

Aimhigher Schools' Action Plans 2007-8

Guidance

About Aimhigher:

- 'Aimhigher' (AH) is a national initiative, regionally organised.
- It is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council until the end of 2008.
- Its key purpose is to support the achievement of the government's target that, by 2010, 50% of the 19-30 population will experience Higher Education (HE) and the more recent target that, by 2020, 40% of adults aged 19+ should gain Level 4 qualifications.
- The project brings together area partnerships of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), schools, work-based trainers and guidance providers.
- AH work in the South West region of England is coordinated by the Regional Partnership, "Aimhigher South West". Within the regional partnership there are three Area partnerships. One of these, the Aimhigher West Partnership, is the organising body for South Gloucestershire,
- AH grew out of an earlier project known as 'P4P' – Partnerships for Progression", the remit of which was to widen participation in HE.
- AH retains "widening participation" as a key function but works with schools in a widening context that includes supporting the raising of standards and addressing the needs of groups currently under-represented in HEIs as well as students described broadly as 'gifted and talented'.
- The project targets mainly students from lower socio-economic groups and other groups under-represented in Higher Education, such as those from families having no prior experience of Higher Education, ethnic minorities, looked after children and those suffering disability.
- The key purposes of Aimhigher include the raising of awareness of Higher Education and aspiration towards participating in education at that level at some time in the future.
- Historically, most students have gone on to Higher Education shortly after leaving school at eighteen years of age. However, new vocational and academic qualifications, the National Qualifications Framework, and the new pathways interlinking such qualifications open up a variety of routes

that have the potential to lead on to the acquisition of Level 4 (HE level) qualifications. These routes include apprenticeship.

- AH is not “yet another initiative”. The project succeeds by making available to schools resources from HE so that schools might achieve more effectively the goals that they set themselves as a consequence of their self-evaluation – it is not ‘a bolt-on’.

How does ‘Aimhigher’ engage with my school?

- The local authority has appointed a person to coordinate work across its secondary schools, the Youth Service, Connexions, local Colleges of Further Education and partner Higher Education Institutions, in accordance with the remit of “Aimhigher”.
- Each school has a person designated to coordinate AH work in the institution.
- Whilst willing to engage with all schools, capacity within the project is not unlimited. Consequently a broad range of data is used to identify certain schools as “Priority Schools” for the project.
- Priority Schools receive approximately £5000 per annum from the project. This money is to provide infra-structure that supports engagement with the project. Priority schools also have the first call on the project resources provided by HEIs.
- Throughout South Gloucestershire, secondary schools are entering into 14-19 Partnerships; collaborative arrangements designed to widen and enrich the curriculum offered to students. Through such partnerships Priority Schools enable AH resources to be shared more widely, with non-priority partners.
- Meetings of School Coordinators take place at least six times each school year. Gifted and Talented Coordinators are also welcome to attend these meetings.
- The purposes of these meetings are to:
 - Create in schools a focus on students who might benefit from HE beyond the age of 19 years, particularly those from ‘under-represented groups’, and to aid in the tracking of the progress of such students,
 - Raise awareness of HE support available to schools through the on-line ‘Opportunities prospectus’,

- Improve the effectiveness of use of such resources by schools in achieving the school's goals by improving coordination of activity between and within schools,
 - Broker event opportunities in order to ensure maximum up-take of scarce resources,
 - Share best practice that raises awareness and aspirations regarding HE and standards more widely,
 - Conduct relevant research and disseminate outcomes.
- Through the 'Opportunities Prospectus', AH West provides a wide variety of activities which schools might choose to incorporate into their normal programmes of activity e.g.
 - Student mentoring,
 - Student ambassadors at parents' evenings,
 - Staff development activities,
 - Subject 'master classes',
 - Subject taster sessions,
 - Subject enrichment,
 - Revision support,
 - Aimhigher Roadshow,
 - University familiarisation days,
 - Local and regional Summer Schools,
 - In addition, a wide range of high quality classroom resources to support student guidance (IAG) re HE is available as well as resources to support the needs of specific groups of learners. These are available from various 'Aimhigher' websites.
 - **The intervention opportunities above are provided by HEIs at no charge to schools!**

- Schools are urged to use such resources in a way that provides for students from Y7-13 a planned progression of AH events that supports the school's programme of IAG, subject delivery and the raising of aspirations and standards.
- Such plans form part of the School Improvement Plan.
- Schools monitor and evaluate their planned programmes of Aimhigher work twice/year in order to be clear about impact and to inform future planning.
- The role of the 'School Coordinator' is crucial. To be of maximum benefit to the school, such staff need to work in a planned way with colleagues responsible for coordinating work relating to:
 - Teaching, learning and curriculum and whole-school planning,
 - Gifted and talented students,
 - Education of ethnic minorities,
 - Special needs relating to student disability (including dyslexia),
 - Partnerships with other schools,
 - Staff development,
 - Data management, student guidance (IAG).

Using Aimhigher resources coherently:

- In the quest to minimise the bureaucratic burden on schools, Aimhigher West will not require schools to produce a separate plan detailing their Aimhigher activity. It is recognised that schools may choose to embed their Aimhigher activities across the single School Improvement Plan.
- The template is offered in order to show the components that need to be considered when planning the deployment of Aimhigher events. The following additional comments may be of assistance:
 - Several schools have expressed a wish to continue to produce an "Aimhigher Plan" that sits as part of a collection of plans that comprise Plans for improvement of the school. Some School Coordinators have expressed the view that such a plan allows them to retain a strong ability to focus on activities that fall within their sphere of influence.

- Some schools have chosen to include in their plans details of 'school' activities that contribute to the aims of Aimhigher i.e. raising awareness of HE and increasing aspiration amongst students and their families regarding their future progression to Higher Education, even where the school does not intend to use Aimhigher resources to support the particular activity concerned – e.g. target-setting meetings with parents and students, routine monitoring meetings with parents, subject awareness evenings etc.
- The most important thing is that the school should plan its activity in the way that suits it best.
- Twice yearly, monitoring reports relating to Aimhigher activity are required from Priority Schools and are requested from schools not in receipt of direct funding from the project. These reports seek evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of the school's AH intervention programme as a whole, as well as of the individual components. The evaluations are used to inform improvement of future provision.

The monitoring reports draw on data described in the planning template; to that end there is an advantage in working in accordance with these from the outset.

Further information about the work of Aimhigher West and the "Opportunities Prospectus" in particular may be obtained from www.aimhigherwest.org.uk,

or by contacting the South Gloucestershire Sub-Area Coordinator, Colin McArthur by e-mail at: colin_r_mcarthur@hotmail.com