

# Learning Evaluation Research Network LERNnote

## School Students' Attitudes to Higher Education

### An evaluation of Aimhigher in Greenwich

#### Background

Aimhigher is a government initiative aimed at increasing participation in higher education by raising the aspirations and developing the abilities of young people from under-represented groups. Aimhigher has introduced summer schools, university visits, revision and study clubs, information, advice and guidance and many other activities and events to help raise aspirations and standards.

#### About the Study

The evaluation involved data collection in a three-year longitudinal study of Years 9, 10 and 12 students' attitudes towards higher education in the London Borough of Greenwich. Quantitative data were obtained through the Attitudes to Higher Education Questionnaire (AHEQ), a self-report measure designed to elicit the students' views about school and education, continuing to higher education, and the students' perceptions of what their families' and friends' views were on education. Qualitative data were obtained through focus groups with students in their first year of 6<sup>th</sup> form/college.

#### Findings

We found clear evidence that Aimhigher activities had a positive effect on students' attitudes toward higher education. Students had more positive attitudes toward attending university if they had reported regularly using the school library, attending after-school clubs and visiting a university. Aimhigher was also linked to the students' motivation and academic self-concept. Focus groups revealed that university visits had the strongest influence on students' attitudes towards attending university. They also revealed that the main reason for young people wanting to go on to higher education was financial.

#### Conclusions and Implications

This project was unique. We know of no other survey of such a large number of students over a sustained time. Findings from this study show that interventions aimed at encouraging young people to go to university are effective. Aimhigher activities play an important role in improving students' attitudes and should therefore continue. Students should also be encouraged to attend them.

*"I've decided that I want more from my life than what the rest of my family had. I want to do better than just go straight into a job – a dead-end job where I'm not going to get anywhere. I want better for myself."* (Student, aged 16)