Aimhigher Communications
Resource Pack
Aimhigher Communications Resource Pack

The Aimhigher Communications Resource Pack has been developed by the National Communications Resource Team (NCRT) to provide practitioners with general guidance on their communications activities. We would value feedback on its content and suggestions for additional communications resources that would be of use.

If you have a specific question about communications or would like advice on a particular activity you can contact a member of the NCRT on 0117 929 7096 or aimhigher@harrisoncowley.com

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Developing a communications plan

If you embark on a journey, it's a good idea to have a clear idea of your destination and how you are going to get there before you set off. It's the same with creating a communications plan. A plan is like a road map for your communications activity – the overall direction that you'll take to accomplish your objectives.

Creating a communications plan involves a few simple steps that will help you identify what you want to achieve and how you plan to get there, using the various communications tools available to you. It will also help you to stay in control of progress and provide a framework for evaluating your success.

**Top Tips**

Before you start developing a communications plan consider the following pointers.

- Keep it simple. Your communications plan doesn't need to be pages long – just clearly presented and easy to understand.
- Make it focussed. Don’t try to do everything, be realistic about what’s achievable.
- Know as much as you can about your target audiences before you begin.
- Review similar communication activities within the Aimhigher network – what can you use or repeat? What worked well and what could be improved?
- Hold a brainstorming session with colleagues to trawl for fresh ideas and approaches.
- Remember that external factors may have a bearing or influence on your plan e.g. term times, seasonal events or legal factors.
- Be prepared to be flexible. Update your plan as you go along, making the most of experience and opportunities as they arise.
- Look for opportunities for working with external organisations or partners who may be targeting the same groups as you.
- Ask Aimhigher colleagues for feedback on your plan – they may have useful suggestions to make.
- Conduct a SWOT analysis to ascertain which external factors might impact on your communications activities – see appendix A on page 73 for a SWOT template.
Developing a communications plan

Developing a plan

Every communications plan will be different but most should include the following key information – use the following section headings to help you develop a structure for your plan. If you would like further advice on putting together a communications plan you can contact the NCRT on 0117 929 7096 or aimhigher@harrisoncowley.com

Objectives

Being clear from the outset about what you are trying to achieve is the vital first step in creating your plan. When considering your communication objectives, ensure that they complement the overall objectives in your area or region’s strategic plan and the objectives detailed in the national communications strategy.

Check your objectives against the SMART mnemonic – are they:

- Specific?
- Measurable?
- Achievable?
- Realistic?
- Timely?

It’s important to consider from the outset how you will measure the success of your activity. Establishing a benchmark or starting point at the beginning of your plan means you’ll be able to measure the success of your activity and whether a difference has been made. Find out if any data or research exists on how things stand at the outset, so you’ll have a ‘stake in the ground’ to measure against once the activity is finished.

Target audiences

The next step is to identify who your communications activity is targeted at. You may have several different target audiences that you want to reach, for example:

- Young people aged 13-16
- Young people aged 16-19
- Older learners and returners to education
- Parents and other family members
- Teachers/tutors in schools, colleges, communities
- Aimhigher brand champions in schools, colleges and universities
- Connexions/IAG personal advisers and careers advisers
- Admissions/WP staff in HE institutions
- Employers
- Training providers

There may also be other audiences such as the local education authority, community groups and business organisations. It’s tempting to try and include everyone in your target audience list, but be realistic as to how many you can reach given available time, resources and budget. Be as specific as you can with each group, for example segmenting each where relevant into age range, school or geographical area. This will help you to decide which communication tools will be most suitable when you come to choosing which tactics to use. You might also find it helpful to refer to the messaging framework (annex B) within the national...
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Communications strategy. You can download this document from the Communications section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/communications_resource_pack/developing_a_communications_plan/national_communications_strategy.cfm)

Once you’ve got an initial list, try to identify some overall priorities so you can ensure that the majority of your budget and resources are concentrated on the most important audiences. For example:

**Primary audience**
- Students aged xx to xx
- Teachers within xx catchment area
- Parents with children aged between xx and xx

**Secondary audience**
- Businesses employing xx to xx people
- Local authorities, education department
- Community groups

**Tertiary audience**
- Internal audiences (Aimhigher network)

Remember that it’s better to communicate effectively with a limited number of audiences than poorly with too many.

**Key messages**

Once you have identified your target audiences, think about what messages you are trying to communicate. Developing key messages will help you to be clear about what it is you want your target audience to ‘hear’ or understand as a result of your communications activity. The messages will probably be different for each of your target audience groups, although there may be some that are common for all.

Visit the Key Messages section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/key_messages.cfm) for help.

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target audience</th>
<th>Key message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>‘By progressing to higher education, I can earn more money’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>‘Higher education means better employment prospects for my students’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>‘Higher education leads to better qualified, more efficient employees’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>‘Higher education provides individuals from all backgrounds with greater opportunity and fulfilment’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Avoid statements that are too complex. Cutting the waffle and aiming to be as succinct as possible is the best way to create messages that work. A good way to try your messages out is to see if they pass the ‘elevator test’. Imagine you are in a lift between floors and only have a minute to explain your message to a companion beside you. Would they understand what you meant?

Strategy

Now you are ready to consider the overall strategic approach that you are going to take to achieve your communications objectives. Your strategy should be about what you are going to do to achieve your objectives, rather than how you are going to do it. The strategy provides a unifying ‘big picture’ into which all of your individual communications activities fit.

Your strategic approach may have a number of separate elements, for example:

❑ To actively engage with parents and relatives of the target cohort in a particular area.

❑ To promote the achievements of Aimhigher through the local or regional media.

❑ To communicate regularly with key stakeholders in the area about how they can become involved in Aimhigher activities.

Tactics

The tactics are the specific communications activities, tools and techniques that will make each part of your strategy a reality. Some of the most popular include:

❑ Newsletters

❑ Press releases

❑ Information packs

❑ Seminars

❑ Leaflets, stickers and posters

❑ Websites

❑ Videos/DVDs

❑ Advertising

❑ One-to-one briefings

❑ Direct mail

❑ Exhibitions

The communications activities you choose should fit into your overall strategy and be driven by your objectives, target audiences and key messages. You will also need to think about the time, budget and resources that you have available - don’t try to do everything! Also think about opportunities for working in partnership with other organisations to deliver particular activities (see page 8 for further information).
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Knowing something about your target audience will help you choose the best tactics to use. What do they read, watch and do? Where are they most receptive to new information? Are they more likely to favour information delivered electronically or face to face? Getting access to market research data that provides this type of information will be of great benefit to your activity. Consider if this is available from partnerships, external organisations or within the Aimhigher network.

Budgeting

How much money you have available in the budget will ultimately dictate the size and scale of your communications activity. If you find yourself having to cope on a shoestring, remember that it is possible to do effective work with a small budget as long as you are realistic.

❑ Always draw up a budget at the start of any communications activity. It may not be possible to put exact costs in for everything, so use estimates until you get the real figures.

❑ Ask for advice from others in the Aimhigher network about the sort of costs you may incur if you have limited experience of running a budget.

❑ Ask suppliers for written quotes when you are putting together your communications plan.

Activity schedule

Once you have decided on your tactics you will be in position to put together a simple activity schedule outlining how you plan to roll out each set of activities over a period of time. Make sure you think carefully about other key dates or events that may impact on your timing. At this stage you should also consider specific roles and responsibilities. It is useful to circulate your communications activity schedule to your colleagues so they can see what is coming up and identify potential synergies or conflicts at an early stage.

Evaluation

It is crucial that your activity plan outlines the criteria that you will use to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of your communications activities. Visit the Monitoring and Evaluation section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/programme_information/monitoring_and_evaluation.cfm) for advice.
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Working in partnership

Working in partnership is central to the Aimhigher programme so it is always worth considering how you can capitalise on existing relationships with other organisations or build new ones to maximise the impact of your communications activities.

Where you can, work with third parties who already have direct communication channels to your target audiences. Piggybacking onto the communication activities of others makes sense if it avoids duplication of effort and materials.

Developing joint communications initiatives can also be extremely successful as long as there is a good match in terms of target audiences and key messages. Any joint initiatives should be treated as such. It is essential that early on in the project, the lead organisation is identified in terms of communications and that there is agreement about how the activity will be managed. Usually, all parties will be given the credit for the partnership project, either through all logos appearing on the communications materials or by naming all the partners in the text.

Top tips

- Find out what they want to get out of the communications activity – what’s in it for them?
- What will they bring to the partnership e.g. contacts, mailing lists, experience, funding?
- Discuss how the activity will be funded and agree who does what, as well as approval processes and spokespeople.
- Be clear about timings and agree an ‘exit strategy’ between you – what is the lifespan of the communications activity?
- Hold regular update meetings to ensure continued dialogue

Action on Access has produced a report entitled ‘Aimhigher and the Learning & Skills Council: Approaches to joint working’ which illustrates a range of joint working arrangements. A PDF version of the report can be downloaded from the Resources section of the Action on Access website (www.actiononaccess.org/?p=2_5_4_3_1).
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National communications strategy

The Central Office of Information (COI) was commissioned to develop a national communications strategy for the integrated Aimhigher programme in Autumn 2004. To download a copy, visit the Communications section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/communications_resource_pack/developing_a_communications_plan/national_communications_strategy.cfm)

If you have any questions about the national communications strategy, please contact a member of the NCRT on 0117 929 7096 or aimhigher@harrisoncowley.com
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Knowing your audience

The success of any communications activity is based on knowing who you are speaking to. Once you have identified your target audience(s), you need to find out as much as possible about them to ensure you are using the most effective routes to communicate with them.

Research can play an important role in building and measuring effective communications campaigns. This section provides an introduction to market research and how it can add value to your communications plan.

Market research

Though there are many different sorts of research, it can be broken down into two basic types: quantitative and qualitative research.

Quantitative research is when numerical data is gathered - for example, if you need to be able to say that '50% of people said Yes' to something, or 'a quarter of the population say they want' something else. Simply put, it's about numbers - objective hard data.

On the other hand, if you want to gain a more in-depth understanding of something - for example if you want to know not only what people do but why they do it, or not just what they want but why they want it - you need qualitative research.

Quantitative research

This research method is based on collecting statistical data through questionnaires or surveys in order to determine public opinion.

Quantitative research involves the use of structured questions where the response options have been predetermined. For reliable conclusions to be drawn from the research, questions must be clearly defined and widely understood, and samples for quantitative research must be representative of the target group.

Different methods are used to undertake quantitative research including face-to-face, telephone, postal and online methods. Each has its pros and cons, depending on the objectives of the research, time and budget constraints.

Cost-effective ways to obtain quantitative research include conducting an online survey via your website, interviewing young people at a taster day or similar event, and including specific questions on an event feedback form (see appendix B for an example). You can also look out for relevant research undertaken by other organisations - sources of widening participation research are listed on the Action on Access website (www.actionaccess.org).
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Quantitative questions

Yes or no

On a scale of 1 to 5 . . .

How much would you pay . . .

How many times . . .

Qualitative research

This research method measures information based on opinions and values as opposed to statistical data. Whereas quantitative research refers to counts and measures of things, qualitative research refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things.

Qualitative research is much more subjective than quantitative research and uses very different methods of collecting information, mainly individual, in-depth interviews and focus groups. The nature of this type of research is exploratory and open-ended. Small numbers of people are interviewed in depth and/or a relatively small number of focus groups are conducted.

Participants are asked to respond to general questions and the interviewer or group moderator probes and explores their responses to identify and define people's perceptions, opinions and feelings about the topic or idea being discussed. The quality of the finding from qualitative research is dependent upon the skills, experience and sensitivity of the interviewer or group moderator.

For example, you could test an idea for a new campaign or promotional give-away by establishing a focus group comprising members of your target audience using existing contacts such as student ambassadors or Year 11 pupils who have taken part in an Aimhigher activity. It may be appropriate to offer participants an incentive such as music vouchers in return for their time. Another option is to invite existing contacts to sit on a youth panel which you can bring together on an ad hoc basis to generate ideas or provide feedback.

Qualitative questions

Do you feel . . .

What is important to you . . .

What do you like about . . .

Useful websites

Market Research Society (www.mrs.org.uk)

British Market Research Association (www.bmra.org.uk)

The Association for Qualitative Research (www.aqr.org.uk)

The Independent Consultants Group (www.indepconsultants.org)
Media relations

Media relations is the name given to the business of getting editorial coverage in the media and can be one of the most challenging areas of a communications programme.

The national communications strategy (see page 9) has identified that the media, in particular local print and broadcast media, plays an important role in addressing barriers to aspiration, attainment and access to HE amongst target audiences. Therefore it’s worth considering using media relations as part of your communications plan.

This section guides you through the various activities involved, from writing impactful press releases and ‘selling’ your story to the media to handling an interview with a journalist.

The NCRT has run a number of media training workshops for Aimhigher practitioners, covering writing for the media, dealing with the media and interview techniques. A copy of the course handout is included in appendix C on page 76.

What makes a media story?

The following pointers can help you to decide when to use media relations.

- Annual milestones on the education calendar - such as UCAS deadlines or clearing - present opportunities for partnerships to promote their own activities to the regional and local media. As do national announcements with regard to widening participation and student finance.

- Events that involve activities are often newsworthy, particularly if they present good picture opportunities e.g. children learning to cook as part of a summer school. Getting local VIPs – such as the town Mayor or a member of the local football team – to open or attend an event can help add news value. Publicising events in advance through your local newspaper or the ‘what’s on’ section on websites can help to increase attendance.

- Announcements of new ways of partnership working or new schemes such as mentoring will often make the news pages, particularly if you can support them with a case study. Facts and figures about outcomes – such as numbers of young people entering HE in your area – also have news value.

Visit the Communications section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/communications_resource_pack/media_relations/examples_of_local_media_coverage.cfm) to view examples of local media coverage and some of the various regional and area partnership activities that have generated newspaper stories.

You may also want to start a ‘good ideas’ file of things that other organisations have done successfully to raise their profile or hold a creative brainstorm about possible news stories with representatives from local schools, Further Education Colleges (FECs) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).
If you’re not sure whether a particular event or activity has news value, or if you think you have a story that may be strong enough to generate national media coverage, contact the NCRT on 0117 929 7096 or aimhigher@harrisoncowley.com

Getting to know your media

It is important to know who your target media are before beginning any sort of media relations campaign.

Most people will be aware of the daily and weekly newspapers in their region and the main TV and radio stations. Pull together a list of those that you know and ask colleagues and other contacts to identify gaps. Speak to young people, parents and teachers about what they read and listen to and which websites they use. To find contact details for your local media try the Media UK Internet Directory (www.mediauk.com).

Once you have a list of media you will want to identify the key contacts at each. Where education correspondents exist they will be a key contact but you may also want to gather contacts for the news, business and healthcare contacts, as who you speak to will depend on the individual story. Set up a table of all key journalists where you can record their contact details, how they like to receive information, and notes of past contact and stories they have covered.

You may want to call and introduce yourself to education correspondents at your local media. Ask if there is a convenient time when you could brief them by phone or in person on Aimhigher and find out more about what types of stories they are interested in. Encourage them to use you as a first point of call when they require information or comment on widening participation issues.

If you need help in identifying local media or finding contact details, contact the NCRT on 0117 929 7096 or aimhigher@harrisoncowley.com

Writing a press release

A press release is the most common format used to present information to the media – it could contain details of an event, a story about a new widening participation scheme in the area or an invitation to attend a photocall.

Follow the step-by-step guidance below on how to write a press release:

Who it’s from – Brand the press release with the Aimhigher logo (and partner logos where relevant) so that the journalist knows whom the information is from.

What is it – Clearly state at the top of the page what type of information is being sent. Is it a news release, a photocall notice, an event invitation, or copy for a feature?

Date – Each press release should be dated for the day it lands on a journalist’s desk.

Headline – This should be a short, catchy title giving a sense of the story in very few words. If you want to entice a journalist or photographer to an event or photo-call then clearly state the date, time and location directly below the headline.
Media relations

**Length** – As a general rule, the main body of a press release should be no more than two pages, including Notes to editors and contact details. Reducing body copy to a single page is even better. Line spacing should be 1.5 or double-spaced. Wherever possible, keep paragraphs to no more than three sentences unless splitting the paragraph would lose the sense of the copy. Also try to keep sentences short - ideally no longer than two lines each.

**Opening paragraph** – The opening paragraph should tell the journalist everything they need to know about the story. Think to yourself, if this story is cut to one paragraph how will I say it/write it. As a general rule, opening paragraphs should contain no more than 50 words and should include the Five-Ws – Who, What, When, Where and Why - but remember, with a limited amount of words you can only provide the very basic details. You will be able to use the rest of the release to elaborate.

**Style** – The style throughout should be as concise and punchy as possible and jargon-free. Avoid acronyms where possible or at least write them in full the first time you use them e.g. higher education (HE). Imagine you are writing for someone who knows nothing about the subject matter and think how best to catch their attention. Keep to the facts and avoid subjective judgements – it may be fair to state that your event is ‘the first of its kind in the area’ but not that it is ‘fantastic’.

**Quotes** – The purpose of a quote is to add colour, explanation or authority to your story. Don’t use quotes to say again in different words what you have already said in the press release. A quote should support rather than simply repeat the key messages or text of the release. A press release should be neutral in tone so a quote is your chance to use language that really sells your event or activity. Ensure that quotes are attributed to a relevant spokesperson whose comments will have weight and that you have their approval on the exact wording. Introduce the speaker before starting the quote (e.g. Aimhigher coordinator, John Smith said: "xxxxxxxxxx"). Keep quotes short and split them where necessary (e.g. Mr Smith continued: "xxxxxxxxxx"). Never include more than two spokespeople in a press release.

**Facts & Figures** – Journalists love statistics, particularly if they are relevant to their particular area or region. Wherever possible, use key facts (such as participation levels) to support your story. Also consider using general facts & figures about higher education when appropriate. Remember to include your website address or the Aimhigher portal address in the press release where relevant.

**Continuation** – When a release is longer than a single page, highlight its continuation by including the words "more" or "more follows..." at the bottom of the first page and the word "continued" or "...2/" at the top of the second page. You should also indicate where the main body of the release ends by writing "Ends" below the final sentence.

**Contact details** – You should always include contact details at the end of a press release, including name, phone number and email address. Also give your website address if further information is available there.
Media relations

Notes to editors – Notes to editors provide additional information to help the journalist or newsdesk maximise the story, for example the fact that accompanying photography and student success stories are available (see page 18 for further details regarding the use of student success stories). Notes to editors should also include a boilerplate – one or two paragraphs that summarise key information about an organisation.

Checking – It is important to check your release before submitting it for internal sign-off. Look out for the following:

- Unnecessary words
- Spelling or grammatical errors
- Contradictions or inconsistencies – particularly if using percentages
- Accuracy of any statistics or numbers quoted
- Accuracy of dates, times and places
- Punctuation

Distribution – Check what format (email, post, fax) journalists prefer to receive information in before sending a press release. Avoid duplication by checking names and addresses. For example, many local radio stations broadcast from the same building and are covered by a single newsdesk. Make sure it’s timely – if you are publicising a forthcoming event, try to send your release out several days in advance but not so early that it gets lost in the pile. See selling a story on page 19 for more information.
Media relations

Template media materials

A number of template media materials are included in the appendix for your reference. These include:

Example mentoring press release (p88)

Example summer school press release (p90)

Example taster day press release (p92)

Example press call notice (p94)

Example letter to a celebrity / MP (p95)
Media relations

Using photography

Photography is a powerful tool to help convince a journalist to use your story and can draw a reader’s attention to an article. Where possible offer the media one or more images to accompany a story, but remember to clearly mark them as ‘background information’ if you send them to TV or radio!

If you are confident that your event or announcement has strong pictorial potential then you may want to consider holding a photocall where you invite the media to come and take their own photographs or video footage (see the example press call notice in appendix G). Bear in mind that media schedules are extremely tight so it is worth canvassing interest from the media in advance and taking advice on appropriate times and locations. If a newspaper does decide to send a photographer, plan ahead by deciding who should be featured in the photograph and any branding opportunities (posters, T-shirts etc) that can be incorporated.

Even if a photographer has agreed to attend your event, it is always advisable to take your own photographs as well or, if the budget will allow it, book a professional photographer. Alternatively you may want to stage a picture to accompany a story that is not event-based, such as the announcement of a new mentoring scheme. The following checklist will help to ensure you get the maximum mileage from your photos.

- Don’t use out of focus or badly framed images. Check that there is no one in the background making ‘rabbits ears’ or obscuring any branding and try to catch people looking happy.

- Remember that the image may be reproduced at any size. Don’t try to include too many people in it or make it too busy, as it will be unusable below a certain size.

- When photographing under 16s, make sure you have written permission from a parent or guardian. A template photography permission form is included in appendix xx. Also check the whole picture carefully for anything that may suggest bad practice or present health & safety issues.

- Always provide a photo caption, clearly identifying who is in the picture and key information to support the story e.g. John Smith (left) and Fred Bloggs (right) from St Mark’s Sixth Form College try their hand at DJing during yesterday’s Aimhigher Music Festival. Held in conjunction with local universities and FE colleges, the event provided information on the wide range of courses related to music. Never provide addresses for those pictured.

- If you are emailing a picture to a journalist, make sure it is a high-resolution file – at least 300 dots per inch (dpi) – and in the right format e.g. JPEG.

- Plan your image to make it interesting. Make sure that it tells a story and remember that an action shot is often more useable than people standing in a row.
Keep your best images on file so that where there is no opportunity to generate an original picture to accompany a story you can select an existing image to help illustrate it. Consider designing an Aimhigher project involving local photography students to help build up your WP image library.

**Student success stories**

The media often want real life examples to support a story so it is useful to build up a bank of student success stories that can be used to illustrate both news and feature articles. Student success stories can also be used to add human interest to publications and to demonstrate the success of Aimhigher activities. An example of how student success stories can be used is available to view in the Communications section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/communications_resource_pack/media_relations/student_success_stories.cfm)

Usually by student success stories, we mean examples of young people from the Aimhigher target cohort who have applied to HE, are participating in HE, or have recently obtained an HE qualification. It is worthwhile gathering a diverse range of case studies to help engage with specific audiences and remove some of the myths associated with higher education. Also, the media may often want to feature an individual from a particular background and you may often only be able to use each case study once in a particular publication.

Partnerships use a range of approaches to gather case studies. For example:

- HE students participating in mentoring schemes often have strong success stories to tell
- Tracking the progress of participants of Aimhigher activities such as summer schools and masterclasses can be a good source of success stories
- Partner organisations may be able to share specific examples such as students with disabilities or apprentices
- Aimhigher South Yorkshire has attended over 30 graduation ceremonies in the area to interview graduates about their backgrounds, why they decided to stay in education and what benefits they have gained from doing so. This has generated a bank of worthwhile role models.

Remember that you must always get specific permission from an individual to use their story in any type of publicity - an example case study consent form is included in appendix J. Let them see a written draft of the information you plan to use and provide details of what you plan to use it for - in a specific publication, at an event or with the local media - and when. Never include people's addresses or contact details, simply refer to the institution they are studying at or the area they are from. If you are planning to use a photograph to support the story then make sure you follow the photography guidance on page 96.
If you want to re-use a story after a period of time it is always worth contacting the case study again to check that their circumstances have not changed and that they are still happy for the information to be used. For more information on how to source and use student success stories, please contact a member of the NCRT on 0117 929 7096 or email aimhigher@harrisoncowley.com

Selling a story

Journalists are bombarded with many potential stories each day so often it is not enough to simply email or send your press release and then hope that the story appears. ‘Selling a story’ is a phrase often used by public relations practitioners to describe the process of approaching a journalist with information that they may be interested in using for a news story or feature article. Below are some useful tips on how to sell your story effectively.

Know who to contact – Making time for getting to know your media will help ensure that you know who to contact with which story (see ‘Getting to know your media’ on page 13). When in doubt start with the newsdesk, unless you are promoting a forthcoming event to TV in which case you might be better off speaking to one of the ‘forward planners’.

Be prepared – Before you make your first phone call, check that you have all of the relevant information to hand – especially a copy of the press release. It is also worth jotting down the key points on a separate piece of paper and a single sentence summing up the story.

Anticipate questions that the journalist might ask – when is the event happening, will it be a good photo opportunity, how many people are taking part, when will the relevant spokesperson be available for interview, are there statistics or student success stories (see page 18 for further details regarding the use of student success stories) to support the story etc. Make sure you are ready with answers - it may even be worth running over the key points with a colleague before you call.

TV journalists think in pictures, so remember to tell them what they will be able to film if they cover your event. Similarly, when talking to radio stations think in terms of who they will be able to speak to on the day.

Timing – Choose your time to call. Daily newspapers usually have editorial meetings around 10.30am to decide on the content for the next day so either call early or the afternoon before.

Don’t call a local or regional radio station 10 minutes before or after the hour as they will be preparing or reading a news bulletin. Check the ‘press day’ (the day the paper goes to print) of weekly newspapers or periodicals and ensure they have the information as far in advance as possible.

When you make the call, always ask the journalist if it is a convenient time to talk. They may be on a deadline and will be extremely unreceptive to being interrupted.
Once you’ve given the basic details, allow the journalist time to digest the initial information and ask questions. They may establish early on that they are not interested in the story or are not the right person to cover it.

Log everything – develop a system to log any contact with journalists. Not only will this form an essential part of the monitoring and evaluation process, it will also allow you to keep a record of who you have spoken to, about what story, and on what date, helping you to target future ‘sell-ins’.

Top tips

❑ Make sure you have read the publication or listened to/watched the programme you are targeting.

❑ Always check deadlines before calling – when do they go to press?

❑ The first time you call, ask whether it is a good time, or whether it would be better to call back later.

❑ Ask how they prefer to receive information – by phone, email or fax.

❑ Ask what kind of stories they are interested in – and make a note.

❑ Make sure you get their direct phone number if they have one, and any other relevant details.

❑ Keep a note of your contact with journalists – when it was and what was discussed.

❑ When you call again, remind the journalist what you discussed before, to help build the relationship.

❑ Invite the journalist to your events – they are more likely to remember you once you’ve met face to face.

❑ Don’t take it personally – not every story you sell in will be successful.
Media relations

Handling a media enquiry

If your story is of interest to the media, they will contact you for further information, or to request an interview. The following tips can help you to handle a media enquiry efficiently.

☐ Always respond promptly to requests for further information - journalists work to very tight deadlines and will appreciate your co-operation.

☐ Note down all of the relevant details including the journalist’s name, which publication or radio/TV station they’re calling from, contact details and, most importantly, their deadline.

☐ Make sure that you or an appropriate colleague is able to provide the journalist with what they need before their deadline. If this is not going to be possible, let the journalist know immediately.

☐ Never say ‘no comment’ as this can sound as if you have something to hide even when you don’t.

☐ Don’t speculate - remember that anything you say to a journalist may end up in print.

☐ If the media enquiry is contentious or relates to the Aimhigher programme as a whole or to HEFCE or DfES policy, contact the NCRT on 0117 929 7096 to discuss whether the response should be handled at a national level.

Organising a press conference

Many organisations use press conferences as a way to let the media know about major new developments or events they are planning. They are a good way of attracting media attention and are often tied in with a press call. However, you need to know when and how to organise a press conference, or you could find yourself facing an empty room.

With ever decreasing numbers of staff on the regional media, running any sort of briefing event that involves getting them away from their desks can be a risky business. Before deciding whether to go ahead with a press conference, it is a good idea to speak to two or three of the key regional media and ask their thoughts on whether it would be something they would be interested to attend. You could also ask what they would want to get out of it (it is in their interest to help you make their job easier) and what day/time/location they would prefer.
If you get a generally positive response and decide to go ahead then bear in mind the following points:

- Don’t spend more money than you have to - if something else hits the local news that morning you might end up with no one there.

- Pick the time and location carefully - take the advice of your key target audience (if you want to get TV along you will need to come up with a strong visual ‘hook’ for them).

- Offer some sort of refreshment to help entice the media along.

- Keep the briefing short - one hour maximum - and make sure you start and finish on time.

- Let the media know about the briefing well in advance and remind them the week it takes place.

- Be clear about why they should attend (opportunity to ask questions/ people on hand to interview/ learn more) - make it clear they can gain more from attending than simply asking you to email the information over.

Manage the expectations of those taking part - journalists are fickle creatures so you never know who will actually turn up until the day.
Media relations

Interview techniques

TV and radio will almost always want to interview at least one person when covering the story and newspapers often will as well when they need more background or are running a longer article.

Before agreeing to an interview and identifying available spokespeople, find out:

- Which newspaper/radio station/TV programme the interview is for and who the interviewer will be.
- Whether the interview will be live or pre-recorded.
- How long the interview will be (and the anticipated duration of the final piece).
- What time the interview will take place.
- The main points to be covered in the interview and whether anyone else is being interviewed.

Identify the best person for the interview and make sure they are fully briefed on the logistics of the interview and the main points of the story. If it’s a telephone interview then make sure they have a quiet office or an area without too much background noise and a landline to conduct it on. Where there is time, provide the spokesperson with a written briefing identifying the following:

- Details of the programme they will appear on.
- Key facts about Aimhigher and your activities.
- Likely questions, both easy and difficult.
- Two or three key messages that you want to get across.
- Some brief but interesting examples that complement the story.

The following advice may also be useful:

In the studio...

- Arrive in good time.
- Have a glass of water to hand.
- Ignore the microphone/camera – talk directly to the interviewer.
- For radio interviews, avoid rustling paper, clicking biros etc.
- For TV interviews, avoid wearing light-coloured clothes or bold patterns.

During the interview...

- Be yourself.
- Speak clearly and slightly slower than usual.
- Keep your replies simple and avoid jargon.
- Have confidence in your own knowledge.
- Give examples.
Media relations

Evaluating media coverage

Evaluating media coverage is an effective way to measure the success of your communications activities and can help to inform your future approach to media relations.

The first step is to make sure that you know about any media coverage you have achieved. Professional cuttings agencies will scan all the relevant media for you on a daily basis but are an expensive investment. Alternatively, subscribe to the daily newspapers in your area and give someone the responsibility of scanning them for Aimhigher coverage and related WP issues that may be of interest.

Always ask journalists when they are planning to cover a story so that you can look out for it and don’t be afraid to follow up to ask whether it went in – you can always order a back copy of the publication. TV and radio will usually be attending your event or at least interviewing a spokesperson to support your story so you should be able to find out when it will be broadcast and tape it.

Keep a monthly record of media coverage, including details of the publication or programme, its reader/viewer numbers, the story covered and the size/length of the coverage to assess your success. You may also want to look at how many of your key messages were included. See if you can identify any patterns about why some stories generated more coverage than others and apply lessons learnt.

Example media coverage

Visit the Communications section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/communications_resource_pack/media_relations/examples_of_local_media_coverage.cfm) to view examples of local media coverage.
Events of one sort or another are central to many Aimhigher activities and vary widely in their scope, audiences and content, from seminars and workshops to masterclasses and taster evenings. This section is intended to provide general guidance on common event management issues rather than advice on the types of events that practitioners should be undertaking to achieve their overall objectives.

For more information on the broad range of events undertaken by regional and area partnerships, visit the Aimhigher Activities section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/aimhigher_activities/index.cfm).

For information relating to summer schools, visit the section on Summer Schools under Programme Information (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/programme_information/summer_schools.cfm) and for information relating to the Aimhigher roadshow, visit the Roadshow section, also under Programme Information (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/programme_information/roadshow.cfm).
Events

Event planning

When thinking about running an event, first ensure you have the following:

- Enough time to organise the essentials - people, venue and materials. This could be anything from a few weeks to a year depending on the nature of the event. Remember, the more advance warning people have of what’s happening, the more chance you have of achieving a good turnout.

- Budget in place to cover the costs of running the event and any associated communications materials you’ll need (such as leaflets, posters and information sheets).

- The support and agreement of those you’ll be working in partnership with, such as the school, university or local authority.

Planning an event is like putting together a very specific communications plan and the same principles apply:

- Be clear about your objectives and whether running an event is the best way to achieve them. Also, check whether there are any forthcoming events that you may be able to use to achieve your objectives rather than running your own stand-alone event.

- Consider talking to representatives of the audience to test whether there is enthusiasm for an event of this kind and how they think it might work best. Also check out current practice examples to see if other Aimhigher partnerships have run similar events that you could learn from.

- Think in more detail about the type of event you want to run:
  - How long should/can it be?
  - Do you need to set a minimum or maximum number of attendees?
  - What are the key elements you need to include?
  - Who should present to have the most impact with your audience?
  - Will there be workshop/breakout sessions – who will facilitate these?
  - Will there need to be different activities for different parts of your audience?
  - Will you need presentation equipment or props?
  - What accessibility and health & safety issues do you need to consider?

- Identify your target audience(s) and the routes by which you can reach them.
Events

❑ Your target audience and availability of key speakers will help inform your choice of venue, date and time but you should also remember to think about other influencing factors such as term times and religious holidays. If you are not familiar with the venue then make sure you visit it well in advance to check it is appropriate and think about layout and branding.

❑ Make sure you organise any catering, equipment and supervisor needs well in advance and prepare branding, event materials and handouts/giveaways.

❑ Once you have decided on your date, venue and format, it may help to put together a timeline to help you plan the event. Successful event management is all about detail so include everything you can think of and allocate clear responsibilities.

An example event timeline is included in appendix K on page 98.

Top Tips

❑ Consider working with other partnerships or organisations to add impact to your event – widening the subject matter or the target geographical area for an event could allow you to do things on a broader scale and attract more of your target audience.

❑ Choose your venue carefully – if you are using a school, college or community centre, then make sure the room is large enough for your needs and suitably equipped. If you are using an external venue then choose somewhere central that is easy for the target audience to get to.

❑ If your event is open to any interested parties then use the local media to publicise it and investigate noticeboards, bulletins or websites at institutions, organisations or companies where you want to publicise it. Refer to the events section on page 25 for more advice on promoting your events.
Events

- If you are sending out invitations then ensure that your mailing list is up-to-date and accurate or you could miss your target and annoy others. Also be aware of data protection laws. Further details regarding data protection can be found on page 40.

- Use Aimhigher branding on your invitations and event materials for maximum impact. Also consider what promotional materials you want to give attendees to take away. Visit the Communications section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/sites/practitioner/communications/branding__logos.cfm) for details.

- Wherever possible, include interactive elements in your events – no one likes being talked at for hours on end. Visit the Aimhigher Activities section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/aimhigher_activities/index.cfm) for inspiration.

- Consider the comfort of your guests by providing refreshments and adequate toilet facilities.

- Ensure that your event is accessible to all. Visit the Communications section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/communications_resource_pack/events/top_tips.cfm) for a good practice guide for staff organising events in HE, produced by the NDT and TechDis.
Events

On the day

The actual day of the event is always hectic and often throws a few surprises at you so make sure you have put together a checklist of essentials in advance. What this includes will very much depend on the nature of your event but the following pointers might help.

- **Contact list** – make sure you have all relevant contacts listed in one place. Think about catering suppliers, presenters, facilitators, photographers and media for starters.

- **Signage** – get there early to ensure that the event is clearly signposted.

- **Essential information** – make sure you know where the nearest toilets (including disabled toilet) and fire exits are and agree who will be responsible for informing attendees at the start of the event.

- **Who’s who** – have a list of all planned attendees to hand and check people’s names off on arrival. Hand out badges at the same time if required.

- **Timing** – ensure you can see a clock to keep your eye on timing and prepare a strategy for if a particular session overruns.

- **VIPs** – agree who will be responsible for greeting and briefing speakers and media when relevant.

- **Handouts/giveaways** – agree what information will be handed out when and by whom. Handing out too much information during an event can be distracting but make sure you give it to people before they leave.
Evaluating events

It is important to always try and evaluate the success of an event. The following evaluation techniques will help you to demonstrate the worth of the event to colleagues and other interested parties and provide you with valuable feedback to make the next event even better.

- **Summarise attendance** – always keep a detailed record of how many people attended the event and who they were – you may want to break down attendance by type – e.g. age/area/business sector. For larger events you should also register numbers taking part in individual sessions/workshops.

- Develop user-friendly feedback forms and put one on each chair before your event begins. It’s a good idea to station someone by the door to ask people to fill them out as they leave - if you don’t get them there and then you are unlikely to ever get them back.

  Feedback forms allow you to measure change in attitudes and awareness as well as satisfaction with the event. You can also include questions to generate statistics that may be useful to include later in media campaigns or publicity material. An example feedback form is included in appendix B on page 74 for your reference. This form can be tailored to suit your event.

- Record comments, questions and requests for further information made during the event - these can be a good indication of interest levels and suggest themes for future events. You may also wish to include quotes in evaluation documents, on your website or in publicity for future events.

- If you require more in-depth feedback, ask attendees whether they would be willing to talk to you after the event about their experience and whether they found it useful or not, then summarise these discussions.

Certificates

If your event is aimed at children or young people, producing a certificate to hand out to participants can add value. An example certificate is included in appendix L which can be tailored to suit your event.
Touring theatre groups

What do they do?

Touring theatre companies use drama as a means to engage, motivate and communicate with their audiences, while exploring a particular concept or idea.

Educational theatre companies usually work in one of two ways - by producing tailor-written plays which address specific issues, such as the benefits and rewards of HE or the fears/anxieties of potential students, or through motivational drama workshops.

Theatre is an inspiring way to promote the Aimhigher message directly to the target cohort and raise awareness of the opportunities in HE.

Case studies

Below are some examples of the work carried out by educational theatre companies and the ways they have worked with Aimhigher partnerships to promote HE.

'The Promise' - Zip Theatre (Wolverhampton)

This piece of musical theatre was originally commissioned by Wolverhampton LEA and has been taken up by Aimhigher co-ordinators in Oxford, High Wycombe, Aylesbury, Northampton and Milton Keynes.

For more information, visit the website (www.ziptheatre.co.uk/plays.html#promise)

'Widen the World' - CragRats (Nottingham)

'Widen the World' focuses on four characters whose hopes, fears, knowledge and enthusiasm could be reflected in the lives of many Year 11 pupils. The storyline presents the wide range of post-16 options, the pressures of exams and the influence of parents, teachers and peers when it comes to decision-making. Young people then had the opportunity to explore these issues in greater depth through workshops run by the actors.

Aimhigher Nottinghamshire worked with Connexions and the LSC to fund the tour which has visited 66 mainstream and special schools in Nottinghamshire. In October 2004, the production helped over 7,000 Year 11 pupils in Nottinghamshire focus on their future plans. The scheme was then repeated in January 2006 when 7,500 Year 9 pupils attended the performances throughout the region.

Post performance analysis shows that as many as 89% of the children who attended the performances said that they now understand more about the options available to them.
**Events**

For more information, visit the Aimhigher Activities section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/aimhigher_activities/dissemination_of_practice/widen_the_world_of_nottinghamshire_pupils__cragrats_theatre_company.cfm)

'Your Life!' - Gibber (Northumberland)

Gibber was commissioned by an Aimhigher co-ordinator in Northumberland to write and produce a piece of theatre for Year 12 students. The result was a 35 minute high energy magazine style show that uses humour and popular culture to convey important messages and information about their options post sixth form.

The main aim of the performance was to empower the young people to think about their futures and take control of their own lives.

For more information, visit the website (www.gibber.org/index/post16.htm)

'HE 4 ALL' - ImpAct on learning (Greater Merseyside)

ImpAct on learning has delivered the 'HE 4 ALL' performance to Year 10 pupils from across Greater Merseyside for the last four years. Their motivational, fast paced show demonstrates that HE is for everyone, whilst also dispelling some of the myths and misconceptions.

The performance can be tailored to meet specific requirements and covers the effects of peer and parental pressure, progression routes to further and higher education and issues around student finance.

ImpAct undertake all of the administration for the tour and provide a full evaluation service. Teacher resource packs support the performance and 45 minute workshops are also available to selected schools.

**Useful websites**

Zip Theatre (www.ziptheatre.co.uk)

CragRats (www.cragrats.com)

Gibber (www.gibber.org)

ImpAct on learning (www.impactonlearning.com)

Y Touring Theatre Company (www.ytouring.org.uk)

BiteSize (www.bitesizetheatre.co.uk)
Promotional Materials

Well-designed, targeted communications materials – from newsletters and bulletins to information guides and leaflets – can create an instant impact and help Aimhigher partnerships communicate effectively with their target audiences.

This section provides advice on when and how to produce promotional materials to get your message across and includes examples of existing Aimhigher materials.

For details of how to order Aimhigher promotional materials, please visit Resource Materials on the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/sites/practitioner/communications/resource_materials/ordering_promotional_materials.cfm)
Choosing the right format

Before you can decide what materials are best suited to your needs, consider the following:

❑ Be clear about who you are targeting. Is it students, teachers, parents or other external organisations? Is it for an internal Aimhigher audience? It could be a combination of any or all of these.

❑ What do you want to communicate and how often will you want to communicate it? Will the information be the same each time?

❑ Think about how you will distribute the materials to your target audience – which format would work best?

❑ What is your budget? Think carefully about the quantity of publicity material you need. The main factor will be the cost of print. There are fixed costs for the preparatory work such as preparing plates and setting up machines which mean that small quantities can be relatively expensive to produce. Generally, the unit cost drops the more you have printed.

If you are still not sure about which format to use then speak to members of your target audience about what they think would work best for them.
Newsletters/bulletins

Newsletters and bulletins can be an effective way of staying in regular contact with your target audiences and are particularly useful when you need to communicate with a particular group on an ongoing basis about a range of issues. Many regional and area partnerships already produce some form of newsletter or electronic bulletin to keep relevant audiences informed of their activities.

Before you start producing a newsletter, think carefully about the frequency and whether you actually have enough interesting material to fill it regularly. It is better to produce a more infrequent but highly relevant newsletter than to send out monthly updates which contain little real news. Or in some cases a stand-alone briefing document may actually do the job better.

Consider what length your newsletter will need to be – bearing in mind that few of us have the time to properly read more than a couple of sides – and how many copies you will need to produce. You may be better off producing an electronic bulletin if...

- You are producing very small numbers or are on a limited budget – e-bulletins are much cheaper to produce and distribute.
- You need to communicate frequently (e.g. weekly) and include information that is very up-to-date. Inevitably by the time your newsletter is printed other things will have happened that you would have liked to include.
- You have limited information to impart – regularly filling a four-page newsletter can be challenging, whereas an e-bulletin is expected to be brief and can vary in length each time.

Whether you are using printed or electronic format (or both), ensure that the quality of the design, content and production are as high as possible and that you apply the Aimhigher brand guidelines. Download a copy of the branding guidelines from the Communications section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/sites/practitioner/communications/branding___logos/pdf_of_complete_branding_guidelines.cfm)

To view examples of existing Aimhigher promotional materials, visit the Promotional materials section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/communications_resource_pack/promotional_materials/examples_of_promotional_material.cfm)

If you have promotional materials that you would like added to the website, please email copies to the NCRT at aimhigher@harrisoncowley.com

Promotional Materials
Publicity materials

Below are details of some of the publicity materials that partnerships may want to use to support their activities and some advice on their use.

There are no set rules about which materials to use but production costs can add up quickly so always think carefully before you start producing something new. Pre-testing of materials such as leaflets, videos or information packs provides vital feedback and helps ensure you’re on target with your approach. Informal methods include draft versions or mock-ups of the campaign materials being given/shown to a small focus group or ‘panel’ that includes representatives of the target audience. Adjustments can then be made depending on the feedback received.

Leaflets

Most leaflets have a short shelf life so tend to be most useful for marketing specific activities or events rather than conveying information you want readers to retain long term. They should be visually striking to catch the eye of your target audience and not too heavy on copy. Usually leaflets present a ‘call to action’ of some kind so you may want to include some form of reply slip or at the very least contact details for further information.

Posters

Posters can also be useful to promote specific activities and events, but remember that you are relying on your target audience having the space and interest to actually display your poster. Many posters never make it onto a wall or languish on notice boards beneath more recent notices. Only use them if they serve a specific purpose in relation to your target audience and ask them what size poster they could accommodate. Never try to include too much information on a poster but do include contact details.

Information booklets

Information booklets can be a good way of providing your audience with more detailed information or advice and should be able to stand alone. Avoid the temptation to cram too much information into a booklet or to lower the production values - this often results in the booklet being difficult to read. Clearly signpost who the booklet is for and what information it contains in each section. Don’t reinvent the wheel - the DfES produces a number of Aimhigher information booklets that are available for regional and area partnerships to use. Visit the section on Resource materials on the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/resource_materials/information_booklets.cfm) to view what is available.
Promotional Materials

CD-ROMs

CD-ROMs are often used to stimulate web-based interactive technology in a portable format. Just as websites should never simply be an 'online brochure', so CD-ROMs should be more than simply a collection of documents crammed onto a CD. Think about the purpose of a CD-ROM and if, when and why your target audience would use one. You will almost certainly need specialist help to produce one and, unlike websites, once CDs are produced you cannot easily update them.

Videos/DVDs

Videos and DVDs can be a useful and innovative way of getting your message across, but they must be appropriate for the target audience. They are a relatively expensive way of reaching an audience and rely on specific opportunities to view them. If you do decide to produce one you should invest the time and money to do it properly and avoid producing the typical 'dull corporate video'. No one wants to be talked at by a television for long. Copies of the roadshow video and DVD are available to order – visit the Ordering Resource Materials page of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/resource_materials/ordering_promotional_materials.cfm) for details of how to order these and other resource materials.

Dos and don’ts for printed materials

Do refer to the Aimhigher branding guidelines when producing any publicity materials. Visit the Communications section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/branding_logos/pdf_of_complete_branding_guidelines.cfm) to download a copy.

Do use strong visuals and make the front page and first page of text as attractive and readable as possible.

Do use a limited number of clean, modern typefaces. Use bold and italic fonts sparingly and for emphasis. Make good use of white space and avoid materials that look too 'busy' or are too crammed full of type.

Do think about 'families' of material - does it all hang together as one unit?

Do work out an accurate estimate of how many copies you actually need Always ask printers for estimates based on different quantities so you can see the marginal cost. An initial run of 500 and then a reprint of 1500 will be more expensive than getting an initial run of 2,000 printed.
Promotional Materials

Do get at least one other person to review the content and get sign-off from your manager/director if required before giving the go-ahead to the printers.

Don’t use lots of acronyms or jargon.

Don’t overuse capitals - they make the text much harder to read and LOOK AS THOUGH YOU ARE SHOUTING AT THE READER.

Don’t forget to include details of where to find further information.

Don’t forget to factor in production time for design and print– a general rule of thumb is to allow a minimum of 4 weeks from start to finish.
Promotional Materials

Distribution

Always think carefully about how you will distribute any promotional materials before you start producing them or you could end up with boxes of unused materials in the corner of the office.

Can you distribute materials directly to your target audience via meetings or events or will you need to rely on electronic or real mail? If you are physically mailing promotional materials, weight will determine the cost of distribution and it is worth checking sample weights with Royal Mail in advance. Remember that you’ll need to allow for the cost of special envelopes or packaging for anything that won’t fit into a standard size envelope. Consider including a short covering letter when distributing material by post, explaining the purpose of the material and its particular relevance to that audience.

Weight will also be a factor if you are asking other organisations to distribute material on your behalf. For example, most magazines will charge a price based on weight for inserting materials into their publication.

It can be time-consuming to send out large amounts of material by post. You may be able to do this in-house but if it is a regular occurrence it may be more time and cost-efficient to use a local mailing house to handle distribution. Email is much more efficient – you can send many hundreds of emails at the touch of a button – but remember that some people receive over 100 emails each day and yours is in danger of being lost in the crowd.

Whichever way you handle distribution, you will need an accurate mailing list. When building lists, you must be aware of the provisions of the Data Protection Act in terms of how you can use the contact information that you gather (see the following section on Data Protection on page 40 for further information). Always make sure your lists are kept up-to-date to avoid sending material to people who have left the target organisation. It can be useful to include a postcard or other reminder in publicity materials, asking people to update their contact details.
Data protection

It is important to understand the legislation relating to the protection of personal information, particularly with regards to young people.

The Data Protection Act (1998) gives individuals certain rights regarding the information held about them. Anyone processing personal information must comply with eight enforceable principles of good practice. Click on the link to download a Data Protection fact sheet.

Specific provision is made under the Act for processing sensitive personal information, such as ethnic origin, and several extra conditions must be met, one of which is having the explicit consent of the individual.

Before you collect the data, it is a good idea to consider all the possible ways in which you might want to use the data. It’s much easier to inform those involved at the outset, rather than having to go back to them at a later date.

If you develop an application or feedback form which is not anonymous, a data protection clause must be included on the form (regardless of whether or not sensitive information is asked for) stating the purpose of the data and any third parties that you might share the information with e.g. HEFCE or your local HEI. The following wording is an example data collection notice:

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**Data Collection Notice**

The data collected here will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act and used to administer and manage this application. For monitoring purposes, this data may also be shared with [the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)/Name of University/Name of School] to help evaluate the effectiveness of this activity as part of the government policy to widen participation in higher education and to develop future policy.

[HEFCE/Name of University/Name of School] will not use your record in a way that would affect you individually.

Under the Data Protection Act 1998 you have the right to a copy of the data held about you by us, for a small fee. If you have any concerns about the use of data for these purposes or would like a copy of the data you have supplied directly to us, please contact [Insert contact details]

This gives people a general right of access to information held by or on behalf of public authorities. It is intended to promote a culture of openness and accountability amongst public sector bodies, and therefore to facilitate better public understanding of how public authorities carry out their duties, why they make the decisions they do, and how they spend public money.

The Freedom of Information Act applies to all recorded information held by English, Welsh and Northern Irish 'public authorities' including the education service and their related offices and agencies. Disclosure of ‘personal’ data is exempted from the Freedom of Information Act.

Any person has the right to make a request for information held by a public authority. The authority must usually respond to this request within 20 working days.

Exemptions

The Act recognises that there are grounds for withholding information and provides a number of exemptions from the right to know, some of which are subject to a public interest test.

For more information on the exemptions visit the Information Commissioner’s Office at www.ico.gov.uk

Further guidance is available from www.foi.gov.uk

Privacy and Electronic Communications (EC Directive) Regulations 2003

These prohibit the sending of unsolicited commercial email without consent and dictate that:

- The sender must not conceal their identity.
- The sender must provide a valid address for opt-out requests.
Promotional Materials

Photography Guidance

You need a person’s consent (or parental consent for those under 16) before taking their photograph. A template photo permission form is included in appendix I on page 96 for your reference.

Under the Data Protection Act, the data subject (i.e. the person appearing in the photograph) is responsible for deciding whether or not their photograph should be taken, provided they are able to understand their rights. It is up to you as the data controller (i.e. the person taking the photograph) to inform them why you want to take their photograph and how it will be used. The Information Commissioner’s legal guidance states that by the age of 12 a child is considered to have 'sufficient maturity' to understand their rights under the Act. However, we recommend that parental consent should be sought up to the age of 16 years to avoid any confusion.

If consent cannot reasonably be sought because the photographs are taken in a public place, for example at an outdoor festival, you must be able to answer ‘yes’ to the following questions in order to use them:

- Would people attending the event expect photographs to be taken?
- Would people in the photograph consider themselves to be in a public place, with no expectation of privacy?
- Do you think it unlikely that anyone would object to the photograph being taken?

If you invite a press photographer or TV crew to your event, or if you are planning to send images to the press yourself, you are responsible for making sure that participants know why images are being taken, where and how they will be published, and to obtain any required consent.

Try to include images of children from different ethnic communities in your communications whenever possible, and to use positive images of disabled children. This will ensure that your photographs are inclusive of the whole community and comply with the disability discrimination legislation. For more information about the Disability Discrimination Act, visit the DirectGov website (www.direct.gov.uk/DisabledPeople/fs/en)
Promotional Materials

Evaluating promotional materials

As with any other communications activity, it is important to try and measure the success of the promotional materials you produce, particularly as they can account for a significant part of your communications budget. Below are just a few suggestions of how you might do this.

- When sending out e-bulletins always include an email address for feedback.
- Include pre-paid response cards with newsletters or information booklets to request feedback.
- Numbers of materials distributed via events can be a useful guide of how many people you have reached but remember not everyone will read them.
- Direct people to a dedicated page on your website for more information and measure the traffic to that page.
- When you are using a number of different materials to attract people to register for an event or activity, give each material a different application code so that you can track which generated most responses.

Examples of promotional materials

To view a range of examples of Aimhigher promotional materials, visit the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/communications_resource_pack/promotional_materials/examples_of_promotional_material.cfm)

If you have promotional materials that you would like added to the website, please email copies to aimhigher@harrisoncowley.com
Websites

Websites can be a very effective way of communicating with your target audiences, allowing them to find out about your activities and key messages quickly and easily.

This section contains guidance on when you might need to develop your own website, first steps to doing so and good practice advice.

Visit the Websites section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/websites/index.cfm) for details of national, regional and area Aimhigher websites, along with other related sites, that you may be able to use to support your work.
Websites

**Do we need a website?**

Websites can be an extremely effective method of communicating but they can also be expensive to set up, take time to maintain and their success ultimately relies on the target audience choosing to make use of them. Therefore, it is worth considering the following points before you embark on setting up a new website:

- Who am I targeting and is a website the best way of reaching them – be wary of trying to be all things to all people.
- How will I generate traffic to the site?
- Are there other websites in existence that I could refer people to rather than reinventing the wheel, such as the Aimhigher portal? ([www.aimhigher.ac.uk](http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk))
- Could I develop a dedicated page on our existing regional or area site rather than a whole new site?
- How will we keep the site content fresh and is there sufficient staff resource and budget to keep the site regularly updated?
Websites

Developing a website – first steps

If you are planning to develop a website you need to put together a clear brief before you approach a web developer. This should include the following:

Target audiences

The first step is to decide which audiences you want to reach using a website. Do you want to provide a central source of information for partners, stakeholders and other Aimhigher practitioners? Or are you trying to reach the target cohort, to let them know the advantages of HE and different routes available? Perhaps you want your website to reach a number of diverse audiences, in which case the site will need to be clearly signposted so that it is easy to navigate.

Structure and content

Once you have decided who you want to target, it is important to understand your users’ needs so that you can create a site they will want to visit. Try to talk to members of the target audience about what content and functionality they would find useful. A web developer will help you to develop a site structure but you should have a clear idea of the types of information that will need to be included.

Administration/passwords

Think about which people will be responsible for administering the content on the site. If you need all users to be able to post information to the site you will need to specify this. Also consider whether all or part of the site needs to be password-protected for confidentiality reasons.

Functionality

A basic Content Management System (CMS) will allow you to post information about news and events on your site and to include downloadable documents. Consider whether you require any additional functionality such as discussion forums or email alerts as this will add to the cost of development.

Design

The website will need to be designed for maximum accessibility and the Aimhigher logo should be visible on every page of the site. Web developers should refer to the brand guidelines for more information.

A PDF copy is available to download from the Branding and Logos section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/branding___logos/pdf_of_complete_branding_guidelines.cfm)
Websites

You may also find it useful to look at examples of Aimhigher websites aimed at different target groups for inspiration (see page 52) and to read through the good practice advice (see page 48).

HERO is offering Aimhigher partnerships the opportunity to develop websites using their Content Management System (CMS). This is a straightforward and cost-effective way of creating a website without getting bogged down in technical issues. To find out more about the web development support available visit the websites section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/websites/developing_a_website/available_support.cfm)

For advice on website content, contact the NCRT on 0117 929 7096 or aimhigher@harrisoncowley.com
Good practice advice

Below is some good practice guidance that is worth considering when developing a new website or updating an existing site.

Web address

In order to promote consistency across the Aimhigher network, your web address or URL should follow the same format as the portal if possible e.g. www.aimhigher.ac.uk/sussex. You should also provide a link to the Aimhigher portal (www.aimhigher.ac.uk) or Don’t Stop website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/dontstop), depending on which is more relevant to your target audience.

Navigation

The most successful websites are those that give their users what they want as quickly and easily as possible. When a visitor comes to your site, it should be clear straight away:

- Who the site belongs to
- What purpose the site serves
- How to contact the people behind the site

There are a number of different ways to organise your site, depending on the content. For example, you might decide to divide the content by target audiences, or by particular types of activity. However you decide to organise your site, try to make sure that the structure is as logical as possible and include a site map and search facility for visitors who can't find what they are looking for.

Remember that visitors may not always enter your site via the home page so it is a good idea to include clear links back to important information such as the 'About us’ section, site map and contact details on every page. A useful guideline that many web designers use is that you should be able to get from any page on your site to any other page with no more than three clicks on your mouse.

Page design

Your home page needs to give a good first impression and the visitor should immediately know where they are and what information they will find there. There should be continuity between different pages and sections of the site and the Aimhigher logo should be clearly visible.

Colours should be subtle and co-ordinated. For visitors, the contrast between text and background is more important than the colour palette used. The screen doesn't always need to be filled with colour or content. White space on a screen can make it easier to see the important parts of the site. Certain fonts are easier to read online than others – these include Verdana, Georgia, Times New Roman and Trebuchet. Verdana is the standard Aimhigher font.
**Websites**

No two browsers will show a page in quite the same way so try to avoid making pages more than 800 pixels wide. Anything larger than this will mean many users have to scroll from left to right and back again as they read down the page. Use graphics sparingly and avoid gimmicky design like Flash animations. As a rule of thumb, do not create pages that take more than 30 to 60 seconds to load using a 28.8K modem.

**Accessibility**

Any website that is funded in part or in full by public money should be made accessible. Designing an accessible site means designing a site that allows as many users as possible to benefit from its content.

New guidance, developed by the British Standards Institution (BSI) and sponsored by the Disability Rights Commission, was launched recently. For further information or to purchase a copy of the PAS 78, visit the BSI website (www.bsi-global.com).

**Content**

Reading from a monitor isn't very comfortable and most people want to make it as short an experience as possible. One of the key factors in making your site a success will be your ability to create well-written content that keeps your user engaged. Here are some tips for writing website copy:

- Bulleted lists can be a useful way of summarising content and creating white space on the screen.
- Sentences and paragraphs need to be short and simple.
- Use bold and italics sparingly.
- Don't use underline as this will be confused with a hyperlink.
- The first time you use an abbreviation on each page, write the name out in full, followed by the abbreviation in brackets.
- Always use spell check and proofread copy before it is published.

**Maintaining the site**

A good website will develop over time and should never contain information that is out of date. Things to think about include:

- How often will the site need updating?
- What new content is needed and who will provide it?
- What extra functionality do you want to add, and by when?
- When should you refresh the 'look and feel' of the site?
Websites

Top tips

- Plan ahead. Allocate enough resources - time, money and people - to build and maintain your website.

- Make it easy to get around. Keep the design of your site as simple and intuitive as possible and avoid gimmicks.

- Stick to your subject. Don’t try to be all things to all people. Stay focused on the objective of the site and your target audiences.

- Think about the style. Writing for the web is different from writing for other media. Make sure your content is short and snappy.

- First impressions. Don’t make the home page too busy - provide a concise description of the website and entice visitors to dig deeper through the use of clear sign-posting.

- View your site through the eyes of a stranger. Once you have completed your site outline, view it in other browsers. Does it look like you wanted it to look?

- Don’t forget to publicise your site. Your website URL should appear on every piece of communication you send out, including business cards, letterhead, newsletters, brochures and posters.

- Reciprocal links. Ask partners and stakeholders if they will include a link to your site on theirs, in return for you doing the same.

- Keep your site current. Come up with a reason for people to revisit your pages and recommend them to their friends/colleagues.

- Feedback. Ask visitors for their feedback using online surveys or polls. Ask the opinion of colleagues and friends, as they will often see things with fresh eyes. Keep looking for ways to improve your website.
Websites

Evaluating websites

It is important that you regularly evaluate the success of your website to better understand the needs of your users and continue to improve it.

The Content Management System (CMS) should allow you to print off regular reports on the use of your website – check with your web developer how to do this. The following should be evaluated at least once a month:

**Unique visitors** – An individual who visited the website. If someone visits more than once, they are counted only the first time they visit.

**Number of visits** – A visit is a series of actions that begins when a visitor views their first page from the server and ends when the visitor leaves the site.

**Page views** – Someone clicking on any page is known as a ‘page view’.

**Most popular pages** – The pages with the highest number of visits.

**Most popular downloaded documents** – The documents that have been downloaded the most times.

In addition you should have a feedback option on the site to help you get more qualitative user feedback on an ongoing basis. You could also consider regularly surveying users about specific aspects of the site to find out what they do or don’t like.
Examples of Aimhigher websites

Go to the links below to view examples of Aimhigher websites aimed at both internal and external audiences.

uni4me
www.uni4me.com
Developed by Aimhigher Greater Manchester, the uni4me site answers young people’s questions about higher education.

gr8choice
www.gr8choice.org
Developed by the Peninsula partnership, gr8choice is an interactive website for students in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset, offering up-to-date information about HE as well as games, competitions and downloads.

Learn & Earn
www.learn-and-earn.org.uk
A partnership project by Aimhigher Lancashire, Lancaster University and the Open University, the Learn & Earn site provides a step-by-step guide to vocational qualifications for people in Lancashire.

Aimhigher Kent & Medway
www.ahkandm.ac.uk
The Aimhigher Kent & Medway site targets both external and internal audiences, using a separate password-protected section for practitioners.

Aimhigher Northumberland
www.aimhighernorthumberland.co.uk
The Aimhigher Northumberland site is divided by target audience, inviting each to enter the site via a different door.

Aimhigher West Midlands
www.aimhigherwm.org
The Aimhigher West Midlands site acts as a portal for the six area partnerships, providing information for learners, teachers, advisers, employers and anyone interested in HE opportunities.

North West Summer Schools
www.nwsummerschools4me.com
The North West region has a dedicated summer schools website, designed to engage pupils and bring the summer school experience to life through the use of case studies and video clips.
Internal communications

Making sure that your colleagues and key stakeholders are aware of any communications activities that you are undertaking is vital to ensure their success. It helps to maximise opportunities for synergies and allows people to learn from each other’s successes and challenges. This section contains some basic advice on how to make your internal communications a success.
**Internal communications**

**Who needs to know?**

Start by thinking about who may need to know about your plans and activities and build a list or database of contacts. Make sure you think about practitioners in other partnerships and any partner organisations, as well as your immediate colleagues. Make contact with relevant colleagues who can assist you in your activity and agree to keep in regular contact to discuss progress.

A useful way of making sure that all the right people are kept informed of your activities is to use the mnemonic RACI.

- **Responsible**: those undertaking the actual tasks that will achieve the communications plan outcomes e.g. Area Co-ordinator.
- **Accountable**: those charged with delivery of an outcome e.g. Area Steering Group Chair.
- **Consulted**: those with valuable input e.g. Connexions or other IAG partners.
- **Informed**: those who need to know that the activity is running e.g. Regional Director.
Internal communications

Communication channels

There are a number of different communication channels that can be used to disseminate information to colleagues and stakeholders. Consider which of the following will work best for you.

- One-to-one briefing
- Team meeting
- Internal email
- Area/regional bulletins and newsletters
- Practitioner bulletin
- JISCmail
- Noticeboard
- Newsletter
- Good practice guide
- Regional/area website
- Practitioner website
- Staff development events, seminars and conferences

Keep track of your communication activities from the outset, so you can share the results with others. Make notes as you go, then use the case study template (included in appendix M) to record what happened once the activity is complete.

Top tips

- Wherever possible, communicate face-to-face with colleagues. They are likely to be far more attentive and if it’s important to receive instant feedback, this is often the best means of doing so.
- Make sure the tone, style and content - and the communication medium used - are relevant to the audience.
- Make sure the information reaches all the right people, that it is regular, up-to-date and concise.
- Don’t overdo it. Information overload will result in colleagues becoming selective about what they read/take in.
How do you know if your communications activity has been successful? Whilst it's easy to rely on 'gut feeling' or general impressions, a more structured approach will help you tell if the messages are really getting through. Evaluation can also help you to demonstrate the value of your activities to others and provide useful feedback to inform future plans.

Knowing how far you've gone means you need to know the point that you started from. Putting a 'stake in the ground' against which you can track changes is the first fundamental step to take. At the simplest level this may be measuring numbers of young people from the Aimhigher target cohort in your area entering HE over time.

At the outset of any communications activity consider what your objectives are and then set your success criteria accordingly. Try to identify measurable outcomes and be as specific as possible.

Turn to the pages as indicated below to view guidance on the types of evaluation tools you can use to measure the success of your communications activity:

**Media relations – Page 12**

**Events – Page 25**

**Promotional materials – Page 33**

**Websites – Page 44**
The elusive youth market is an important yet often frustratingly difficult audience to reach. As the primary audience for Aimhigher, finding ways to communicate more effectively with 13 – 19 year olds is an ongoing challenge for practitioners.

There are many barriers to communication with young people and this is especially true of teenagers, who are likely to ‘tune out’ if they feel that they are being told what to do. Notoriously wary of attempts by adults to be cool or too ‘matey’ with them, vulnerable to peer pressure and fearful of putting themselves forward, teenagers demand a whole new set of rules be understood before meaningful engagement can take place.

This section of the resource pack offers ideas and suggestions for how you can become more effective in your communications with teenagers, shares best practice from other Aimhigher practitioners and offers some useful links for further information and support.
Targeting Teenagers

Five fundamentals

- **Talk Their Language** – terms such as ‘youth’ and ‘kids’ can be a real turn-off for many teenagers so be careful how and when you use these words. The adult ‘voice’ can be interpreted as patronising or alienating by young people so try to use language that is familiar and accessible.

- **Ask, Don’t Tell** – The best way to find out what’s hot and what’s not is to ask your audience. Set up your own teenager ‘peer panel’ who can test your ideas in return for incentives (such as music vouchers). As well as providing feedback, the panel is likely to be a useful source of creative ideas and will give you an insight into what makes teenagers tick.

- **Capture Their Interest** – today’s teenagers are into music, fashion, sport, celebrities, chat, games and texting. Look for ways to tap into these interests in order to get your messages across. The opinions and behaviour of peers and role models such as sports stars and DJs are particularly influential with teens.

- **Give Them Control** – teenagers are at a time in their lives when everyone’s telling them what to do or what not to do. Giving them a say in what’s happening will present a refreshing change and encourage involvement. Remember also that teenagers listen to teenagers – so let their voices be heard.

- **Cool Doesn’t Last** – the lifecycle of what teenagers rate as ‘cool’ can be incredibly short and, once the latest trend is perceived as being ‘mass-market’, its cache often wears a little thin. Check the temperature of your idea with your peer panel before leaping in.
Targeting Teenagers

Media relations

Traditional media such as regional newspapers tend to be of little interest to teenagers, so it’s important to find alternative channels for communicating your message. Young people are much more comfortable with a high volume of media choice than older generations and more adept at filtering in order to find what they want. Below are some routes to consider:

Local radio

Local radio stations, in particular commercial ones, are often geared towards the youth market. Many youth projects obtain restricted service radio licences in order to broadcast during the summer holidays, and community radio stations often have a dedicated youth-run show.

Ask your Peer Panel for help in identifying which radio stations are currently popular and who their favourite DJs are, then listen out for opportunities to get coverage for your activities. For example, offer the station an interview with a student ambassador from the local area who can give top tips on budgeting whilst at university, or let them know in advance if you are organising an open day or HE fair. Refer to ‘What makes a media story?’ on page 12 for more ideas.

Finding ways to get media-hungry teenagers involved with the local radio station is likely to capture their imaginations, for example arranging a visit to the studios or a ‘DJ-for-a-day’ promotion. The team at Greater Merseyside organised a ‘Radio Star’ competition with local station, Juice FM, which took the form of a Pop Idol type contest and gave constructive advice to budding radio presenters and DJs.

From the hundreds who auditioned or sent in their mixes, a group of 10 went to the public vote to become a Juice FM presenter, and the remaining five were able to show off their talent in a DJ challenge at a Liverpool nightclub. The winner was awarded a residency contract at the club and a regular gig as a specialist DJ on Juice FM.

Richard Finch, Information & Communications Officer for Aimhigher Greater Merseyside, uses local radio regularly to target teenagers in his area. He explained: "We use both BBC and commercial radio stations regularly as part of our communications activities, including cost effective advertising campaigns. One way to ensure that your message gets heard is to adopt the right voice. Young people know immediately if they are being patronised, so you’ve got to use the right language and approach. Our radio advertising always features the voices of young people and when we produced a special DVD as part of a campaign, it featured five sets of young people from various age groups, so it’s the voices and faces of their peers they experience, not ours."
**Targeting Teenagers**

**Online media**

“What’s cool about the net is it’s full of different opinions...lots of sites are actually arguments between people, you can make up your own mind.”

Online media that offers the opportunity for debate and not just one point of view gets young people’s approval. Chat rooms, message boards and e-zines provide fertile ground for expressing views. Posting a question about higher education on an appropriate site could spark a debate and give you valuable feedback on a particular programme or activity being planned. Ask your Peer Panel or other teenagers you meet which sites they use and then monitor them for opportunities to promote Aimhigher.

Refer to the section on ‘Websites’ on page 68 for examples of popular commercial websites aimed at teenagers, or look at the section on ‘New technology’ on page 70 to find out more about using blogs.

**Case studies**

Teens talking to teens – encouraging peer endorsement of the Aimhigher message – is one of the most effective ways to communicate with this target group. Mentoring schemes, ambassadors and student associates’ programmes are part of many partnerships’ core activity and can provide strong material for case studies. Written from the perspective of the students themselves, case studies and first person stories are popular with teenage media and can also provide impactful content for websites and leaflets.

Visit ‘Student success stories’ on page 18 for more information on using case studies.

**Images**

Relevant not just with the media but for all Aimhigher communications activity, photographs and images are an essential tool for reaching this audience but need to be chosen and used with great care. An organisation famous for its work with young people, the Prince’s Trust found that it’s easy to get it completely wrong. Teens found as many reasons not to identify with a picture or image, as with it. Try to get photos of young people participating in lively activities and events and make sure you consult with your Peer Panel before making any final decisions about images. Refer to ‘Photography guidance’ on page 17 for information regarding data protection.
**Targeting Teenagers**

Using cartoons and graphics is another way to capture a teenager’s attention. The DfES has developed a series of cartoon images for their Don’t Stop campaign and the artwork is available to download and use free of charge.

Visit the Communications section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/resource_materials/creating_your_own_promotional_materials/don_t_stop_artwork.cfm) to view the different designs available.
Targeting Teenagers

Celebrities

We live in a society where celebrities are increasingly seen as role models by young people. TV presenters and soap stars, film actors and actresses, pop stars, DJs and sporting stars all carry varying degrees of influence with teenagers. Therefore working in partnership with these individuals can help to communicate particular messages in a positive, exciting and persuasive way.

Visit the Communications section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/communications_resource_pack/targeting_teenagers/celebrities.cfm) to view coverage of Aimhigher which appeared in ‘Soaplife’ magazine in June 2006 – thanks to the endorsement of a member of the Hollyoaks cast.

To find a suitable celebrity that fits the budget, start off with some local area research, such as:

- **Radio stations** – which stations/DJs are most popular with teens?
- **Football clubs** – who are the key players?
- **What’s On guides** – which bands/musicians are coming to your area?
- **Theatre productions** – are any soap stars or TV actors popular with teens due to appear in a local theatre production or Christmas pantomime?

If celebrities believe in a cause they are more likely to offer their support for free, so you need to pitch your case to them in the same way that you would to a journalist. Obviously any celebrities or sports stars that come from an Aimhigher background will be particularly effective in getting the messages across to the target cohort, and may be more inclined to get involved.

If you are unable to contact your chosen celebrity in person or by phone, try sending a letter or email (via their agent if necessary) which includes a few examples of particularly effective activities or student success stories to get them on side. Invite them to take part in an event or photocall, or simply to provide a message of support which can be used on your website or in promotional materials. You can even offer to draft a quote on their behalf to ensure that your key message is included.

Carenza Lewis from Channel 4’s Time Team took part in an archaeological dig organised by Aimhigher Cambridgeshire & Peterborough and the University of Cambridge, alongside 50 local school children. Whilst Carenza had been working with local schools for some time, this was the first time that youngsters had been given the opportunity to carry out research ‘in the field’.
Targeting Teenagers

Carenza commented: "This is one way of making studying at university level real and interesting to younger learners. Archaeology is a great vehicle for this because it captures people's imaginations, covers so many academic subject areas, and can make learning about history and the environment truly exciting."

An example letter to help get you started is included in appendix H and contact details for most artists can be obtained from the Spotlight website (www.spotlightcd.com)
Targeting Teenagers

Events

Distinct from organising your own WP events, using an existing event organised by a third party as a means to connect with teenagers presents a powerful communications opportunity for Aimhigher partnerships.

Getting involved with someone else’s event provides several positive benefits, in addition to the potential cost savings, such as an existing structure within which you can tailor your messages, association with ‘cool’ brands or activities that teenagers are already interested in, a tailor-made media opportunity and access to a ready-made audience of your target cohort.

Any local event that is guaranteed to attract teenagers – for example extreme sports shows, computer gaming exhibitions, football-related events, music festivals and fashion shows – present opportunities for cross-promotion. Depending on budget constraints, you may be able to take a dedicated Aimhigher stand (preferably staffed by existing students or recent graduates), run a subject-specific workshop or host a Q&A session with a student ambassador. If the relevant equipment is available, you could also consider using the Aimhigher roadshow film for 13-16 year olds as an additional visual aid.

Ask for input and advice from the event organisers, or from other complementary organisations also attending. Consult your teenage ‘peer panel’ and then tailor your communications materials and approach accordingly. If it is not possible to participate in the event directly, ask the organisers if they would be willing to include an Aimhigher information booklet (available to view or order from the Aimhigher practitioner website - www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/resource_materials/information_booklets.cfm) or freebie within the event pack (refer to the following section on ‘Freebies’).
Freebies

Promotional items and giveaways are key tools in connecting with brand-conscious teenagers. Badges, pens, bags, keyrings – plus ‘of the moment’ items such as the hugely popular wristbands that were adopted and used for campaigns by several high profile charities – can all help to embed your message with teens. However, once again, the items must be appropriate and in the all-important upward curve of the ‘cool’ cycle.

A number of Aimhigher partnerships have developed freebies which can be given out at events or after young people have completed a particular activity. If popular, these items can also provide longer term exposure for the Aimhigher brand. Ali Redford, Project Officer with the ASPIRE partnership in South East London has produced a range of multi-coloured button badges as a giveaway for students at local colleges. Visit the Communications section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/region_and_area_campaigns/giveaways/button_badges.cfm) for further information.

Feedback from students has been very positive. Described as 'highly collectable' the colleges have reported back that students are 'covering their clothes with as many as they can find!'

Top Tips

❑ Check first whether anyone else has produced giveaways that you can use or adapt to avoid duplication of resources. Visit the section on Region and Area Resources on the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/region_and_area_resources.cfm) to view examples including badges, mobile charms, keyrings, pens and DVDs. If you do spot something you like, check whether the relevant partnership has received positive feedback from the target audience and if they consider it to have been a good investment.

❑ Do some research to find out what else is available – for example sports bottles, memo pads, mobile phone covers, juggling balls, frisbees, post-it notes, mouse mats, iPod cases, mini footballs, memory sticks and bugs.

❑ Test your ideas with your Peer Panel before committing to a particular design. Promotional items can be expensive so you need to get it right first time.

❑ Shop around. There are lots of websites offering promotional merchandise that will provide you with inspiration but it may be more cost effective to use local suppliers.
Targeting Teenagers

- If you do engage an external design company to produce something bespoke, make sure they are aware of the Aimhigher branding guidelines, which can be downloaded from the Communications section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/branding___logos/pdf_of_complete_branding_guidelines.cfm), and also the available artwork, which is also available to view and download from the website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/resource_materials/creating_your_own_promotional_materials.cfm).
Targeting Teenagers

Websites

Websites present a huge opportunity for connecting with today’s teenagers, who are the first generation to have grown up with internet technology. Get it right and you’ve got an enthusiastic, engaged and entertained audience. Get it wrong however, and you’ve lost them in the click of a mouse. Below are some do’s and don’ts on targeting teenagers via the web and links to commercial websites that are currently top of the pops for teens, as well as examples of Aimhigher teen-facing sites.

Do give them what they want - interactive elements such as games, chat rooms and quizzes are all popular with teenagers and will keep them on your site for longer. Give them an opportunity to talk about themselves and ask questions with message boards and blogs (see page 70). However remember that you as web ‘publisher’ are responsible for inaccuracies, abuse and other questionable material that may be posted by site visitors - investigate moderation issues and resource this appropriately.

Don’t make them work too hard - teenagers believe websites should be fun and entertaining. If you make the site too difficult to navigate, or have graphics that take ages to download, they just won’t bother. As the web has evolved people have come to expect navigation to run across the top and down the left-hand side - follow this expectation and don’t put barriers or gimmicks in the way of visitors accessing the information. If the functionality of your site is restrictive, consider including links to existing games such as UNIAID’s Student Survivor II (www.studentsurvivor.org.uk/2/).

Do let them have a say in the content. Use your Peer Panel or ask local school pupils to review draft designs and provide feedback. You’ll also gain that vital authentic ‘tone of voice’ of teenagers talking to teenagers.

Don’t assume that you can use the same content for a youth-facing site that you would for one that is aimed at practitioners. Ensure a level of consistency with other promotional materials but keep it appropriate to your audience - web pages should have short paragraphs and fit to one and a half screen scrolls. Keep the site design clean and fresh and keep content as concise and snappy as possible. The Don’t Stop website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk) is a good first port of call. Also worth a read are the information booklets for pre- and post-GCSE students, which are available to download from the Resource Materials section of the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/communications/resource_materials/information_booklets.cfm)
Targeting Teenagers

Below are examples of popular commercial websites aimed at teenagers:

**General**

**Monkeyslum** ([www.monkeyslum.com](http://www.monkeyslum.com)) - online destination for the pre-FHM generation of teenage boys aged 11-19.

**Mykindaplace** ([www.mykindaplace.com](http://www.mykindaplace.com)) - UK magazine-style site for teen girls including fashion, interviews, beauty, showbiz gossip, quizzes and astrology.

**Community**

**MySpace** ([www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)) - a free online community which allows users to share photos, journals and interests with other members.

**Habbo** ([www.habbo.com](http://www.habbo.com)) - a free virtual community for anyone aged 13 years or older where users can hang out with friends, design their own pages and create games and competitions.

**Bebo** ([www.bebo.com](http://www.bebo.com)) - a social networking site where members can stay in touch with college and school friends, share photos and discover new interests.

**Joga** ([www.joga.com](http://www.joga.com)) - an online community created by Google and Nike for anyone anywhere in the world who shares a love for football.

**Music & downloads**


**Lush Forums** ([www.lushforums.co.uk](http://www.lushforums.co.uk)) - UK music forum with over 10,000 members.

A number of Aimhigher partnerships have developed websites which are aimed at the target cohort. A popular example is uni4me ([www.aimhigher.ac.uk/uni4me](http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk/uni4me)) which has received over 10 million hits and more than 500,000 visits since it launched in July 2001.

Stuart Marshall, Website Project Coordinator for Aimhigher Greater Manchester, said: "Although the site was originally designed for the North West region, it has been used by schools and colleges all over the UK to inform young people about higher education and the different options available."
Targeting Teenagers

Feedback received from young people included the following comments:

"What’s good about uni4me is that you don't have to waste time reading info that you don't want to know - you can just go to the section or the parts that are relevant to you."

"A mint site - I love playing the games!"

"I would like to say thanks for such an excellent and informative site. It has helped me to answer some of the many questions I had about higher education."
New technology

In addition to websites, teenagers are now using a vast array of new technologies on a daily basis. Phenomenon such as computer gaming, MP3 players and text messaging have captured the attention of young people all over the world.

In this section, some of the most popular forms of technology used by teenagers and the associated marketing opportunities are explained. Not all of these options will be appropriate or affordable but a basic understanding of what’s available will help to give an appreciation of what teenagers are increasingly familiar with and may provide partnerships with new ways of engaging with them.

Blogs

Web logs or ‘blogs’ - essentially online diaries - represent the fastest-growing medium of personal publishing and the newest method of individual expression and opinion on the internet. Hundreds of thousands of people read blogs every day and, by doing so, influence each other’s thinking. Teenagers love blogs because they allow free rein for self-expression. Check out some examples at www.mykindablog.co.uk

How can I use them?

A third of children use blogs and social networking sites at least two or three times a week, according to a report by NCH and Tesco Telecoms. By monitoring relevant blogs, partnerships can easily and cheaply research the views and likes/dislikes of particular cohorts. The following search engines keep track of what is going on in the ‘blogosphere’:

- **Google Blog Search** ([www.google.com/blogsearch](http://www.google.com/blogsearch))
- **BlogPulse** ([www.blogpulse.com](http://www.blogpulse.com))
- **Technorati** ([www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com))
- **Feedster** ([www.feedster.com](http://www.feedster.com))

Blogs also present an opportunity to communicate targeted messages about Aimhigher. If your partnership has a youth-facing website, you could set up your own blog and ask members of the target cohort to post up their thoughts on a particular activity. Alternatively, find out which of your partner organisations (schools, colleges, HEIs etc) have their own blogs and invite student ambassadors to contribute to them.
Targeting Teenagers

Podcasts

Podcasts are professional or homemade audio broadcasts (including music videos or comedy programmes) that are available on the internet. Podcasting is the method of distributing these multimedia files for playback on mobile devices and personal computers. With the arrival of the must-have MP3 player (often referred to generically as iPods), a steady stream of uploading and podcasting opportunities have arisen. Visit the BBC website (www.bbc.co.uk/radio/downloadtrial/podcast.shtml) to access a step-by-step guide to accessing podcasts via your computer.

How can I use them?

With many universities now running their own radio stations, the next move could well be broadcasting their own podcasts across the web, which in turn would offer opportunities to disseminate widening participation messages.

There is also potential for Aimhigher partnerships to create their own audio content which can then be uploaded to a website. In order to podcast you will need some technical skills, including the ability to record your own audio in MP3 format and create an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) file which holds the ‘directions’ for sending your file when a user’s programme requests it. Visit Podcasting News (www.podcastingnews.com) to find out more.

Viral marketing

A technique whereby users are encouraged to pass on a marketing message to friends and relatives, viral marketing is often used by organisations targeting teenagers due to the easy transfer of messages or information via the internet or text messaging. Viral marketing depends on a high pass-along rate from person to person. If a large percentage of recipients forward something to a large number of friends, the overall growth snowballs very quickly. This technique is also sometimes referred to as buzz marketing, guerrilla marketing or stealth marketing, and is not always restricted to technology platforms.

How can I use it?

Screen savers, games or funny pictures that are easy to pass on via email or mobile phones. Get it right and it will be picked up and passed on in a flash by forwarding-crazy teenagers. Visit the website of the Information Commissioner’s Office (www.ico.gov.uk) for guidance on data protection law and how it applies to electronic communications.
List of Appendices

All documents included in this pack are available to download from the practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner)

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A SWOT template

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Case study template
### Appendix A - A SWOT template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aimhigher communications</th>
<th>SWOT analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths</strong></td>
<td><strong>Weaknesses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Threats</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B - Example event feedback form

Example feedback form

Name of Event
Venue and Date of Event

Many thanks for attending [insert details of event]. To help us assess our events we would appreciate you taking a few minutes of your time to complete this questionnaire. Please tick the boxes that best represent your views (□).

1. What were your main reasons for attending this event? (please tick all that apply)
   a. To find out about higher education opportunities in [area/region]? □
   b. To learn about Aimhigher? □
   c. To network? □
   d. Other (please specify) _____________________ □

2. How useful were the presentations/activities/seminars/workshops e.g. workshop on progression mapping – break down into separate questions as required
   a. Very useful □
   b. Fairly useful □
   c. Not at all useful □

3. Please rate the length of the event:
   a. Just right □
   b. Too long □
   c. Too short □

4. Please rate the venue:
   a. Very good □
   b. Good □
   c. Average □
   d. Poor □

5. Please rate the catering:
   a. Very good □
   b. Good □
   c. Average □
   d. Poor □

6. Had you heard of Aimhigher before this event?
   a. Yes □
   b. No □
Appendix B - Example event feedback form

7. What were your perceptions of higher education before this event?
   a. Not suitable for me / my child  
   b. Might be an option for me / my child  
   c. Don’t know  
   d. Other (please specify) ____________________________

8. Have your perceptions changed?
   a. Yes  
   b. No  
   If yes, please specify what changed your mind: ________________________________________
   ________________________________________
   ________________________________________

9. Please tick the boxes that best describe you:
   Gender:  Male  Female
   Age:  13-16  16-19  19-30  Over 30
   Ethnic Origin:  White  Mixed  Asian  Black  Other

10. Any other comments: ________________________________________
    ________________________________________
    ________________________________________
    ________________________________________
    ________________________________________

THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK
Please hand in your completed questionnaire to an Aimhigher representative
or fax it to [insert fax no]
Appendix C - Media training handout

Aimhigher Media Relations Workshop

Prepared by the National Communications Resource Team

Tel: 0117 929 7096
Email: aimhigher@harrisoncowley.com
Appendix C - Media training handout

Why use media relations?

The media, in particular local print and broadcast media, plays an important role in addressing barriers to aspiration, attainment and access to higher education amongst target audiences. Getting coverage of your story or event in the media can be a fantastic way to raise the profile of Aimhigher and/or increase attendance at events. Conversely, if they get a story wrong or provide negative information, the media can undo much of your good work.

What makes a media story

When undertaking any type of media relations activity, it’s important to first decide whether the information is actually newsworthy. The first question a journalist will ask is, ‘Why should anyone care?’, so you must be confident that your story has relevance.

If you are looking for fresh ideas, have a look through the ‘Current Practice Examples’ on the Aimhigher practitioner website, or the examples of local media coverage in the Communications Resource Pack (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner). You could also start a ‘good ideas’ file of things that other organisations have done successfully to raise their profile or hold a creative brainstorm about possible news stories with representatives from local schools, FECs and HEIs.

The following pointers can help you to decide when to use media relations:

- Annual milestones on the education calendar (such as UCAS deadlines or clearing) present opportunities for partnerships to promote their own activities to the regional and local media. As do national announcements with regard to widening participation and student finance.

- Events that involve activities are often newsworthy, particularly if they present good picture opportunities e.g. children learning to cook as part of a summer school. Getting local VIPs – such as the town Mayor or a member of the local football team – to open or attend an event can help add news value.

- Announcements of new ways of partnership working or new schemes such as mentoring will often make the news pages, particularly if you can support them with a case study. Facts and figures about outcomes – such as numbers of young people entering HE in your area – also have news value.

Writing for the media

In order to grab a journalist’s attention, you need newsworthy, targeted and well written information. When writing for the media, the information should always be tailored for their audience. Imagine that you are the editor of a local newspaper and visualise your reader – what would he/she want to read about?

There are various different formats that can be used to present information to the media but a press release is the most common. A press release is a written announcement prepared especially for distribution to the media in order to convey news about a company, organisation or individual (see Appendix 1).
Appendix C - Media training handout

Other types of media material include a photocall notice (Appendix 2), used to promote a particular event, and tailored copy, which could be a feature article, advertorial or opinion piece.

Press releases

The following guidelines will help to ensure that your press release ends up on the news editor’s desk and not in their bin!

Who it’s from – Brand the press release with the Aimhigher logo (and partner logos where relevant) so that the journalist knows whom the information is from.

Date – Each press release should be dated for the day it lands on a journalist’s desk.

Headline – This should be a short, catchy title giving a sense of the story in very few words. If you want to entice a journalist or photographer to an event or photocall then clearly state the date, time and location directly below the headline.

Length – As a general rule, the main body of a press release should be no more than two pages, including ‘notes to editors’ and contact details. Reducing body copy to a single page is even better. Line spacing should be 1.5 or double-spaced. Wherever possible, keep paragraphs to no more than three sentences unless splitting the paragraph would lose the sense of the copy. Also try to keep sentences short – ideally no longer than two lines each.

Opening paragraph – The opening paragraph should tell the journalist everything they need to know about the story. Think to yourself, if this story is cut to one paragraph, what do I want it to say? As a general rule, opening paragraphs should contain no more than 50 words and should include the Five-Ws – Who, What, When, Where and Why – but remember, with a limited amount of words you can only provide the very basic details. You will be able to use the rest of the press release to elaborate.

Style – The style throughout should be as concise and punchy as possible and jargon-free. Avoid acronyms where possible or at least write them in full the first time you use them e.g. higher education (HE). Imagine you are writing for someone who knows nothing about the subject matter and think how best to catch their attention. Keep to the facts and avoid subjective judgements (known as editorialising) – it may be fair to state that your event is ‘the first of its kind in the area’ but not that it is ‘fantastic’.

Quotes – The purpose of a quote is to add colour, explanation or authority to your story. Don’t use quotes to say again in different words what you have already said in the press release. A quote should support rather than simply repeat the key messages or text of the release. A press release should be neutral in tone so a quote is your chance to use language that really sells your event or activity. Ensure that quotes are attributed to a relevant spokesperson whose comments will have weight and that you have their approval on the exact wording. Introduce the speaker before starting the quote (e.g. Aimhigher co-ordinator, John Smith said: “xxx”). Keep quotes short and split them where necessary (e.g. Mr Smith continued: “xxx”). Try to avoid including more than two spokespeople in a press release, although there will be cases where it might be necessary to include more because of the number of parties involved.
Appendix C - Media training handout

Facts & Figures – Journalists love statistics, particularly if they are relevant to their particular area or region. Wherever possible, use key facts such as participation levels to support your story. Also consider using general facts and figures about higher education when appropriate. Remember to include your website address or the Aimhigher portal address in the press release where relevant.

Continuation – When a release is longer than a single page, highlight its continuation by including the words "more" or "more follows..." at the bottom of the first page and the word "continued" or "...2" at the top of the second page. You should also indicate where the main body of the release ends by writing "Ends" below the final sentence.

Contact details – Always include contact details for further information at the end of a press release, including name, phone number and email address. Also give your website address if further information is available there.

Notes to editors – Notes to editors can provide additional information to help the journalist or newsdesk maximise the story, for example the fact that accompanying photographs and student success stories are available. Notes to editors should also include a boilerplate – one or two paragraphs that summarise key information about an organisation (see Appendix 1) – and other relevant background information that will help to put your story in context.

Checking – It is important to check your release carefully. Look out for the following:
  • Unnecessary words
  • Spelling or grammatical errors
  • Contradictions or inconsistencies – particularly if using percentages
  • Accuracy of any statistics or numbers quoted
  • Accuracy of dates, times and places
  • Punctuation

Approval – Remember to get your press release approved by the relevant people within your partnership, or the relevant partner organisation, before issuing it. Quotes will need to be approved by the spokesperson in question, and be sure to have permission to use supporting materials such as a student case study.

Photocall notices

If you are confident that your event or announcement has strong pictorial potential then you may want to consider holding a photocall where you invite the media to come and take their own photographs or video footage. A photocall or press call notice is basically an abbreviated press release (no more than one A4 page in length) which acts as an invitation to your event, highlighting core information such as photographs and interview opportunities. The following information should always be included (see Appendix 2):

Headline – As before, this should be a short, catchy title giving a sense of the story in very few words.
When – The date and time of the event.
Where – Details of location or venue and how to get there.
What – A brief description of the event.
Who – Include any VIPs that will be attending, or a particular spokesperson that you want to promote.
Appendix C - Media training handout

**Contact Details** – Always include a contact name and phone number for further information. It’s a good idea to include a mobile number as you may receive calls from journalists on the day of the event.

**Tailored copy**

You may be asked to provide tailored information for the media – in the form of a feature article, advertorial (paid-for editorial), case study or opinion piece. In this instance you will almost certainly be restricted to a specific number of words and it’s important to keep to this word count, as not doing so may mean that the article is not used.

A feature is an in-depth article which focuses on a single topic but may involve a range of issues or organisations within it. Although a feature should be balanced, they tend to have a slightly more narrative style, allowing the writer a degree of personal creativity or commentary. The most important fact to remember is that as the writer, you are expected to behave as a journalist would – be questioning, informative and, where possible, impartial.

Advertorials are a combination of an advertisement and editorial copy, which are paid for by the organisation concerned, but designed to look like impartial editorial content.

Fact sheets are a very effective method of supplementing press releases with additional information for journalists. They are usually written as a series of bullet points and should ideally be no longer than a single page.

A case study – highlighting a particular event or activity – can add colour to a story as well as demonstrating the impact of Aimhigher in your area or region. Local media will be particularly interested in human interest angles so it’s a good idea to have a stock of student success stories with accompanying images to support your media activity.

Some tips on what makes a good case study:

- Activities with a clear ‘why’ and ‘how’ and a defined target audience
- A new approach to an old activity
- Activities that produce tangible results
- Fun participatory activities with a simple objective

**Using photography**

Photography is a powerful tool to help convince a journalist to use your story and can draw a reader’s attention to an article. Where possible offer the media one or more images to accompany a story but remember to provide a photo caption, clearly identifying who is in the picture and key information to support the story.

Even if a photographer has agreed to attend your event, it is always advisable to take your own photographs as well or, if the budget will allow it, book a professional photographer. Alternatively you may want to stage a picture to accompany a story that is not event-based, such as the announcement of a new mentoring scheme.
Appendix C - Media training handout

Visit the Communications Resource Pack on the Aimhigher practitioner website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/resource_material) for suggestions of how to maximise your photos and an example photo permission form.

Getting to know your media

It is important to know who your target media are before beginning any sort of media relations campaign.

You are probably aware of the daily and weekly newspapers in your region and the main TV and radio stations. Pull together a list of those that you know and ask colleagues and other contacts to identify gaps. Speak to young people, parents and teachers about what they read and listen to and which websites they use. To find contact details for your local media try the Media UK Internet Directory on www.mediauk.com. Don’t forget online media such as the regional BBC news site or the local Chamber of Commerce website and try to find out about newsletters and e-bulletins produced by local communities and other stakeholders.

Once you have a list of media you need to identify the key contacts at each. Where education correspondents exist they will be an important contact but you may also want to gather contacts for the news, business and healthcare contacts, as who you speak to will depend on the individual story. Avoid duplication by checking names and addresses. For example, many local radio stations broadcast from the same building and are covered by a single newsdesk. Set up a table of all key journalists where you can record their contact details, how they like to receive information, and notes of past contact and stories they have covered – see Appendix 3.

You may want to call and introduce yourself to education correspondents at your local media. Ask if there is a convenient time when you could brief them by phone or in person on Aimhigher and find out more about what types of stories they are interested in. Encourage them to use you as a first point of call when they require information or comment on widening participation issues.

Regularly reviewing the media in your region will not only help you to keep abreast of the issues and identify opportunities for partnership working with other organisations, it will also mean you will know what to expect if you are interviewed by one of them. Make the effort to listen to local radio stations and watch the regional TV news.

Selling in to the media

Journalists are bombarded with many potential stories each day so often it is not enough to simply send your press release and then hope that the story appears. ‘Selling a story’ is a phrase often used by public relations practitioners to describe the process of approaching a journalist with information that they may be interested in using for a news story or feature article. Below are some useful tips on how to sell your story effectively.

Getting the pitch right
Before you do anything, look carefully at the information that you want the media to cover and make sure you are clear about what the story is. You may only have a couple of minutes to get a journalist interested, so it helps to try and summarise the story in a single sentence. Don’t worry about trying to get your key messages across at this point, stick to tangible/newsworthy elements of the story that will be easy for
the journalist to grasp and are most likely to capture their interest. Think about each of the media you are pitching to and tailor the pitch accordingly. TV stations think in pictures and will want to know what they can film, while radio stations will be mostly concerned about who they can interview.

**Be prepared**
Once you are clear on what angle you are pitching, take some time to prepare supporting information you might need. Anticipate questions that the journalist may ask – when is the event happening, will it be a good photo opportunity, how many people are taking part, when will the relevant spokesperson be available for interview, are there statistics or student success stories to support the story etc. Make sure you are ready with answers - it may even be worth running over the key points with a colleague before you call.

**Timing**
Choose your time to call and always ask the journalist if it is a convenient time to talk. They may be on a deadline and will be extremely unreceptive to being interrupted. Daily newspapers usually have editorial meetings around 10.30am to decide on the content for the next day so either call early or the afternoon before. Check the ‘press day’ (the day the paper goes to print) of weekly newspapers or periodicals and ensure they have the information as far in advance as possible, particularly if you are hoping to get a photographer along. If you are promoting a forthcoming event to a local television or radio station, ask for the ‘forward planners’, who will keep a diary of relevant dates. Don’t call a local or regional radio station 10 minutes before or after the hour as they will be preparing or reading a news bulletin.

**On the phone**
Once you’ve given the basic details, allow the journalist time to digest the initial information and ask questions. You may establish early on that they are not interested in the story or are not the right person to cover it. Take clear notes of any further information they require and how they would like to receive it and always check their deadline. Make sure you log the call on your contact schedule to allow you to keep a record of who you have spoken to, about what story and on what date, helping you to target future ‘stills-ins’. If the journalist seems to have time to chat then take the opportunity to build a rapport and keep notes of any personal details they let slip (e.g. recently moved house) to help you re-establish a connection next time.

**Handling media enquiries**
From time to time the media will contact you about a story they are writing. This may be specifically about Aimhigher or relate more broadly to HE issues. Often media enquiries will take you by surprise when you are in the middle of doing something else. The following advice will help you to handle enquiries effectively – finding out the information you need without giving anything away that you don’t want to.

**Dos and don’ts**
- **Do…** use a media enquiry form like the one in Appendix 4 to note down all of the relevant details including the journalist’s name, which publication or radio/TV station they’re calling from, contact details and, most importantly, their deadline.
- **Do…** find out as much as you can about the story – was it prompted by a press release, what’s the angle and tone, how long do they expect it to be, who else are they speaking to?
Appendix C - Media training handout

- Do... check exactly what they want from Aimhigher and when they need the information by – do they want to receive it by email, fax or telephone?
- Do... ask where they heard about Aimhigher / got your contact details, if you haven’t spoken to them before.
- Don’t... be afraid to ask questions – remember they are calling because they need your help.
- Don’t... speculate about the story or say ‘no comment’ – anything you say could end up in print.
- Don’t... feel pressured to respond immediately or to give an interview on the spot. If the request is urgent buy yourself time by saying that you are in the middle of something and will get back to them ASAP.
- Don’t... over-promise or leave a journalist hanging on – if you don’t think you can get them what they want then let them know immediately or they won’t call you next time.

Issues / crises

It is particularly important to be on your guard if a journalist contacts you with an enquiry about Aimhigher or related DfES policy that may be contentious. Don’t let yourself be drawn into discussion or comment on the subject, or make the mistake of refusing to comment or saying ‘no comment’. Never talk ‘off the record’ – there is no such thing. Instead:

- Politely say you are not the best person to comment
- Gather as much information as possible
- Check the source and who else they have spoken to
- Find out their deadline and contact details
- Promise that you or a colleague will get back to them shortly

The NCRT can provide advice on handling difficult media enquiries and work with you to put together quotes or statements if required. If the enquiry relates to the Aimhigher programme as a whole or to HEFCE or DfES policy, then the response may be handled at a national level.

Preparing for an interview

Doing a successful interview is all about being well prepared. Find out as much as you can about the interview in advance using the media enquiry sheet. Does the journalist want clarification or expansion on a story you have given them or informed comment on a related story. Are there any particular issues they want to cover that may be contentious? Then decide on the best spokesperson (it may be you) and do your own thorough research to make sure they are well briefed in advance.

Interview objectives

Start by thinking about your objectives for taking part in the interview. For instance:

- To raise the profile of Aimhigher’s work in the area/region
- To increase brand recognition of Aimhigher
Appendix C - Media training handout

- To generate interest from potential partners/participants in an initiative or event
- To promote information about HE/student finance
- To showcase the successes of students from the target cohort
- To correct misapprehensions about HE or Aimhigher

Key messages
Once you have clarified what Aimhigher has to gain from you taking part in the interview you can go back to the relevant information to identify your key messages. Try to pull out three key messages that it is essential to get across during the interview. If you are trying to publicise an event or service, don’t forget to include the date and place and any website or contact details. You may also want to pull together five supporting messages, depending on the length of the interview.

Interesting examples / anecdotes
It is useful to think of a couple of examples of Aimhigher activities or anecdotes about student successes you can refer to, to illustrate your point and add interest to the interview. Strong statistics that support your key messages are also worth having to hand, as are facts and figures that demonstrate that Aimhigher is effective.

Likely questions
Always take time to brainstorm likely questions – both easy and difficult – that the interviewer may ask you. Speak to your colleagues and ask what questions they would ask. Prepare a brief response for each - never just hope that a tricky question won’t come up.

Interview skills

The nutshell / soundbite
Your ‘nuttshell’ or soundbite response to a first question should contain the story that you wish to tell and incorporate as many essential key messages as you can manage in the timescale. Given that broadcast media in particular may only use a maximum of 15 seconds, it is worth rehearsing your soundbite to ensure that it includes as much information as you need, includes the Aimhigher name and is concise and clear. It is usually only possible to include three points in this time limit.

Whether you are faced with an open question or a directly hostile one, always respond in the first instance with your soundbite. If you feel awkward about coming straight back with the answer you want to give rather than responding directly to a hostile question, you can take control by saying something like: “Well firstly I’d like to explain what today is all about....” Or, “Ok I’ll deal with that point in a moment, but let me first explain why we’re here today......”

The rest of the interview
A benign reporter will then go on to ask the basic who/what? etc. questions and may even prompt you to come out with positive statements, which make for good copy/listening, by encouraging you, or praising the event.

The hostile reporter may do the same to start with, but they will be merely warming up to the challenging questions. Some will challenge you from question one.

Despite their reputation, journalists are not always trying to catch you out, but there are certain hot issues like student finance that they may bring up and will question
aggressively. It is important to anticipate these issues in advance and prepare a detailed question and answer brief (Q&A).

**Ending the interview**
Try to always end the interview by restating your nutshell. By this time you will have warmed up and it may be the case that your end nutshell is far more succinct and lively than your introductory one.

**General pointers**
- Try not to sound defensive. Counter a hostile question by starting off your answer with your nutshell soundbite of the positive points that you wish to get across. Then go on to address the hostile question. It doesn’t help to ignore it, as a reporter will usually persist.
- Don’t begin answer with “No” or “We’re not trying to say that”. Simply respond with positive statement of the benefits to all of Aimhigher and THEN answer the question specifically if appropriate.
- Tell the truth.
- Watch out for the reporter who gets your organisation’s name wrong or challenges you on something that he/she has made a mistake over. Simply correct them in your answer. This is so much more effective than telling them they’ve got it all wrong.
- Rehearse your Q&A’s – particularly the most difficult questions.
- Journalists work to tight deadlines and cover a range of stories every day. Even those who are education specialists can fail to grasp the complexities involved in trying to meet your objectives. As a result their questions can seem irritatingly simplistic (try not to be irritated). The truth is that their question will reflect the view of the layperson and it is your job ahead of the interview to try and anticipate these questions and comments and to prepare succinct, pertinent responses.
- Some reporters ask lengthy and challenging questions, which can include one or more incorrect assumptions. Respond by breaking the question down if there are clearly two or even three questions being put simultaneously. Deal with them point by point and correct any inaccuracies.
- **MONEY!** Student finance is a hugely controversial and complex topic. Journalists will bring it up because it is a recurrent theme on the news agenda. They may also ask about how much an initiative is costing and attempt to equate the cost with efficiency. Money and finance will be amongst their most combative questions. Prepare well.
- If you are promoting a fun event or a happy story, try and enjoy the interview. Sound enthusiastic and interested.
- Bring the story to the life by using anecdotes or quoting examples.
- Remember nothing is ‘off the record’ if you don’t know a journalist (and even if you do).
Appendix C - Media training handout

- Don’t say ‘no comment’.
- Do offer to spell names and write down figures for them, although this information should be in your press release.
- Some questions may be outside your remit as Aimhigher. If this is the case then explain that you are not best placed to answer that particular question and try to point them in the direction of someone who might be able to help.

**TV / radio presentation tips**

- Nervousness is normal – healthy even!
- Prepare, practise and persevere. If you are well prepared, your objective and your messages will be clear and the nerves will subside.
- Visualisation or thinking positively can help. Think to yourself ‘this will go well’.
- Before a press conference or location interview, make sure you introduce yourself to broadcast journalists who turn up at events. Talk to them before they start recording to give you the chance to overcome initial nerves and try out key messages.

**Voice**

- Tension can radically affect your ability to speak confidently. Hum low and gently prior to the interview. Calm yourself by breathing slowly out a few times.
- Think about what you are saying and your own interest in the subject will come through. Enthuse and smile.
- Bring a bottle of water with you.

**Dress**

- Wear something you feel comfortable in, but which conveys your authority whether or not you are to be interviewed for TV.

**As a general rule:**
- Wear a good quality fairly plain jacket or overcoat
- Dark colours (navy blue and charcoal) carry more authority than lighter colours (light grey and light brown)
- Try to avoid all-black
- Get a haircut if possible
- Men should wear a tie
- Avoid big bold patterns

**Body Language**

- Meet your interviewer’s eye.
- Stand still (no rocking).
- Clasp your hands in front of you if it helps.
Appendix C - Media training handout

Microphones

- In radio interviews stand (or if in a studio sit) about seven inches away from the microphone.
- Try to speak at a consistent volume level.
- If in a studio and participant is asked to wear headphones, don’t be afraid to ask to turn down/up the volume.
- TV journalists carry a fluffy microphone and will position it appropriately. Try to ignore it and speak directly to your interviewer.
NEWS RELEASE

[date]

MENTORING MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN [AREA]

A new mentoring scheme designed to inspire young people in [area] to consider higher education was launched today [date] at [venue].

Co-ordinated by Aimhigher [area/region], a national initiative to widen participation in higher education, the scheme will provide [number] student mentors to work with Year 10 and 11 pupils at [number] secondary schools throughout [area].

The mentors, recruited from local universities and further education colleges, have been matched with small groups of students identified by Aimhigher as having the potential to progress to higher education. Mentors will meet with their groups once a week to focus on three main areas – revision and study skills, future options and any personal issues that might get in the way of their studies.

Aimhigher area co-ordinator, [name], said: “We’re very excited about this year’s mentoring scheme, which has already recruited a record number of students. Many of the young people involved have the potential to succeed in higher education but lack the confidence to apply, often because their family has no history of further study or they are unaware of the different routes available.”

Mentors will guide their groups through the wide range of options now available, including A’levels, apprenticeships and foundation degrees, as well as providing general information about student life.

Today’s launch builds on the success of previous mentoring programmes, which have made a difference to both mentors and mentees, developing their self confidence, improving study skills and clarifying future work and study options on both sides.

-more-
Appendix D - Example press release - mentoring

/2...

Some of the former participants also attended today’s launch. [Name of student], aged [age], from [school] was an Aimhigher mentee in [year] and has now been offered a place studying [subject] at [HEIFEC].

[First name of student] said: “I got involved with Aimhigher through the Target Access Scheme in my high school and was mentored by a student at [HEIFEC]. Aimhigher’s mentoring scheme helped to raise my own aspirations and made me realise that staying on in education could help me to find my dream job in [field].”

Aimhigher [area/region] is now working to extend the mentoring programme to include other groups, including a project with [include relevant details e.g. partially sighted/deaf students].

Ends

Notes to editors
The Government has set a target that by the year 2010, 50% per cent of those aged between 18 and 30 should have the opportunity to benefit from higher education.

Aimhigher is a national programme which aims to widen participation in higher education by raising the aspirations and developing the abilities of young people from under-represented groups.

Jointly funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for Education and Skills (DFES), the Aimhigher programme operates across nine regional partnerships and 45 area partnerships throughout England.

An integral part of the work of Aimhigher [area/region], mentoring schemes have provided advice and guidance to [number] young people in [area] to date.

Contact details
For more information, photography of the launch or student success stories, please contact:

[Name]
[Contact numbers]
[Email address]

More information about Aimhigher [area/region] can be found on our website at [website address].
Appendix E - Example summer school press release

NEWS RELEASE

[date]

UNIVERSITY OPENS DOORS TO LOCAL SCHOOL PUPILS

Local school pupils have been given the chance to experience university life as part of an Aimhigher initiative to encourage more young people to consider higher education.

[Number] [year group] pupils from [school] joined more than [number] pupils from across the [region] taking part in a free residential summer school at [university] – one of many up and down the country jointly funded by the Aimhigher programme and the European Social Fund.

Student Ambassadors led an exciting programme of sessions including film studies, sports coaching, estate management and biological molecular science. There were also team projects which included building a robot and conducting forensic investigations into a mystery death.

A social programme was included in the schedule to ensure the pupils had plenty of fun and since no university experience would be complete without gowns and mortarboards, the summer school ‘graduates’ collected scrolls from [name, title] at the end of the week.

“These summer schools are an integral part of our ongoing programme of events designed to encourage pupils from a range of backgrounds to consider progressing to higher education. We are delighted that once again the [region] Aimhigher Summer School has been an outstanding success”, said [name, title].

[Name] added: “The pupils work hard and play hard. It is a great opportunity for them to see for themselves what university life would be like – and it is provided free-of-charge.”

MORE
Appendix E - Example summer school press release

“Pupil, school” said: “The summer school provided us with loads of information about life at university and I now feel that it is something I will definitely consider.”

ENDS

Notes to editors
Aimhigher is a national programme which aims to widen participation in higher education by raising the awareness, aspirations and attainment of young people from under-represented groups.

Jointly funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Department for Education and Skills, the Aimhigher programme operates across nine regional partnerships and 45 area partnerships throughout England.

Summer schools provide a taste of university life to Year 10, 11 and 12 students who might not realise their potential or whose circumstances could lead them to consider a limited range of institutions and/or subjects, or not apply for higher education at all.

[Insert information regarding ESF funding as appropriate]

Contact details
For more information or to request photography, please contact:

[Name]
[Contact numbers]
[Email address]

More information about Aimhigher [region] can be found on our website at [website address].
Appendix F - Example taster day press release

NEWS RELEASE
[date]

LOCAL SCHOOL PUPILS ENCOURAGED TO ‘AIM HIGHER’

Local school pupils were given the chance to learn more about higher education and the different options available to them at a Vocational Taster Day held at [name of institution] on [date].

Co-ordinated by Aimhigher [area/region], a national initiative to widen participation in higher education, the Taster Day provided students with information on a range of post-16 vocational opportunities and demonstrated the different progression routes available.

The schedule covered a wide range of subjects including music and performing arts, health care, art therapy, hospitality, catering and engineering. Students also got hands-on experience of practical skills including cookery, web design and welding.

Aimhigher [area/region] invited over 100 Year 11 students from local schools who have the potential to succeed in higher education but lack the confidence to apply, often because they are unaware of the different routes available. The day also touched on the practical issues such as tuition fees, accommodation and grants.

Aimhigher co-ordinator, [name], said: “[area/region] has a history of low participation in higher education and we want to challenge the perception that A’levels are the only way in. The Taster Day is an inspiring way for the students to find out more about vocational routes such as Foundation Degrees and Apprenticeships, as well as practical advice on student life and the financial support available to them.”

[Pupil, age, school] said: “The Taster Day was great fun and we learnt about the different courses on offer at local colleges and universities. It is something which I will definitely consider now I have seen that further study could be a possibility for me.”

ENDS
Appendix F - Example taster day press release

Notes to editors
Aimhigher is a national programme which aims to widen participation in higher education by raising the awareness, aspirations and attainment of young people from under-represented groups.

Jointly funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Department for Education and Skills, the Aimhigher programme operates across nine regional partnerships and 45 area partnerships throughout England.

An integral part of the work of Aimhigher [area/region], events such as taster days have provided advice and guidance to [number] young people in [area] to date.

Contact details
For more information or to request photography, please contact:

[Name]
[Contact numbers]
[Email address]

More information about Aimhigher [area/region] can be found on our website at [website address].
Appendix G - Example press call notice

PHOTOCALL NOTICE

[date]

TITLE IN BOLD SUMMARISING PURPOSE OF EVENT

Event: One or more paragraphs describing the event, for example:

Year 11 pupils from 8 schools around area/region are being challenged to build a hovercraft in just one day.

Organised by Aimhigher area/region, the event has been designed to give female pupils an introduction to the diverse career options available in the engineering field. Female engineers from X company will work with the girls to design and construct a working hovercraft, followed by a test run!

Aeronautical engineering students from X university/college will also be on hand to encourage the pupils and provide an insight to student life.

Date: Date of event

Time: Time of event

Venue: Venue details, including directions if necessary

ENDS

For further information please contact:
Name, job title, area/region
Contact details, including mobile if available
Appendix H - Example letter to a celebrity/MP

Name
Address 1
Address 2
Address 3
Postcode
Date

Dear [Name],

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce you to Aimhigher - a government funded initiative which aims to widen participation in higher education by raising the aspirations and developing the abilities of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, including ethnic minority and disabled students.

On [date], we will be holding a Higher Education Taster Day in [area] and we are keen to garner support from local celebrities and politicians to help promote the event. I understand from the local press that you will be visiting the city in [month] during your tour of [name of show], and am writing to invite you to take part in a press call in [location].

I understand that your schedule must be extremely busy, but we feel that an endorsement from yourself would be an excellent way to promote our event to local schools and to raise the profile of Aimhigher. We would therefore be delighted if you were to agree to take part.

The exact time and format of the press call will be decided once we have confirmation of your interest in participating.

If you have any questions about this event or the work of Aimhigher, please don’t hesitate to give me a call on [telephone number].

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Name
Job Title
Partnership

DfES Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT
Tel: 0800 280 024 Email: info@dfes.gov.uk www.aimhigher.ac.uk
Appendix I - Example template photography permission form

PHOTOGRAPHY PERMISSION FORM

As part of our communications activity, Aimhigher occasionally uses photography for publicity purposes. We would like your permission to photograph/film you/your relative for possible inclusion in our publications, website and other publicity material. The image(s) will remain the property of Aimhigher and will be used for the designated purpose of promoting Aimhigher’s aims in relation to widening access to higher education. It may also be included in the central Aimhigher image library for use by other Aimhigher practitioners. You/your relative’s contact details will remain strictly confidential.

Name: ...........................................................................................................

Address: ........................................................................................................

..................................................................................................................

Contact number: ..........................................................................................

E-mail address: .............................................................................................

If the participant is under 16 years old, please give date of birth of individual and name and contact details for parent/guardian:

Date of birth: ..............................................................................................

Name of parent/guardian: ...........................................................................

Contact number: ..........................................................................................

I permit Aimhigher, the Department for Education & Skills (DES) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to use photographs of me/my relative in Aimhigher publications and publicity material, and for inclusion in the central Aimhigher image library.

Signed: .............................................. Date: ..............................................

(must be signed by parent/guardian if individual is under 16 years old)

For Aimhigher internal use:

Photographer: ...............................................................................................

Date: ...................................... Location: ...................................................

Subject: ...........................................................................................................

Copyright: ...................................................................................................
CASE STUDY PERMISSION FORM

Thank you for agreeing to take part in a potential case study for Aimhigher. We appreciate your support in sharing your experiences with the public and for helping to promote the Aimhigher message.

We would like to assure you that your personal information will not be shared. If we send your story to a journalist, we will not disclose your contact details without seeking your prior consent.

Aimhigher will also do everything possible to ensure that you are fairly represented.

__________________________, permit the Department for Education & Skills (DFES) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to use information on me/my relative in any publicity literature, media materials or other documentation used to promote the Aimhigher campaign, for a period of three years from the date specified below. I understand that the DFES or HEFCE may contact me again for further permission if they wish to use my story after this period.

Signed: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

(must be signed by parent/guardian if individual is under 16 years old)

Name of student: ____________________________________________________________

Address: ________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Telephone number: _________________________________________________________

E-mail address: _____________________________________________________________

If the participant is under 16 years old, please give date of birth of individual and name and contact details for parent/guardian:

Date of birth: ___________________________________________________________________

Name of parent/guardian: _____________________________________________________

Contact number: __________________________________________________________________

Please return the completed consent form to the National Communications Resource Team c/o Harrison Cowley, 40 Queen Square, Bristol, BS1 4QP or fax to 0117 926 0547.
## Aimhigher - example event timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Week 4</th>
<th>Week 5</th>
<th>Week 6</th>
<th>Week 7</th>
<th>Week 8</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree objectives and format of event with team</td>
<td>insert initials of relevant team member</td>
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<td>Source VIPs / speakers</td>
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<td>Design invitations / draft invitation copy</td>
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<td>Draw up invite list</td>
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<td>Send invitation to printers</td>
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<td>Draft photocall notice &amp; follow-up press release (see examples)</td>
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<td>Post invitations</td>
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<td>Produce event materials, if required</td>
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<td>Follow up invitations</td>
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<td>Draft speech / opening words, if required</td>
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<td>Brief team on roles &amp; responsibilities</td>
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<td>Review presentations, if required</td>
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<td>Draft feedback form (see example)</td>
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<td>Send follow-up release and photos to media</td>
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<td>Send thank you letters / emails to helpers</td>
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<td>Draft report - what worked &amp; what you would do differently next time</td>
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Appendix L - Example certificate

AWARD CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that

[Name of student]

Of

[Name of school]

Took part in

[Name of activity]

[Date]

Signed
Appendix M - Case study template

Aimhigher Case Study Template

Please use this template to tell us about an interesting Aimhigher activity.

Once completed, please email the case study to info@actiononaccess.org for inclusion on the Aimhigher practitioner website.

Title: Click here to write a brief description of the activity (no more than 20 words)

Region or Area:

Contact (name and email address for further information):

Date (month and year in which the activity took place):

Theme (e.g. progression routes, mentoring, summer schools):

Description of activity

Click here to write a brief description of the activity (200–400 words). Remember to include ‘why’, ‘how’ and ‘who’ and avoid jargon. Write as if you are telling a friend who does not work in HE about the activity.