



ASPIRENorth

**The schools outreach project of the North Forum for widening participation
in Further and Higher Education**

BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 1st August 2008 - 31st July 2010

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July 2008

ASPIRENorth is a project of the North Forum for Widening Participation in Further and Higher
Education

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1. STRATEGIC AIMS

ASPIRENorth is the schools outreach project of the North Forum. It was established on 1st January 2006 as a major widening participation project to help address issues of low progression to post-school education in the north of Scotland. ASPIRENorth's remit is to engage with young people from P7 to S4 in order to raise their early awareness of the value of post-school education, provide impartial and relevant information and advice and deliver a programme of activities which motivate, encourage aspiration and build self-confidence. The overarching objective of the project is to facilitate young people in making more positive and better-informed decisions about their post-school educational choices.

The original Business Plan was written in 2006 and detailed planned development and roll out of the project up until the end of the initial funding cycle in July 2008. This Business Plan Update now refines and consolidates the initial strategy in the light of the last two years' experience and provides a recommended framework for ASPIRENorth for the next two years of operation, i.e. until July 2010.

As the initial period of delivery of ASPIRENorth has been very successful and the project has developed much in accordance with the detail of the original plan, this update has focused primarily on recommending a period of consolidation of the work undertaken to date. Some minor changes to the initial strategy have been made as appropriate, where reviews and evaluations over the last year have prompted this, but in essence the plan remains substantially unchanged from its original format and purpose.

Eight key strategic aims were initially developed to closely reflect the findings of the Scottish Funding Council's 'Learning for All'¹ report published in September 2005. These aims are deemed to remain valid in the light of further developments in national thinking and advice within the 'Learning for All' context, and it is therefore recommended that they are retained unchanged. The only minor revision relates to wording in Aims 1 and 7, which now refer to post-school education as opposed to higher education.

AIM 1:

"In the long term it is better to get the "first chance" right rather than rely on remedial policies"

ASPIRENorth will focus its work on young people from P7 to S4 in schools with low progression rates to higher education during this crucial 'first chance' phase, to raise awareness, aspirations and expectations of post-school education

AIM 2:

"We will expect best practices to become common across the whole of Scotland. We will work to involve schools in this more fully"

ASPIRENorth will develop a programme of activity which acknowledges and reflects best widening participation practice across Scotland, and builds relationships with schools and other Widening Participation Forums in order to facilitate this

¹All quotations taken from Learning for All, SHEFC, September 2005

AIM 3:

"The influences of family, community and peers are often very important in forming aspirations. Since people's aspirations and expectations regarding lifelong learning are often formed when they are relatively young, the influence of schooling (and school subject teachers in particular) can be especially important."

ASPIRENorth will engage positively with the chief influencers of young people, i.e. parents, school staff and any directly relevant community groups within the context of the geography of the target schools

AIM 4:

"Lifelong learning enhances learners' life opportunities by improving their skills, knowledge and confidence."

ASPIRENorth will work to promote positive attitudes to learning and improve the skills, knowledge and confidence of the young people it works with

AIM 5:

"We need to broaden the Forum's mission to include all post-compulsory education"

ASPIRENorth will raise aspirations and awareness of non-advanced as well as advanced post-school provision and will highlight and promote the links in between.

AIM 6:

"Support, develop and put on a long-term footing regional multi-agency co-operative activities to raise aspirations and co-ordinate activities"

ASPIRENorth will work to build strong relationships with all partners and in developing activities will also be mindful of the need both to enhance what already exists and look towards longer-term embedding and sustainability.

AIM 7:

"We did not expect to have achieved ideal levels of participation across the whole population in the relatively short time it has been a high priority. Neither did we expect it to be easy to link the many actions we and others have taken with particular impacts: someone's decision to participate may have been affected by many different actions or by none"

ASPIRENorth will monitor progression to further and higher education within its target schools, take cognisance of any sector-wide targets to be set, and engage with regional partners as appropriate to contribute to the achievement of these

AIM 8:

"Continue to develop both quantitative and qualitative evidence on the patterns of participation and achievement, causes and effects and evaluation of programmes"

ASPIRENorth will monitor and evaluate the project's programmes and activities to provide meaningful evidence of their quality and effectiveness in relation to the stated strategic aims of the project.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

The North Forum for Widening Participation in Higher Education was set up in 1999 to involve HE and FE institutions and other relevant organisations in the north-east of Scotland (i.e. the local authority areas of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire). The geographical area covered by the Forum was extended in 2000 to include the local authority areas of Eilian Siar, Highland, Moray, Orkney and Shetland.

In late 1999 the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) invited bids for projects to widen access to higher education. The North Forum partners agreed to submit a joint bid for a major project – the University for Children and Communities (UCC). The bid was successful and in 2000 funding of £124k per annum for four years was secured from SHEFC, the funding later being extended to the end of December 2005. The UCC worked with the schools in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire with the lowest progression rates to higher education, but also with a broader range of community groups in relation to lifelong learning opportunities.

Following both an internal and an external evaluation of the UCC's work in late 2005, the North Forum took the decision to bring the UCC project to an end. The decision was taken to build on the good local practice already established with schools, and to restructure the existing UCC model to create a new, more clearly focused and defined schools-outreach project which would meet the needs of low-participation schools across the whole of the North Forum area.

The new project was called ASPIRENorth. A Director was appointed at strategic level on 1st January 2006 and plans were put in place to recruit two teams of operational staff in both Aberdeen and Inverness office bases. The aim was to re-launch ASPIRENorth as the major widening participation project for the north of Scotland, and to grow awareness of the brand through the new name, new logo, new website, new staffing and the development and delivery of a new and effective programme of activity. The goal was for ASPIRENorth to eventually be perceived as the 'gold standard' schools outreach project for the north of Scotland.

3. WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

As a project of the North Forum ASPIRENorth works with and on behalf of all partners, acknowledging existing partners' or other external programmes and activities where appropriate, and dovetailing with them where possible. The project always attempts to provide guidance and information which is objective, student-centred and of equal benefit to all of the designated school communities it is working with. For this reason ASPIRENorth will continue to maintain a policy of providing a coherent and equitable programme of activity in its own right, capable of being delivered across all of its target schools. It will not, therefore, in principle, provide additional support, either in staff time or resources, for individual widening participation activities already being undertaken by others. All its resources, activities, ideas, materials etc., are however, freely available to be used by interested parties (e.g. schools, partner institutions, other Forums or widening participation projects) who may wish to copy or adapt these in some way to

achieve a similar not-for-profit end, with the proviso that ASPIRENorth and/or the North Forum is acknowledged as and where appropriate. The project will therefore fully support any additional widening participation capacity that can be built in this way.

One of the project's key strategic aims will therefore continue to be to build stronger relationships with all partners and target schools in order to encourage co-operative and complementary work and add overall value to the regional widening participation effort. For the consolidation period of August 2008 to July 2010 this aim will remain fundamental to the success of ASPIRENorth, and it is worth noting here that the first two full years of programme delivery have already gone a long way towards achieving this.

Current partners in the North Forum are:

Aberdeen City Council
Aberdeen College
Aberdeenshire Council
Banff & Buchan College
Careers Scotland – Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Careers Scotland – Grampian Enterprise
The Highland Council
Highland Theological College
Inverness College
LEAD Scotland
Lews Castle College
Lochaber College
Moray College
Moray Council
North Atlantic Fisheries College
Orkney College
Orkney Council
Sabhal Mor Ostaig
Scottish Agricultural College
Scottish Funding Council
Shetland College
The North Highland College
The Open University in Scotland
The Robert Gordon University
University of Aberdeen
UHI Millennium Institute
WEA

4. TARGET SCHOOLS

The 2006 Business Plan included a detailed strategy for determining and prioritising target schools and proposed that this should be reviewed in the light of the first two years of programme roll-out. This review was undertaken in April 2008 and minor changes to the original strategy were approved by the North Forum as follows:

It was noted that two schools in the H&I region had withdrawn from the programme very early on – Ullapool High School and Culloden Academy. Both schools have continued to be eligible for programme inclusion during the first two years of delivery and have been given opportunities to re-enter. As neither has chosen to do so it was agreed that from August 2008 both should be removed from the programme, leaving 24 fully active ASPIRENorth schools. 12 of these fall into the remit of the Grampian office, and the other 12 (plus some Junior High School involvement in Orkney), into the remit of the H&I office.

The 24 target schools currently active in the programme will be retained for 2008-2010 delivery. It was also noted that at the current point in time, and with current resources, there is no capacity available for adding additional schools in either the Grampian or Highlands & Islands areas.

Banff Academy and Buckie Community High School will be re-graded to Priority 2 schools and become eligible for the full year-group Priority 2 programme in 2008-09.

In the longer term ASPIRENorth should work towards eliminating the Priority 3 category and re-grading all such schools as either Priority 1 or 2 only – but this will have to be subject to additional resources becoming available to do so.

The full target school strategy should once again be reviewed in July 2009 and annually thereafter.

For the purposes of this Updated Business Plan it should be noted that much of the value of working with schools comes from building relationships via consistency of quality delivery. For this reason it is strongly recommended that future reviews of target school strategy should seek to minimise changes to the list of participating schools unless there are strong reasons for doing so.

5. MANAGEMENT

The original management and advisory structure for ASPIRENorth was deemed to have worked well during the initial development phase of the project, but by 2008 the initial need for intensive strategic development and high-level relationship-building has been overtaken by more concentration now being placed on practical activity development and physical roll-out of the programme by the operational team. It therefore became apparent in early 2008 that significant elements of the Director's original job description were gradually becoming redundant as the project established itself. This is deemed to be a positive development as it clearly demonstrates the success of the initial strategy and the eventual maturing of the ensuing programme of activities. As a result of this, however, and bearing in mind the uncertainty of levels of long-term funding, consultation was undertaken by the North Forum and a decision made to re-structure the management of ASPIRENorth, making the Director's strategic post redundant in the process. The new management structure adopted would appear to provide an appropriate framework in which ASPIRENorth can continue to progress during 2008-2010, but it is recommended that this is once again reviewed at the end of this period to ascertain whether the new approach is still working appropriately and fulfilling the needs of the project at that time.

The revised management structure is as follows:

The North Forum Executive

The North Forum Executive will determine the policy direction for ASPIRENorth

The North Forum Manager

The North Forum Manager will undertake line management and budgetary responsibility for ASPIRENorth and will ensure policy implementation.

The ASPIRENorth team

The operational team will consist of two Regional Co-ordinators, two Development Workers and two members of secretarial/clerical staff. Two regional offices will continue to address the needs of both the Grampian area and the Highlands and Islands area. For reasons of logistical effectiveness and economy the office bases will continue to be in Aberdeen and Inverness. The roles of project staff are summarised as follows:

- **Regional Co-ordinator**

The two Regional Co-ordinators will take responsibility for the continued operational roll-out and day to day management of their respective area offices, liaise directly and build relationships with schools and Forum partners in their area in order to plan and deliver the different elements of the programme, establish and Chair a regional Advisory Group to ensure good two-way communication with relevant stakeholders, set local operational targets and performance indicators in collaboration with the North Forum and each other, manage local budgets and financial recording, line manage Development Worker and secretarial/clerical office staff, develop, review and deliver the ongoing programme of activities as necessary including production of all necessary materials, working together and independently develop the project website, project workpacks and marketing and promotional materials as appropriate for both programme delivery and general public relations purposes, seek opportunities for positive promotion of the project's work and maintain an effective PR strategy; ensure local office processes work smoothly across and between both area offices and in accordance with the requirements of the host institution, maintain appropriate evaluation processes for project work and report on same, work with the Development Worker to establish tracking procedures for participating students and also databases for volunteers, and in particular continue to build key relationships with target groups of school students, school staff, university and college staff, Careers Advisors etc., maintain and update personal knowledge of best widening participation practice nationally, and represent ASPIRENorth as required.

- **Development Worker**

The two Development Workers will support the work of the Regional Co-ordinators as required and in particular, deliver the programme of activity through close liaison with target schools and partner institutions, contribute to the ongoing planning and development of any new activity, piloting where required, maintain an effective procedure for recruiting and training volunteers involved in ASPIRENorth's programme

of activities, and establish databases as appropriate for recording purposes, work directly with partner institutions to help embed a culture of student volunteering and a network to support this, contribute to maintaining efficient processes in relation to tracking the progress of programme participants, performance measure setting, monitoring and evaluation and reporting on the regional office's activities as required, contribute to the maintenance of efficient office administration processes both electronically and paper based, promote the interests of ASPIRENorth and the North Forum as appropriate and contribute to the development of the project website and all other marketing or public relations materials as required, represent the project and deputise for the Regional Co-ordinator as required, undertake any other alternative duties as directed by the Regional Co-ordinator.

- **Administrative Secretary**

The two Administrative Secretaries will provide administrative and secretarial support for core ASPIRENorth personnel in regional offices, provide welcoming and knowledgeable first point of contact at area offices, manage all office admin processes including processing invoices and keeping accurate and up to date financial records, managing databases, ordering stationery and office supplies as directed, servicing Advisory Groups, contributing to the production of professional programme and marketing materials, preparing reports as directed, keeping effective general records for office management purposes, helping with organisation and delivery of ASPIRENorth events or meetings as required, working with the host institution to ensure practical office procedures run smoothly and in accordance with external requirements, any other duties as directed by the Regional Co-ordinator.

Advisory Groups

The Regional Co-ordinators will take responsibility for maintaining and developing the two local Advisory Groups consisting of interested stakeholders or third parties who are in a position to provide local advice and information to the project and provide views and feedback on ASPIRENorth plans and activity. These groups should continue to be open to partner institutions, target schools, teachers, Careers specialists, representatives of complementary widening participation projects and Council representatives. The frameworks that have been established for the Advisory Groups to date in terms of agendas and timings appear to be working well and should be maintained during the 2008-2010 period. As the name suggests, however, the Advisory Group should continue to exist to inform, advise and comment on ASPIRENorth's work in relation to local contexts and to provide a forum for the interchange of ideas and information, but the Group should continue to have no responsibility or remit to either steer or manage the ASPIRENorth project.

6. PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITY

The actual content of the core programme of activity has been fully developed and rolled out as at July 2008, all as initially outlined in the original Business Plan. This is fully detailed in project literature and on the ASPIRENorth website. Each activity has been piloted, reviewed at least once, and revised where necessary and it is strongly recommended that this full programme should now remain unchanged and allowed to run in its current form until at least July 2010. At this point it would be appropriate to

carry out a further review to see if any adjustments to the programme are appropriate at that time.

It was envisaged that the first two years of the project delivery (i.e. up to end July 2008) would be spent gradually building up the complete series of activities, and this has been fully accomplished in accordance with the Business Plan. During these first two years all statistical targets for development and delivery have been met and indeed in many cases exceeded. The full potential for maximum possible delivery therefore continues to be as noted on the table below, which is the original projection duly updated to take account of the withdrawal of the two schools noted earlier, and a re-adjustment of the associated primaries as a result of Orkney Council preferring us to work with Junior High Schools (who are counted as part of Kirkwall Grammar School).

Target level of activity to be offered in 2008-2009 and 2009-2010

Programme	No. of senior schools	No. of primary schools	No. of interventions each	TOTAL No. of interventions per annum
Priority 1 – S1-S4 incl P7 transition	6		5	30
Priority 1 – associated primary activity		24	1	24
Priority 2 – S1-S4	15		4	60
Priority 3 – S1-S4 selected pupils	3		4	12
Parents evening/event	24		1	24
'Floating' intervention	24		1	24
TOTAL INTERVENTIONS				174

As highlighted in the original Business Plan although ASPIRENorth has now reached a point where the full programme of activity is theoretically available to all eligible schools, it remains unlikely that there will be a 100% uptake of events against entitlement, if the experience of other similar projects is taken into account. There are inevitably times when schools cannot take advantage of an activity due to their own commitments, even when they may wish to do so in principle. ASPIRENorth has now, however, achieved its original targets of developing the full programme and making it available in principle to all eligible schools. It is recommended therefore that the project's annual delivery targets for 2008-9 and 2009-2010 are based on maintaining at least the level of delivery achieved in 2007-8 (i.e. 143 interventions), as well as ensuring schools have the opportunity to opt into all elements of the programme for which they are eligible. A further notional target should also be to encourage schools to increase this uptake to as close as possible to the maximum 174 interventions noted above. For information, it should also be highlighted that the definition of an 'intervention' is one school having

received as complete as possible a delivery of one specific activity – but in terms of real time commitment this frequently consists of a series of repeat small-group sessions in order to achieve full-school participation. The number of actual sessions actually provided therefore will always far outnumber the target noted here for ‘interventions’.

In summary:

The total number of ‘interventions’ delivered by ASPIRENorth during 2007/8 was 143. This number should therefore remain the minimum target number for expected actual interventions per annum for the next two years, working where possible towards a maximum of 174 possible interventions.

7. MARKETING

Over and above the programme of direct schools activity the project has continually explored a variety of ways to develop public relations activity and raise the profile of ASPIRENorth’s work. The intention is to continue to reinforce awareness of the ASPIRENorth brand both within the target schools and within the education sector generally and evidence to date would suggest that strong foundations for this have been built to date. During 2008-2010 the project should continue to carry out the following:

- twice-yearly newsletter
- poster campaigns in schools
- development and promotion of an effective website aimed at clear target groups, incorporating useful links to and from other relevant websites
- leaflets and display materials which are clear, informative and targeted appropriately as necessary
- development of a unified and recognisable corporate image and style for all project materials, reports etc
- proactive engagement with local and national media
- proactive ongoing networking with partners, schools, education authorities, Widening Participation Forums, Scottish Government etc.
- build up of network of student volunteers
- retention of interested local employers and volunteers generated through the short-term Young Employee Volunteer scheme
- proactive involvement with national conferences and events where ASPIRENorth can highlight its project aims and share its achievements
- staff involvement in relevant external advisory groups as appropriate
- active promotion of staff development opportunities to ensure all team members are fully supported in carrying out their roles knowledgeably and professionally and can create the right impact at a personal level
- the provision of a professional and prompt ‘first response’ to all external enquiries
- ongoing development of IT to support both target groups and student volunteers
- accessibility and professionalism of staff at all times

8. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND TRACKING

ASPIRENorth has developed a clear strategy in relation to evaluation and tracking which meets its stated aims in the original Business Plan and this was approved by the North Forum in 2008. This strategy paper appears as Appendix 1 and will continue to be implemented during 2008–2010. All resultant reports will be made available to the North Forum Manager for dissemination as appropriate.

In addition to this ASPIRENorth will continue to work with the North Forum Manager to annually monitor progression rates to further and higher education within its target schools.

9. BUDGET

The annual budget for ASPIRENorth for 2008-09 has been set at £250,000. An analysis of 2007-08 spend has been carried out and discussions have taken place with the North Forum Manager with regard to the likely categories and levels of spend for the coming year. A new budget template cannot be provided at this stage due to the ongoing changeover of financial services from The Robert Gordon University to the University of Aberdeen. Actual salary and overhead projections are therefore still awaited, but preliminary predictions do suggest it will be possible to operate a programme within the given £250,000 budget which maintains a similar level of delivery and activity as 2007/8, savings now having been made as a result of the removal of the Director's post. Projected expenditure does not, however, include any further large-scale web development.

It should be borne in mind that the effects of statutory annual salary increments and cost of living rises may mean that the North Forum will have to review the budget for ASPIRENorth for 2009-2010 in the light of final 2008-2009 spend.

10. PROJECT REVIEW

It is recommended that with the removal of the permanent Director post and the inevitable loss of some of the benefits this still carried for ASPIRENorth, the project should be monitored on a regular basis over the next two years (e.g. six monthly). This would ensure ASPIRENorth is continuing to operate within the terms of this Business Plan Update and staying firmly on strategic track. At the end of July 2010 it may be appropriate for a more full external evaluation to be carried out in order to assess progress and help inform the North Forum's future strategic planning at that time.

APPENDIX 1



ASPIRENorth Evaluation Strategy Document

Introduction

ASPIRENorth will work directly with P7-S4 pupils in 26 target schools across the north of Scotland. The project team will also engage with a variety of other stakeholders including teachers, parents and representatives from partner institutions.

To measure the effectiveness of the project and its activities, the project team must evaluate many different aspects of the project's operations. The strategy outlined below explains how the project team will evaluate their work, taking into consideration the views of the varied range of stakeholders who come into contact with the project.

Evaluating the impact of project activities

The project team must evaluate the impact of their activities throughout the life of the project. To achieve this, the team must establish an initial 'benchmark' against which the project's influence can be measured. This benchmark must measure the perceptions, awareness, aspirations and confidence of the pupils before they engage in project activities. By asking pupils to complete the same survey in future years, once they have engaged in project activities, the team can measure the extent to which the key strategic aims of ASPIRENorth are being achieved.

A pupil questionnaire will be used to obtain the above benchmark. **The questionnaire will be completed by a minimum of 25% of each S1 year group in all ASPIRENorth target schools. The pupils will then complete the same questionnaire on an annual basis.**

S1 pupils have been chosen for this exercise as the majority of pupils will not have engaged in any previous ASPIRENorth activity. Pupils from Priority 1 schools will have engaged in a P7 activity, but this will mainly focus on the transition from primary to secondary school and as such will not greatly influence their views on post-school education. The pupils will all participate in ASPIRENorth activities during S1, S2, S3 and S4. By re-surveying a similar sample of pupils from each year group on an annual basis, the project team can measure the influence of the project over a significant period of time. It also allows the team to measure the cumulative effect of the different project activities over time.

In future years, each new S1 year group will be surveyed in advance of the ASPIRENorth S1 activity being delivered in their school. The same methodology outlined above will be adopted to ensure the programme of activities continues to have a positive effect on pupils throughout the life of the project.

Evaluation of individual activities

It is essential that effective evaluation tools are utilised to assess the effectiveness of the project's individual activities. Evaluation of the project's activities has a number of purposes: -

- To ensure the activities meet the key strategic aims of ASPIRENorth
- To ensure that the format and delivery of the activities is appropriate to their audience
- To guide the future development of each activity, particularly during the pilot delivery stage

Feedback from other projects would suggest that evaluating every 'intervention' (i.e. every delivery of every activity in every school) results in an 'evaluation overload' which does not provide project staff with a useful assessment of the above areas. As such, project staff must specify targets for the evaluation of each activity which do not overload project staff, but also give an accurate picture of the effectiveness of each activity.

S4 Student Life Experience pupils (Highlands & Islands)

Each year the above activity will give around 60 pupils from target schools across the Highlands & Islands the chance to live in real student accommodation and find out more about post-school education opportunities outwith their local area.

As this activity lasts for 5 days, the pupils benefit from a far more intensive intervention than those who take part in the other project activities. The project team will track this small group of pupils over time to see how their experience influences their post-school education perceptions and choices. The pupils who took part in Student Life Experience 2008 will be contacted at the following times:

1. September 2008
2. Easter 2009
3. September 2009
4. Easter 2010
5. September 2010

At each contact point the project team will ask the pupils about their plans for when they leave school. By September 2010 all of the pupils will have left school and the team will have a clear picture of the destination of each pupil. This will go at least some way to demonstrating the impact of this particular activity. Pupils who take part in the activity in future years will also be tracked in a similar way.

The project team will look at how best to approach the pupils at the above points.

Targets for activity evaluation

In most cases the team will deliver activities across multiple sessions in each school due to the limited group sizes which can be addressed in each session and timetable constraints within schools. As such, **it is proposed that the project team evaluate at least one delivery session of every activity in each of their target schools.** This approach has been chosen for a number of reasons:-

- Due to the large geographic area covered by the project, it is essential that the team can gauge the effectiveness of the activities in a wide variety of areas. By evaluating activities in all our target schools, the team can identify issues relating to delivery in

- particular geographic locations. This will ensure any future activity development takes account of regional issues identified during the evaluation process.
- Activity evaluation is time consuming and it is essential that the team strike a balance between time spent delivering activities and time spent evaluating them. By evaluating only one session of each activity in each school the project staff can rate the success of each activity whilst allowing sufficient time for quality engagement with pupils

During the development phase of the project, it is proposed that the team will only evaluate activities during the first 6 months of that activity being delivered in schools. This will provide sufficient time for the team to evaluate the success of any given activity. Activities will then be re-evaluated on a rolling annual programme where a different activity is chosen for rigorous re-evaluation each year.

Pupil Case Studies

The project team will also use pupil case studies to measure the effectiveness of the project activities from the perspective of individual pupils.

During the first year of activity delivery, the project team will select two S1 pupils (preferably one boy and one girl) from six of the project's target schools. Each pupil will have one short informal interview with project staff each year. Although informal in nature, the structure of these conversations will be designed to try and gain an insight into the pupils' perceptions of post-school education and also of the ASPIRENorth activities. This will provide the project staff with an accurate picture of the long term 'personal' impact of the project activities. It will also allow the team to track the progress of these pupils throughout their engagement with ASPIRENorth.

Each year a further two pupils from additional six target schools will be added to our case study group. Ultimately the project will have two case study pupils from S1-S4 in every target school. This is a significant sample which will give the team valuable information not provided by the other evaluation tools outlined above.

Teachers

The project team must also evaluate the success of project activities from a teacher's perspective. It is proposed that a teachers' focus group is held in selected schools on an annual basis. This focus group will allow teachers to give us their views on the success of project activities, their impact on pupils and the delivery of activities in their school (e.g. format, rooms used for delivery, number of visits etc).

Given the large number of target schools and large geographic area covered by the project, it is proposed that a sample of three schools from each region (six in total) are chosen to participate in the focus groups. The sample schools will change annually on a rotating basis to ensure teachers from different locations have a chance to give some formalised feedback on the effectiveness of the project activities.

Student/Recent Graduate Volunteers

As the project develops, student and recent graduate volunteers will form a core part of activity deliveries. As such, the project team must make efforts to gather opinions and feedback from these individuals. Evaluation of the volunteers scheme will be co-ordinated by the project Development Workers.

Volunteers will be asked to complete a questionnaire following their initial training designed to gather their thoughts specifically on the training of volunteers. During their time with the project, volunteers will have the chance to participate in focus groups to discuss their views and give

feedback to project staff. Selected volunteers will also be invited to join ASPIRENorth Advisory Group meetings to discuss project development with team members and other stakeholders. Where volunteers decide to end their involvement with ASPIRENorth, they will be asked to complete an exit questionnaire to collect feedback and help identify possible areas for improvement.

Capturing views of other key stakeholders

The methods outlined above evaluate the project from the perspective of its impact on pupils. It is also essential for the project team to capture the views and opinions of other stakeholders who engage with the project.

Due to the wide variety of stakeholders who have some form of contact with the project, it is difficult to carry out any form of in-depth evaluation with this group. To gain some insight into the opinions of our stakeholders, the project team will capture and record relevant verbal or written quotes from individuals. This will allow the team to gauge the opinions of a variety of different stakeholders in a quick and informal manner.

Stakeholders will also have the chance to voice their opinions on the project activities during the three regional Advisory Group sessions held every year.

Summary

Although the above strategy will give the team a balanced methodology for assessing the overall impact and effectiveness of the project, it is proposed that this approach is reviewed on an annual basis. This will allow the team to adapt the strategy to the changing needs and increasing workload of the project.