

SPRING 2009

NORTH•FORUM

NEWS

Welcome!

Welcome to this special edition of the North Forum newsletter, which highlights some of the best project outcomes from North Forum work over the last few years. It also points out where you can get more information about issues that may be particularly relevant for you in your own institution and work.

The North Forum has now moved away from commissioning individual projects so that we can focus our efforts through two coherent programmes of activity – in schools (through ASPIRENorth) and communities (through our new communities programme). As we move into this new phase of work, we felt that it was

important not to lose the very useful outcomes of previous projects. Many of these will be embedded in the North Forum's programmes of work over the coming years; however, others are more relevant to individual institutions, and so this newsletter highlights some of these for you, and indicates where you can get more details if you wish.

We hope that you will find this edition useful,

and we would be delighted to hear your comments or feedback on any of the issues raised.



Paul Sherrington
Vice Chair, North Forum

Good practice and useful recommendations from recent North Forum projects

Engaging men through local learning centres

There is plenty of evidence nationally that men are currently under-represented in post-compulsory education. The North Forum decided to commission a project to find out some of the reasons for this, and to develop practical ways of addressing the issue. The project reports (available on the North Forum website) have lots of useful information about the reasons why men don't engage in learning. The study found that there are four main types of barrier to men engaging with education – namely psychosocial, lifestyle, curriculum design and delivery, and informational barriers – and then looked at ways in which each type of barrier could be addressed.

Through the project, local learning centres across the North Forum area were funded to use their local knowledge and experience to develop projects that would suit the needs of men in their own communities. This resulted in lots of unusual and valuable innovations; and afterwards they reflected on what worked and what didn't work. These reflections, in the reports on the North Forum website, make for interesting reading, and the lessons learnt here have been shared amongst learning centres in the area, in the form of an action plan of practical ideas that have proved successful in attracting and engaging men.

The specific recommendations arising from the report for tertiary-level institutions are as follows:

- Develop a student support package that meets the needs of part-time students.
- 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.
- Develop guidance provision focused on the needs of men.
- Develop case studies of successful, male former pupils/students of all ages to use as role models with schools and community-based provision.
- Develop more effective links between work-based learning and post-compulsory level education.
- Work with boys at as early a stage as possible to raise expectations and clarify benefits and options.
- Develop programmes to attract men through leisure interests with clearly signposted progression routes.
- Engage with the wives, partners and families of men to encourage and support all members onto appropriate programmes.

Obviously, tertiary-level institutions alone cannot solve the issue of under-representation of men in education; the 'Engaging Men' reports suggest ways in which the issue can be addressed nationally and regionally, and these suggestions have been passed on to the relevant bodies for action.

Capacity building project: staff support website

The Forum recently developed a staff support website, to provide information for staff who are working with students and potential students, particularly adult learners returning to education. The site is designed to be used by anyone who comes into contact with potential students, and it recognises the key role that non-teaching staff, including admin staff, customer services staff and others have in shaping the learning experience of students and potential students. The site has seven main sections, which you can dip in and out of as you have need to:

- Section 1** – Information centre
- Section 2** – Know your area
- Section 3** – Courses and progression routes or articulation
- Section 4** – Student support
- Section 5** – Techniques and skills
- Section 6** – Marketing and advertising strategies
- Section 7** – For staff development officers

Each section has short, downloadable pdf files which you can print out and refer to. The site can also be used to help train new staff, particularly in learning centres, and there is a range of materials on the site to help with this, along with a section for staff development officers. We recently removed the requirement to register to download files, to make the site even more user-friendly. Try it for yourself at <http://www.staff-support.co.uk/>

Scoping study of learning centres in the North East

The North Forum gathered together information about the learning centres in the North East. We'll be using this in our future work, but you might want to look at the directory of learning centres (complete with contact details) available on our website (www.scotland-northforum.ac.uk).

Video project

As part of this project, we produced six videos promoting post-compulsory education and life-long learning. Each video communicated key messages by tapping into the local flavour of designated areas within the north of Scotland. These areas were:

- North-east coast – Banff, Fraserburgh, Peterhead**
- Aberdeen city and immediate area**
- Central Aberdeenshire and Moray**
- South Highlands and Inverness**
- North and West Highlands**
- Western and Northern Islands**

The video for each area features a number of local young people who are taking part in post-school education, providing role models for other young people and information about the range of potential post-school options. These videos are proving popular on YouTube, and links are available on the North Forum website.

FE transition project: easing the transition between schools and colleges

The purpose of this project was to ease the transition between schools and colleges in the North Forum area so that the pupils are prepared and supported appropriately and so that the transition is successful. The project identified lots of good practice and also made recommendations for future action. In particular, the project developed a series of case studies that illustrate good practice by colleges and schools across the Forum area. The project report, on the North Forum website, contains a host of useful recommendations for colleges, a few of which are highlighted below for you to consider:

- The concept of further education and its associated career and educational progression benefits should be marketed by members of the North Forum so that further education is perceived more as a complementary and parallel routeway to post-school education for pupils progressing from schools with a range of qualifications and exit points.
- Colleges in the North Forum area should develop a section on their websites collating information relevant to school leavers wishing to enrol on both non-advanced and advanced courses. The information should contain contact names, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of those who can supply information which may be useful to potential students from schools.
- Information which would allow school leavers to make appropriate choices and which clarify relevant key issues should be produced by each college. The information should be made available in a format – electronic or paper – with which school leavers may readily identify.
- Colleges should offer activities both within college and on school premises to allow pupils to gain experience and knowledge of elements of further education at an early age. If possible such activities should attempt to involve parents or guardians in order to provide information on opportunities for progression beyond school.
- Colleges should offer school staff the opportunity to visit colleges, receive information as regards college provision and inspect college facilities on information days. To reach as wide range of colleagues as possible, it might be desirable for such sessions to be held on school in-service days.

National bridging project

The national bridging project took place across Scotland to look at how bridging between HN and degrees could be improved. The North Forum looked at computing and engineering, while other Forum areas looked at other subject areas. The North Forum work identified the need for more soft skills training materials (e.g. on report-writing and presentation skills)

to be made available for students hoping to progress from HN to degrees; these were developed and circulated to colleges in the North Forum area. They also made available the HELM (Helping Engineers Learn Maths) materials across the Forum area.

Access route planner: 'course you can' website

The Forum wanted to promote lifelong learning opportunities throughout its area and de-mystify the routes into post-compulsory education, so it set up the Access Route Planner project. The project developed a means of setting out progression routes between institutions in the North of Scotland, and a website was developed to provide a 'one-stop shop' covering informal and formal educational opportunities in the North of Scotland. It is available at www.courseyoucan.org.uk.

Mapping ethnicity in the Highlands and Islands

The report had two aims: to identify barriers faced by minority ethnic groups in the research study areas in accessing further and higher education; and to recommend practical ways in which those barriers may be removed or reduced and access to further and higher education be improved for minority ethnic groups. This area of work is large, and encompasses many different departments and functions within each North Forum institution. Institutions will wish to consider the detailed recommendations arising from this study, a few of which are outlined below to give an indication of the types of issues involved:

- Colleges and universities should pursue joint approaches to this work with other relevant agencies in their local areas. In some of the research study areas mechanisms for joint working already exist, e.g. Community Planning Partnerships; however, these could be used more effectively to address the issues identified.
- Mass marketing and promotional approaches are inappropriate when the potential minority ethnic post-school market is highly differentiated. Colleges and universities need to explore more creative methods of communicating and conveying information about their courses and qualifications and make it meaningful to this audience. Institutions may wish to consider, for example:
 - Developing more outreach marketing /promotional

activities, going out to communities rather than expecting communities to come to them.

- Organising taster sessions.
- Having information meetings with specific communities (e.g. Chinese) with an interpreter.
- Translating key documents (e.g. course overviews, qualifications framework and access to funding) into relevant languages and ensuring that information is circulated to the relevant networks and publications accessed by these groups.
- Staff involved in guidance and support need to be more skilled up and sensitive to the diverse needs of minority ethnic groups. Given the strong influence of adults in their children's post-school decision making, there is a need to improve the communication links between the adults or 'potential learners' identified in the report (see www.scotland-northforum.ac.uk) and advice services, so that adults have a better basis from which to assist their young with making post-school decisions.

FE/HE transition report

The FE/HE Transition project was carried out by the colleges and universities in the North East of Scotland, and it aimed to reduce or eliminate barriers to smooth transition between the institutions so that students were able to move from a college to an HEI with ease and confidence.

Although the project involved partners in the North East of Scotland only, the work undertaken and the lessons learnt will be of use to all institutions dealing with transition. In addition, the project developed two tools that can be used by all institutions, particularly the buddy scheme manual, which contains generic, undated material, so it is still relevant and would be of use to any Forum partners who are interested in setting up such a scheme but who were not involved in the initial project – it is available online at http://www.scotland-northforum.ac.uk/documents/buddy_training_manual.pdf

The report included detailed recommendations for and examples of good practice in information days for college students and HEI familiarisation events: while some of these are specific to the institutions involved, some may also be useful to other institutions within the Forum area. Similarly, the specific recommendations on articulation agreements are useful for any institution: see the report on the North Forum website for more details.

North Forum newsletter

If there is any issue that you would like to see covered in future editions of this newsletter, please contact the Forum Manager, or the newsletter editor, the Forum's Vice-Chair, Paul Sherrington, at psherrington@banff-buchan.ac.uk

Schools liaison activities

This report outlines the widening participation initiatives funded by the four Scottish Forums that relate to schools: it describes the initiatives and includes information about their evaluation. Lots of its recommendations have been addressed in the North Forum's schools programme, ASPIRENorth, but there are also recommendations that are useful for individual institutions to consider, and these are listed below:

- Employing current students as link students, ambassadors or mentors in both the primary and secondary sectors is a key factor in success. It is further recommended that, if possible, students who have attended the target schools or their feeder primaries or have lived nearby or who come from the same socio-economic groups should be recruited to work in these schools.
- To continue to break down barriers and to further enhance relationships between FE/HE providers and the feeder primary schools it is recommended that FE/HE staff attend parents' evenings, open nights, PTA meetings and any school social events.
- Attendance at events in primary schools not only has a direct impact on pupils but there may be spin-off benefits in that parents are made more aware, they acquire accurate information and can exert a powerful influence on their offspring. It is recommended that parents are targeted as part of the schools visiting initiative.
- FE and HE institutions should offer opportunities for primary school children to participate in activities on their campuses. Examples could include using language laboratories, using computer technology, music and science workshops or any activity which relates to the primary curriculum.

Latest news!

The North Forum has just appointed two new Communities Development Workers. Fiona Hawthorne (based in Inverness) is working across the Highlands and Islands, and Debbie Robertson (based in Aberdeen) covers Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray. Fiona and Debbie will plan and run the North Forum's Communities programme, which has the following aims:

- to raise aspirations about, and promote participation in, further and higher education in communities across the North Forum area (Highlands and Islands, Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray);
- to operationalise the communities programme objectives outlined in the North Forum strategic and operational plans (see www.scotland-northforum.ac.uk);
- to build on the outcomes from previous North Forum projects (such as the ones outlined in this newsletter);
- to share good practice in community engagement across the North Forum area.

Fiona and Debbie will be out visiting North Forum partners to find out how they can help you in your communities work. Some of you will meet Debbie and Fiona as they travel around the area, and you should also feel free to contact them directly (debbie.robertson@abdn.ac.uk or f.hawthorne@abdn.ac.uk).



“ I previously worked with Macmillan Cancer Support in Highlands & Moray as Fundraising Manager and before that managed Strathpeffer Community Centre for four years, where I set up a learning centre. I'm really looking forward to the challenges of this new role and getting out to meet with the Forum partners and communities. ”
Fiona Hawthorne



“ I am looking forward to my new role working with people from the community in the Grampian and Moray area. I am keen to ensure that people have the opportunity to achieve their learning ambitions wherever possible and to help bring communities together through learning. ”
Debbie Robertson

This newsletter has been designed to give you a flavour of some of the key projects carried out in the Forum in recent years, and has highlighted a few of their key recommendations. The full reports from all these projects are available on the North Forum website – www.scotland-northforum.ac.uk – if you want to investigate the outcomes of any project in more detail. Alternatively, if you want any more information on anything in this newsletter, please contact the North Forum Manager, Caitriona Maciver, on c.maciver@abdn.ac.uk

Caitriona Maciver

