

## **Proposed Aimhigher Associates Scheme pathfinder**

This document summarises a more detailed bid to HEFCE for a 'pathfinder' project for the proposed Aimhigher Associates Scheme.

In their bid document the funders proposed to establish a scheme to recruit

“undergraduates from a state school background (who) will provide support and encouragement to learners as they encounter the various transition milestones between year 9 and year 13 and (who) will receive training to help them in this role. “

The scheme would involve: -

- a national programme with defined minimum content, quality assurance and training
- identification, recruitment and payment of undergraduate 'Aimhigher Alumni' working as Aimhigher associates
- extended engagement between learner and associate for at least 15-20 exchanges per year over several years so that learners are supported at key transition points
- support for learners engaged in the UCAS process for summer school and, in particular, mainstream HE provision
- funding for school, college and area coordination
- the development of a nationally agreed and coordinated training programme, including an element of joint training for school or college staff and associates
- enhanced arrangements in schools and colleges for HE-related information, advice and guidance (IAG)
- the option to develop electronic exchanges between learner and associate
- the use of the Higher Education Progression Framework (HEPF) as the basis for exchanges between learner and associate
- Aimhigher associates will be checked with the Criminal Records Bureau and, from October 2009, will need to be members of the Independent Safeguarding Authority Scheme. “

The scheme would be integrated into the work of Aimhigher partnerships as follows: -

- “Targets will be agreed with Aimhigher partnerships for outputs and outcomes from the scheme and these will be reflected in the monitoring procedures and evaluation plans of all Aimhigher partnerships.
- The Aimhigher Associates Scheme will operate within the existing arrangements for governance and management in the mainstream Aimhigher programme.
- Links will be encouraged between the scheme and other initiatives such as the City Challenge; 14-19 consortia; the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Programme (STEM) and the Young Gifted and Talented programme. “

The aims of the scheme would be

“to challenge notions of learner deficit by promoting an emphasis on extending provision to meet the needs of learners as various transition and progression

milestones are encountered

- to provide support to targeted learners so that they engage in the UCAS process from year 9 onward with enhanced support to those in year 13.
- to use the wider resources of Aimhigher partnerships to help schools and colleges improve the quality, quantity and timing of impartial HE-related information advice and guidance available to learners
- to ensure that learners from widening participation backgrounds progress to the full range of HE provision available “

## **The Aimhigher Bedfordshire bid**

Provisionally accepted to a value of £208,000

### **HE Providers**

- University of Bedfordshire
- Bedfordshire Federation for Further and Higher Education (the University of Bedfordshire, Barnfield College, Bedford College, Dunstable College, Luton Sixth Form College and Shuttleworth College)
- Universities for Milton Keynes (the Universities of Bedfordshire and Northampton with Milton Keynes College)
- University Centre Aylesbury Vale (the University of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire New University with Aylesbury College)

*Note that work with FE colleges who are also significant providers of higher education is a key feature of this proposal.*

*Note also that bilateral discussions have begun with Aimhigher Milton Keynes, Oxford and Bucks to ensure that we can work together to deliver this scheme.*

### **Schools, Colleges, Academies and Trusts**

The target cohort for the Aimhigher Associates Scheme will be selected from among the FE Colleges (including Aylesbury and MK Colleges in collaboration with Aimhigher MKOB), the Luton Sixth Form College and those schools where the Aimhigher cohort is most strongly concentrated, up to a maximum of 30 schools (including Academies and Trusts) and the colleges

### **Rationale**

The key value of this scheme as being that it complements the existing Aimhigher plan by giving a smaller group of learners the opportunity to work intensively with an Aimhigher Associate to develop a portfolio of skills and knowledge to help them to raise their aspirations and to realise them. We believe that this will work because it involves interaction with peers in a small group, as part of a nationally defined, locally delivered structured programme of sessions which will complement the Higher Education Progression Framework and Transition Learning Mentoring Programme which are the

twin pivots of the Aimhigher plan for this area.

The opportunity to target a group of learners in those schools and colleges which have the largest concentrations of young people in the Aimhigher cohort is particularly welcome. The Aimhigher partnership in Bedfordshire is underpinned and supported by a number of other partnerships which include strong partnerships with local colleges and with 14-19 consortia.

A particular feature of this proposal is our wish to work collaboratively with our neighbour partnership in Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. We have experience of working with Aimhigher MKOB on a mentoring project, using University of Bedfordshire students as ambassadors, to work with students attending vocational programmes in Health and Social Care and in Sport Science and would greatly welcome the opportunity to develop this further.

We are deeply concerned about poor progression from Advanced Apprenticeships to higher education and intend, if successful, to make this a distinctive feature of our implementation. Similarly we have undertaken a number of successful interventions to engage young people in public care and we see their involvement as another distinctive feature of this initiative.

We are developing close links with the gifted and talented initiative (to develop in particular a more coherent programme of summer activities for G and T young people) and this would be an opportunity for us further to develop those links.

We think this initiative dovetails exactly with the strategic objectives of the Aimhigher partnership which are; to establish a strong partnership founded on strong linkages to 14-19 strategic partnerships, schools, colleges, Academies and Trusts and the Lifelong Learning Networks; to provide a coherent, progressive programme of activities for learners in the Aimhigher cohort designed to enhance progression through school and college and into higher education; to provide a mentoring programme to support learners in the transition from stage to stage and into higher education; to provide both impartial information, advice and guidance and substantial opportunities strongly to engage with the local higher education providers; and to build three local partnerships, based on the agreed unitary local authority boundaries, in Luton, Central Bedfordshire and Bedford.

### **Links to the existing Aimhigher project**

The Aimhigher Associates Scheme has some features in common with this area's new Aimhigher plan for 2008-11. This is, in our view, a strength of this bid. The Bedfordshire Aimhigher plan provides for three strands of activity – the delivery of a local implementation of the Higher Education Progression Framework –(HEPF), generally involving relatively large groups of learners, the deployment of a team of Transition Learning Mentors (TLMs), working with smaller groups of learners at key points of transition, and systematic co-ordination of these activities across participating schools

and colleges. This creates a set of conditions which is favourable to the establishment of the Aimhigher Associates Scheme and a context in which the development of that scheme will clearly add value because:-

- it will complete the picture by enabling the provision of a systematic programme of small group interaction, complementary to the HEPF and the TLM programme;
- it will strengthen the participation of schools and colleges, by supporting the delivery of a training programme;
- it will enhance the opportunities for young people from widening participation backgrounds to interact with a peer group already involved in and benefiting from higher education;
- it will provide a *structure* for such interactions which will relate explicitly to the HEPF and TLM programmes;
- it will underline progression to higher education as the proper chief object of Aimhigher; and
- it will enable such interaction to be evaluated within the same framework as the wider Aimhigher programme

There is a range of local interventions in which some or all of the proposed partners listed above participate. These include; a mentoring scheme for looked after children, the use of student ambassadors to support Aimhigher activities or to engage in outreach work on behalf of local HE providers, the Student Associates Scheme, and a substantial student volunteering programme which includes arrangements for students as tutors in schools.

In this area, we are also developing a Young Ambassador project in collaboration with the University of Bedfordshire and the Bedfordshire Olympic Opportunities Support Team (BOOST) to develop a cadre of young people who will work with their peers in the run up to the London Games in 2012 to raise the aspirations of young people to achieve, especially in the fields of education and training.

### **IAG / Communication**

This proposal arrives at a key moment for the provision of HE-related IAG in this area, with the transfer of Connexions into the Integrated Youth Support Service within the local authorities (whose status is itself about to change with the establishment of two new unitary authority in May 2009 to replace the Bedfordshire County Council).

The Aimhigher Associates scheme is well placed to provide an appropriate focus on HE at a time of considerable change where continuity might tend to be lost. The University of Bedfordshire would be delighted to have this opportunity to contribute to the stability of ongoing HE-related IAG, in partnership with Aimhigher.

A particular opportunity to enhance IAG arises from the University, the Associates and the school or college co-ordinators working together so that a better understanding can be developed, for example, of the reality of the higher education experience, of the

nature of student financial support, of the range of routes into and through higher education and of the expectations of admissions tutors.

Communication with parents, we believe, to inform them of developments in the scheme will need to be routed via the school or college co-ordinators. However, the possibility of an event for parents, perhaps at the end of the first year, should also be kept in view.

### **Targeting**

The learner cohort for the Aimhigher Bedfordshire plan 2008-11 has been identified by reference to the postcodes which are in the 4 most deprived deciles for all three of the following: Child Poverty (IDACI), Educational Deprivation and Low Progression to Higher Education (POLAR 2).

We are mapping these learners against local authority records for schools and FE College records for their own learners to understand how the learner group is distributed between providers. The resulting lists of learners are being sifted to identify within them those with 'clear potential for HE', young people in public care and those with disabilities or specific learning difficulty which could impede progress to higher education.

For the Aimhigher Associates Scheme, we propose to work with those schools where the the Aimhigher cohort is more strongly concentrated and with the FE Colleges / Sixth Form College. We will further refine these learner lists by reference to the HEFCE-provided UCAS data sets to take account of the NS-SEC of applicants and the application rates of their schools or colleges.

We think it is important that the learner group for the Aimhigher Associates Scheme should be a subset of the Aimhigher cohort, in order that the former will have full access to the full range of Aimhigher provision.

The overall Aimhigher cohort (those who score on all three measures (child poverty, educational deprivation and low HE participation and who have evident potential to progress to HE) is of the order of some 5,000 learners in this area, as is set out in the Aimhigher plan for 2008-11. However, taking account of the statement in the guidance that 'the number of Aimhigher associates, learners and HE providers engaged in the scheme will vary between areas in line with the current Aimhigher targeting and funding methodology', we assume that an intervention on this scale could not be supported. A target group of around 500 seems more realistic, given the funding available and the share this area has of the national Aimhigher funding.

The refinement of targeting for the Aimhigher Associates Scheme will therefore be designed to capture a much smaller group of young people with one or more of the following characteristics: -

- they have the potential to enter higher education but might not otherwise attempt to do so (or succeed in doing so), because they attend schools, colleges or

- programmes with a weak tradition of progression to higher education (vocational programmes such as Advanced Apprenticeships are a particular case in point);
- their selection of higher education programme or institution might otherwise be unnecessarily constrained, given their evident potential to progress (young people on the Gifted and Talented register are a case in point here) ;
  - they have a specific learning difficulty or disability which might inhibit or dampen their aspiration to enter higher education;
  - their parents' occupational background would place them in NS-SEC 4-8; and
  - they are in care.

### **Recruitment and training of Associates**

The Aimhigher Associates will be recruited from among the undergraduate population of the University of Bedfordshire and its partner FE Colleges. The record systems of the University will be used to identify undergraduates who have been recruited from the schools and colleges attended by the target learner group. They will be invited to a selection day in the course of which they will make a presentation (to an audience which will include learners representative of the target group) and be interviewed by a panel drawn from among the co-ordinators in the schools and colleges.

In future years, we will look to identify potential future Associates during the course of the Aimhigher programme. In the initial pathfinder year, the above method is probably the most secure.

We will provide a training programme for Associates and co-ordinators which will run over the year and support the development of the scheme, as well as underpinning its evaluation.

The programme will begin with a two-day programme for Associates which will dovetail with a half-day programme for co-ordinators, with the latter group helping to lead some of the sessions, as well as receiving information. Topics covered will include:-

- The Aimhigher initiative and the Associates Scheme
- Effective group work
- CV writing
- Interview skills
- Sources of information and guidance about higher education and employment opportunities
- The arrangements for student financial support
- The UCAS system
- Child protection
- Protocols for working together

Early in the Spring Term, there will be a half-day review meeting to reflect on progress with the scheme (to be jointly attended by Associates and co-ordinators) and to identify specific training needs for the Associates. Towards the end of the Spring Term there will

be a further training day for Associates which will address the issues identified by the review meeting.

Towards the end of the first half of the summer term there will be a final training event, which will consist of a half-day review and evaluation session for Associates and co-ordinators (both separately and jointly) which will capture what has been learnt so far, inform the following year's training programme and generate findings which will be of value in the dissemination phase accompanying the national launch of the scheme in April 2009.

Training days will be compulsory for Associates and will draw on external experts as appropriate (e.g. Connexions, UCAS etc.)

The University will also appoint a mentor to work with each of three groups of Associates, grouped by their work with schools and colleges in each of three unitary authorities (as they will be) of Luton, Central Bedfordshire and Bedford. This mentor will be an experienced member of the University's widening participation team.

### **Key features**

Distinctive features of the scheme as we propose to implement it, include: -

- Focus on looked after children
- Focus on progression from Advanced Apprenticeships
- Strong alignment with local authority structures including 14-19 strategic partnerships
- Good links with local gifted and talented initiatives

## **Funding**

HEFCE have indicated that they are minded to fund us as per the following table.

### **Annex A: Funding allocation for the Aimhigher Associates Pathfinder phase**

| <b>Expenditure Category</b>                                  | <b>Number of units</b> | <b>Amount £</b> |
|--|------------------------|-----------------|
| School/College Coordination fee at £2,500 per school/college |                        | 75,000          |
| Number of intended schools/college                           | 30                     |                 |
| Area Coordination fee  |                        | 25,000          |
| Payments to Aimhigher Associates @ £1000 max per associate   |                        | 100,000         |
| Number of intended Aimhigher Associates                      | 100                    |                 |
| Training costs   |                        | 3,000           |
| Data collection, monitoring and evaluation                   |                        | 0               |
| CRB checks   |                        | 5,000           |
| Other funding  |                        | 0               |
| <b>TOTAL FUNDING ALLOCATED</b>                               |                        | <b>208,000</b>  |
| Number of learners   | 500                    |                 |
| Cost per learner   |                        | 416             |