HE and School Partnership: The role of Aimhigher

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Aimhigher London West, Central & North (WECAN) Partnership

Summary

- Aimhigher now
- Challenges
- Opportunities
- If we didn’t have Aimhigher would we have to invent it?

Aimhigher

- Government funded programme to support progression to HE for young people from under-represented groups
- Began in 2004
- Funded until 2011 - £240m 08-11
- 40+ area partnerships of schools/colleges/HEIs
- Activities including pupil HE experiences/staff & learning material devp/work with parents

Aimhigher

- Individual partnerships strong
- ‘Front-lineness’ high – Aimhigher delivered nearly 1m interventions in 08-09 (HEFCE report to be released soon)
- Infrastructure strong
- Image mixed

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University scheme having 'little impact' on low-income students

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guardian.co.uk, Tuesday 20 September 2005 12.58 BST
Article history

A £400m government scheme to encourage more students from poor backgrounds to go to university has failed to have a significant impact, according to an official report.

The evaluation of the flagship Aimhigher: Excellence Challenge programme found there was no hard evidence that it had made the poorest teenagers more likely to want to go to university, although it seemed to have expanded their horizons.

Schools with pupils taking part in Aimhigher activities, such as summer

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University aspiration gap stays stubbornly wide, survey shows

- Multimillion-pound drive fails to bridge class divide
- Rise in overall proportion wanting to go to college

Polly Curtis, education editor
The Guardian, Monday 7 April 2008
Article history

A multimillion-pound drive to encourage students from the poorest backgrounds to go to university has failed to narrow the gap between the numbers of poorest and richest teenagers wanting to get a degree, new figures show.

More children now say they want to go to university than ever before, but there is still a 23 percentage point gap between the proportion of the wealthiest children who aspire to a university education and their poorest classmates.

The figures demonstrate the stubborn class-based educational divide which ministers have put at the heart of their school policies and the prime minister's promise to "unlock the nation's potential". Opposition MPs suggested they proved the government had failed to tackle the "poverty of aspiration" which reinforces class divides.

Some 78% of children from homes in the top social group say they want to go to university, compared with only 55% of the poorest students. While overall the proportion of children who say they would like to go to university has increased from 53% in 2000 to 62% in 2008, the gap between the social classes has not narrowed. The figures are extracted from surveys of 6,000 seven- to 16-year-olds made since 2000 by the British Market Research Bureau, seen exclusively by the Guardian.

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Aimhigher:Challenges

- **Aimhigher:Aspirations?**
- Not explicitly linked to IAG – 80% of 250 schools in 5 areas of England see aspiration raising as main Aimhigher function (Aimhigher WECAN research released by September)
- **Caught in an access pincer**
- Lack of ideological support on the right
- Seen as pathologising/threatening by academic left
- Is it frontline enough?

Aimhigher:Opportunities

- **Aimhigher:Aspirations**
- As an idea has political capital
- Aimhigher: Social Mobility
- Also has political capital
- **Targeted**
- Important when resources limited
- **Strong support from stakeholders**
- Important when listening to deliverers is in vogue

HE & Schools Partnerships

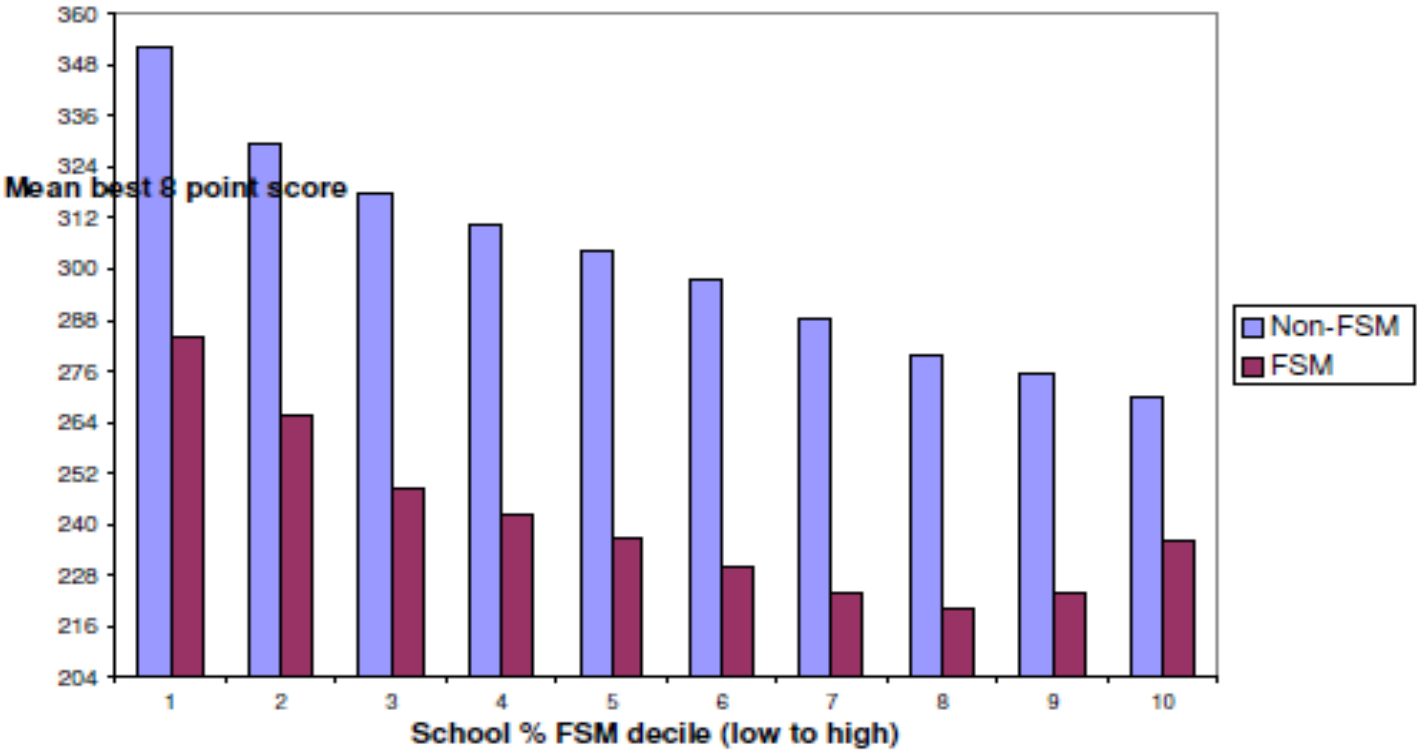
- **If we didn't have Aimhigher would we have to invent it?**
- HE: school partnerships not in principle (or principally) about Access
- Schools & HEIs self-interest/status driven organisations
- Schools & HEIs extremely differentiated

Schools self-interest

- Existence of league tables
- Education as positional good
- Getting the best intake in-built in the system
- Pupil premium best example
- Idea that schools need financial incentive to work with disadvantaged pupils

Schools Differences

Figure 2: Mean best 8 GCSE and equivalents point score for non-FSM and FSM pupils by deciles of school deprivation (6 points equates to one GCSE grade, e.g. C = 40, B = 46 etc)



Schools Differences

- *'The 2,679 state comprehensive schools in England are highly socially segregated: the least deprived comprehensive in the country has 1 in 25 (4.2%) of pupils with parents on income benefits compared with over 16 times as many (68.6%) in the most deprived comprehensive. The social make-up of a school's intake partly reflects where it is located, but is mainly due to which pupils apply and are selected*.'

- **Worlds Apart : social variation among schools** (Sutton Trust 2010)

HEIs & Self-Interest

- **Multiple league tables**
- Position in them matters to HEIs
- **Multiple interest groups**
- **Positioning on Fees good example**
- Different university representative groups
- Each putting forward a position that benefits their own type of institution
- Each representing different learners

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Mission groups call for higher fees

20 May 2010
By Rebecca Attwood

NUS and UCU dissent as sector argues for a greater graduate contribution. Rebecca Attwood reports

Universities united this week in calling for graduates to contribute more towards the cost of their education, as they published their proposals for a new system of funding.

All of the sector's mission groups contend that there is a case for introducing a "real" rate of interest on student loans or a higher repayment rate, but they are divided on the issue of the tuition fee cap, as submissions to the review of university fees and funding show.

According to the Russell Group of large research-intensive universities, the best way to protect the quality of higher education is to allow universities to set their own fees.

The group advocates an "incremental approach" to removing the fee cap altogether.

But as a new study shows that efforts to widen access to elite universities has stalled (see page 11), the Million+ group of new universities says that opening up a market in fees would simply transfer more resources to the universities that are the most socially exclusive.

Million+ makes the case for introducing a maximum 2 per cent rate of interest on loans provided by the state, and for extending the graduate contribution period from 25 to 35 years.

Doing this would deliver savings of up to £1 billion a year, which should be used to stop the £600 million cuts set out in the 2009 pre-Budget report, the group says.

It also wants to see the end of statutory bursaries, arguing that this would allow universities to reduce their fees, which would in turn reduce the size of the loans students require.

The resulting savings to the Exchequer would also fund more than 800 additional student places.

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Funding cuts could wipe out half of all the college places that are linked with universities

Ian Nash
The Guardian, Tuesday 2 March 2010
Article history

Gulsum Cengiz, Dan DiMartino and Enver Huseyin are angry about the government's funding cuts. Photograph: Frank Baron

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HEIs & Access

- Access generally supported but seen as expendable
- Recent budget cuts putting access at risk
- School partnership can be a ‘strategic priority’ –
- About recruitment or access?

The partnership free market

- Without Aimhigher or something like it:
- Would learners from lower SEG be championed systematically?
- Would they receive exposure to range of institutions?

Conclusion

- Access won’t just happen by better HE:school partnerships
- Access an ongoing political issue
- Arguments need making and re-making
- Do we need to learn from other countries – US for example?

Conclusion

- What is ‘Aimhigher’ (or what could/should it be)?

- Funding Stream
- A project
- An organisation
- A movement – or part of it

- Thank you for Listening

- Dr. Graeme Atherton

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