create a highly visible, national campaign to promote the benefits of, and options for, post-compulsory level study by men.
- With the decline of traditional, male-dominated industries in Scotland, those that have grown, such as Care, and are seen as female-dominated, should examine the ways in which they attract, retain and develop employees to overcome any potential barriers for men.

## Institutional Level

- Tertiary-level institutions should develop a student support package that meets the needs of part-time students.
- Tertiary-level institutions should work more closely with community learning and development officers to identify opportunities, develop ideas and share resources that encourage men to engage with learning on pathways that could lead onto post-compulsory level study.
- Schools, Colleges and HEIs should develop guidance provision focused on the needs of men.
- Schools, Colleges and HEIs should develop case studies of successful, male former pupils/students of all ages to use as role models with schools and community-based provision.
- Tertiary-level institutions should develop more effective links between work-based learning and post-compulsory level education.
- Tertiary-level institutions should work with boys at as early a stage as possible to raise expectations and clarify benefits and options.
- Tertiary-level institutions should develop programmes to attract men through leisure interests with clearly signposted progression routes.
- Tertiary-level institutions should engage with the wives, partners and families of men to encourage and support all members onto appropriate programmes.

## Learning Centres

- Learning centres should adopt the Local Learning Centre Engaging Men Action Plan in section 6.2 of the project report.
- Learning Centres should provide the UHI Learning Centre Unit with additional ideas for, and modifications of, the Local Learning Centre Engaging Men Action Plan so that they can be shared and disseminated widely.

## The North Forum

- The North Forum should support the project dissemination strategy outlined in Appendix 4.
- The North Forum should continue to work with local learning centres across their region to fulfill their community remit.
- The North Forum should fund a project to strengthen links between learning centres, with strong links to partner agencies, to mirror that which has developed in the Highlands and Island in the last four years. This would help enable any future learning centre-based North Forum project to cover all of the geographic area within its remit.
- The North Forum should fund a second phase of the Engaging Men project to involve a wider range of centres and to build on the lessons learned during this project.

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