

## **“AimHigher” As Headteacher – What’s in it for my school?**

**To learn more about the opportunities offered by Aimhigher visit  
[www.aimhigherwest.org.uk](http://www.aimhigherwest.org.uk)**

### **Background:**

- The government is committed to the creation in the UK of a post-industrial, knowledge based economy in order to secure the nation’s economic competitiveness. To achieve this, the UK requires a highly educated population, particularly at Levels 2, 3 and 4.
- To that end it has set the following targets, that:
  - By 2010: 50% of population aged 19-30 achieve Level 2 qualifications.
  - By 2020: 40% of population aged 19+ achieve Level 4 qualifications

### **The purposes and organisation of Aimhigher:**

- The original mission of “AimHigher” [AH] focussed on securing the wider participation of students from “non-traditional” backgrounds into Higher Education, by using resources provided by HEIs working with schools and colleges to support their progression.
- The “widening participation [WP] cohort” included students from families within which there was no prior experience of HE, those from ethnic minorities, those suffering disabilities and those living in areas of significant socio-economic deprivation.
- The project originally planned to focus on WP cohorts in Y9-13 inclusive. However, many schools have chosen to focus on such cohorts at an even earlier stage, research having shown that pupils often make “hard” decisions about their future much earlier, often based on poor knowledge and little experience. The attitudes of families and friends have been found to be highly influential, requiring early intervention by schools if appropriately raised aspirations are to be achieved.
- The project is nationally funded and regionally organised.
- AimHigher West is the overarching organisation subsuming South Gloucestershire. South Gloucestershire LEA is one of a number of Sub-Areas making up the regional structure.

## What is in it for my school?

- National data on schools in the Area is analysed by UWE on behalf of AimHigher. Analysis of the data enables schools to be banded according to the criteria set out above, FSM being taken as a proxy indicator for deprivation. Exam results, including progress indicators are used in conjunction with the other indicators to identify “Priority Schools”.
- Priority schools receive funding [currently £5k p.a.] to establish internal infrastructure to support the widening participation agenda.
- All schools, including those not deemed to be “Priority Schools” have access to the resources set out in the “Opportunities Prospectus”, copies of which have been sent to each school, so there is something beneficial to be gained for free or at minimal cost for **every** school.
- Each Sub-Area also receives funding to ensure local coordination and accountability of the project’s work but no funds are held centrally by the Sub-Area Coordinator, whose task it is to ensure that, through effective collaboration between local schools and colleges, best value is obtained from the available HEI resource.
- The majority of funding allocated to the Area has historically gone directly to HEIs to establish the capacity to fulfil the project’s aims. This resource allows HEIs to respond to the needs of schools/colleges with no cost to these latter organisations at the point of delivery, within notional, pre-determined Sub-Area cost limits.
- Within South Gloucestershire, secondary schools and colleges have been asked to nominate someone who can coordinate work internally and who is able to represent the school at meetings of School Coordinators, held locally once/term.

### “AimHigher” – towards a new future:

- The Project has been reviewed prior to FY 06/07 and new, smaller limits have been set on future financial allocations to the Area Partnership.
- From April 06, AH funds are being paid directly to schools directly by the DfES via Standards Funds, as part of the school’s single budget.
- This latter change will be highly significant as far as AH is concerned since the funds paid to schools will not be “earmarked” to AH.

- Schools that receive funding by this route will be required to demonstrate that they work in partnership with Aimhigher in order to secure the national goal of widening participation in HE.
- In the name of “AimHigher”, the HEIs will be able to continue to deploy their expertise to make a significant contribution to schools and colleges by working in partnership to secure the interests of the widening participation cohorts, to drive up standards and to aid schools in demonstrating their success in meeting the needs of this diverse group of students. HEIs will also be able to support schools in raising aspirations and standards more generally, including those of G&T students.
- However, from 2007/8 the government will be requiring a more closely targeted use of Aimhigher resources, particularly those which are the most expensive to provide. The details of how this targeting is to be accomplished have yet to be published finally, but the guidelines are likely to focus on meeting the needs of students from lower socio-economic groups

### **Getting the most out of AimHigher:**

- AimHigher resources are made available to be used by schools and colleges to support the wider aims of the institution’s Development Plan in the contexts described earlier.
- It is intended that the benefits of AimHigher resources should be made available to schools subject to the minimum of bureaucracy necessary to ensure operational efficiency and accountability.
- The “School Coordinator” has a key role to play by working with colleagues [e.g. G&T Coordinator, Guidance Team, Curriculum Planners, Staff Development Coordinator] in school to:
  - Identify WP cohorts in accordance with the criteria set out in Pages 73-76 of The Opportunities Prospectus”,
  - Identify the range of targets set for these groups and monitor the progress they make,
  - Set targets for progression to HE, including for the WP cohort,
  - Identify needs of students and staff that could be served effectively by the deployment of AH resources,
  - Draw the resources of AH into a coherent plan [part of the SDP] to meet the needs of students in the school, the plan to include as

appropriate, particular events for students, parents and the professional development of staff.

- Supply a copy of the Plan to the Sub-Area Coordinator
  - Monitor and evaluate the impact of the AH Plan – essential if provision is to be designed to meet need and future funding to be secured,
  - Collaborate with other School Coordinators and with the Sub-Area Coordinator to ensure that the benefits of the AH resource are used to best effect locally.
- Following appropriate consultation, AimHigher West has drawn up a role description for school coordinators.
  - School Coordinators have the potential to play a very useful role in schools. Their work spans several Year Groups and, in order to be effective in the role, the Coordinator needs to be able to understand not only the “big picture” of the potential offered by the “Opportunities Prospectus” but also possess an overview of school development plans/ programmes, linking in to both curricular and wider “guidance” needs. It helps if the person really has a passion for the role, seeing it as a means to make a difference in the school.
  - For maximum benefit to be derived from the work of the Coordinator, schools are urged to consider how best the person in this role should relate formally to other key personnel in school, such as those indicated earlier. Experience shows that Aimhigher Coordinators are most effective when they work as part of a team that coordinates delivery of interventions designed to facilitate student progression.
  - Sub-Area meetings of School Coordinators may be of interest to school G&T Coordinators in particular and they are always welcome to attend these meetings.

**In conclusion:**

- AimHigher has a potential contribution to make to raising standards, challenging the gifted and talented and widening participation in HE. It also offers a valuable source of professional development at minimal cost.
- The AH programme supports schools in demonstrating to outside agencies improvement in quality and effectiveness of provision, the enhanced progression of “non-traditional groups” to HE and successful

partnership working with parents and the wider community, represented by HEIs and others associated with AH.

- The programme opens up to the school new relationships with HEIs that, in turn, offer opportunities for further development, locally, nationally and internationally.
- Such partnerships widen the opportunities to develop learning that is different, challenging, personalised and congruent with the school's wide-ranging aims.
- **Aimhigher is not another 'bolted on' programme! Aimhigher offers to schools a wide range of resources and expertise, to be drawn upon in carefully considered, systematically planned ways in order to help to ensure that students achieve and progress in the most appropriate way for each individual, within and beyond school.**

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