

University of Kent

RUFDATA evaluation plan for schools based widening participation activity 2008-11

What are our *Reasons and Purposes* for evaluating Aimhigher & Widening Participation?

The University and Aimhigher have made a considerable investment in trying to widen participation to higher education. Around 75% of children in Kent and Medway are educated in non-selective secondary schools where it is much more likely that there will be low progression to higher education. We have developed a curriculum and activity offer for students that range from 'tastes of HE' in year 8 through to a systematic engagement in generic and subject based learning from year 11 to 13. We are committed to working with teachers, students and parents to ultimately create a culture in non-selective schools where there is an engagement in thinking about HE and an expectation that students will be able to progress into further and higher learning.

However, despite this ongoing commitment we need to consider the questions that need asking and the ones to answer. How much is enough? When do we achieve 'the tipping point' in individuals' aspiration and attainment? When do we achieve, in partnership, a stable ethos change within the sixth form? Do we need engagement across the entire school to be effective? What is the right balance between generic skills and academic subjects?

One of the wonderful surprises of our development work has been to experience not only the positive impact that our student ambassadors have on students in secondary school (often their own school) with regard aspiration raising and subject input but to realise the significant impact that the experience has on the ambassador's own learning. This recognition is something that we wish to move from the anecdotal through to an evidence base that can help to establish the ambassador role more systematically within the student experience at Kent.

During our work with colleagues in schools we have also discovered that many teachers would like to engage in subject based activities. Teachers' positive engagement with curriculum is key to the positive engagement of their students in learning. This seems an obvious statement, although it is made because often this seems to be a missing link. Therefore, we are interested in building a range of approaches to this issue.

What will be our *Uses* of our evaluation?

A plan for the evaluation of widening participation activities already exists within the University and is contained within the University's Widening Participation Strategy (2007-10). Equally, Aimhigher Kent and Medway, of which the University is a part, undertakes a range of evaluation activities throughout the year. This plan, which has been requested by the HEFCE, will be used as an opportunity to weave together evaluation activities from these two sources and engage in future joint planning.

We want to critically review our practice and ensure that it is the best that it can be. And we want to share with partners and internal staff who may not know about it yet the quality of the work being undertaken by staff and students and chart the truly transformative impact that many students have already felt in their lives through their involvement.

What will be the *Foci* for our evaluation?

Our focus is to assess the contribution that our progression curriculum and associated events have on participation and progression to higher education. Our interest extends to students and staff in our partner institutions and parents and the wider community. Equally, we are interested in the impact of this work on the University staff and students who develop and deliver this activity as part of their overall experience.

There is also an interest in trying to establish an understanding of the levels of activity and

engagement required for students to support their effective progression to higher education (or proactively engage with the discounting of certain opportunities).

Finally, a particular focus of this plan is to ensure that the work undertaken by the University of Kent and by Aimhigher Kent and Medway is evaluated in reference to each other.

Numbers engaged in the evaluation are contained within the timescale and data sections of this document.

What will be the range of *Data and Evidence* for our evaluation?

Data and Evidence – Qualitative and quantitative methods

1. Analysis of participation, progression, retention and achievement trends by drawing on a range of data sets.

From year one (if available):

- Flagged information at individual level will be sought from UCAS and HESA for both Partner and Aimhigher school students.
 - Widening Participation premium data for Kent students and UCAS field on parental employment used at individual level for intake from Partner and K&M Aimhigher schools.
 - Predicted and actual GCSE data at individual level available to establish longer term trend analysis.
2. Sample for quantitative and qualitative evaluation established between Partner and Aimhigher schools.

Using Widening Participation premium students as the whole group, impact will be measured using the following categories:

From year one (if available):

- Students from outside of Kent and Medway to act as a second control group (for widening participation) to the first (all home young UG entrants not receiving premium).
 - Partner School students in two sub-groups (those recorded as engaged in activities and those not engaged in Kent activities from partner schools).
 - Aimhigher (Kent and Medway) school students as part of collaborative study
 - Identify sample groups from those students derived from both Partner and Aimhigher schools for qualitative study.
 - Aimhigher and Partner summer school students.
3. Develop a shared measure of engagement for students undertaking activities with Kent and Aimhigher – a 'touch scale' – that allows us to assess investment and the relationship to impact. This will link to longer-term measures of retention and degree classification.
 - This will be developed in year one and piloted in year two with students in the sample group.
 4. Train student ambassadors in qualitative research methods to undertake impact assessments with participants in Kent and Aimhigher activities.
 - Ambassadors will be trained in year one.
 - Ambassadors will be evaluated as a case study that will be available by year three. The University is interested not only in the impact that the

ambassadors have on our school students but also on the impact that their involvement has in their own learning and development.

5. Evaluate the success of subject forums with teachers. Use groups to assess if there has been a change of expectation and ethos in the school (and college?). Also looking at indicators of levels of engagement with teachers' subject engagement and learning.
 - Undertake a qualitative study in year two drawing on interviews and questionnaire.

6. Baseline Data

The University will collect data on participants from partner schools in the following fields:

- Name
- Date of birth
- Gender
- Post code
- School
- Attainment data
- Fields on ethnicity, disability, occupational background of carer and experience of higher education will be collected through the University's engagement in Aimhigher.

Collaborative Evaluation Study between the University of Kent and Aimhigher Kent and Medway

The University of Kent Partner School programme targets a number of schools that are also AHKM partners. It makes sense to collaborate and evaluate the effect of these programmes working in tandem. In many cases, AHKM students will attend both AHKM activities and Kent Partner School activities. Student participation in both programmes will be recorded and at the end of each academic year we will identify 3 groups of students:

- 1 Students in two University of Kent Partner Schools
- 2 Students in two AHKM Schools
- 3 Students in two Joint Schools

Students in each of the groups will be tracked, and data relating to attainment and progression collated and analysed. In addition to the data tracking exercise, we will use a variety of methods to collect qualitative evidence to assess the impact of the programmes.

2008/09 to 2010/11		
Ambassador training	Annual programme of research skills training linked to existing Ambassador Scheme	Ambassador Forums – feedback mechanism to Kent and AHKM team
Data sharing	Annual cycle of data sharing between Kent and AHKM	Shared tracking of individuals and cohorts
Student-focused research	Focus groups for Yr 9 & Yr 12 2 Kent P Schools 2 AHKM Schools 2 Joint Schools	Initially delivered by Kent and AHKM team – with research-ambassadors taking on role after training
	Participation tracking 2 cohorts - Kent activities only 2 cohorts - AHKM activities only 2 cohorts – both Kent & AKHM activities	
Staff-focused research	Focus groups for school staff 2 Kent P Schools 2 AHKM Schools 2 Joint Schools	Initially delivered by Kent and AHKM team – with research-ambassadors taking on role after training

	School staff forums	Delivered by Kent and AHKM team
Activity evaluation data	Shared data as part of individual and cohort tracking	Data provided by LA, Connexions and LSC through AHKM

Who will be the *Audience* for our evaluation?

A plan for the evaluation of widening participation activities already exists within the University and is contained within the University's Widening Participation Strategy (2007-10). Equally, Aimhigher Kent and Medway, of which the University is a part, undertakes a range of evaluation activities throughout the year.

This plan, which has been requested by the HEFCE, will be used as an opportunity to weave together evaluation activities from these two sources and engage in future joint planning.

The data and analysis will also be useful in the planning of future provision by our partners in schools, further education colleges, local communities and by staff at the University.

What will be the *Timing* for our evaluation?

An annual cycle of monitoring and evaluation of quantitative data exists in the University's current evaluation and this has been refined to articulate with the collaborative requirements of working with Aimhigher. This annual cycle is available but has not been contained in this plan due to the level of detail contained within the document. This section identifies broad themes that will be investigated during the next three years, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Year one

- Analysis of participation, progression, retention and achievement trends by drawing on a range of data sets established and maintained.
- Qualitative study of school students undertaken by trained ambassadors.
- Train student ambassadors in qualitative research methods to undertake impact assessments with participants in Kent and Aimhigher activities.
- Develop a shared measure of engagement for students undertaking activities with Kent and Aimhigher – a 'touch scale'.

Year Two

- Pilot the 'touch scale' with students in the sample group.
- Evaluate the success of subject forums with teachers by undertaking a qualitative study

Year Three

- Ambassadors will be evaluated as a case study that will be available by year three.

Who should be the *Agency* conducting the evaluation?

The University of Kent has an annual cycle in place for pulling together data on participation, which is undertaken as a collaborative venture between the Student Planning Office and the Partnership Development Office. Aimhigher Kent and Medway already have in place sophisticated data collection and analysis for monitoring and evaluation purposes which will be drawn upon for the successful delivery of the joint model of evaluation proposed within this document.

Qualitative work will be undertaken by student ambassadors, including paid and voluntary, and 15-20 Super ambassadors trained in research methods for evaluation.

We will be seeking to work towards internal sustainability for this approach with a rolling programme of training for student ambassadors with a view to being able to accredit this learning activity so that evaluative research becomes integral to how we build student capacity.

Jen Wyatt, University of Kent
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