Making a Difference.
Widening participation in Higher Education.
The recent SOAMS (Sheffield Outreach and Access to Medicine Scheme) Summer School was the first one in which I have participated and I enjoyed it tremendously. I am a mature student studying medicine and am the only member of my family to have attended university. Because of this I really wanted to get involved in something that encourages young people to think about Higher Education in general, and medicine as a career in particular. The SOAMS project does just this, and I have loved being able to pass on some of my experience to encourage young people from similar backgrounds to mine to think about becoming doctors. I only wish that SOAMS had been in existence when I was at school, as I might have considered a career in medicine before I reached my late 20s! I thoroughly enjoyed my time helping out and giving something back, and would love to be involved again next year.

John Barker,
Student Ambassador supporting the SOAMS Summer School

Broadening our horizons

We believe that Higher Education (HE) should be open to anyone who has the ability, determination and motivation to benefit from what it offers. That’s why we invest a great deal of time and resources into our work around widening participation, encouraging those from non-traditional HE backgrounds to realise that going to university could be a real possibility and offering them the chance to benefit from the research intensive environment offered by an outstanding university like ours.

Of course, we can only achieve results by working in partnership with the many other individuals and organisations who help to influence the choices tomorrow’s students make – from parents and other family members, through to teachers, careers advisers and, of course, our own undergraduates and graduates who offer an excellent example to anyone thinking about coming to university.

This booklet aims to give you a flavour of the many different ways we try to spread the word about the opportunities and benefits of studying here at the University of Sheffield and how we work in partnership to get the message out as widely as possible. This is something I wholeheartedly support and would like to see continued and developed over the coming years.

Professor Keith Burnett, Vice-Chancellor
Reaching out to different audiences

For many children and young people, going to university is not something they and their families would even think of. We’ve been working alongside many of our partners to try and change that, building relationships with schools, colleges and other organisations to try and break down those barriers and open up the possibilities of university for as many capable young people as possible.

Although our dedicated Outreach and UK/EU Recruitment team has specific responsibility for this work, opening up opportunities is something we see as central to everything we do. Many of our academic departments manage and deliver a range of specific targeted activities, while others offer extra support to students once they arrive, such as peer mentoring and academic support.

Who are we trying to target?

We’re interested in making a real difference to the lives of people in our region, so much of our work is focused on working with schools and colleges in the South Yorkshire region and neighbouring areas. We particularly want to help people who might miss out on the opportunity to enter HE without the additional support and encouragement we can offer.

Our work is particularly targeted at:

- Primary school children and their parents
- Secondary school pupils of all ages
- College students
- Mature learners.

How do we do it?

At the University of Sheffield we are committed to supporting each stage of the learning journey. That means that we will work with potential students, of all ages, before they make the decision to come here, as well as continuing to support them throughout their entire time with us.

Different students need different kinds of support to ensure they can make the most of their time at university and negotiate the transitions required at each stage. They may need help to manage the step from Further into Higher Education, ongoing study support, or help to look after their health and well being. Many prospective and current students also need help planning and managing their finances and we work hard to make sure that whatever support is needed is both available and easy to access.

Overall, our activities focus on four key themes:

- Raising awareness of research-led Higher Education and aspirations to experience it
- Providing assistance to prospective students to help them prepare for study at the University, whatever their previous experience
- Increasing the number of students from under-represented backgrounds who study with us, both at undergraduate and postgraduate level
- Providing an inclusive and supportive learning experience at university so that students can fulfil their potential and become active citizens, lifelong learners and successful employees.
We know that young people in South Yorkshire and the surrounding regions have great potential, but we also know that, compared with other regions nationally, we still need to raise the levels of educational aspiration and attainment.

The University is working hard with many local partners to encourage young people to aspire to further and higher studies, and we do this with a range of innovative programmes.

At the younger end, we work with Year 5 and 6 pupils and their parents on a number of initiatives including the **Professor Fluffy programme**, a nationally-acclaimed programme devised by the University of Liverpool to help children and parents understand how education improves career and life prospects. Everything about the programme is interactive, encouraging the children to take an active role in finding out more about Further and Higher Education and what it’s really like to be a student – even giving them the chance to don university gowns and mortar boards to really step into the part.

**Whilst at Shortbrook Community Primary School, Reiss Turton took part in a Professor Fluffy event at the University. He commented:**

Thank you for organising the trip – it was really fun and exciting. My best bit about it was the quiz when we had to label the man with all the answers. I liked the photo bit and pretending to have a graduation and I would like to have a proper graduation when I am older.
We also have a wide range of programmes and options targeted at secondary schools to help raise aspirations and encourage informed decision-making about study routes and Higher Education in general.

One such programme is Discover US which works over three years with targeted Year 9, 10, and 11 pupils from non-traditional HE backgrounds, taking them on a journey of discovery to find out more about their own capabilities and extend their aspirations, giving them the chance to see for themselves what we have to offer them over the course of the programme. The students come into university and spend time with current undergraduates to find out what university is really like, and the regular contact between the pupils and the university students helps to build long-term relationships and a better understanding of what they could gain by coming here.

We also organise annual awards to recognise excellent achievement by school pupils in areas such as attendance, completing coursework and taking an active part in other school and extracurricular activities.

The programme gives them the opportunity to experience a different sort of life. This is very powerful as they often don’t know anyone who has been to university – now they do!

Karen Sowden, The Armthorpe School

The school has had students in Y11, Y10 and Y9 on the programme and it has been a crucial part of our work on raising aspirations and challenging the most able. I know the students and their parents are as impressed and grateful as I am to the University, and everybody involved. It is changing lives here.

The University’s Achievement Award scheme has given me a real incentive to complete all my coursework and keep my attendance and punctuality at a high standard. It also gives me something additional for my CV, which will hopefully be valued by employers.

Alix Crossland, Hinde House Secondary School

Being at uni and talking to students is very important and makes them think ‘I can be part of this’.

I felt like a student and that was just amazing.
Providing assistance to prospective students

We understand that first generation university applicants in particular may need some additional help and guidance with the whole process of HE applications. That’s why, through our Outreach and UK/EU Recruitment Team, we provide a flexible menu of activities which all schools can access, comprising visits to the University and campus tours, as well as bespoke visits for schools and colleges.

In addition to information on the range of courses on offer at the University, we can provide details of financial support for those who qualify. If you need to know more about writing a personal statement or making subject or university choices, our highly experienced staff can provide advice either at your school or college or on campus.

We work closely with school staff to design our input and feedback from teachers has been very positive.

“Just a note to thank you for your excellent presentation on ‘Personal Statements’. Our students found the session most interesting and very informative. We will be in touch in the next academic year to book another presentation.”

“We all very much appreciate the warm and friendly welcome and support during the day. The opening introduction to the University got the whole day off to a great start. The student ambassadors handled everything really well and were cheerfully positive throughout.”

As well as campus tours and information briefings, we have also developed specific programmes which link school and college-based subjects with areas of study and teaching and learning methods familiar in universities.

Our Higher Education Preparation Programme has been devised in conjunction with schools and colleges in the region to help teachers and young people bridge the divide between studies at 16 and beyond. Feedback from teachers so far on the project has suggested not only that it is successfully building awareness of HE but that it will also help students at the post-16 stage, by providing them with an academic skills ‘toolkit’ that can be used in a range of study contexts and qualification settings. Student participants’ comments bear this out:

“I have more understanding of Higher Education and the differences and similarities between Uni and 6th form.”

“Student ambassadors were brilliant. Made me more motivated. Made uni seem fun!”

Working in partnership with a range of organisations, every year we invite Year Y9 and Y12 students from across South Yorkshire into the University to find out more about opportunities in science and engineering. The students take part in master classes and practical laboratory sessions, meeting current undergraduates studying science and engineering subjects, and take a tour around the campus.

This work is supported by Science and Engineering Champions. These are highly skilled and enthusiastic university students, trained to share their experiences with school children. They really encourage them to think seriously about studying these subjects at university.

There are benefits to everyone in this arrangement as Biomedical Science graduate Craig Bell explains:

“I had never really considered teaching until I was at university. I got involved with the Outreach team, working with students from local schools.

“My experience made me realise that teaching shouldn’t be just about the curriculum – it’s also about inspiring pupils and showing them how amazing science can be. I’m now a teacher and a learning advisor to the Science Museum in London, developing web resources for school science clubs.”
Increasing the number of students from under-represented backgrounds

We are proud of our achievements at the University and of the scholarship and research which places us in the top one hundred world universities (2011 Shanghai Jiao Tong Academic Ranking of World Universities). We are equally proud, however, that we are joint first in the Russell group of research intensive universities in the recruitment of young full-time first degree entrants from low participation neighbourhoods. We also recruit one of the highest percentages of state school pupils in the Russell Group.

For many young people with no family background in the professions it can be hard to break into these very competitive fields. Over recent years, we have developed a number of highly successful programmes which help talented youngsters to consider applying for degrees in medicine, dentistry, law, accountancy and architecture.

**Sheffield Outreach and Access to Medicine (SOAMS)** – is a highly regarded programme aimed at encouraging students from non-traditional backgrounds to consider medicine as a career. Working with Year 9-13 students and their parents, the team provides support and guidance to students who have an interest in medicine or science. The initiative has been running successfully since 2001 and currently has around 400 participants benefiting from a programme of activities aimed at raising awareness of the opportunities that exist, raising aspirations to university-level study, and improving levels of achievement. SOAMS was commended for widening access to medical training by the General Medical Council.

SOAMS presented me with many opportunities which allowed me to acquire and develop various new skills which would benefit me not only whilst applying to study medicine, but also beyond this stage of my career. I am sincerely grateful to all the staff who worked on SOAMS and who gave me invaluable support and guidance and enabled me to achieve my dream of becoming a doctor.

Saima Khan, SOAMS participant now graduated and working as a doctor.
In a further initiative, our ADOPT scheme – Access to Dental Occupations: Practice and Tutoring – offers Year 12 and 13 students considering a possible career in dentistry the chance to get an insight into the different disciplines within the profession and decide if it is the right route for them. As well as interaction with staff and current students and work experience placements, students also take part in a number of events, including hands-on activities, practical laboratory work, AS and A level revision sessions and UCAS application and interview preparation sessions. An Independent Teaching Review described ADOPT as “gold standard” in its work to broaden access to dentistry.

These intensive programmes provide a unique insight into future careers which students may not previously have considered. The programmes not only encourage them to think about these professions, but also provide them with a high quality study environment, skills workshops and revision techniques, all aiming to boost their achievement.

Another initiative we’re very proud of is our Looked After Children/Care Leavers Project, for which we’ve received the Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark for Commitment to Care Leavers. Working collaboratively with Aimhigher South Yorkshire and Sheffield Hallam University, we’ve developed a programme of activities targeting this particular group of young people and encouraging them to consider progressing into Higher Education. Progression to university amongst this group nationally is very low and we are pleased to work collaboratively with colleagues in local authorities and in other organisations, such as Rotherham Titans Rugby Club, to break down some of the barriers to HE.

The University of Sheffield is also ranked first in the Russell Group in terms of our recruitment of part time mature students from low participation neighbourhoods. Many adults have chosen to study part time with us and their university success has produced a whole new change of direction in their lives.

Ali Hayward, a mature student in the University’s Institute for Lifelong Learning, received the Individual Regional Award as part of Adult Learners’ Week 2010. The awards honour and celebrate remarkable individuals who have made a difference to their lives through learning and have inspired others to return to learning and recognise their potential.

Ali’s achievements are truly inspirational. She left school in her early teens due to a disability and then worked at the local council for many years. After giving birth to her daughter, who was diagnosed with having cerebral palsy, Ali suffered from depression and a deterioration in her own disability. Things changed when she took up volunteering and also began a creative writing certificate at the University which culminated in her completing a part-time degree in Literature and Creative Media.

My life has changed beyond anything expected. I’m excited about my future. Education changes lives. It’s powerful and for me will always be a privilege I never thought I’d have.

Ali Hayward
Providing an inclusive and supportive learning experience at university

Most students will need ongoing support of various kinds when they start at university, so we work hard to ensure there’s a smooth transition from school or college to university life, providing dedicated welcome events for mature and for local learners plus peer mentoring and additional academic support such as help with maths and essay writing. We also however understand that students are individuals with specific needs and this is why our Inclusive Learning and Teaching project has been so important, working hand in hand with students themselves to identify and develop support strategies which will help through any difficult times.

Our MASH programme – Maths and Statistics Help – offers one to one support, a drop in facility, online materials and help with using maths and statistics software. We also provide a writing advisory service for both international and home students to help them improve their skills with input and advice from a specialist writing tutor.

We provide online help for students – both pre-enrolment and whilst at university – in the form of TASH – The Academic Skills Hub – a student-friendly signposting resource where you can quickly access information about academic skills, university life, studying in Sheffield and the range of support available.

One of the most helpful things for any new student is to be able to turn to someone with a little more experience for support and advice, and that’s where our Sheffield Mentors scheme pays dividends. Existing students pair up with new students to support them when they first start and throughout their first year. The mentors receive training in their new role and both parties can gain significant benefits from the relationship.

Some students who have benefitted from having a mentor:

Having a mentor took a lot of the pressures and worries off that I might have had if I arrived at university without a mentor. It most definitely helped me settle in much more quickly.

The best thing about having a mentor is knowing there was someone who had already been through the university experience, encouraging me to join societies and enjoy myself. Particularly during the first term when I was still getting used to university life her advice was really appreciated.

I can only commend all that you do for our children. We have been involved for several years now and it is a constant delight to see our children being given these opportunities. All of the student leaders have been professional and committed. We really value their support.

Children's Project, Emmaus School

It gave me a brilliant insight into the world of teaching. I have been accepted onto a Secondary Science PGCE course. The volunteering I carried out was an important step in my achievement of this.

Emma, Biomedical Science student, classroom mentor

Our national award winning Student Services Department (named ‘Outstanding Student Services Team 2010’ by Times Higher Education) provides a wide range of support services to all students, whether they’re school leavers or mature students returning to education. There are also specific services provided to support disabled students, advising not only current students but prospective students and their families, schools and colleges.

Lastly, a central part of life as a student at the University of Sheffield is the concept of the Sheffield Graduate and the Graduate Award. The Sheffield Graduate concept is a commitment from the University to support students’ development as rounded citizens, ready for further study, employment and engagement with the wider world. The Graduate Award rewards students for actively engaging with their communities. Consequently, many students get directly involved in support for raising aspirations in schools and colleges locally as volunteer classroom mentors, as Student Ambassadors, or as community project leaders through Sheffield Volunteering, based in the Students’ Union.
How we work with partners

Effective partnership working, locally and nationally, is crucial to the success of all our projects. We are pleased to be working hand in hand with neighbouring local authorities and other organisations supporting choice and progression for young people in the wider region. At the University, our work with communities links closely with the raising aspirations and attainment programmes managed by children’s services in the South Yorkshire region and good communication and planning underpin the goals we share for our young people.

Furthermore, we have been proud to collaborate with sub-regional partnerships which aim to create clearer pathways for learners of all ages and backgrounds into Higher Education. Aimhigher has linked schools, colleges and universities in a national initiative to widen participation in Higher Education in England.

In addition, as a result of our work with Higher Futures, the Lifelong Learning Network for South Yorkshire, we have developed new routes into the University of Sheffield for vocational learners. This has culminated in the creation of new progression agreements in Engineering and Health, promoting access for learners coming into the University with a range of qualifications. The University encourages applications from students who can demonstrate that they have the potential to benefit from the course they have chosen to study, and from the social and learning environment which the University provides. We therefore welcome applications from a wide range of qualification and learning backgrounds.

As an example, the School of Nursing and Midwifery recognises the value of a health and social care workforce that reflects and represents the diversity and profile of health care service users. As part of the School’s long standing commitment to widening access and participation in health care education and careers, Progression Agreements with local colleges have recently been confirmed that will enable students from vocational education backgrounds to access its Health and Human Sciences degree course in order to pursue their interest in health service careers.

The value of the partnership between the University of Sheffield and Sheffield City Council cannot be overstated. The belief that we share in providing good education to meet individual needs, as well as a clear focus on quality, binds our work closely together.

Sonia Sharp, Executive Director, Sheffield City Council, Children and Young People’s Services

The Aimhigher project focused on ways of promoting HE to groups of people identified as being less likely to recognise and take up the opportunities offered by a university course. Working closely with the University of Sheffield, we have seen real progress locally in changing attitudes to university, in attainment at school, increased applications to HE and increased levels of take up of offered places by members of our target groups. From Primary to HE level, the activities generated through the partnership between Aimhigher and the University have made a real difference to young people’s futures in South Yorkshire.

Ian Barlow, Director, Aimhigher South Yorkshire

How we judge our impact

We don’t just measure our success by the numbers of students we have worked with who choose to study at the University of Sheffield, although that is an important indicator. We also aim to work with a range of partners to help raise achievement and attainment overall, thus helping to open the door to HE for many of the region’s young people. This means working closely with schools and colleges, local authorities and other universities. It also means using all of the skills and talents of our own undergraduates and even our Nobel prize winning alumni such as Sir Harry Kroto, pictured above, to encourage young people to consider university.

We work with approximately 20,000 participants in our outreach programmes, predominantly in the South Yorkshire area but also extending into Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and other parts of Yorkshire. This includes over 5,000 participants on general introduction to HE programmes, over 2,000 participants on master classes and over 2,000 participants on subject specific programmes.

From 2002 to 2010 the overall number of young people under 19 in South Yorkshire applying to university has increased by over 65% from 4,425 in 2002 to 7,305 in 2010. We believe that our outreach programmes, both general and targeted, have contributed to this change.

We are committed to ensuring that eligible undergraduate students receive financial support through our bursary scheme. In 2010/11 we provided bursaries to over 5,700 students, approximately 45% of our student intake.

We work hard with partners to increase the numbers of students from groups underrepresented in Higher Education. The most recent figures place us joint first in the Russell Group of research intensive universities in the recruitment of young full time first degree students from low participation neighbourhoods.

We are also proud of the fact that we are placed second highest in this group in the recruitment of part-time and mature undergraduate entrants with no previous experience of HE and from low participation neighbourhoods.

We have also consistently recruited high numbers of young full time first degree students from state schools and colleges and against this measure we are ranked third in the Russell Group.
Find out more

For more information about the range of programmes we offer, take a look at our website www.sheffield.ac.uk/schools

A list of Outreach and UK/EU Recruitment team contacts can be found at www.sheffield.ac.uk/schools/team.html

If you’d like to get involved with any of our existing outreach and widening participation activities or have ideas or feedback which you would like to discuss, please contact us at:

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