



Hampshire & Isle of Wight
Lifelong Learning Network

Project Dissemination Pack

Project Title

Offenders into HE: An Investigation into the Aspirations of Offenders for Higher Education

Project Aims

To identify offender and ex offender aspirations and barriers to accessing HE

Project Objectives

- Carry out research with 20 offenders/ex offenders in the community to establish their learning goals
- Work with Aim Higher to facilitate 'Taster Days' and feedback findings
- Develop recruitment, engagement and progression opportunities which tackle the barriers, both perceived and actual experienced by the participants
- Disseminate findings and recommendations to all stakeholders

Partners

- Totton College (Lead Partner)
- Aim Higher
- Solent University
- Hampshire Probation Services
- Skills For Life Plus Offenders Project



Stages

(Give an outline of the stages taken to successful carry out this project)

Appointment of suitably experienced researcher

1) Research and design the survey

The initial step was to design a suitable questionnaire with which to survey offenders in the community.

We identified that using a modified version of the National Adult Learning Survey accompanied by an Offending Behaviour / Cognitive Skills Evaluation test from the National Probation Service would serve best to identify learning and behavioural barriers.

2) Recruitment

We needed to recruit 20 participants to the project. We focussed on a cohort of offenders and ex-offenders with level 3 attainment (or above) from the earlier OLASS project. We also identified participants from a local probation office and the Society of St. James organisation Jamie's Computers.

3) Carry out the interviews

Offenders and ex-offenders in the community were interviewed individually and in private using the Survey and Psychometric Questionnaire.

4) Facilitate attendance at Aim Higher 'Taster Day'

Meetings took place with Lizzi Brazier the Aim higher co-ordinator at Solent University to arrange a 'Taster Day'. A programme of presentations from members of the Aim Higher team was organised. This included; Student Life, Applying to University, and Finance. Participants were also taken on a tour of the campus.

5) Analyse of the findings

Responses to the learning survey, the psychometric questionnaire and the Aimhigher questionnaire were transferred to a MS Excel spreadsheet.

6) Produce the final research report

7) Deliver the findings and recommendations

A dissemination event was arranged at Hanger Farm Arts Centre in Totton and all stakeholders were invited to attend. The final report will be issued to all those who have requested it.



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Problems

(Outline all the problems/challenges you faced)

Recruitment - Attempts were made to contact the identified cohort of offenders and ex-offenders from the earlier OLASS project. Those with whom successful contact was made some were either not available until later in the year or missed their appointments.

Attendance at Aim Higher day was low – Participants were sent letters and maps before the event and all of those who had provided telephone numbers were called to confirm attendance. Three confirmed they would be present and, on the day, they and one other were the only ones to attend. The rest were left with telephone messages asking them to confirm attendance.

Solutions

(How did you solve the problems outlined above)

Recruitment - Contact was made with the trainers at the London Road Hampshire Probation Service Office and Jamie's Computers, a charitable organisation that provides training and employment opportunities to socially excluded adults in Southampton. They helped identify potential participants who would be suitable for the research.

Supporting Documentation

(Enter links to supporting websites and/or outline the types of documents you are submitting with this pack)

- Raw Data
- Finished Report

Results/Outcomes

This was a very small sample group and causation was not examined so it is difficult to make generalisations. However it is interesting to speculate that there may be some association between learning aspiration and the



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psychometric scores.

Participant feedback was somewhat contradictory with regard to learning obstacles and incentives. On the one hand they responded that they “*prefer other things*”, are “*not interested*”, and “*don’t need to do any learning*” whilst also responding that they “*want to do some learning but can’t find any opportunities locally*” and want “*Advice on the type of learning I could do*”.

Some participants appear to need up-to-date course specific information for those who are keen to undertake learning of some kind. While others are unsure of what direction to take and require broader advice and guidance.

Intentions and expectations for future learning were investigated with the participants and 2 groups were identified – those that were more likely to continue into learning, and those that were less likely to do so.

Psychometric tests for measures of attitudes to criminal behaviour and thinking were applied to the participants. Five measures were significantly different between the groups. In all cases the High Aspiration group scored more favourably than the Low Aspiration group.

Other obstacles such as returning to learning and finance were addressed at the taster day. Those who attended the Taster Day found the experience very positive and 3 of the participants intend to go on to HE.

Conclusion

(Include and advice or recommendations for other organisations wishing to undertake this project)

Early, independent and individualised Information, Advice and Guidance is important for these learners.

‘Taster days’ may be a way of encouraging more offenders to enter HE, but engaging these learners and improving attendance needs to be addressed.

We cannot say that having less offender-like attitudes leads to higher aspirations for learning; it is possible that learning aspiration and psychometric scores for offending attitudes are not linked. However it is interesting to speculate that there may be some association between the two.

Further study could explore Learning style preference and the educational establishments response to that preference.