

Aimhigher LIFE Partnership Strand AL2b – Engineering

Stickland's Primary School Progression Pathway's into Engineering Project

Encouraging children to develop an interest in science and technology at a young age is the key to ensuring that we continue to secure the engineering skills Britain needs in the 21st century if she is to retain her position as a world-leader in this vital economic sector. FE Colleges and Universities have long realised that the biggest barrier in terms of engaging young people to consider careers in engineering have centered around the eroded and outmoded perceptions of what engineering will actually entail in the 21st century.

The LIFE Partnership is piloting a project with Stickland's Primary School (Evershot, Dorchester) to provide a series of planned activity days designed to support the idea that if these perceptions are to be effectively changed, interventions at a much younger age are needed. Competitions such as the 'K'nex Junior Engineers for Britain and 'First Lego League Robotics Challenges' have already been delivered. These are exciting initiatives designed to promote science (physics), engineering and technology in a new, exciting, stimulating and above all 'fun' way, and they are linked to the national curriculum in these subject areas. Beaminster School (NW Dorset) is the secondary school that most of the children from Stickland's would progress to from Year 6 onwards and the school has 'Technology Status'. It is an Aimhigher LIFE target school and in rural terms is very isolated, being almost 2 hours traveling time from it's nearest HEIs (Bournemouth & Exeter Universities) and 45 minutes from the nearest FE Colleges (Yeovil and Weymouth).

Beaminster is committed to raising awareness in science, technology and engineering and has very positively embraced a number of interventions designed and supported by Aimhigher in the past. The opportunity therefore existed to chart how interventions at a pre-secondary school age might change the children's perceptions of 'engineering' and encourage them to consider sticking with science based subjects when making their option choices in Year 9. The children will be tracked as they move from primary to secondary education to determine if these types of interventions have made a real difference. Evaluations from the first two activity days would suggest that the initiative will prove to be very successful, with an amazing 35% stating that they 'wanted to be an Engineer when they grew up'

Gwyneth Irvine, Design & Technology Teacher from Stickland's School reported before the project began that;

'We have completed the "baseline assessment" of the children's attitudes to the world of engineering. I have to tell you that approximately 90% visualised an engineer as a man in a boiler suit with a spanner in his hand standing beside a car or a bike! A few linked the name with steam engines and drew fireman shoveling coal into a steam engine, one recorded a washing machine repair man and one a man claspng lots of money who had just won a competition. I think there's an even bigger task involved than anticipated as it is very hard to change ideas so firmly entrenched and so much easier if they have no idea at all!!