

The “Aimhigher” Programme for Schools in South Gloucestershire – Guidance for School Coordinators

Welcome to Aimhigher in South Gloucestershire schools:

School Aimhigher Coordinators fulfil extremely important and valuable roles that contribute to the raising of standards in schools and to the encouragement of young people to fulfil their potential. This document is not an attempt to “teach grandmothers to suck eggs”. It is an attempt to summarise, in practical terms, the role of the School Coordinator.

Aimhigher is a national programme, delivery of which is managed through Regional and Area Partnerships that engage amongst others, HEIs and schools. The work is funded nationally through the Higher Education Funding Council in England (HEFCE) and payments to “Priority” schools and Local Authorities are made via the DfES.

The aims, objectives and modus operandi of Aimhigher (AH) are set out in the “Opportunities Prospectus”, copies of which are routinely available in schools. (This document is the essential starting point if you are new to working in the context of AH).

Coordinating AH work in your school will probably be just one of many things on your job description. How much of a priority you feel it to be will depend on how clearly understood is the potential benefit to students of the resources that are available for schools to call upon by yourself and by others in the school,. Most of these resources are provided free of charge.

Experience shows that these resources are most effective when integrated into the wider programmes that comprise the school’s work – the intention is not to create an “Aimhigher “department! The Coordinator role is about just that; coordinating the best ways of using resources to raise awareness and aspirations of HE, particularly amongst students from families that have little direct experience of HE and to help to raise standards in school. AH work is not an adjunct; it lies at the heart of the school’s core activity.

The key tools:

- Pupil data sets – performance, targets, social contextual data,
- The Aimhigher “Opportunities Prospectus”,
- The Aimhigher West website:
www.aimhigherwest.org.uk
- School self-evaluation data
- The School Improvement Plan – of which plans for AH activities form part.

The essential steps:

At first reading these steps will sound daunting, especially if you are the person coordinating Aimhigher in your school. You can’t do it all on your own, nor should you try to – the knack is to work with and through others!

Your Headteacher will recognise the value of this work and will (continue to) support you in ensuring that it makes a significant contribution to the life of the school and to the particular young people on whom it is focused.

The key to fulfilling this role lies in your belief in its value. Good delegation, (upwards as well as downwards!), communication and political skills lie at the heart of helping all involved to contribute to the overall success of the intervention programme.

1. Secure the commitment of the Head, SLT and Governors to this work:

- Keep colleagues at all levels informed,
- Encourage these senior colleagues to use the language of “widening participation”, “raising awareness and aspirations” and to promote a focus on this group and on delivery of the intervention plan.

2. Identify “widening participation” (WP) cohorts in all year groups:

- Use the criteria set out in the “Opportunities Prospectus” – talk with the school’s data managers about how best this monitoring might be achieved – keep the workload to the necessary minimum.

3. Plan to track WP students’ progress against routinely set targets:

- Build on existing data sets,
- “Tag” WP data – allowing progress of the group to be monitored as a focus group in school.

4. Devise an intervention plan that:

- Targets all year groups,
- Develops in concert with other strategies re T&L, G&T etc. to raise standards and is written in conjunction with other plans in school in order to minimise the burden of bureaucracy,
- Is clear about intended outcomes,
- Leads to raised pupil awareness and aspirations re work at HE level,
- Encourages research in school that challenges assumptions, creates new insight and leads into more effective styles of working with the target pupil group,
- Supports the progress to HE of “under-represented” groups,
- Learns from the experience of other schools and, where appropriate, builds on collaborative working methods,
- Delivers a structured range of interventions year on year in order to raise standards and widen the WP cohort’s experience of different HE experiences,

- Engages and enhances the involvement of parents' in supporting their child's learning,
- Incorporates effective IAG and staff development strategies,
- Builds in plans to regularly monitor and evaluate impact.

5. Secure delivery of the school plan:

- The plan will involve a wide variety of colleagues that work in school: curriculum planners, Heads of Faculty, teachers, learning mentors, clerical staff, "Connexions" staff etc. Each needs to understand why the work is being done and the importance of their part.
- Monitor progress regularly and feedback on progress/impact to all staff – value their contribution – celebrate success!

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