



Review of Evidence from Aimhigher Area Partnerships of the Impact of Aimhigher

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to demonstrate the impact of Aimhigher partnerships on the educational progression, attainment and the aspirations of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The young people represented here were chosen to participate in the Aimhigher programme because of their evident potential to progress to higher education study and, importantly, because that potential was unlikely to be realised – according to their teachers – without the extra support that Aimhigher partnerships have put in place.

1.1 Background

Since 2003, partnerships between schools, colleges, universities and other affiliated providers have worked together to widen participation in higher education. Initially this was in response to the government's aspiration that 50% of young people should be studying at higher education level by 2010. In 2004, the Excellence Challenge and Aimhigher initiatives were brought together and since then that the gathering of information, with a view to assessing the impact of a range of initiatives to widen participation, became an explicit function of the extended Aimhigher partnerships.

The importance of utilising partnerships – to create the conditions for clear co-ordination without blanket prescription and with the freedom to create projects that suit local needs – has become increasingly evident in retrospect. From a network of over 40 individual partnerships has grown something unique and powerful: a national programme that holds the needs of the individual learner (and not those of particular sectors or institutions) at its heart; a cross country agenda that has the flexibility and sensitivity to respond to local conditions while being accountable to national standards; and a ready made local, regional and national 'rapid response' structure with the management and delivery expertise to adapt quickly to new government imperatives and to deliver them in ways that strengthen local provision through regional and national collaboration.

The recent paper *Trends in young participation in higher education*¹ is the result of a 15 year study. The paper reports that:

- Young participation in higher education has significantly increased for England to the point where over 20% of young people are more likely to continue into higher education than in the mid-1990s, with young people from disadvantaged areas substantially more likely to do so.
- The proportion of young people living in the most disadvantaged areas who enter higher education has increased by over 50 per cent over the last 15 years and over 30 per cent in the last five years. These increases are consistent with other statistics including analysis of recent trends in GCSE attainment.
- The proportion of young people living in the most advantaged areas who enter higher education has increased at a slower rate than for disadvantaged young people, by over 15 per cent over the past 15 years and by more than 5 per cent in the past five years.

These findings are consistent with the targeting mechanisms developed by Aimhigher partnerships and with the monitoring and evaluation information relating to the Aimhigher programme contained in this document.

Aimhigher area partnerships have been collecting evidence to evaluate the success of their collaborative work since 2003. In the earliest days of such collaboration, the strong cross-sector and inter-sector relationships and structures that form the solid base to every Aimhigher partnership, were being negotiated and an understanding of the kinds of collaboration that were possible were being developed. At the same time government, both national and local, was reviewing the quantitative information that was available on widening participation, and exploring ways in which this could capture the efforts of partnerships most effectively. The Higher Education Funding Council for

¹ Corver, M., Trends in young participation in higher education: core results for England, HEFCE 2010/03, January 2010

England (HEFCE) worked in continuous consultation with Aimhigher partnerships on this, and in 2008 issued *Guidance for Aimhigher Partnerships*². This was a significant development. From August 2008 all Aimhigher partnerships used the same criteria to select the young people who would receive specialist Aimhigher support and recorded the nature of that support. This created the conditions for both qualitative and quantitative assessments of the effectiveness of the practices that had been developed through collaborative and consensual working. Furthermore, Aimhigher partnerships pioneered the use of a finely balanced mechanism for identifying those young people who would benefit most from support, which proved to be more sophisticated than merely relying on the uptake of the Free School Meals and Education Maintenance Allowance which misses many young people most in need of support, from families who are eligible for these allowances but choose not to take advantage of them.

Aimhigher partnerships have been able to create planned support for individual young people in schools and colleges according to their needs and not according to the needs of the administering institutions, or indeed local, regional or national politics. Partnership creates excellent conditions for transparent working: with participating institutions and organisations monitoring each other very effectively where joint funds are involved.

Partnership, both at the national and local level, has created the opportunity to achieve the economies of scale that make the production of documents such as this possible. It has also led to national efficiencies: the development of a co-ordinated national scheme has created the conditions for the sharing of best practice rather than the duplication of effort. For the 2009/10 academic year Aimhigher partnerships have delivered, together, the following³:

- A total of 54,544 events;

- Some 2,226,580 individual contacts (note: many participants had more than one contact so the figure overstates the number of individuals involved).

In addition the Aimhigher national roadshow held 4,850 sessions for around 70,000 learners.

The evidence presented here is both quantitative and qualitative, and provides just a selection of the evidence available from partnerships across the country. It focuses on the impact of Aimhigher on a number of outcomes:

- Changing the culture of progression within institutions;
- Raising student awareness and aspirations;
- Contribution to an increase in student attainment;
- Contribution to an increase in student progression.

The bulk of this report focuses on impact on student outcomes. We recognise that there are other important outcomes not evidenced here. For example, the cultural changes that have been facilitated within institutions through Aimhigher partnerships; the support for the development of staff in schools and Further Education Colleges who are unfamiliar with the demands of applying to higher education; the building of confidence among students and staff; the development of relationships between sectors that has ensured that vulnerable young people are supported at points of transition from one sector to another.

There is a wealth of other evidence exploring the impact of Aimhigher not included in this report that can be found on the Aimhigher practitioner website or directly via the individual area partnerships operating throughout the country.

1.2 Collection of evidence

In order to collect research and reports from area partnerships for inclusion in this review, an initial 'call for evidence' was made by Email to the partnership leads and data/research managers via the Aimhigher Data Network Group. Particular emphasis was

² HEFCE, *Guidance for Aimhigher partnerships: update for the 2008-2011 programme*, HEFCE 2008/05

³ Hansard (Citation: HC Deb, 6 December 2010, 90W)

given to research and evaluation which assessed the impact of Aimhigher participation upon learners and/or staff members. It was agreed that the review should focus on evidence which addresses outcomes for learners in relation to the core underlying factors:

- aspirations towards HE progression (including attitudes to staying on in education, confidence, and learner-identity);
- awareness and knowledge about progression;
- attainment at GCSE or A Level;
- evidence of actual progression (staying on rates at age 16 and 17, progression to university level at 18+).

Because of the local and devolved nature of the programme, a broad approach to the definition of research evidence was adopted. This reflected the fact that evaluative research is often small scale, and more concerned with individual schools/colleges or cohorts, rather than macro-level analysis. This review thus includes a range of approaches to the collection and analysis of evidence, including small scale and qualitative research and statistical analyses of data, as well as large scale and triangulated research projects. The review also took account of other national research which was potentially influential and which provided a context for Aimhigher partnership research and evaluation. This would show if and how local findings aligned with other studies at a national level.

Sixty-two submissions were received, and an initial categorisation of the reports was made, each being assessed by members of a panel established to undertake the work. The initial sift was designed to assess the usefulness of the evidence received for drawing general conclusions about the programme, and the type of research methods employed. The panel process led to forty-one of the studies received being judged to be particularly relevant to evidence of Aimhigher outcomes and learner progression, and this report is based on this sub-set, although all the submissions were useful in informing the conclusions made. Further information of the research reports

included in this report is given at Annex A. A list of the partnerships who submitted evidence is given at Annex B.

1.3 Overview of the evidence base

Aimhigher implementation is underpinned by an understanding that providing support for progression is a cumulative process over a life course and is best tackled through addressing the combination of factors that underpin progression: aspiration, awareness and attainment. The resulting interventions are numerous and complex within and between Aimhigher partnerships. Aimhigher partnerships have developed a multi-layered approach which ranges from tightly targeted resource-intensive support with priority groups, to more generalised information and awareness raising across area cohorts. Aimhigher interventions have ranged across all age groups and used a wide range of methods from less intensive approaches such as presentations, to in-depth and sustained support, such as one to one and group mentoring. The range of objectives, target groups, and delivery mechanisms, and the locally based nature of the programme is reflected in the wide variety of different types of research evidence which were submitted to the review. This ranged from data based approaches, practitioner-based research, and commissioned research assignments.

Another key feature was the diversity of local approaches to undertaking evaluation projects which included:

- activity focused research and evaluation in relation to specific interventions, and often relating to specific priority target groups (eg. Smith, 2010, Harvey & Leyden, 2010);
- qualitative projects with learners and staff members to explore perceived changes as a result of Aimhigher (eg. Kerrigan & Carpenter, 2009, Rogers, 2009);
- quantitative research, usually drawing on administrative datasets, and focusing on outcomes for Aimhigher learners in comparison to other groups (eg. Kerrigan, 2010b, Kerrigan, 2010c, Smith, 2010);

- a focus on educational practitioners and school structures as the locus for improvements in progression (eg. WECAN, 2010, and Rouncefield-Swales, 2009).

The Aimhigher Progression Framework model has highlighted the importance of learner outcomes in planning activities, and this is increasingly reflected in evaluations of the effectiveness of activities. At the same time, the Aimhigher model implies a holistic, cumulative pattern of intervention, and several researchers have sought to take into account how different kinds of intervention combine together (rather than focusing on specific activities fixed in time and place). Several of the research projects which were included in the review were the result of Area Partnership formalised evaluation strategies and plans aimed to take account of the series of inter-connected interventions delivered by different agencies at different stages.

Many Aimhigher partnerships have grappled with the challenge of designing evaluation frameworks which not only measure changes in progression but also take account of the underlying causal factors, and complex interactions, that affect young people's chances and which evaluate the outcomes in relation to the barriers, influences and opportunities to progress. A number of qualitative research projects by area partnerships shed light on the processes that intercede between Aimhigher interventions and progression outcomes, and these projects give some indication of why and how people behave and interpret the world as they do, beyond simple causal inferences. In particular, learner-identity has been a key concept for some evaluation projects.

Some evidence was found of connections between research activity across Aimhigher partnerships, for example, in terms of cross-area research, projects with shared methodology, and cross-referencing through literature reviews.

1.4 Structure of the report

This document reports the findings of the review of the evidence provided by Aimhigher area partnerships concerning the results of their activities over the past few years. The report is structured according to the key outcome indicators identified at the outset: actual progression in education including into higher education, increased awareness of higher education options, increased aspiration to progress, and raised attainment. To some extent this delineation is an artificial one: many of the reports received sought to collect evidence against a set of outcomes, and moreover most commentators have found a link between all the underlying factors. Each section includes a general overview of the nature of the evidence provided by area partnerships and then goes on to highlight and summarise findings and conclusions.

In an attempt to bring the results of Area Partnership research and evaluation to life, and to put the results of some specific examples of evaluative research in context, each of the sections includes one school/college level case study example. School/college level research was a feature of many of the reports provided by area partnerships. Furthermore, because of the devolved nature of the national programme and the centrality of institutions to the partnerships approach, it is at the level of schools and colleges that the delivery and impacts of Aimhigher tend to be played out.

2. EVIDENCE OF PROGRESSION OUTCOMES

“Aimhigher gave me the confidence to progress to the next level”

(Quote from participant in Aimhigher work based learning progression framework as part of follow-up research, Harvey & Leyden, 2010)

2.1 Overview

Research at national level which disaggregates participation rates in higher education for young people by area-based categorisations, including deprived areas and low participation wards, has clearly shown that proportionally more young people are now participating in higher education than before from the neighbourhoods targeted by Aimhigher⁴. Such findings are a cause for celebration amongst Aimhigher practitioners, given the programme’s central importance as a major vehicle for widening access to university level education. They suggest that progress is being made, although a huge gap still remains between rates of progression by socio-economic groups. The issue of the underlying causality of the observed positive trend in higher education entrants from the most deprived areas is tricky in most sociological research. It is particularly difficult for Aimhigher given the range of factors at play and the imprecise relationships between recorded participants and target populations as a whole. Particular concerns exist in this area of research in relation to the need for statistical analysis using administrative datasets or large scale follow-up surveys capable of quantifying progression rates amongst Aimhigher beneficiaries, and capable of dealing with contextual factors - such as gender - upon progression, and isolating the effects of different Aimhigher interventions. Some commentators have also stressed the need for analysis of the effects of Aimhigher interventions to include some kind of comparison, or ‘control’ group.

A longitudinal study by The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) tracked cohorts of individuals (mainly those who were in Year 11 in 2001-02) to see the extent to which they entered higher education. The study found that the Aimhigher: Excellence Challenge initiative

4 Corver, M., Trends in young participation in higher education: core results for England, HEFCE 2010/03, January 2010

was positively associated with improvement in progression rates to higher education for some young people, particularly those from more disadvantaged groups (defined as those receiving free school meals). Although not large, the differences in progression outcomes are statistically significant, and young people from Aimhigher: Excellence Challenge schools with only average attainment had a 10.3 per cent chance of entering higher education, compared to 9.2 per cent for those from non-Aimhigher: Excellence Challenge schools⁵.

Local analysis of higher education progression outcomes using longitudinal tracking and administrative data have proved challenging for Aimhigher partnerships for several reasons, although some recent research projects have attempted this as shown below. In general the data systems which record participation and bring together individual data at the level required for multivariate analysis have only recently been put in place, and do not yet have the timescale required to look backward from the defined goal of higher education entry, especially where for some groups of learners’ progression outcomes may be drawn out and partial. Proving causality of the trends is also problematic, not least because Aimhigher does not operate in a policy vacuum. The Aimhigher ‘effect’ is not simply designed to act on the level of individual decision making, but also seeks to bring about changes in the structures and culture within and between partner institutions and organisations, particularly in schools and colleges. However, an increasing availability of longitudinal data sets, and more systematic recording and advances in data sharing between agencies has increased the opportunities for experimental research into learner outcomes using administrative data.

⁵ Morris, M., Rutt, S., & Mehta, P., National Foundation for Education Research, The longer term impact of Aimhigher: Tracking individuals, October 2009, HEFCE Passy, R., and Morris, M., National Foundation for Education Research, Evaluation of Aimhigher: learner attainment and progression: Final Report, HEFCE, August 2010

A recent research report into Aimhigher data systems suggests that many partnerships collect systematic data on most learners, who could be tracked through the stages of progression recorded in administrative data (Smith, 2010). In addition, some evaluation projects have taken the approach of researching progression outcomes through a direct follow-up with individual learners.

2.2 Local evidence of higher education progression using administrative data

Examples of research using statistical techniques into whether Aimhigher learners progress into higher education are summarised in Table 1. A range of national and local datasets have been used, using 'fuzzy matching' techniques. For example, the evaluation project undertaken by Aimhigher area partnerships in the South East utilised data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) to determine whether Aimhigher learners in this region⁶ went on to appear in the first year entrant dataset for HEFCE funded higher education at UK universities. Over 13,000 participants were tracked and 38% had progressed to HEFCE funded higher education. As part of this project researchers followed-up just under 6,100 individuals in one partnership area, across three cohort years. Encouragingly, Aimhigher learners progressed to university at age 18 or 19 at a higher rate than their national peers.

The difference in progression against what might otherwise be expected for the Aimhigher group was most pronounced for learners from areas which lack a tradition of progression to higher education; 24% of the Aimhigher group who lived in a POLAR2 quintile 1 (very low) participation area, and 31% in quintile 2 (low) areas progressed to HE following Aimhigher interventions, compared to 18% and 21% nationally. However, students studying in Further Education were much less likely to enter higher education than school participants and only 37% of the 2006-07 participant cohort had entered by age of 21 years with the highest proportion of these entrants coming in at age 19-20 years (Smith and Thompson, 2010).

⁶ Students recorded on the Aimhigher South East learner database.

'Fuzzy matching' of participating cohort against education data in one Local Authority in the Midlands has revealed even higher rates of progression. Just under half (48%) those Aimhigher learners who left statutory education in 2006 or 2007 (and who were therefore old enough to have started a higher education course by October 2009) were studying in higher education. The largest group in the sample were aged 18, and since some students may choose to take a break from education at this point, it is likely that proportionally more will subsequently go on to higher education over time. Importantly this research also showed that staying-on rates from 16 onwards were higher than average amongst Aimhigher learners and almost none had opted for a non-educational outcome (Kerrigan, 2010b).

Local authority analysis in Stoke-on-Trent also found that being part of the Aimhigher cohort has helped towards improvements in staying on rates in education post-16 (including full time education or work based learning), and tested the hypothesis that there are different levels of impact for the different vulnerable groups. For the 2008 school leavers and for the three year average (2006 – 2008) being part of the authority's widening participation cohort had a positive impact on the young person's destination choice post 16. For example 76.5% of the Aimhigher leavers in 2008 progressed to full-time education or training compared to 72.1% on average. However, for young people from more deprived backgrounds (i.e. entitled to Free School Meals and Index of Deprivation scores of 21.15 or higher), some 13.1 % more in the widening participation group progressed to full time education than other young people with the same deprivation profile. The research concluded that although young people from the more deprived areas achieved lower than average staying on rates overall, they got higher levels of impact from being part of the widening participation cohort, as did the young people who were classed as persistent absentees. When it came to looking at entry into higher education post-18, although the differences between the cohorts were reasonably small, the widening participation cohort had increased chances of entering

Table 1:

Partnership and reference source	Research Population	Research Method	Key findings
South East region (Edgar & Thompson 2010)	Over 13,000 participants on the Aimhigher South East database who left school from 2006-8.	'Fuzzy matching' to entrants to HEFCE funded HE. The 2006 cohort was matched for 3 years, the 2007 cohort for 2 years and 2008 cohort was matched for one year).	Overall 38% were found to have progressed to HEFCE funded higher education. Some 27% of Aimhigher participants who lived in the most disadvantaged higher education participation rate quintile areas (POLAR quintile 1) progressed to higher education. This compares to the overall England Young Participation Rate (YPR) of 18% for this quintile. The proportion of participants living in the next most disadvantaged quintile was also higher than the England YPR (34% compared to 23%).
Kent and Medway (Edgar, Smith & Thompson, 2010)	Over 6,000 AHKM participants in 2006-08.	Matching against the first year entrant dataset for HEFCE funded HE at UK universities provided by HESA.	24% who lived in a POLAR quintile 1 (Very low) participation area, progressed to higher education. This compares to a progression rate of 18% nationally for students who live in POLAR quintile 1 areas. AHKM students living in a POLAR quintile 2 area (low participation) progressed to higher education at a rate of 31% compared to 21% nationally.
Lincolnshire & Rutland (Kerrigan, 2010b)	The 741 Aimhigher cohort students, who were in Year 10 to 13 (in 2007/08) and Year 11 to 13 (in 2008/09) and had taken part in at least one Aimhigher activity.	Tracked participating Aimhigher cohorts' subsequent destinations at 16 and 18 through a 'fuzzy matching process' using local authority dataset.	93% who left statutory education in the summer of 2008 were still in education or training at October 2009 (slightly higher than the average staying on rate). Of participants who left statutory education in 2006 or 2007, 48% were in HE by October 2009. A further 21% were studying at a Further Education College, 7% were studying at sixth form (including taking re-sits). Therefore, 84% of this group were still engaged in education or training after they had reached the age of 18 or 19.
Peninsula (Plymouth, 2009)	The 1,064 Aimhigher participants who completed Year 11 in 2008.	Tracking to Level 3 study and HE.	Some 88% progressed to sixth form or Further Education full-time study. 45% of Aimhigher participants who had reached the age of 20 were in higher education, compared with the regional average of 29%.
Staffordshire (Stoke-on-Trent) (Gilbert, 2009)	Leavers from the local authority's widening participation cohort over three years 2004-06. Analysed by 'vulnerable' groups.	Tracking using data collated and managed by CYPS, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Connexions Staffordshire.	The 2006 leaver widening participation cohort had a positive correlation with participating in higher education at 18, although the differences between the cohorts are reasonably small (23.6% compared to 20.2%). 10.5% of the WP cohort with an identified SEN progressed to higher education at 18 (compared to 3.5% on average of all young people with SEN). The more deprived the young person's postcode area the greater the impact of being part of the target cohort.
Kent & Medway (AHKM) (Smith, 2010)	Participants who were matched with a learning mentor in schools	Tracking study	81% of mentees stayed on in education post 16 compared to 72% on average for partner school students. 46% of students who were mentored in Year 11 progressed into higher education and just under half went into Further Education.

higher education of over 3 percentage points, and those with Special Educational Needs (SEN) were more than three times as likely to have progressed to higher education at 18 than the average (Gilbert, 2009).

The results in terms of better than expected university progression have also been confirmed in evaluation projects relating to specific activity strand cohorts, although, as might be expected, the rates of progression vary by group. For example, the evaluation of Aimhigher Kent and Medway mentoring participants found that 46% of students who were mentored in Year 11 progressed into higher education (and just under half continued into Further Education).

2.2 Capturing higher education progression outcomes using partnerships with colleges

The review of wider outcome evidence suggests that partnerships have used the relationships with partner institutions in the Further Education sector and Aimhigher learners to put in place informal data collection to track higher education applications and progression. Despite the fairly unpromising external environment for applicants, due to limitations on HE places, several examples of a step-change in applications and success for Aimhigher target colleges have been referenced in recent reports (see Table 2).

Table 2

Partnership and reference source	Population	Research method	Key findings
South West (2007)	School/college coordinators	Questionnaire survey.	54% of teachers strongly agreed and 47% agreed that Aimhigher had encouraged students in the school to aspire to higher education.
West (2010)	Stroud College Gloucestershire	Institutional level application statistics.	Increases in the level of cohort numbers applying to university (5% increase from previous year) and being accepted at university (8% increase from previous year).
LETG (2010)	BSix Sixth Form College	Institutional level application statistics.	Of 290 Level 3 Year 2 students on roll at the end of the 2009/10 academic year: 229 applied for HE (79%). 218 received offers (95% success). The number, range and locations of the Higher Education Institutions that BSix students progress on to has increased year on year. BSix also has an increasing number of students who are progressing on to higher ranking universities.
Essex (Federation of Colleges in Essex, 2009)	Essex Further Education Colleges. Six colleges provided progression data.	Questionnaire to college co-ordinators and Principals.	Progression from further to higher education improved over the period of Aimhigher funding; from 2006 to 2009 applications to higher education increased from 1,950 to 2,600. Aimhigher almost certainly had a part to play in this improvement. Participation in full-time further education increased by 14% in the same period.
Aimhigher South East Area Partnerships (MoRE; Edgar, Smith & Thompson) 2009	Partner school aggregates	Institutional level UCAS applicant data – trend analysis	On average, in Aimhigher partner schools across the South East area there has been an increase in the proportion of students at end of Level 3 study who have applied through UCAS (from 59% in 2006 to 66% in 2009, an increase of 7 percentage points). Some areas such as Aimhigher Berkshire have seen an even higher increase (8.3 percentage points).

The reports included several examples and case studies of where Aimhigher is associated with increases in applications to higher education, at the level of individual post-16 institutions, especially from those with a low baseline for progression, and amongst the most disadvantaged learner cohorts.

Research undertaken by the Federation of Colleges in Essex (FEDEC) on the effect of Aimhigher activities in colleges found that learners had benefited from increased aspirations and confidence as well as better advice and guidance which had led to a greater understanding of higher education progression routes. Progression from further to higher education had improved over the

Aimhigher funding period, and the researchers concluded that this funding almost certainly had a part to play in the improvement (FEDEC, 2009). At its best, Aimhigher aims to be integrated into the fabric of target colleges whereby, despite the lack of tradition of university, progression becomes a general expectation and consideration, including amongst learners on vocational courses and across occupations. Local research with colleges supports the view that this ambition is becoming a reality. For example Aimhigher has been described by a representative from a community college in South Gloucestershire as: *"...an integral part of the college curriculum [and] instrumental in raising student aspirations"* (Aimhigher West, 2010).

Impact on progression: College case study

Bolton College has been involved with Aimhigher since 2005, and during this time application and acceptance rates to university have increased year on year. Qualitative research into the impact of Aimhigher on the college was undertaken during 2010 through a learner questionnaire survey and interviews with key practitioners.

During the 2009/10 academic year some 834 Bolton College students participated in a wide range of activities, including amongst other things: 'University Challenge' Performance & Workshop, visits from the Key 103 bus, Moving On event, University visits and tasters, and parents HE evening. In the learner questionnaire survey about Aimhigher activities, 100% of respondents found most activities offered were either 'very useful' or 'useful'. Tutor feedback indicates that Aimhigher activities have had a positive impact on students and staff, allowing students to get up to date information on progression routes and staff to keep up to date with any changes that have occurred since they attended university. One tutor commented that learners who have taken part in Aimhigher activities have approached tutors for more information about university, including some who, before the activities, did not consider university was for them. An Aimhigher training event for staff saw the highest number of tutors ever attending and was supported by senior management within the college.

There is evidence of a greater awareness of Aimhigher activities and the benefits derived from participation by students, tutors, other staff members and parents. For example, a Sports Tutor said that awareness of, and participation in, Aimhigher activities helps tutors act more effectively as mentors and advisers particularly when engaging with first generation university goers. A Public Services Tutor said: *"raising aspirations is important with these students...the aspirations of students is increasing and knowledge of choices is growing"*.

Applicants for 2010 entry to university from Bolton College students increased by 60% from the previous year. As of September 2010, 161 students were accepted for university, up over 80% from last year's total of 88. Aimhigher activities have played a part by raising awareness of higher education, particularly for potential first generation university students. 'Access' course completion has also had an impact. Key elements which have helped Aimhigher activities to be successful at Bolton College include having a dedicated Borough Co-ordinator, choosing activities which are appropriate to the student group involved, and planning activities at appropriate times during the academic year.

Aimhigher Bolton, A Celebration of Aimhigher Activities at Bolton College, July 2010

Similarly, in response to a questionnaire survey of Aimhigher outcomes, one community college in the South West commented that: *“Our university applications are now consistently between 65 and 70, when in the past they were 25-40. Aimhigher has definitely made my UCAS job easier and increased aspirations in a deprived area where university is often not considered”* (South West, 2007). Furthermore, case study research in one college in the South East highlighted that the number, range and locations of the higher education institutions that students progress on to has increased year on year, including progression to ‘higher ranking’ universities, particularly the A level students (LETG, 2010).

2.3 Other approaches to measuring progression outcomes: follow-up surveys

Following up participants through surveys and other means is another way in which researchers have attempted to track progression to higher education. Examples of studies using this approach are given in Table 3. Using tracking through a series of surveys with individuals, the ASPIRE Partnership has applied regression analysis

to show that participating in an Aimhigher activity is associated with a statistically significant increased likelihood of applying to and entering higher education. Importantly, those participants who were found to not yet be in HE stated a very strong likelihood of entering HE. To ‘improve career prospects’ was the most common reason given by this group for considering entering HE, and financial barriers (rather than low aspiration) were identified as the key obstacle to progression among the young people who had not yet applied (Noble, 2009). Tracking through telephone and survey follow-up has also been undertaken with Advanced Apprentices who were part of a group involved in the Aimhigher Progression Framework approach for Work Based Learners in Greater Manchester. The research found that just under a quarter of the Advanced Apprentices who had benefited from Aimhigher activities had progressed to HE from Aimhigher initiatives – well above the levels of general progression to higher education from Apprenticeships. However, as might be expected, this rate was somewhat below that for 18-19 year olds emerging from A level provision at schools and colleges (Harvey & Leyden, 2010).

Table 3

Partnership and reference source	Population	Research method	Key findings
ASPIRE (Noble et al, 2009)	Participants in Aimhigher activities that had taken place between 2003 and 2005.	Series of tracking surveys between June 2006 and January 2007 (questionnaire, telephone survey plus postal survey).	Aimhigher activity was associated with a statistically significant increased likelihood of applying to HE of 4.5 percentage points, and of entering HE of 4.1 percentage points.
Greater Manchester (Harvey & Leyden, 2010)	Work-based learners completing Level 3 Apprenticeships over 3 years who had taken part in Aimhigher activities.	Follow-up through phone contact.	26% of learners who completed the Step-In to HE module up to 2009 progressed to HE, and 46% said they intend to progress in future.

Key conclusions

- Analysis of the progression outcomes for Aimhigher learners requires partnerships with data providers which could be at local or national level. The time periods involved can be a limiting factor.
- Longitudinal research of Aimhigher participants is being undertaken for those in a named cohort reaching eligible HE age, and more opportunities will become available for this approach over time. Studies show Aimhigher participants have increased their probability of entering HE, with the difference varying by groups according to the starting point and cohort profile. Several studies in different areas suggest that the rates of progression to HE by Aimhigher groups tend to be around 10 percentage points higher than national or local baselines for the groups, with the biggest differences being for people from the most deprived neighbourhoods.
- For learners from the most disadvantaged areas the chances of entering higher education increased by a third to a half of entering by age 20 years, and for vocational learners the change was found to be even higher from a lower starting point. Issues of causality are problematic as it has not proved possible to control for other factors, aside from the Aimhigher support, which may have an effect on the young people.

3. EVIDENCE OF ATTAINMENT OUTCOMES

'My class who participated in [Aimhigher curriculum enrichment project over 5 days] got the highest value added of any subject in the school. It's fantastic!'

(Quote from class teacher at inner city schools with 59% of pupils in Aimhigher target areas, taken from Rogers, 2009)

3.1 Overview

In light of the strong evidence to suggest that differences in qualifications between socio-economic groups underpin the differences in higher education participation rates⁷, it is understandable that Aimhigher evaluation projects would seek to take account of attainment outcomes for Aimhigher learners. In addition, attainment is one of the indicators of impact of Aimhigher interventions⁸. The target of such research tends to be schools and/or cohort groups, and a recurring problem is being able to set up a sufficiently rigorous research framework to indicate the causes and effects of improvements in attainment. However, despite this, a number of projects have found a positive association between involvement in Aimhigher and raised attainment, with examples of encouraging results from a range of Aimhigher areas by location and profile.

National research evidence commissioned by the DfES into the impact of Aimhigher has shown a slight positive impact on young people's attainment (and aspirations), based on the young people who participated in the early 2000s⁹. More recently, some Area Partnership research projects into attainment of Aimhigher learners have been able to draw on administrative data in order to undertake statistical analysis of exam results across fairly large scale datasets at Area Partnership or Local Authority level, and most of these include analysis of the performance of Aimhigher learners against comparator learner groups. Although the

methodology and outcome measures vary across the research projects, there is a common concern to verify the effects by comparing with other groups or undertaking statistical tests of validity. Some projects have taken the approach of looking at actual versus predicted grades, and this appears to be useful because it takes account of differing starting points for the groups of learners who are involved. The review of evidence has also highlighted that, in addition to large scale research, some partnerships regularly undertake smaller scale analysis of activity groups of institutional cohorts as part of 'day to day' management and monitoring of the Aimhigher programme.

3.2 Research into attainment outcomes using administrative data

Several research projects have been undertaken drawing on exam results from administrative data, and most of these projects have a comparative element, although different datasets and approaches have been used. The key findings from across several area partnerships are detailed in Table 4. The findings suggest that benefits in attainment for Aimhigher schools and learners can be found using a range of measures at school and individual level, and across the education stages. Commissioned research in Essex focusing on attainment at Level 2 for example is typical in identifying a positive link between Aimhigher and raised attainment. This project concluded that improvements in attainment at Level 2...*"are greater in Aimhigher schools than non Aimhigher schools and also with Aimhigher cohorts rather than other pupils in a school. There may be many factors contributing to this, but there is a probability that Aimhigher has had some influence on schools in their work with youngsters from deprived backgrounds, those from disadvantaged areas and those not exposed to a culture of progressing to higher education at home"* (EARN, 2010b).

⁷ Chowdry, H., Crawford, C., Dearden, L., Goodman, A., & Vignoles, A., (2008) Widening Participation in Higher Education: Analysis using Linked Administrative Data. Institute for Fiscal Studies

⁸ HEFCE (2008a), Guidance for Aimhigher partnerships: Update for the 2008-2011 programme, 2008/05

⁹ Morris, M. & Rutt, S. (2005) Evaluation of Aimhigher, and Emmerson, C., Frayne, C., McNally, S. & Silva, O. (2006) An Economic Evaluation of the early impact of Aimhigher: Excellence Challenge on Pre 16 Outcomes, Department for Education & Skills

Table 4

Partnership (or Authority) and reference source	Focus of measure	Measure	Key Findings
Staffordshire (Stoke on Trent) (Gilbert, 2009)	Aimhigher eligible pupils	Attainment of 5A*-C (a control group was identified by having attainment of greater than or equal to 27 at Key Stage 2, greater than or equal to 33 at Key Stage 3 and not living in a classified deprived area).	The Aimhigher group had the highest 3 year increase in 5+A*-C, 5+A*-C including English & Maths and 5+A*-G compared to all other groups identified (with a 26.6% increase compared to Staffordshire 4.5% increase over 3 years). There was a 15.6% difference between Aimhigher and a 'Control' group of learners in achievement of 5+ A*-C including English and Maths at GCSE in 2009.
Aimhigher South East Partnerships (MoRE: Edgar, Smith & Thompson 2010)	Aimhigher partner schools with continued Year 10 and 11 delivery	Proportion of students attaining 5A*-C and average GCSE total point score.	Aimhigher partner schools with continued Year 10 and 11 delivery, were found on average to have made improvements in the proportion of students achieving 5A*-C GCSE including English and Maths (eg. Aimhigher Hampshire up to 38% on average in 2009, from 28% in 2003). The partner school average total GCSE points score had increased from 295 points in 2004 to 382 points in 2009.
Lincolnshire and Rutland (Kerrigan, 2010b)	Aimhigher cohorts who took part in Aimhigher activities in Year 10 (in 2007/08) and 11 (in 2008/09) and took Key Stage 4 in 2008/09	Number of 5A*-C grades at GCSE and average capped point score compared to predicted, and in comparison with all Local Authority students.	Aimhigher learners performed significantly better than expected: achieving 8.82 A*-C grades above the predicted 7.42 (based on Key Stage 3 assessments) and with a capped point scores average 16.6 points higher than anticipated. Aimhigher learners performed above the improvement made by all students (the comparator group) and tests showed this was not down to chance.
Northamptonshire (Kerrigan, 2010c)	Aimhigher cohorts who took part in Aimhigher activities in Year 10 (in 2007/08) and 11 (in 2008/09) and took Key Stage 4 in 2008/09	Number of 5A*-C grades at GCSE and average capped point score compared to predicted, and in comparison with all Local Authority students.	Aimhigher students achieved an average of 0.3 more A*-Cs than predicted, and average capped point score for the group was some 3.8 points higher than anticipated. The control group attained below the predicted level and tests showed the difference for the Aimhigher group was not down to chance.
Kent & Medway (AHKM) (Smith, 2010)	AHKM mentees who engaged in the AHKM project during the period 2006-08	Predicted and actual attainment of mentored students against their non Aimhigher peers, and qualitative research into attitude and aspiration through generic and individual case studies	60% of an AHKM mentee cohort achieved 5 A*-C GCSE including English and Maths compared to an average of 31% of all students in partner schools. Over 80% of a mentee cohort achieved higher total GCSE points than their Year 9 estimates. In comparison, 65% of a non AHKM cohort at partner schools (with same Year 9 estimates) had higher points achievement than their Year 9 estimates. Moreover, the extent to which AHKM mentees increased their points was found to be considerably more than the non AHKM cohort.
Milton Keynes, Oxford & Buckinghamshire (Edgar, 2010)	Aimhigher cohort	GCSE achievement (predicted against actual) compared with non cohort peers.	Findings suggest that the cohort students exceeded or met their GCSE A*-C predictions to a greater extent than non-cohort students. There was, however, a significant variation between local authorities, and between schools within authorities

Levels of attainment and trends vary across areas and for some groups the effects have been in terms of maintaining attainment where other comparison groups are doing less well. This is clearly seen in a series of analyses across two Local Authority areas in the East Midlands; in both areas Aimhigher learners performed better than expected in terms of the number of A*-C grades above the predicted, and against the improvement for all local authority learners. However, the difference ranged from 0.3 in one area to 1.4 in another, with contextual factors, including general levels of improvement, playing a part. Importantly, however, both these projects utilised rigorous statistical tests to confirm that the positive difference in attainment levels for Aimhigher learners are unlikely to be down to chance (Kerrigan, 2010b and Kerrigan, 2010c).

Local authority based analysis of exam results confirms the conclusion that Aimhigher learners do better than might be expected compared to local and national 'norms'. Drawing on the pupil level datasets available within the local authority sector,

research projects undertaken by Aimhigher partner local authorities have gone furthest to try to quantify the extent of the differences for groups of individual participants in Aimhigher. Studies replicated across local authority boundaries suggest that the overall levels of progress (or otherwise) within education systems affect the starting point for learners, and the progress made. Research in Stoke on Trent, for example, highlighted that widening participation initiatives have a greater impact the more deprived the young person's background: young people living in the bottom 30% of areas saw a 1.5 times improvement in exam results if they were part of the cohort and 1.8 times improvement if they were in the bottom 10% of deprived areas nationally (three year average). In order to control for the fact that participants might have been chosen for their potential to attain, the research measured improvements in attainment using the difference between the young people's Fischer Family Trust (FFT) estimate for GCSE and their actual attainment (Gilbert, 2009).

Attainment benefits: school level case study

Case Study research in one local authority area found exceptionally good improvements in exam results for Aimhigher learners at a school with a high deprivation profile (76% of pupils in Aimhigher target areas within the 40% most deprived nationally). Pupil level tracking systems showed that for the Year 10 named Aimhigher cohort, 41% made an improvement in their progress. For the Year 11 named Aimhigher cohort, 50% achieved above the number of A*-C grades predicted from Key Stage 2 data. The case study gives some indication of how this school's approach to Aimhigher is particularly supportive of attainment benefits. Aimhigher is used to specifically target learners from Year 8 onwards who may not achieve their potential in school, with the aim of promoting ambitions, achievements and morale. The selection of learners is informed by data including predicted results at GCSE. A variety of Aimhigher activities have been arranged which are chosen to match the learners' needs and abilities, take learners' interests into account, and the timing of events is matched to the school year.

The schools' tracking system indicates how learners are doing, and the Aimhigher coordinator closely monitors and intervenes to resolve any particular problems. Activities include: motivational experience(s); curriculum enrichment; Aimhigher Associate sessions; Future Conference and Choices event; Summer School; revision support; campus visit; Graduate Officer session(s) and the Roadshow. Aimhigher is integrated into the School Improvement Plan (Objective 5: raising achievement) and Self-Evaluation Framework (Section A2.10 'the extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being' and A4.5 'the effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being'). The Aimhigher coordinator is a member of the non-teaching staff which allows more time to be actively involved with the learners, including retrieving feedback following activities, and being available for learners to talk to.

Golding, D., Radcliffe Riverside School: Aimhigher in School, Aimhigher Bury, July 2010

In-depth activity evaluation projects, such as that conducted in relation to the AHKM mentoring programme, have tended to include a degree of follow-up/tracking, whereby outcomes, including attainment outcomes, become available for analysis. In this research, data and information collected for over 600 individuals was analysed and the evaluation concluded that AHKM Learning Mentors contribute significantly to impact on GCSE attainment (as well as retention and progression beyond age 16). Eight out of every ten learners who received Aimhigher mentoring went on to achieve higher total GCSE points than their Year 9 estimates, considerably more than learners who were not mentored. Six out of ten of the Aimhigher mentored group got 5A*-C at GCSE including English and Maths, in contrast to only 36% of a cohort of students partner schools with a similar profile using matched learner data from Fischer Family Trust (FFT) (Smith, 2010).

3.2 Activity focused approaches

For some area partnerships the collection of individuals' attainment data is integral to Aimhigher planning and delivery, and the analysis of information on Aimhigher learner performance is routinely undertaken in close collaboration with teachers, although not necessarily written-up as formal research. In North Yorkshire for example, schools were asked to provide tracking data on attainment, using predicted grades from the beginning of Year 9 to actual grades received at the end of Year 10. This approach allows data to be shared, but the results are complex and presented in many different formats (North Yorkshire, 2009-10). Nevertheless, in some schools staff would say that Aimhigher has contributed to an improvement in forecasted grades for the cohort: *"the improvement is beyond what would have been expected and this is as a result of their aspirations being raised by Aimhigher."* quote from Assistant Associate Head Teacher (Wilson, 2010).

Other research found that two-thirds of participants across four years of cohorts involved in an ongoing curriculum enrichment project had attained above the predicted level at GCSE. Evidence from pupils and staff recorded improvements in

motivation, self esteem, confidence, enthusiasm, aspirations, interest in higher education, communication skills, team work and attainment. The evaluation included in-depth research with participating Year 11 pupils in two schools. The learners were asked to rank how much they thought they had improved across several areas such as motivation, concentration and participation in class. Over half (52%) said their teacher(s) had commented on their improved performance since the event. This report concluded: *"The impact back in the class room was also noticeable and showed that giving young people a challenging experience outside their usual environment could change their views of their life chances: demonstrating that qualifications could open doors for them into a world to which they now aspired, had a significant impact on attainment"* (Rogers, 2009). The findings are backed up by other practitioner led evaluation studies, which have shown that Aimhigher activities help to provide some direction to students' learning and make them see why it is important to do well, for example in GCSE exams (South West, 2007).

Qualitative research, although somewhat anecdotal, becomes more convincing across a range of studies. Research with learners which explored the relationship between Aimhigher participation and improved attainment, concluded that taking part in Aimhigher activities has made learners realise that they have to work hard for things in life, including doing their best in exams. For example, as part of qualitative research, one learner explained how her attitude to learning had changed and she is now more motivated to finish coursework in school (Moore, 2010). In other focus group research, a Year 10 participant commented *"Yes [the activities have given me more motivation to do well at school], you can achieve more, do better really. ... I have been trying harder all over really"*. This kind of change in Aimhigher participants' attitude to school work has also been confirmed in qualitative research with teaching staff. A typical comment from a senior teaching professional included: *"behaviour for some [Aimhigher participants] has improved... Aimhigher has shown them a mature and positive approach and a way forward, a pathway if you like"* (Kerrigan, 2010d).

Table 5

Partnership (or Authority) and reference source	Focus of measure	Measure	Key Findings
Aimhigher Kent and Medway (More: Edgar, Smith & Thompson 2009)	Student level tracking study exploring association between participation in activities and HE progression	Student level tracking study using activity records and HESA data.	In Aimhigher Kent & Medway, 37% of students who participated in high intensity activities such as master classes and mentoring progressed to higher education compared to 33% of participants generally and 28% of participants who had experienced a higher education talk only.
Nottinghamshire (Kerrigan & Carpenter, 2009)	Sample of participants involved in Aimhigher Personal Adviser (APA) project	Questionnaire survey and qualitative research to assess stakeholders perceptions of the impact of the project on motivation.	Motivation to do well is a pre-requisite of improved attainment. There are methodological limitations to measuring 'soft' outcomes, but the combination of the qualitative and quantitative techniques employed indicated that participants were motivated to do well in their studies, and the project is likely to contribute towards an improvement in attainment. Over four-fifths of questionnaire respondents said that the programme had encouraged them to do well in their studies, with 56% reporting it had 'definitely' done so.
Nottinghamshire (Kerrigan, 2010)	Perceptions of impact on motivation to work harder in school/college.	Survey of practitioners, teaching professionals and participating students.	Discussions with participants revealed that students felt that the programmes had motivated them to work harder in order to achieve the standards required to give them a greater chance of progressing to their favoured higher education course. The study concluded that although impossible to quantify, the master class programmes are likely to have a direct influence on student attainment.
WECAN (Atherton, 2010)	The impact of Aimhigher on learners	Questionnaire survey with WECAN participants.	There is a positive relationship between the extent of Aimhigher and attainment related attitudes and behaviour. The study found an association between involvement in Aimhigher and a commitment to school and willingness to do extra work to aid achievement.
Salford (Rogers, 2009)	2005/6, 2006/7, 2007/8 cohorts in Aimhigher Fashion Futures project	Analysis of actual versus predicted GCSE attainment. Qualitative research with participants, parents and teachers.	65.9% of all participants over three years went on to attain above the predicted level at GCSE.

Research into a programme of master classes in one area found that some students have the expectation that Aimhigher would help them in their subsequent school or college studies – and discussions with participants revealed that students felt that the programmes had motivated them to work harder in order to achieve the standards required to give them a greater chance of progressing to their favoured higher education course. This study concluded that although impossible to quantify, master class programmes were

likely to have a direct influence on student attainment. In addition to helping motivate students to achieve in their Level 3 studies, research projects with learners and school/college staff has identified that some of the material studied in the master class programmes was directly related to students' Level 3 studies. Students could apply what they had learned at the university to their school/college studies, which, again, could be seen as a contributory factor in helping raise participants' attainment (Kerrigan, 2010).

A wide range of Aimhigher activities, not just master classes, have been linked in the research with improved attainment, although the evidence base is mainly through qualitative projects with learners, and in relation to the motivational benefits from many different types of Aimhigher interventions where potential to be accepted at a university is the central theme. The evidence base includes testimony from one Year 13 student who self-categorised himself as 'really lazy' and 'pretty much failing' but was caused to rethink after a campus visit. The student reports that since the visit his effort level - and results - have improved (Year 13 student taking part in focus group research as part of longitudinal tracking project in Lincolnshire and Rutland, Kerrigan, 2010). Similarly, research found that over four-fifths of participants who received assistance from an Aimhigher personal adviser, suggested that the programme had encouraged them to do well in their studies, and this was backed up by qualitative research through focus groups. The research concluded that the ongoing relationship with their Aimhigher personal adviser had helped clients through their exams and their increased motivation was perceived to have a direct impact on improved grades (Kerrigan & Carpenter, 2009).

3.3 Broader based studies of Aimhigher attainment benefits

In spite of the very positive findings for Aimhigher learners in terms of attainment outcomes at Level 2 and Level 3, attainment is generally a second order rather than first level objective for Aimhigher. As one report emphasised: *"Aimhigher is interested in GCSE attainment as a means to an end....attainment [therefore] helps progression and it is for this reason that Aimhigher works to contribute to raising attainment... Since Aimhigher can help to raise young people's sights to consider whether HE progression might help them to achieve a desired career, it can increase the motivation to study and thus contribute to improving GCSE outcomes"* (Rouncefield-Swales, 2009).

Complementarity between Aimhigher and school/educationalist objectives has been identified as crucial to cementing

relationships on the ground, and some researchers have set out to test the hypothesis that schools engage more fully with Aimhigher when they see the benefits for attainment. In a series of research projects into the impacts of Aimhigher on the culture of schools, a consistently high eight out of ten school staff respondents agreed that attainment has been raised due to Aimhigher (EARN, 2010a,b,c). Proportionally more also believe that aspirations have been raised. Aimhigher has had a strong impact on teachers' expectations for pupil progression – particularly in 11-16 schools – but has had little impact on teaching and curriculum developments in general (EARN, 2010a). All types of schools say that Aimhigher has strengthened aspirations, although analysis by type suggests that Aimhigher interventions have made most impact for low and mid attaining schools. Although aspiration and attainment are likely to be linked, for some the raising of learners' ambition gets played out in other ways – i.e. in the choices students make. For example, one respondent in the questionnaire survey undertaken in Merseyside commented: *"I believe Aimhigher makes a significant impact on the aspirations of young people. This does have some impact on attainment but it is not the most significant factor. Students are likely to apply for courses that will lead on to higher education. I have not found that this necessarily translates into them achieving A or B grades instead of Cs and Ds"*. (EARN, 2010c). Targeting factors and other contextual issues are likely to play a part, as well as the types of support which Aimhigher puts in place.

In a survey of schools taking part in Aimhigher in South West, the feedback from teachers was unanimous about Aimhigher affecting learners' awareness of higher education, and aspirations to go, but less over-whelming in relation to attainment outcomes, although this is understandable given the objectives of activities. Nevertheless, a majority (83%) said that Aimhigher has helped to motivate students to work towards achieving their educational objectives, and two-thirds said Aimhigher has helped students in the school to improve their performance, although the remainder were not sure (South West, 2007).

Key conclusions

- Area partnerships have analysed the attainment outcomes for Aimhigher learners using a range of measures, data sources, and comparison groups. Improvements in attainment linked to Aimhigher have been found at both individual and school level.
- Several projects have focused on attainment at Level 2 (GCSE), although Aimhigher has been associated with improved attainment across educational levels. Those evaluators who have been able to analyse results for participating learners in a named 'cohort' have started to quantify the differences in actual results, compared to what otherwise might be expected, although local context and initial targeting factors impact on these results. Learners that fully engage in the learner progression framework of sequenced activities, and those that are offered intensive and sustained intervention through targeted projects by Aimhigher, appear to have the strongest evidence of attainment benefits.
- Although the research design of projects undertaken at Area Partnership level has sought to use comparator groups and statistical tests to establish a base level against which differences in attainment by Aimhigher learners can be judged, it has not been possible to control for the range of factors involved and establish causality of observed changes. More work is needed in this area, in the context of Aimhigher targeting of lower socio-economic groups, and the relationship between class differences in attainment in schools.
- Attainment is generally a 'means to an end' for Aimhigher, addressed only indirectly through activities designed to motivate learners to achieve, raise confidence and strengthen their commitment to learning. This approach complements school and local authority priorities, and there is evidence from several commissioned projects into school cultural change that suggests attainment is important to teacher engagement in activities.

4. EVIDENCE OF AWARENESS OUTCOMES AND CHANGES IN ASPIRATIONS

"...we are still in a situation where I would say at least 90% are first time university applicants in the family. It (Aimhigher IAG project) seems absolutely vital. It's not going to happen at home, it's got to happen here (at school) and it's got to happen through (activities) and it really does what it says on the tin, we are really aiming to aim higher"

(Teacher quoted in LETG, 2009)

4.1 Overview

Both practitioner-led and academic research into Aimhigher outcomes has highlighted interactions between aspiration, awareness raising and attainment factors, and the importance of joint effects which support the case for ongoing interventions with learners across a broad front. Therefore many research and evaluation projects have taken into account awareness of, as well as attitudes to higher education, alongside other factors particularly aspiration to attend. There is some evidence to suggest that raising awareness of higher education options may be an inadequate measure, unless associated with changes in aspirations and learner-identity. By the same token, aspiring to university is insufficient without understanding of the requirements and practical steps required to get there¹⁰.

Some Aimhigher Area Partnership research has set out to investigate how awareness raising interventions are designed to offset the effects of contextual factors, using concepts of 'hot' and 'cold' sources of knowledge¹¹. Aimhigher researchers have often been concerned to demonstrate how interventions are targeted to the needs of particular groups, especially those who lack a tradition of university within their families and communities, reflecting findings from previous studies that cultural and social capital is socially embedded¹². For example, groups targeted by Aimhigher tend to lack role models and have little opportunity for contact with universities or current university students.

Although evaluations of the outcomes of Aimhigher interventions on learners' awareness of higher education, and their aspirations to attend, have used both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the latter have been seen as particularly important in the context of providing for the 'learner voice' (eg. Noble et al, 2009).

Area partnerships have taken many different approaches to measuring changes in aspirations as a result of Aimhigher activities. These range from the use of relatively simplistic questionnaires administered directly to learners around their stated intention or likelihood of progressing to higher education in future, to more complex longitudinal studies utilising attitudinal ratings which take account of a range of factors including learners' confidence in their ability to progress, and perceptions about their alternative courses of action etc. Some researchers have stressed the findings that supporting students' progress from school to higher education is a complex and iterative process (using the metaphor of a journey). Moreover, Aimhigher researchers have been concerned to identify the journey that is undertaken by the school as well as by individual students (and the relationships between the two). The research therefore focuses around the series of steps, whilst recognising the inter-connectedness of the steps (Roberts & Weston, 2010). The review of Area Partnership research showed that motivation is often identified as a key measure amongst a suite of Aimhigher learner outcomes at different stages, although most researchers have tended to focus on observed changes in motivation as identified by external witnesses (ie. observers of how learners behave and express themselves), rather than delving into underlying psychological aspects and subjective processes. Much of the evidence of benefits for learner motivation is at an individual level, and the results are strongly supportive of Aimhigher promoting a positive shift in learner motivation.

¹⁰ Bok, J (2010), The capacity to aspire to higher education: 'It's like making them do a play without a script', *Critical Studies in Education* 51(2) 163-178

¹¹ Ball, S. (2003) *Class Strategies and the Education Market: the Middle Class and Social Advantage*, London: Routledge

¹² Reay, D., David, M.E. and Ball, S. (2005) *Degrees of Choice – social class, race and gender in higher education*, Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books

4.2 Evidence of impact from learner feedback approaches

Table 6 provides examples of research drawing on learner feedback approaches. The main research question asked in the evaluation undertaken by ASPIRE was whether activities had any impact on the participants in terms of informing them about university life and increasing their desire to enter higher education. Data from evaluation surveys completed by participants in all activities between 2007 and 2008 was used along with a series of in-depth interviews. The data did indicate that awareness of higher education had grown among those who had taken part in Aimhigher activities – in particular it was interesting to see that those young people who had taken part in Aimhigher activities had much better financial awareness than those who had not participated. The report concluded that *“activities, therefore, do appear to be successful in terms of providing information and encouraging HE entry by ‘demystifying’ the HE experience”* (Noble et al, 2009).

Aimhigher Essex took an approach to understanding changes towards higher education for Aimhigher cohorts which involved asking learners to complete a series of questions at the beginning of Year 10 and again at the end of Year 11. Matching and comparing responses has facilitated analysis of changes in understanding and aspirations towards higher education following participation in the Aimhigher programme. Based on the overall results for over 950 participants over three years, at the end of Year 11, Aimhigher learners were 1.5 times more likely to demonstrate a good understanding of higher education, and 1.4 times more likely to say that they are definitely considering it (EARN, 2010b).

Aimhigher Hertfordshire’s evaluation of changes in attitude to higher education among young people in relation to their experience of the Aimhigher programme, involved a triangulated research methodology which included teacher interviews, focus groups, and a distance-travelled measurement tool administered through a questionnaire. The approach provided clear evidence of improved awareness (pupils were more confident about where to get help for progression planning,

showed a better understanding of what is available and were more likely to feel there is a course which is ‘right for me’). Some had benefited from particular skills development, for example, learners who had taken part in a university visit which had included a goal mapping session, were found to be most confident that with hard work they could achieve their goals. Awareness benefits were found to sit alongside raised aspirations – learners were increasingly *“thinking about going into higher education”* (Roberts & Weston, 2010).

Evaluation of a career education IAG programme (a discrete schedule of activity) which has the specific aim of increasing student knowledge and awareness of higher education (as well as attitudes to progression), showed that encouraging learners to plan for their future was key to success. Feedback from learners indicated that the activities helped learners to set short and long-term goals and informed them realistically, about what they need to achieve to progress towards university (LETG, 2010). Research with vocational learners is particularly encouraging in terms of the conclusion that Aimhigher awareness raising is contributing to decision-making on higher education. For example, nearly all respondents in one survey are now confident that they will be able to identify the right course. The research concluded that: *“Activities such as financial aid workshops and visits to [other] universities expanded their perspective on what courses are available and which universities best suit their needs”*. Importantly, familiarising vocational learners with the university environment and campus life through campus visits as well as a Summer School was considered to be particularly important for first-generation students who *“felt less daunted by the mysterious world ‘behind the walls’ and has prepared them to navigate a university campus as undergraduates”* (London South, 2010).

Qualitative projects have highlighted that alongside raising awareness of higher education, Aimhigher encourages learners to have a better understanding of the requirements of university progression and consequently what is required of them (including the necessity of doing well in exams). Moreover, interviewees as part of

Table 6

Partnership (or Authority) and reference source	Focus of measure	Measure	Key Findings
North Yorkshire (Wilson, 2010)	Activities with schools in 2010	Teacher interviews, focus groups and the distance-travelled questionnaire	Analysis of distance travelled questionnaires indicates positive increases in aspirations: pupils are increasingly “thinking about going into higher education”. A large number indicated that they had plans in place and were confident that they could with hard work achieve their goals. Pupils were more confident about where to get help for progression planning, and more confident that “there’s a course which is right for me.” Pupils felt they better understood the education and training options available to them. Consensus from focus group participants was that Aimhigher had helped them understand where to go in the future and how to do a good job.
LETG, 2009	Vocational progression scheme (for those learners on BTEC National Certificate/ Diploma in Sport or Health & Social Care).	Learner feedback questionnaires after each activity, learner focus group research, practitioner feedback interviews	The vast majority of participants said that activities have made them more likely to consider university, and most say are more motivated. A key outcome was that participants were now thinking about what job they want to do in future.
ASPIRE (Noble et al, 2009)	All activities between 2007 and 2008.	Participant evaluation surveys and sample of in-depth learner interviews	Relatively few participants expressed a strong view that going to university was not something that they were planning to do anyway. The respondents agreed that the activities provided motivation and encouragement for educational progression, and made it seem more achievable.
Leicestershire (Kerrigan, 2010a)	Five cohorts of learners from four different schools and colleges	Focus groups over three years measuring changes at transitional points in higher education awareness, aspirations, and motivation to attain.	There was evidence from the research that Aimhigher interventions had helped raise young people’s aspirations to progress to higher education. Learners said a key benefit of going on a university visit was being able to visualise yourself there.
Sussex (Woods & Kendall, 2010)	Around 300 undergraduates from local disadvantaged areas	Undergraduate student survey and focus groups exploring what factors influenced their journey to HE	There was no evidence of a causal link between Aimhigher and higher education entry, but there was substantial evidence that Aimhigher had reinforced students’ decisions to progress into higher education and helped them chose which subject to study and the type of university to attend. Aimhigher students felt better prepared for academic study and the financial aspects of student life.
Northamptonshire (Kerrigan, 2010c)	Four cohorts of learners from three different schools	As above	Pupils’ perceptions of university students had changed considerably (after exposure to Aimhigher interventions), from a perception that all students were ‘snobs’ to one in which university is for people of all backgrounds. Students had been informed of the financial aspect of studying higher education, which had helped allay fears and (mis)conceptions.
Nottinghamshire (Kerrigan, 2010d)	Five cohorts of learners from five different schools and colleges	As above	Aimhigher interventions had helped raise young people’s aspirations to progress to higher education. In a number of cases students who, in phase one of the study, had suggested that they were not planning on going to university, had since changed their mind.
Essex (EARN, 2010b)	Year 10-11 cohort learners from 2005-09	Analysis of attitudinal questionnaires in Year 10 and 11.	Learners have mostly benefited through increased confidence and greater understanding of the various routes.

case study research have emphasised the role of schools and Aimhigher in preparing students to succeed at university rather than just to secure a place (Roberts & Weston, 2010). Another qualitative project concluded that the evidence from learners and teachers shows that Aimhigher is clearly: “promoting the value of planning for the future as well as the benefits of higher/further education and raising self-esteem” (Denner, 2010).

Planning for the future and learners setting targets for themselves has also been found to be a key outcome of one to one sessions with Aimhigher Associates, and feedback from the learners reveals clear progression planning (Wilson, 2010).

Some Area Partnership evaluation frameworks have included the identification of cohorts for longitudinal research, to measure changes in learners’ aspirations over time (along with motivation to attain and HE awareness), alongside exploring the cumulative impact of Aimhigher interventions. For example in areas of the East Midlands, initial research, in year 1 focused primarily on participants’ initial perceptions of higher education and present and future aspirations. The year 2 research focused on any change in such perceptions, and specifically, the role played by Aimhigher (Kerrigan, 2010d,e,f,g).

Qualitative evaluation of small scale interventions through an Aimhigher-Connexions personal adviser project concluded that the programme had played an important role in helping clients decide which careers to aspire to. This work is small scale and tightly targeted towards ‘at risk’ learners. Importantly, the project was found to have played a crucial role in clients’ current (educational) circumstances and, without ongoing Aimhigher personal adviser support, they doubted that they would have taken the same direction – some participants suggested that they would otherwise have dropped out of school/college, and other participants said they would have undertaken unskilled work rather than continue in education (Kerrigan and Carpenter, 2009).

Some qualitative research has found that where Aimhigher learners had decided not to enter higher education, Aimhigher helped them to develop a very clear idea about their reasons for not wanting to go, including that

one can be successful without having a degree. The report concluded: “Young people can be very rational in their planning for education and a career. Aware of the relative advantages and disadvantages of different alternatives, they see some as equally – or indeed more – valuable as going to university. This reflects different aspirations, not low aspirations”¹³.

4.3 Evidence based on research with practitioners

Research evidence of the benefits of Aimhigher in terms of awareness of progression routes including higher education is particularly topical in the context of an increasingly stronger focus on schools as providers of relevant and up to date information, advice and guidance (IAG) (McNeill, 2010). Some examples of projects based on research with practitioners are given in Table 7. Research into synergy between Aimhigher and local authority level plans and strategies has revealed a range of approaches which authorities have adopted depending on the local circumstances and in order to fit with wider objectives. For example in an authority with no local HE institution, Aimhigher IAG activities had focused on developing progression plans for non-A level learners which emphasised a range of progression routes including university and higher and further education provision (Rouncefield-Swales, 2009). This research project also identified that staff in a number of authorities believed that involvement in Aimhigher had established understanding about the need for open, accessible and appropriate progression pathways for young people, and this along with the resulting resources and knowledge, would be an enduring legacy from Aimhigher amongst school and local authority professionals. There was an apprehension, however, that the knowledge may be invested in a relatively small group of key individuals, and is not always shared across schools including the school leadership.

Teacher feedback as part of evaluations of targeted intensive interventions provides examples of where Aimhigher is having a

¹³ Watts, M. and Bridges, D. (2006) ‘The value of non-participation in higher education’, in *Journal of Education Policy* 21(3): 267-290

particularly transformational influence on learners who may be at risk of not fulfilling their potential. For example, in qualitative research in North Yorkshire, one senior teacher commented: *"....even the most cynical student now sees uni as an option, which is a real break-through"* (Wilson, 2010). In another study of Aimhigher mentoring in Kent and Medway, comments included: *"One to one mentoring has 'saved' certain students who might well have continued to dwell in the land of*

underachievement and demotivation" and *"Due to the enthusiasm and determination of our mentor, more students are being motivated to consider the further/higher education route"* (Smith, 2010). The benefits are echoed by comments from practitioners in further education as well as schools: *"It is clear that the target group have had their aspirations raised and genuinely think about higher education as an option, especially where they have not thought about it before"* (South West, 2007).

Table 7

Partnership (or Authority) and reference source	Focus of measure	Measure	Key Findings
Kent & Medway (Smith, 2010)	Mentees	Qualitative research with stakeholders, Learner tracking study.	Mentees are more likely to say that mentoring activity was influential than the other AHKM activities. Head teachers acknowledge that AHKM's designated Learning Mentor work has contributed to an increase in aspirations, progression and attainment. AHKM Mentoring increases mentee knowledge of HE study and mentees are more likely to recognise facts about HE study following mentoring.
Kent & Medway (Fretwell & Smith, 2010)	Head Teachers	Qualitative research with partner school head teachers.	Over 90% of head teachers said that involvement in the Aimhigher partnership had facilitated links that had not been present before and that membership of the partnership had helped the school foster a culture of progression beyond 16 years.
Greater Manchester (EARN, 2009)	Teachers in 11-16 schools	Questionnaire survey, in-depth interview and a teacher focus group.	Respondents felt strongly that Aimhigher's major impact is on pupil aspirations (and by some as contributing to attainment). There are some 'limits' to what Aimhigher can do: low attaining (and mid attaining) schools do not see higher education progression as high a priority as those who have high attainment. Although, there does not appear to be a linear relationship between impact and Aimhigher funding allocation to a school, there were issues associated around sustainability of achievements.
Cheshire and Warrington (EARN, 2010a)	Teachers in Aimhigher schools	Interviews and focus groups with school staff.	Staff felt raising aspirations and confidence was the main achievement.
Essex (EARN, 2010b)	Teachers in Aimhigher schools	Interviews and focus groups with school staff.	Aimhigher has raised learners' aspirations, confidence and knowledge of options. Staff in schools are key in influencing post-16 and higher education progression.
Greater Merseyside (EARN, 2010c)	Partners and interventions over past 10 years.	Questionnaire survey, in-depth interview and a focus group.	Aimhigher has been a catalyst, in two ways: universities have developed interventions they would not otherwise have done; new relationships have developed with schools and colleges. School staff mostly see Aimhigher's impact as raising aspirations although a majority also said it contributed to raising attainment.

Raising aspirations: school level case study

Case study research was undertaken with schools as part of the programme evaluation in Hertfordshire. In one case study school, the Head teacher was keen to develop an aspirational school culture to challenge pre-conceived ideas about students' potential. This culture-building is seen to be a long-term, capacity-building venture. Feedback from teachers also suggested that an aspirational school culture was fundamental to developing student belief in their own abilities and potential, although many recognised this is difficult to attain, however, because many students have a negative view of their own capabilities and potential to succeed. The Aimhigher programme is seen to be a key lever in challenging these negative perceptions and making young people aware of the variety of pathways available to continue their education. Many of the teachers and school leaders interviewed for the research positioned the Aimhigher programme at the centre of their school's strategy to raise student aspiration. Though it was initially viewed as a standalone initiative, school leaders are now ensuring that Aimhigher is positioned at the centre of a raft of initiatives designed to challenge student self-image and to provide the practical support to ensure that they achieve their potential. The Aimhigher co-ordinator is also responsible for the economic well-being strand of the Every Child Matters agenda and Aimhigher is therefore being located structurally alongside careers education. The school has also reviewed and revised their Key Stage 5 curriculum offer in order to raise their retention rates.

The link between raised aspirations and raised levels of attainment was mentioned by a number of teacher interviewees. They see the Aimhigher programme as helping them to 'raise the bar' and supporting them in conveying the message to young people that they can do more. The range and scope of activities on offer was praised by staff. Opportunities offered by the Aimhigher programme are seen to positively influence students' attitudes in a number of ways. Aspects which were identified for particular commendation were: campus visits, post-16 talks, the road show, work with parents, using school alumni who are studying at university, and supporting the transition to university. The research highlighted a connection between raised aspirations at the upper end of the school and attitudinal change in younger students. The number of young students saying they aspire to university is rising over previous years.

At interview some parents commented on the positive impact of university visits on their child's understanding of the nature of post-18 study. The case study research concluded that *"There is clear evidence that the Aimhigher programme impacts positively on student and parental attitudes to higher education. This impact is secured through effective interventions at a number of levels and is underpinned by a transparent and effective working partnership between the university and the school"*.

Roberts, A., & Weston, K., An evaluation of attitudinal changes to higher education among young people in relation to their experience of the Aimhigher programme, Aimhigher Hertfordshire, May 2010.

In one study, teachers and tutors were particularly pleased with the range of materials offered to raise participants' awareness of the vocational progression routes and benefits of higher education (London South, 2010). However, other research highlighted that some teachers proposed the need for further information on progression routes and curriculum offer, both student and teacher information, so that more effective follow-up work could be done back in school. Students appreciate this follow-up work which they see as effective in keeping an application to university high on their agenda (Roberts & Weston, 2010).

Through a series of studies for area partnerships, EARN/WECAN have piloted work in this area using a 'school culture' scale (set of questions administered through survey and interview based research). These surveys show encouraging changes in the importance of higher education to the school and support from senior management: important in so far as the changes indicate that the impact of Aimhigher is not confined to the more peripheral parts of school life, but is having an effect on the identity of the school as an institution. Furthermore, staff knowledge of HE progression is important if a change in culture in the school due to

Aimhigher is actually going to benefit learners, and the results here are also encouraging (EARN, 2009). Schools research in Essex found that Connexions and Aimhigher generally liaise and work well together, but it is accepted that Aimhigher provides most of the work regarding HE progression IAG, particularly in 11-16 schools (EARN, 2010b).

Other researchers have looked at the synergy between Aimhigher and local authority/school strategies through evaluation of strategic plans and interviews with senior staff. Importantly, this research found that in spite of the range of models that had been adopted for the local area

coordination role within local authorities, all the authorities articulated Aimhigher's contribution in terms of supporting young people to achieve their full potential. Some authorities, although not all, identified a contribution of Aimhigher to attainment and school improvement. The project found that several authorities had undertaken learner level evaluations which: *"have provided evidence to suggest Aimhigher is positively affecting progression rates by increasing awareness, aspiration and attainment. The presence of this local information enabled coordinators to convey strong messages regarding Aimhigher"* (Rouncefield-Swales, 2009).

Key conclusions

- Aimhigher provision of progression IAG and awareness raising activities is inextricably linked to work on aspirations, and is targeted to the needs of particular groups, especially those who lack a tradition of higher education within their families and communities. Having the experience of higher education, and providing tools to plan for the future, are key themes.
- Changes in learner awareness have been measured in different ways, drawing on learner feedback. The data indicates that higher education awareness had grown among those who had taken part in Aimhigher activities. Some had benefited from particular skills development, eg. action planning/goal setting. Increased knowledge of higher education and what's involved is associated with a positive increase in learners' self-confidence in their ability to progress, especially for vocational learners.
- Not all learners are considering higher education but this is not necessarily a negative finding for Aimhigher if an alternative pathway is a rational choice for them.
- Aimhigher has been shown to be the main source of progression IAG in 11-16 schools. However, the research also raises issues over the extent to which the knowledge is embedded in institutions.

5. WHICH ACTIVITIES HAVE THE MOST IMPACT?

As already discussed the nature of Aimhigher activities varies considerably, as a result of local factors, and therefore the research included in the review covered evaluation projects of different types of activities. Moreover, the Aimhigher 'offer' tends to vary with the number and type of activities which learners take part in, and is also dependent on the level of engagement of the school/college or other provider. Indeed, some recent research projects have shown that a key barrier to the implementation of the learner progression framework is time out of lessons for both staff and learners. There appears to be general acknowledgement that the idea of sequenced activity is 'good', however the reality of this happening within differing school contexts is inevitably difficult. Schools which do not employ internal staff and which rely on participation by cohort pupils in 'external' events delivered by partners can also be affected by 'blockages' at senior/leadership level. The extent of Aimhigher activity and success in organising and delivering this activity can depend on who the Aimhigher co-ordinator is in a school and how much influence they have within the school context (Moore, 2010). Some schools will involve the cohort in a wide range of activities whereas for others learners may only have a campus visit. Learners who are involved in Aimhigher delivery through targeted intensive projects (such as mentoring or Associates) tend to get the most inputs.

In the longitudinal tracking project of Aimhigher Kent and Medway cohorts, progression rates were found to be highest for participants who engaged in intensive Aimhigher activities, for example, 37% of students who participated in mentoring, taster or master classes, and Summer Schools (or combinations of these) were found to have progressed to HE, compared to 28% of those who had only low intensity interventions (eg. Higher Education Talks in school) (Edgar, Thompson & Smith, 2010). To some extent the conclusion that participation in more numerous and higher intensity activities correlates with increased impact appears self-evident, and is certainly borne out by other research into intensive widening participation activities such as mentoring and Summer Schools. Qualitative research with learners supports the claim that it is only through sustained help, that Aimhigher contributes to students' confidence in both making an application and in identifying themselves as a potential university student (Roberts & Weston, 2010).

The evidence suggests that the cumulative effects of the progression framework approach is bringing good results in schools, and the same appears to be true for other groups such as work-based learners. In London South the Vocational Progression Scheme (VPS) 2009/10 ran in eight Further Education Colleges in the London South Region and two schools (Academies) with sixth form provision, catering for those studying BTEC National Certificate or BTEC National Diploma in: Sport or Health and

Social Care. The scheme includes a range of interventions and the evaluation data suggests that there has been a cumulative effect on progression from vocational courses (London South, 2010). Feedback from the work-based learner cohort in one large partnership area which is working with over 20 providers, found that 84% agreed that they were definitely more interested than before in progressing to a higher level of learning as a result of Aimhigher activities (of which two-fifths (38%) strongly agreed). Where Apprentices have accessed a range of support they have been more likely to consider making the transition to higher education, especially where this included personal as well as group support during their training. Tracking over three years showed that just under a quarter, (23%) had gained a place or were in the application stage following completion of a Level 3 Apprenticeship framework, which is well above the norm for this group of learners (Harvey & Leyden, 2010).

A research study, presenting evidence of which types of Aimhigher activities have the best effect on attainment indicates that participation in numerous activities, perhaps as part of a Higher Education Progression Framework (HEPF), is likely to have a greater impact on attainment than limited participation. The Lincolnshire and Rutland Aimhigher cohorts who took part in Aimhigher activities in Year 10 (in 2007/08) and Year 11 (in 2008/09) and took Key Stage 4 in 2008/09 performed significantly better than expected in their assessments.

The analyses indicated that participation in numerous activities is likely to have a greater impact on attainment than limited participation. Although this theory could not be tested statistically, due to relatively small sample sizes, this is an interesting finding and worthy of further investigation when additional data become available. Cohorts who were flagged as 'Experience 2' students, i.e. they have taken part in at least three Category 2 (intensive) activities had improved at a greater rate (from Key Stage 3 assessments) than 'Experience 1' participants, i.e. those who have taken part in less than three Category 2 activities. In fact, the average number of A*-Cs that 'Experience 2' students achieved above what had been predicted was 1.89, compared with 1.27 for 'Experience 1' students) (Kerrigan, 2010).

In relation to aspiration raising, qualitative research with Aimhigher learners suggests

that what is important is not simply just knowing about university, but having the experience of higher education. This gears up learners in a way that is likely to be more enduring and brings in other required aspects such as visualising the future and action planning. In quantitative learner surveys in Cheshire and Warrington, activities which involved having a visit to a university to look around the campus and meet students were rated as useful by many more learners than other (school based) activities (EARN, 2010). The evidence is particularly convincing in relation to the research around Aimhigher activities which involve a residential experience, and this is backed up by comments from practitioners: *"The pupils got to really experience university in every way and I do believe it is the foundations of them aspiring to further education in the future"* (Quote from teacher following residential experiences as part of qualitative research project) (Denner, 2009)

Key conclusions

- Learners that engage most fully in the series of activities in the learner progression framework get the most benefits, and progression rates are higher. There is some evidence that learners who get intensive support in school eg. through a learning mentor, in addition to Aimhigher activities out of school, progress to a greater extent.
- It is hypothesised that taking part in numerous (at least three) activities, perhaps as part of a Higher Education Progression Framework, leads to the most improvement in attainment, although this has not been proven.
- Having the experience of university (rather than 'second-hand' information) is key to raising aspirations.

Annex A: Reference sources included in the review (with brief summary information on the nature of the research undertaken)

Aimhigher West Partnership, Feedback from Stakeholders for HEFCE consultation, 2010

A summary of evaluation findings in the Aimhigher West area.

Atherton, G., The impact of Aimhigher on Learners, Aimhigher WECAN London Partnership, 2010

A student level study exploring the relationship between the extent of involvement of learners in the programme and their aspirations, knowledge and awareness of higher education (HE) and their attainment related attitudes and behaviour.

Atherton, G., & Riches, J., Balancing the budget – Can games-based learning prepare students to manage financially in Higher Education? Aimhigher WECAN London Partnership, 2010

Explores the role that online games-based learning has in assisting prospective students to develop financial decision-making skills related to higher education, through learner feedback research.

Atkinson, G., Aimhigher Impact Data 2009, Staffordshire County Council, December 2009

Report was produced using Local Authority data to evaluate the improvement in attainment of the students identified as being eligible for Aimhigher involvement, compared to a control group.

Denner, L., Raising Aspirations Evaluation Report, 2006-8, Aimhigher Peninsula, 2009

Outlines the work of Strand 1 of the Aimhigher Peninsula Programme over the academic years from 2006 to 2008.

Edgar, R., Aimhigher MKOB, GCSE predictions vs attainment study, 2010

A comparison of the GCSE achievement of an Aimhigher cohort vs non Aimhigher cohort

Edgar, R., Smith, S. and Thompson, R., AHKM participant tracking study, Aimhigher Kent and Medway partnership, July 2010

This is a summary of the results of the HESA matching study whereby AHKM participants were tracked to HESA datasets.

Edgar, R., Smith, S., & Thompson, R., South East Area Partnerships participant tracking study, July 2010

HESA matching study exploring the association between the level of activity participation in Aimhigher and higher education progression

Edgar, R., Smith, S., & Thompson, R., MoRE South East Area Partnerships UCAS applicant trend analysis study, July 2009

Presents a trend analysis of UCAS applicant data at institutional level and explores the difference in applicant growth of Aimhigher member schools and non member schools.

Educational Access Research Network (EARN) (2010a), Aimhigher Cheshire & Warrington: An Evaluative Study, Interim Report July 2010

Reports the results of a commissioned evaluation on the impact of Aimhigher on staff in schools in the Cheshire and Warrington area, using a mix of quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Educational Access Research Network (EARN) (2010b), Aimhigher Essex: Staff Attitudes Research Study, 2010

Commissioned evaluation report which looks at the impact of Aimhigher on staff in schools in the Essex partnership area, using a mix of quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Educational Access Research Network (EARN) (2010c), A retrospective study of the impacts of Excellence in Cities, P4P and Aimhigher on Learning Institutions in Greater Merseyside, Aimhigher Greater Merseyside, 2010

Commissioned research into the developments in the Aimhigher programme in Greater Merseyside and the impact of Aimhigher interventions on institutions, using a survey, telephone interviews and focus groups with school representatives.

Educational Access Research Network (EARN), Aimhigher Greater Manchester: Staff Attitudes Research Study, 2009

Commissioned evaluation report which looks at the impact of Aimhigher on staff in schools in the Greater Manchester partnership area, using a mix of quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Fretwell & Smith, Aimhigher Kent & Medway, Annual Head Teacher Survey, 2010

A survey with over 40 head teachers exploring how membership of the Aimhigher partnership had added value to their school.

Gilbert, S., Widening Participation Evaluation Report, Aimhigher Stoke-on-Trent, November 2009

Summarises the effect that being part of the widening participation cohort has on GCSE attainment and post 16, 17 and 18 destinations. Assesses pupil attitudes to further and higher education following participation in Widening Participation / Aimhigher activities.

Golding, D., Radcliffe Riverside School: Aimhigher in School, Aimhigher Bury, July 2010

Review report by Aimhigher Coordinator looking at take-up of activities across cohorts and benefits to participants including performance in exams.

Kerrigan, M., and Carpenter, C., Mentoring in Partnership: An Evaluation of the Aimhigher Personal Adviser Programme, Aimhigher Nottinghamshire, August 2009

Evaluation of the programme using a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methods, including qualitative interviews with Aimhigher personal advisers, teaching professionals and Aimhigher practitioners; focus groups with participants; analysis of quantitative evaluation questionnaires; analysis of participant data.

Kerrigan, M., (2010a), Evaluation of The Advantage Nottinghamshire Masterclass Programme, Aimhigher Nottinghamshire, August 2010

Report of an evaluation of master class programme which draws on findings from a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.

Kerrigan, M., (2010b), Predicted versus actual attainment: Aimhigher Lincolnshire & Rutland participants taking Key Stage 4 assessments in 2008/09, Aimhigher in the East Midlands, July 2010

The results of a study which used data stored on the Aimhigher in the East Midlands Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Database, matched with Fischer Family Trust (FFT) data provided by Lincolnshire Local Authority, and analysing any deviation from expected results of young people taking part in Aimhigher activities.

Kerrigan, M., (2010c), Predicted versus actual attainment: Aimhigher Northamptonshire participants taking Key Stage 4 assessments in 2008/09, Aimhigher in the East Midlands, July 2010

The results of a study which used data stored on the Aimhigher in the East Midlands Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Database, matched with Fischer Family Trust (FFT) data provided by Northamptonshire Local Authority, and analysing any deviation from expected results of young people taking part in Aimhigher activities.

Kerrigan, M., (2010d), Summary of Year One and Two Research with Core Evaluation Partner Schools / Colleges: Northamptonshire, Aimhigher in the East Midlands, August 2010

Interim findings based on qualitative research with four cohorts of learners from three different schools identified to take part in longitudinal research, to measure changes in higher education awareness and aspirations and learners' motivation to attain.

Kerrigan, M., (2010e), Summary Of Year One and Two Research with Core Evaluation Partner Schools / Colleges: Aimhigher Leicestershire, Aimhigher in the East Midlands, August 2010

Report on longitudinal study with five cohorts of learners from four different schools and colleges covering a range of year groups to enable the research team to measure progress at different transitional points involving focus group research supported by practitioner interviews.

Kerrigan, M., (2010f), Summary of Year One and Two Research with Core Evaluation Partner Schools / Colleges: Lincolnshire & Rutland, Aimhigher in the East Midlands, August 2010

Report on longitudinal research with four cohorts of learners from three different schools and colleges covering a range of year groups to enable the research team to measure progress at different transitional points involving focus group research supported by practitioner interviews.

Kerrigan, M., (2010g), Summary of Year One and Two Research with Core Evaluation Partner Schools / Colleges: Aimhigher Nottinghamshire, Aimhigher in the East Midlands, August 2010

Report on longitudinal research with five cohorts of learners from five different schools and colleges covering a range of year groups to enable the research team to measure progress at different transitional points involving focus group research supported by practitioner interviews.

Kerrigan, M., (2010h), 2007/08 and 2008/09 Aimhigher Lincolnshire & Rutland participants' destinations analysis, Aimhigher in the East Midlands, August 2010

Analysis of participant attainment outcomes whereby data on Aimhigher cohort students who had taken part in at least one Aimhigher activity, was 'fuzzy matched' with destinations (741 successful matches). Trends for Aimhigher students were measured in terms of any deviation from expected progression rates.

LETG, Impact on Participation in AimHigher Report – BSix Sixth Form College, 2010

College level case study including data on the 2009/10 year group (with 2010 entry to HE).

LETG, Aimhigher - Impact Evidence: Career education IAG programme (discreet programme), 2010

Summary report which includes learner feedback and school/staff perspectives from a sample of schools and a sixth form as part of LETG Aimhigher's three-year in-depth evaluation of its IAG work with the schools.

London South, A collection of evidence from Aimhigher London South which demonstrates the impact of the Vocational Progression Scheme (VPS) on learners' aspirations, attainment and progression, 2010

Presents data on how well the VPS and Summer Schools have impacted upon aspiration, attitudes and attainment, using paper-based surveys and open-ended focus group interviews with Summer School participants.

McNeill, J., HEFCE Primary Pilot Evaluation Report, Aimhigher Greater Merseyside, April 2010

Research into the University of Liverpool primary project designed to contribute to how Aimhigher partnerships could add to the development and sustainability of links between primary schools and Higher Education Institutions. Data was collected via an online survey of teaching staff, pre and post intervention participant focus groups and an audit of provision.

Merseyside, Park High Aimhigher Activity 2009-10, 2010

Information on school level activities and feedback on these from the 2009/10 academic year.

Moore, J., Learner Journey Report, Aimhigher Greater Manchester, July 2010

Initial conclusions on the pattern of Aimhigher interventions and the learners' experience of Aimhigher across Greater Manchester boroughs.

MoRE – Monitoring, Research and Evaluation group for the South East Area Partnerships, Edgar, R., Smith, S., & Thompson, R., trend analysis exploring GCSE attainment of Aimhigher partner versus non partner schools, 2009

Presents GCSE attainment data for sub sets of schools: participating and non participating schools in Aimhigher and looks at whether GCSE attainment has improved and points score achievement.

Noble, M., with Chilosi, D., Ylonen, A., Broadhead, P., Wilkinson, M., and Evans, G., Researching Aspire, June 2009

Presents summaries of four research projects: a quantitative study of the impact of Aspire on GCSE results and higher education application rates; research into costs and benefits of partnership approaches; research into the perspectives of Student Ambassadors; research into the views of Aimhigher learners.

North Yorkshire Aimhigher: Evaluation Report to HEFCE 2009/10

Evaluation report to HEFCE addressing key evaluation themes set out in partnership plan.

Porter, S., A Sporting Chance: Boys into Higher Education using Football Project, Report of the evaluation of the second phase, July 2010

Second phase evaluation project which used questionnaires and focus groups to build on initial research, including an assessment of the continuing impact of the project on the higher education aspirations and awareness of the cohort

Roberts, A., and Weston, K., University of Hertfordshire School of Education, An evaluation of attitudinal changes to higher education among young people in relation to their experience of the Aimhigher programme, Aimhigher Hertfordshire, May 2010

Research into young people's attitudes towards higher education using data gathered in two case study schools through interviews/email contact with 36 staff, students and parents.

Rogers, J., 'From the Classroom to the Catwalk': Evidence of impact on learner attainment and aspiration 2005-2009, Salford Aimhigher, September 2009

Case study examining the impact on attainment and aspiration of a five year programme offered annually to targeted Year 10 pupils from Salford High Schools. The data included interviews with pupils, parents/carers, and teachers and analysis of three years of GCSE results.

Rouncefield-Swales, A., Embedding Aimhigher in Local Authorities: Report to Aimhigher West Area Partnership, July 2009

Research to investigate the extent to which the values, attitudes and philosophy of the Aimhigher programme are embedded within the work of local authorities using desk-based research and fieldwork interviews with 14 to 19 advisers and line managers in all eight local authorities in the Aimhigher West area.

Smith, S., Evaluation of AHKM Learning Mentors in Schools, Aimhigher Kent and Medway, September 2010

This paper presents quantitative and qualitative findings including the predicted and actual attainment of mentored students against their peers, and the longitudinal tracking of individual students, along with qualitative research that reveals shifts in attitude and aspiration through generic and individual case studies.

South West, Schools Questionnaire, April 2007

Presents the results of a questionnaire for schools and colleges completed by Strand 1 Liaison Teachers (41 responses).

Wilson, P., York and North Yorkshire HEFCE Annual Evaluation Return, 2010

Evaluation report template which describes activities undertaken in 2009/10 prepared for return to HEFCE as part of annual Area Partnership monitoring.

Woods, R., Kendall, S., The Quiet Shadow of Aimhigher, Aimhigher Sussex, July 2010

Research exploring what factors influence undergraduates from low participation neighbourhoods in their journey into higher education and their sense of academic preparedness on arrival.

Annex B: Area Partnerships included in the Review

The report is based on a review of information which was submitted by a selection of Aimhigher partnerships. Although only a subset of evidence is referenced here, all the submissions informed the conclusions drawn. The following partnerships provided information for inclusion in the review:

ASPIRE (South East London)	London South
Berkshire	Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire
Black Country	Northamptonshire
Cheshire & Warrington	Nottinghamshire
Essex	Peninsula Partnership
Greater Manchester	Staffordshire
Greater Merseyside	Surrey
Hampshire & Isle of Wight	Sussex
Hertfordshire	The Humber
Kent & Medway	Tyne & Wear Northumberland
Leicestershire	WECAN (West Central & North)
LIFE Partnership	Western Partnership
Lincolnshire & Rutland	York & North Yorkshire
London East Thames Gateway (LETG)	Yorkshire

Annex C: Aimhigher Area Partnerships and Lead Agencies

Area Partnership	Lead Agency	Area Lead (at December 2010)
ASPIRE (South East London)	University of Greenwich	Gwen Evans
Bedfordshire & Luton	University of Bedfordshire	Steve Kendall
Berkshire	University of Reading	Carole Ebsworth
Birmingham & Solihull	The University of Birmingham	Mike Thompson
Black Country	University of Wolverhampton	Natalie Latham
Cambridgeshire & Peterborough	University of Cambridge	Sandy Yatteau
Cheshire & Warrington	University of Chester	Christine Edmunds
County Durham	New College Durham	Peter Phipps
Coventry & Warwickshire	Coventry University	Philip Dent
Cumbria	University of Cumbria	Hazel Watt
Derbyshire	University of Derby	Kryssy Hartley
Essex	University of Essex	Maggie Weston
Greater Manchester	Open University in the North West	Jo Wiggans
Greater Merseyside	University of Liverpool	Emy Onuora
Hampshire & Isle of Wight	University of Winchester	Tony Acland
Herefordshire & Worcestershire	University of Worcester	Val Yates
Hertfordshire	University of Hertfordshire	Carole Linnell
The Humber	University of Hull	Susan Wells
Kent & Medway	Canterbury Christ Church University	Felicity Dunworth
Lancashire	University of Central Lancashire	Kate Dunbavan
Leicestershire	Leicestershire VESA	Neil Stock
LIFE Partnership	Bournemouth University	Stella Lees
Lincolnshire & Rutland	Bishop Grosseteste University College	Sue Knight
London East	Queen Mary, University of London	Susan Mueller
London South	Kingston University	Kevin Maskell
Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire	Open University in the South	Jan Martin
Norfolk	University of East Anglia	Lorraine Sturman
York and North Yorkshire	York St John University	Pam Wilson
Northamptonshire	The University of Northampton	Philip Burch
Nottinghamshire	Nottingham Trent University	Dave Coppock
Peninsula Partnership	University of Plymouth	Vanessa Fitzgerald
Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin	University of Wolverhampton	Karen Hayward
South Yorkshire	Sheffield Hallam University	Ian Barlow
Staffordshire & Stoke	Staffordshire University	Judith Robinson
Suffolk	University Campus Suffolk	Julian Illman
Surrey	University of Surrey	Marilyn Birks
Sussex	University of Brighton	Debra Vice-Holt
Tees Valley	Teesside University	Tanya Peacock
Tyne & Wear Northumberland	Newcastle University	Sarah Aldridge
WECAN (West Central & North)	University of Westminster	Graeme Atherton
Western Partnership	University of Gloucestershire	Elizabeth Garton
West Yorkshire	University of Huddersfield	Jonathan Higgins

Copies of this report are available at:
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