The new Aimhigher programme will integrate two existing initiatives to widen and thereby increase participation in higher education. This guidance is primarily for practitioners at local and regional level who will be developing plans for the new programme. It will also be useful background for all those involved in delivery or who have a stake in the programme – including schools, further education colleges, work-based learning providers, higher education institutions, local education authorities, voluntary organisations and Connexions partnerships.

Aimhigher: guidance notes for integration

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Contents

Annexes

Aimhigher: guidance notes for integration

To	Heads of HEFCE-funded higher education institutions
	Heads of LSC-funded further education colleges
	Heads of universities in Northern Ireland
Of interest to those responsible for	Widening participation, Learning and teaching, Strategic and corporate planning
Reference	HEFCE 2004/08
	LSC Circular 04/01
Publication date	January 2004
Enquiries to	aimhigher@hefce.ac.uk

Executive summary

Purpose

1.   The new Aimhigher programme will integrate two existing initiatives to widen and thereby increase participation in higher education. This guidance is primarily for practitioners at local and regional level who will be developing plans for the new programme.

2.   It will also be useful background for all those involved in delivery or who have a stake in the programme – including schools, further education colleges, work-based learning providers, higher education institutions, local education authorities, voluntary organisations and Connexions partnerships.

Key points

3.   The guidance:

- explains the objectives, scope and structure of the integrated programme
- sets out the key milestones for the integration
- explains that plans for the period August 2004 to July 2006 need to be prepared by 1 June 2004, and what these plans should include
- describes the process by which the funding bodies will approve plans and release funds
- explains what support will be available in taking this work forward.

4.   The new Aimhigher will be structured around Regional Forums and sub-regional Area Steering Groups.

Action required

5.   Regional Forums and Area Steering Groups should submit their plans for integration to Regional Partnership Boards by 1 June 2004.

What is this guidance and who is it for?

6.   The January 2003 White Paper 'The future of higher education' made a firm commitment to bring together two initiatives 'to deliver a coherent national outreach programme'. These initiatives were Aimhigher (formerly Excellence Challenge) and Partnerships for Progression (P4P), which was renamed Aimhigher: Partnerships for Progression. The new programme is called Aimhigher and will operate most intensively in disadvantaged areas. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) manages Aimhigher on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

7.   This guidance is mainly intended for practitioners at local and regional level who will be developing plans for the new programme[1]. It will continue to be developed, and we will provide updates on the web as appropriate, for example on funding allocations.

8.   This document will also be useful background for all those who will be involved in delivery or who have a stake in the programme – including schools, further education colleges (FECs), work-based learning providers, higher education institutions (HEIs), local education authorities (LEAs), voluntary organisations and Connexions partnerships. The guidance:

a.   Explains the objectives, scope and structure of the integrated programme.

b.   Sets out the key milestones for the integration.

c.   Explains that plans for the period August 2004 to July 2006 need to be prepared by 1 June 2004, and what these plans should include.

d.   Describes the process by which the funding bodies will approve plans and release funds.

e.   Explains what support will be available in taking this work forward.

Vision and overview

9.   Annex C provides some background about the two existing programmes – Aimhigher (formerly Excellence Challenge) and Aimhigher: P4P. They already have much in common. Through partnership arrangements, both identify, plan and carry out work to raise students' aspirations and attainment, with the ultimate aim of promoting expansion of, and greater social inclusion in, higher education (HE). They both focus on people from disadvantaged backgrounds, or backgrounds where participation in HE is not a tradition. Much of the activity and many of the staff and partners are the same for both initiatives, and therefore there is a clear rationale for integration.

10.   However, there are currently differences in:

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[1] We consulted on a draft of this guidance; information about this consultation can be found in Annex F.

- planning periods
- geographical coverage
- definitions of the funding year
- funding methods
- planning parameters
- target groups.

11.   The White Paper commitment to the integration of Aimhigher requires planning groups to be in place as soon as possible. Therefore, bearing in mind the limited time available, and the differences in national coverage, we will make use of the existing Aimhigher: P4P structures in the first instance to ensure that the plans can be developed by 1 June 2004. For example, we will ask Aimhigher: P4P sub-regional co-ordinators to set up the first meeting of an Area Steering Group, to ensure that the process is started; however, it will then be up to the group to decide how it wants to work.

12.   The vision expressed in the White Paper is one of a coherent, national outreach programme, achieved by bringing the two initiatives together and removing the differences between them. Integration will increase the impact that can be made, and help to reduce bureaucracy. The new Aimhigher will be outcome-focused, and will seek to identify and spread approaches which evidence shows to be most effective and which offer best value for money.

13.   The overall aim will be to widen participation in HE and increase the number of young people who have the abilities and aspirations to benefit from it. The single most important cause of the social class division in participation in HE is differential attainment in schools and colleges. Aimhigher will achieve a greater take-up of HE by under-represented groups, by seeking to raise current levels of attainment and aspiration. This will also contribute to the Government target of making progress towards 50 per cent participation of 18-30 year-olds by 2010.

14.   To achieve this vision, the new Aimhigher will:

a.   Consolidate the core aspects of the existing programmes, Aimhigher and Aimhigher: P4P.

b.   Build on local partnerships to develop coherent, planned approaches to raising aspiration, attainment and progression.

c.   Invest new resources to increase the breadth of schemes and to further address educational disadvantage. We are committed to funding all existing contractual obligations and activity previously announced under the two initiatives. We have clarified what these commitments are in Annex E.

d.   Support the consolidation and development of vocational pathways into higher education.

15.   Under the new Aimhigher, partnerships will continue to evolve, settle and develop after the submission of plans in June 2004. This will lead from the minimum of a co-ordinated local approach from June 2004, to a single coherent plan by August 2006.

16.   The primary target group will be 13-19 year-olds but partnerships can also work with other age groups where there is a clear justification for doing so. Aimhigher encompasses a wide range of activity designed to improve attainment, raise aspirations and otherwise facilitate progression to HE. This can include master classes, summer schools, teacher and curriculum development, mentoring, and joint work to articulate vocational progression routes to HE. (More information about vocational progression and work-based or work-related learning is in Annex B.) Key to the vision is a coherent and flexible menu of provision for those in the target groups as they progress through school, college or work-based learning.

17.   Aimhigher will operate at three levels. There will be some national projects and a regional tier, with 'lighter touch' management, with the vast majority of planning and activity taking place at sub-regional level. This is described as 'area' level throughout this guidance.

18.   The guidance has been developed to reflect the flexible and permissive framework called for by many practitioners. Plans will take account of local factors and therefore the approach will inevitably differ between areas. Areas should also recognise that the aim of the programme is to raise aspirations and attainment, not to address recruitment to individual institutions. They should provide appropriate opportunities for young people to experience higher education, which may mean operating across area and regional boundaries.

<u>What needs to be done?</u>

19.   The integrated programme will start on 1 August 2004. A plan is required from each area and region by 1 June 2004. The timescale and new focus on the sub-regional area requires planning to start as soon as possible. Bearing in mind the limited time available, and the fact that Aimhigher: P4P already has a sub-regional structure, we are asking Aimhigher: P4P sub-regional groups to convene initial meetings of all the major stakeholders in each area to agree how work will be taken forward.

20.   By 1 August 2004 we expect that:

a.   New joint planning and management structures (an Area Steering Group and Regional Forum) will be in place in each area and region.
b.   A clear understanding of the role of existing Aimhigher and Aimhigher: P4P partnerships and co-ordinators will be established.
c.   There will be agreed plans which set out the priorities and needs of each area and region; summarise the activity under the existing programmes which will roll forward during 2004 to 2006; and explain what new activity will be carried out with extra money.
d.   A lead institution will be identified in each region to act as banker for payments to HEIs; or in each area if they choose to appoint their own banker.
e.   There will be one mechanism for monitoring and one for evaluation.
f.   There will be a single Aimhigher brand and publicity.

Aims, objectives and outcomes

<u>Aim</u>

21.   Aimhigher is funded to widen participation in HE and increase the number of young people who have the abilities and aspirations to benefit from it.

22.   The focus for the programme is people from groups that are under-represented in HE, and it will therefore operate most intensively in deprived areas. By widening participation, we mean increasing the number of people in higher education from a range of under-represented groups, as defined in paragraphs 40-45.

23.   This aim supports the key proposals in the White Paper 'The future of higher education' to 'make certain that the opportunities that higher education brings are available to all those who have the potential to benefit from them, regardless of their background. This is not just about preventing active discrimination; it is about working actively to make sure that potential is recognised and fostered wherever it is found' (page 67).

<u>Objectives</u>

24.   The objectives of Aimhigher are:

•   to raise aspirations and motivation to enter HE among young people in schools, further education and workplace learning, who are from under-represented groups

•   to raise the attainment of potential HE students, who are from under-represented groups, so that they gain the academic or vocational qualifications and learning skills that will enable them to enter HE

•   to strengthen progression routes into HE via vocational courses, including Modern Apprenticeships, whether they are delivered in schools, colleges or the workplace

•   to raise students' aspirations to attend HE and to apply to the institution and/or course best able to match their abilities

•   to improve the attainment, aspirations, motivation and self-esteem of gifted and talented young people aged 14-19; and the quality of identification, provision and support for those students in schools and colleges.

25.   The programme is not specifically aimed at increasing the participation in HE of those who are not currently under-represented. However, we do not rule out some work with people who are not themselves from under-represented groups; for example, achievement-raising work across the whole age cohort in a school, which would raise the achievement and aspiration of both under-represented and non-under-represented students.

<u>Outcomes</u>

26.   The key outcome at national level will be increased participation rates in HE – as measured by the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate – of those from under-represented groups. We are currently exploring how best to measure participation at national

level by different groups. Since we will not be able to track all individual participants through into HE by 2006, *intermediate* indicators of success at the national level will be:

- increased application rates to the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) from under-represented groups

- improvements in attainment at levels 2 and 3 and equivalent, by those from under-represented groups (measured as average points score, and also as a proportion of students receiving top UCAS points)

- improvements in post-16 participation rates at level 3 by those from under-represented groups

- target groups (and intermediary groups such as parents) reporting increased positive attitudes and aspirations towards HE

- target groups (and intermediary groups such as parents) reporting increased awareness of higher education, including vocational routes, and the Aimhigher brand.

27. We would expect targets to be set at area level by partnerships. These would be collated regionally where appropriate, but we do not intend to set regional targets. We would not expect area targets to cover every outcome measure set out above. In general, we would leave it to partnerships to agree appropriate and realistic targets and associated methods of measuring. These could, in the long term, be the measures set out above.

28. We are bringing the 14-16 Gifted and Talented initiative into the integrated programme, to complement the existing work in Aimhigher (formerly Excellence Challenge) partnerships. In the joint communiqué issued in December, we said that we would consider adjusting strategic boundaries so that Aimhigher could support gifted and talented 14-19 year-olds, subject to views. We will provide a more detailed update on plans for this once they have been agreed by the Aimhigher National Partnership Board.

Planning, management and governance

29. A set of principles will inform the planning, management and governance processes for regional and local areas:

a. The programme will have a national framework and coverage, but will also recognise the need for a high level of self-determined regional and area flexibility.

b. Existing plans, and activities rolled forward under Aimhigher, will form the basis of the first plans by Area Steering Groups (ASGs). Existing commitments at regional level will form the basis of the first regional plans. Both plans will also need to include activities related to the additional funding.

c. Management arrangements will be light touch.

d. ASGs will produce a single, strategic plan. Regional Forums will do likewise. Initially these will cover the period August 2004 to July 2006 but the intention is that they will become

three-year plans and will roll forward annually. Further information on plans is given in paragraphs 58-65 below.

e.   ASGs and Regional Forums will review and monitor their plans regularly and supply annual progress reports to the funding bodies. This process will be clarified as part of the on-going work on monitoring.

f.   Planning structures and groups should be inclusive in terms of membership, with all sectors represented, and operate within national governance principles set by the National Partnership Board.

g.   ASGs and Regional Forums will set their own targets at the appropriate level, for existing activities and additional funding.

h.   Agreed processes for monitoring and evaluation will be established, with only one mechanism for the entire integrated process. These are essential for effective measurement of volume and impact.

i.   ASGs and Regional Forums will inform HEFCE how they want their allocations to be phased in order to fund the activities set out in their plans.

j.   Plans should meet the requirements of the Race Relations Amendment Act.[2]

k.   Support will be provided for the integration process.

30.   The overriding principle is that funding will be directed primarily to the delivery of activity on the ground. We are assuming for planning purposes that areas will be consistent with existing Aimhigher: P4P sub-regions, to make use of existing structures. As these do not always map across nationally recognised boundaries, we have used local LSC boundaries as the rational and consistent grouping to bring together existing Aimhigher and Aimhigher: P4P funding commitments. If areas do not retain the existing Aimhigher: P4P sub-regions, they may wish to use local LSC boundaries. The decision should involve all stakeholders and take account of the need for ASGs to include representation from, and engage effectively with, LEAs and schools.

31.   Aimhigher plans will cover a range of activities which seek to raise aspirations and attainment levels and enhance progression to higher education, particularly for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Aimhigher funding will support such activities according to identified needs but it cannot be used to fund programmes of study in partner institutions

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[2] All institutions within Aimhigher partnerships have a general duty under the Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000) to promote race equality. They are required to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and promote good relations between people of different racial groups This duty to promote race equality should be built into partnership agreements, and we would encourage partners to share the race equality policies of other institutions within the partnership to make sure that they are compatible.

Aimhigher structure

32.   The new Aimhigher structure is shown in Figure 1. It will involve:

a.   A range of projects at national level.

b.   A regional level. The regional groupings will ensure that guarantees that apply to existing Aimhigher: P4P activity and other regional commitments are met; manage the summer schools supported by the European Social Fund; continue existing cross-regional activity; and carry out other activities where economies of scale, consistency or spread of good practice can be achieved by undertaking them at regional level. Once funding commitments have been met, regions can agree to delegate some of their own funding to area level if that makes sense locally.

c.   An area level, where most of the planning and delivery takes place.

<u>Area Steering Groups</u>

33.   ASGs will be the level at which most planning takes place and where most activity is managed. In the first instance each ASG should be convened by the existing sub-regional Aimhigher: P4P group. At their first meetings, ASGs will need to decide how to select a chair, a process for drawing up a plan within the necessary timescale, full membership of the group, a communication strategy and, if desired, a sub-regional banker (an HEI or an FEC that is directly funded by HEFCE).

34.   Membership of ASGs should be inclusive and representative of all sectors, but groups should not be so large that they cannot act as a decision-making body. ASGs should ensure that the contribution of all publicly funded schools is considered, and not just those involved in the existing Aimhigher programme.

35.   It is up to each ASG to decide how it will manage activity within its area. It could, for example, form sub-groups to take forward more detailed planning, co-ordination, delivery and communication of a particular activity or theme.

Example: co-ordinating mentoring

In one sub-region there are three HEIs, seven FECs, a number of Advanced Modern Apprenticeship training providers, and 11 secondary schools. Rather than mentoring being designed, developed and delivered across a sub-region on several fronts, and quite possibly differently in different institutions, an activity management group with representatives from the appropriate institutions and sectors form a working group to ensure maximum coherence and effectiveness in planning activity for the area. This process ensures that individuals are given the widest possible choice, that the mentoring is best targeted, that duplication is minimised, <u>and that the process is most cost-effective of time and resources.</u>

<u>Regional Forums</u>

36.   A nominee from each of the ASGs in a particular region – possibly the chairs – will meet in a Regional Forum. They will share their plans, to ensure coherence and to ensure that, collectively, they respond to regional needs and priorities. The Regional Forum will

determine the level and scale of regional activity, including how the regional allocation of funds will be spent after existing commitments have been met, and will monitor delivery of any activity that takes place at regional level. The forum will include any regional co-ordinator, and a representative from the institution acting as banker in a region.

National Partnership Board

37.   The National Partnership Board (NPB) will be responsible for setting out the broad policy parameters and the overall management of the initiative. It will establish strategic direction, planning frameworks and guidance; determine funding formulae; develop principles and a framework for governance; and determine a communication policy. The NPB will consider any regional and area strategic plans that have been referred to it as raising significant concerns, and will therefore have the final say. It will also monitor impact and oversee evaluation.

Regional Partnership Boards

38.   Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) will be convened by HEFCE and the LSC and will meet two or three times a year. They will advise on the regional context for ASG plans and those drawn up by the Regional Forum. They will consider plans from within the region submitted by ASGs and the Regional Forum, and provide feedback. They will provide advice to the NPB on the approval of regional and area plans. Any plans which raise significant concerns will be referred to the NPB for consideration. RPBs will identify, in conjunction with ASGs, a regional (and if desirable sub-regional) lead institution to act as bankers. They will review and monitor regional activities, and establish any advisory group they consider appropriate.

39.   See Annex A for membership of the boards and groups described above.

Figure 1 Overall structure of Aimhigher
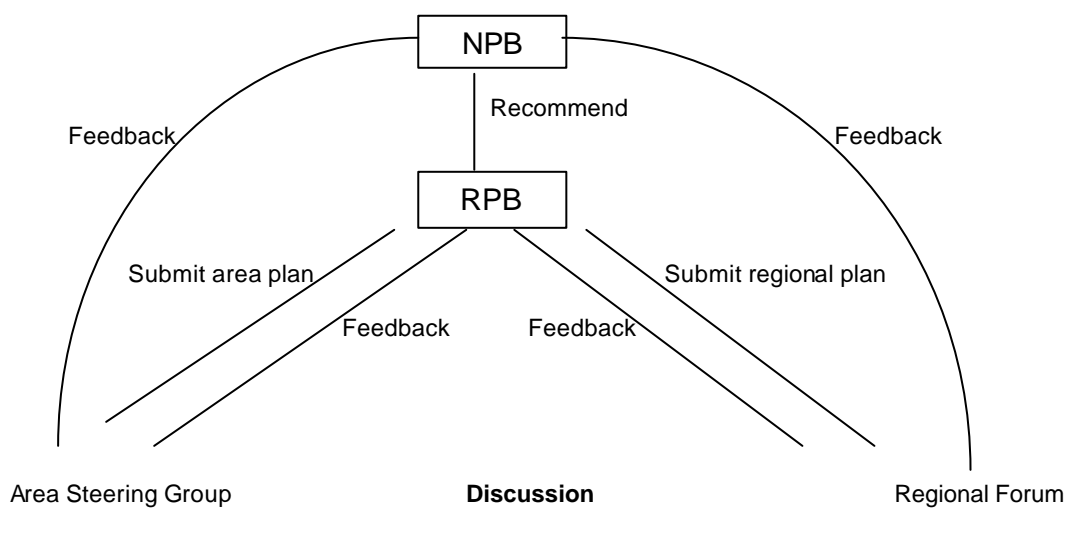
Target groups

40.   The main target groups for the integrated Aimhigher programme include:

•   young people aged 13-19 from groups that are under-represented in HE

•   adults 19+ from groups that are under-represented in HE.

41.   We would expect the bulk of activity to be directed towards 13-19 year-olds. We would also expect a greater emphasis on those aged under 30 than on older adults, since Aimhigher has been funded to support the target of working towards 50 per cent of 18-30 year-olds having experience of HE by 2010. However, partnerships would be able to carry out work with the over 30s where it is considered to be effective, for example because family learning has an effect both on the young target groups and on older learners. Similarly, partnerships can carry out some work with under 13s if they judge it to be affordable and effective. However, other funding streams are available for raising aspirations at Key Stage 2.

42.   By under-represented groups, we mean groups that are currently under-represented in HE at the national level or in certain types of institution or course. These include:

•   young people from neighbourhoods with lower than average HE participation

•   people from lower socio-economic groups

•   people living in deprived geographical areas, including deprived rural and coastal areas

•   people whose family have no experience of HE (either their parents or siblings), and young people in care

•   minority ethnic groups or sub-groups that are under-represented in HE, in certain subjects and in certain types of institution

•   groups that are currently under-represented in certain subject areas (for example, women in engineering), or in certain types of institution

•   disabled people. We would expect all activities to be inclusive of disabled people. However, we would also expect some activities to specifically target disabled people.

43.   The National Disability Team and Skill have recently undertaken a scoping study of existing resources and studies of aspiration-raising for disabled people within Aimhigher: P4P (published at www.actiononaccess.org). The findings show that disabled people are not always overtly considered as a target group within current activities. However, a wide range of practice and activities has been identified and could be promoted within the Aimhigher programme plans.

44.   For the Gifted and Talented strand of the programme, the focus will be on those under-represented in HE, but the target groups would include other gifted and talented learners who

have the potential to benefit from HE but who might not otherwise do so. This will be clarified in forthcoming information on the web.

45.   Partnerships may wish to prioritise other target groups that are under-represented in HE in their region or area. We do not necessarily expect all partnerships to target all of these groups; however, the plan will need to demonstrate the evidence used to identify the specific target groups.

Funding

46.   The new Aimhigher will be funded from a joint pot of money, and the regional and area funds will be allocated by a formula that reflects both existing commitments, and measures of deprivation (a combination of attainment at school age, and HE participation). A funding allocation model has been developed, and was circulated for consultation as part of the December Aimhigher update.

47.   A set of principles underpin funding arrangements:

a.   Funding will be concentrated on front-end activity in schools, colleges, universities and workplace providers, with minimum amounts spent on overheads.

b.   Areas and regions will each have their own allocations of funds.

c.   A formula has been used, but regions and areas should note that they will not be issued extra funds pro-rata to their current levels of funding.

d.   Guarantees have been made to Aimhigher: P4P regional partnerships, to Aimhigher partnerships in Excellence in Cities (EiC) areas, to Education Action Zones (EAZs), and those Excellence Clusters receiving Aimhigher funding on 31 December 2003. ASGs and Regional Forums can fund new activities only from any surplus allocation above that required to meet the guarantees. Surplus allocations have been determined according to a formula based on attainment at school age and HE participation, but this is not intended as a guide as to how allocations should be spent locally between different types of activity.

e.   Regional Forums have been provided with sufficient funds to meet existing commitments, and funds for additional activities, which they can delegate in part to ASGs if they wish.

f.   Over time as the guarantees and commitments come to an end, the amount of flexibility at area and regional level will increase.

48.   Funding arrangements will enable longer-term planning over the full period of the initiative and have minimum restrictions caused by funding technicalities.

Table 1 Indicative funds available

Source	2004-05	2005-06
Existing Aimhigher: P4P baseline	£20 M	£20M
Summer schools*	£4 M	£4 M
Excellence Challenge baseline	£35 M	£35 M
Additional funding per year	£59.5 M	£63.2 M
Totals available	**£118.5 M**	**£122.2 M**

*Summer schools funds will remain ring-fenced due to European Social Fund commitments.

<u>Funding allocations</u>

49.   In December 2003 we issued provisional funding allocations for areas and regions, and indicated that we would be undertaking further work in January 2004 to verify this data. We will issue corrected allocations shortly, as well as more detailed information on the background to the funding methodology used.

<u>Flow of money</u>

50.   The programme will be managed by HEFCE. However, of necessity, funding will flow through three routes:

a.   Funds for pre-16 provision will flow through the standards fund, as they currently do. The exception is for EAZs, where DfES will continue to provide funds for pre-16 provision directly.

b.   Funds for post-16 provision at sixth forms in schools will also be provided through the standards fund, except in EAZs where the DfES will provide it direct.

c.   Payments for sixth form colleges and FECs, level 2 and 3 workplace provision, and HE will be provided by HEFCE through the institutions appointed by ASGs as regional or sub-regional bankers.

51.   ASGs and Regional Forums will tell HEFCE what funding is to be provided to which institution, and through which route, in accordance with the above principles. This is similar to arrangements which apply under the previous Aimhigher (Excellence Challenge) programme. We are devising the appropriate forms, on behalf of the National Partnership Board. These will be issued shortly, in time for allocations to flow from the start of the new academic year. We will provide further information about this in the funding update to be issued shortly.

52.   For HE money flowing through HEFCE, existing Aimhigher: P4P regional banker institutions will receive the regional level funds. These institutions have existing contractual arrangements within Aimhigher: P4P, and we would not wish to alter these arrangements for regional level funding to HEIs. Some Aimhigher: P4P sub-regions also have local HEIs acting as an area banker. Aimhigher ASGs may wish to adopt similar arrangements, with either the existing local HEI used by the Aimhigher: P4P sub-region or another institution. The regional or area banker would be responsible for receiving the funds for the partnership and disseminating them to partners, but it does not have responsibility for agreeing the plan. Plans will need to include a sum to cover any administration costs of the banker.

<u>Funding year</u>

53.   The programme will operate on the academic year and, as far as possible, we intend to provide funding on that basis as well. For both the existing Aimhigher and Aimhigher: P4P programmes the guarantees cease at the end of March 2006. We cannot commit past this date as it is the end of the current spending review period. However, we see the integrated Aimhigher programme as a long-term commitment, and hope that we will be able to sustain activity post 2006. Once the Government has announced its spending plans for the following three-year period, we will announce funding for the complete academic year.

54.   We are providing bridging arrangements between the end of the financial year 2003-04 and the start of the academic year 2004-05.

<u>Regional money</u>

55.   We will allocate a pot of money at the regional level, the use of which will be determined by the Regional Forums. This will be explained further, and regional amounts set out, in the funding document to be issued on the web shortly, once we have agreed commitments with partnerships. This money will be allocated using the same formula as the area funding, to ensure that all existing commitments will be met. These commitments include the matched funding for the European Social Fund (where this exceeds the regional amount available for summer schools), regional co-ordination and communications, and the thematic partnerships in the London region.

<u>National money</u>

56.   There will be a national pot of money to fund activities such as work that can be disseminated nationally, or subject-specific work at a national level that may be used by institutions within the Aimhigher programme. We intend to issue a call for expressions of interest in February 2004.

<u>Timetable</u>

57.   Table 2 gives the timetable for funding.

Table 2 Timetable for allocation of funds

April-July 2004	P4P partnerships, Excellence Clusters, EAZs and Aimhigher partnerships continue to receive funds through existing funding routes to meet guarantees and other agreed commitments. This will be at the rate of 4/12ths of their guarantees/annual allocations.
April	We distribute forms to enable ASGs and Regional Forums to set down how they wish their funding allocations to be distributed, and to whom, within the above principles.
By 1 June	ASGs and Regional Forums submit their plans and completed funding forms.
August onwards	Partners start to receive funds according to their profiles and/or the funding arrangements for the relevant funding streams (such as the standards fund).

Submission of strategic plans for 2004-06

58.   Regions and areas will need to develop, by June 2004, strategic plans covering the period August 2004 to July 2006. Such plans should show that the existing Aimhigher: P4P plans, and activities planned by Aimhigher partnerships in EiCs, by EAZs and Excellence Clusters, have been mapped and shared, and that a process has begun to bring these plans together.

59.   Especially at area level, strategic plans will concentrate activities (and funding) on raising aspirations and attainment in schools, sixth form and further education colleges, and workplace learning providers; and outreach from HEIs. They will need to take account of existing guarantees and commitments first. The focus is therefore not to re-write existing plans but to address the shift towards integration, and the use of additional funding.

60.   The purpose of the strategic plan is to highlight the needs of the area and region and show how they will be addressed in the period up to July 2006. The format will be determined by the areas or regions themselves in order to provide appropriate flexibility. However, the plan will need to address:

a.   The geographical boundaries (the area covered by the strategic plan). The boundaries should be drawn to reflect 'cross-border' issues, for example ensuring that an appropriate commitment is made to work with feeder schools and colleges outside the immediate locality.
b.   The characteristics of the area or region, identifying those areas where attention needs to be focused, where effort will be targeted, and funds spent.
c.   The partners involved in the planning and delivery of activity, including the existing Aimhigher partnerships in that area.
d.   The commitments made to existing activity, and new activity.
e.   Governance and management arrangements which will be put in place from August 2004.
f.   Targets (determined by the ASG for the area plan, and by the Regional Forum for the regional plan). We are not asking partnerships to identify a completely new set of targets. However, area plans should clearly identify the existing targets for Aimhigher (Excellence Challenge) and Aimhigher: P4P, and how these will be adapted or supplemented between 2004 and 2006 to reflect the extra funding that will be available and any new areas of activity.
g.   How a single, coherent plan for Aimhigher will be achieved by 2006.
h.   The target group(s) for additional activities, and the rationale for selecting those groups.
i.   Identification of the banker institution (at regional and/or area level).

Annual action plan

61.   We expect the strategic plan for August 2004 to July 2006 to contain an annual action plan. This action plan will be revised annually to reflect any changes in funding, activities and targets, as well as updating payment profiles where necessary. It should set out funding, activities and targets from the existing Aimhigher: P4P and Aimhigher (Excellence Challenge)

plans, as well as for the new funding for the integrated programme. The action plan should also include progress to be made in that year towards integrating the initiatives, with appropriate milestones.

62.   The overarching strategic plan for an area might state that it is prioritising mentoring as an important activity in which to invest, and list the groups to target during this period. The action plan would then set out the funding and activities for that year to meet this priority, and would identify targets against which progress could be monitored.

Links with other strategies and plans

63.   Aimhigher plans will be delivered in the context of a national drive to increase attainment, and to increase the percentage of the population with higher level skills and qualifications. However, it is equally important that plans should link to local area plans, for example:

- strategic area reviews
- LSC strategic area reviews
- OFSTED/Adult Learning Inspectorate area inspections
- 14-19 strategies
- Connexions service plans
- LEA development plans
- school development plans where appropriate
- widening participation and related strategies of HEIs and FECs
- other strategies related to local LSCs.

64.   Where appropriate, plans should also refer to regional and national plans, such as those from Regional Development Agencies and the National Skills Strategy, and have regard to the planning remit of these agencies.

65.   We do not expect plans to show how they link with each strategy, but partnerships should provide assurances that they have done so. Further guidance on planning activities is given in Annex D.

Example: developing a strategic plan for a region
Aimhigherland

Context
Aimhigherland is a medium-sized region with a mixture of conurbations, seaboard and a rural hinterland. Within Aimhigherland there are five generally accepted sub-regions or areas of local activity, including Metropolis and Hillbeach.

Metropolis is a sprawling conurbation with an inner city heart and relatively more prosperous suburbs. Participation rates in HE from most of the area's schools and colleges are lower than the national average, and the attainment rate at GCSE is 15 per cent below the national average. However in some schools the participation and attainment rates are significantly above the national average.

Metropolis consists of five LEAs, two of which (A and B) contain EAZs. These EAZs have funding guarantees until January 2005, when they cease operations. There are two EiC Excellence Challenge Partnerships (in LEAs C and D). These have Aimhigher (Excellence Challenge) plans until March 2004 and funding guarantees to 2006. The Aimhigher: P4P plans for the whole of Metropolis are approved until 2006. In one LEA (E) there is an Excellence Cluster which came into being in September 2003. It is not currently participating in Aimhigher and has no funding guarantee.

Another sub-region is *Hillbeach,* which has one LEA covering a large geographical area. It has a sparse population and a number of small towns with either a specific industrial base or reliant on a rural economy. Participation and attainment rates vary across the sub-region and there are pockets of severe educational disadvantage. Hillbeach benefits from activities within the regional P4P plan, and has three Excellence Clusters, created before September 2003. They have funding guarantees until 2006. There are no LEA-wide Excellence Challenge plans.

Plan requirements
In the Aimhigher strategic plans to be submitted in June 2004 both the Metropolis and Hillbeach plans will need to:

- demonstrate that they have established an ASG that will plan, monitor and ensure delivery of all Aimhigher activity in that area
- show that there are governance arrangements for the ASGs which comply with the national principles
- establish the existing commitments and make sure they are appropriately funded until the end of the guarantee.

This means that Metropolis will have some additional flexibility over its allocation when the EAZs cease operations in January 2005 and the guarantee expires with them. For Hillbeach, the guarantees for the Excellence Clusters and P4P will continue through to 2006, so the ASG must use its allocation to meet these guarantees first.

Writing the plan
Each area will need to write a strategic plan for 2004-06, which will incorporate an annual action plan.

The strategic plan should include the following:

- allocations of funding, demonstrating how existing activities undertaken by Aimhigher (Excellence Challenge) and Aimhigher: P4P will be integrated to ensure that the plans are complementary
- allocations of additional funding, focusing on the target groups to achieve a measurable impact in terms of raising aspirations, attainment levels and progression
- mechanisms for delivering the plan, for example lead institutions may be responsible for particular strands of activity
- a monitoring and review mechanism.

The annual action plan will include details of how funding will be allocated each year, including appropriate targets and milestones for that period.

This means that the Metropolis ASG should include within its strategic plan what will happen with activities currently taking place in EAZs, given that the EAZs will cease in January 2005. It should ensure that any additional activities or possible changes in focus are incorporated into the overall plan. The ASG may have to revise the annual action plan for 2005-06 to take into account any changes in funding and activities when the EAZs cease in January 2005.

The Hillbeach and Metropolis ASGs must assess participation and attainment rates, and areas of severe educational disadvantage, to identify target groups or areas for urgent attention. These should be matched against regional priorities. These can then be included in the ASGs' annual action plans. The Regional Forum will have responsibility for the planning and delivery of region wide activities which will include existing commitments and any further agreed activity. They will also look at coherence and consistency across the area plans.

Finally, the ASGs and the Regional Forum will submit their plans to the Regional Partnership Board.

Key milestones to 2006

66.   Table 3 sets out key milestones for the integrated Aimhigher programme to 2006.

Table 3 Key milestones for Aimhigher

30 January 2004	Guidance published
February-May 2004	Planning period, including meetings of ASGs and Regional Forums as appropriate
March 2004	Regional Partnership Boards meet
March 2004	Planning events held
1 June 2004	Plans submitted to the RPBs
End June 2004	RPBs meet and make recommendations, and submit plans they have not recommended to the National Partnership Board
Mid July 2004	NPB meets and considers proposals
Late July 2004	Feedback to partnerships on any funding conditions
August 2004	Aimhigher: P4P regional co-ordinators submit monitoring reports relating to August 2003 to July 2004 to HEFCE/LSC. This is the final year of monitoring as two separate programmes
August 2004	New activities start
August 2005	ASGs submit annual monitoring returns relating to August 2004 to July 2005, and proposed action plans for 2005-06
September 2005	RPBs consider monitoring return and proposed action plan and make recommendations to NPB
October 2005	First national report on the impact of Aimhigher
January 2006	NPB and RPBs set national and regional framework for full Aimhigher integration from August 2006 (to examine what should be in new plans)
June 2006	Strategic plans produced (subject to funding)
August 2006	New fully integrated Aimhigher begins (subject to funding).

Monitoring and evaluation

67.   A set of principles will inform the monitoring and evaluation processes for regional and sub-regional/local areas:

     a.   Processes for monitoring and evaluation (and only one mechanism for the entire integrated process) are crucial for an effective programme, and to enable effective measurement of volume and impact.

     b.   Monitoring mechanisms must be integrated with the evaluation process.

     c.   The processes of monitoring and evaluation will be differentiated for national, regional, and local area levels.

     d.   We must build on what exists, including existing and planned evaluations of Excellence Challenge and Aimhigher: Partnerships for Progression.

<u>Monitoring</u>

68.   The NPB will provide the national steer for monitoring of the programme, receive monitoring feedback from the RPBs, and be responsible for overall monitoring. It will monitor budgets, targets and outcomes, but will also be concerned with overarching national policies and seek to ensure that the partnerships are taking account of these policies and strategies (such as the 14-19 agenda and the National Skills Strategy).

69.   Monitoring at a local area level will be the responsibility of the ASGs reporting to the RPBs on targets, outcomes, budgets and activities.   In some cases, the RPB will raise any concerns, provide advice, and report back to the NPB as appropriate.

70.   The main criteria against which the NPB and RPBs will assess annual monitoring reports include the following:

     a.   Addressing the aims and objectives.

     b.   Delivering activities set out in plans.

     c.   Working towards targets set out in plans.

     d.   Meeting local priorities.

     e.   Adding value to other widening participation targets (for example of schools, FECs and HEIs).

     f.   Working towards national HE widening participation goals set by the Government.

     g.   Giving value for money.

     h.   Including other HEIs, FECs and key partners in the region.

i.   Ensuring that neither serious duplication nor omissions occur.

71.   Area and regional partnerships will set their own targets, and monitor progress towards these targets, which will be collated at the regional level. Partnerships may wish to set and monitor targets at the school and college level, in order to satisfy themselves that funding is being allocated appropriately. They may also wish to set targets at the ward level based on the data on participation issued by HEFCE (POLAR). We will continue to collect POLAR data at the national level and make it freely available to areas and regions for planning and monitoring purposes. However, we will not prescribe the nature of these targets, and will not require partnerships to report in detail on progress towards targets at individual schools and colleges. Partnerships will record such information as they need in order to monitor progress towards targets but will not be required to return details of all participants in Aimhigher. Partnerships will determine their needs for activity monitoring for the purposes of their annual monitoring return to the RPB.

Evaluation

72.   The funders are developing a national evaluation strategy, which aims to measure how far the programme achieves its aim of supporting increasing participation rates in HE, whether part-time or full-time, of those from under-represented groups. The key outcome is increased admission rates to HE of those from under-represented groups.

73.   A team will carry out a quantitative and qualitative evaluation, in order to establish national progress towards the indicators of success. This will include qualitative interviews, case studies, and, subject to feasibility, an extension of the survey methodology currently used for the Excellence Challenge evaluation. We are also exploring the extent to which national databases can be used to obtain information on outcomes achieved by school-age students at local level. If possible these databases will be linked and used by the national evaluation team to report outcomes achieved at regional and area level. We expect to provide further details of the national evaluation strategy in March 2004.

74.   We need to tie this national evaluation strategy into regional and area evaluation work. We aim to ensure that area and regional partnership evaluation activity complements and does not duplicate work undertaken for the national evaluation. Similarly, we will ensure that the outputs of area and regional evaluation are available to the national evaluation team. Partnerships are invited to set aside funding for evaluation in their plans at the area and/or regional level. Where funding is set aside at the area level, we would expect the region to provide a co-ordinating role for all evaluation.

75.   We are working with partnerships to draw up a 'menu' of potential evaluation projects considered to be both feasible and, in principle, desirable for understanding Aimhigher. We will discuss this at the Action on Access seminar on research and evaluation on 5 February 2004, and will issue more details after this. These will include a list of potential projects, possibly with measures of the impact of single activities, case studies, interviews and surveys.

76.   Once the menu has been compiled, partnerships will be invited to buy evaluation work from it according to their own needs and priorities. Selected projects will then be centrally put out to competitive tender. The successful contractors will conduct the evaluation research, managed at the national level but involving partnerships as appropriate (for example, through

a steering group). The intention is to create as small a burden as possible on partnerships, and to ensure best value for money. Partnerships who wish to discuss the menu are invited to contact Fiona Reid (e-mail f.reid@hefce.ac.uk).

77.   We recognise that some partnerships will want to carry out their own evaluation, outside of the evaluation menu. All forms of monitoring and evaluation must have due regard to the burden on institutions. LEAs and schools already have mechanisms for recording student attainment. Where possible, existing mechanisms, and the information arising from them, must be used and no additional burden on schools should arise. We would also recommend that large scale survey or tracking work is not developed by partnerships until it is clearer what the national evaluation will deliver and at what level it will report findings. We are keen to avoid respondent fatigue through the same Aimhigher participant being surveyed by both the national and regional or area evaluations.

Communication strategy

78.   We are currently looking at the national communication strategies of both Aimhigher (Excellence Challenge) and Aimhigher: P4P. We have commissioned a review to map what exists, and to recommend what strategy we should be developing for a coherent approach to communications. The outcomes of this review will be reported to a sub-group of the NPB, and we will provide further updates to the sector on our progress.

Support for Aimhigher

79.   Support for the new Aimhigher will be required at national, regional and area level. Action on Access is the national co-ordinating team appointed by HEFCE and the LSC to support Aimhigher: P4P, and it will continue to support the new integrated Aimhigher. The team currently works with institutions from both the higher and further education sectors through a network of regional and area advisers, who support regional Aimhigher: P4P partnerships in each of the nine English regions.

80.   The role of Action on Access is not to monitor but to advise the partnerships in the regions, to support evaluation, and to help individual partnerships meet their aims and objectives. Specifically, the regional and area advisers will:

- support partnerships in developing and implementing activities in the region and local areas
- provide advice and support as needed or requested
- assist with management, dissemination, monitoring and evaluation, and ensuring plans are in place
- inform partnerships of national developments
- share information across partnerships, disseminating good practice and encouraging collaboration
- identify staff development needs within teams.

81.   The Action on Access advisers will give wider support to the process as a whole by attending appropriate groups, providing reports and advice, and acting as a channel of communication between regional partnerships and the funding bodies. They will also provide

informal feedback to the partnerships from the RPBs, help partnerships address the requirements of the NPB, and contribute to and attend regional and area events.

82.   Action on Access will identify and disseminate good practice in delivery, staff training and development, undertake commissioned research, and inform and advise the relevant policies of both funding councils. It has already established strategic partnerships with the National Disability Team, and the Learning and Teaching Support Network.

83.   The Action on Access web-site, www.actiononaccess.org, and the Aimhigher programme web-site, www.aimhigher.ac.uk/programme, are used to communicate with all those planning and delivering the activities, and to disseminate formal messages from the NPB.

Annex A
Membership of Aimhigher management structures

National Partnership Board

Association of Colleges
Business representative
Connexions service
DfES
Department of Health
Government Office
HEFCE
HEFCE Board member
Local education authority
LSC
LSC Council member
National Union of Students
Regional Development Agencies
Secondary Heads Association
Standing Conference of Principals
Teacher Training Agency
Universities UK

Observer: Action on Access

Regional Partnership Boards
The following should be invited:
Association of Colleges
Connexions service
Government Office
HE Association
HEFCE
LSC
Regional Development Agency
Schools representative
In attendance: Action on Access

The chair may wish to invite the chairs of ASGs, and any regional co-ordinators, as observers. (Additional members can be co-opted onto the group if necessary to ensure all sectors are fairly represented, such as health.) Initially, a DfES representative may attend as an observer to offer advice and guidance on appropriate areas (such as Gifted and Talented provision)

Area Steering Groups
Representatives from:
Aimhigher (Excellence Challenge)
Further education
Higher education
Schools

Work-based learning providers
LEAs

Other stakeholders as appropriate (with consideration given to the need for parity)
In attendance: Action on Access

Funding bodies may wish to join this group from time to time as observers, where appropriate

Regional Forum
Any Regional Co-ordinator
Lead institution as banker
Nominees from ASGs in region
In attendance: Action on Access

Annex B
Vocational and work-based learning routes into HE

1.   It is recognised that a key area for Aimhigher to address is the barriers to progression to higher education for vocational and work-based learners. Aimhigher partnerships are encouraged to engage in activity which maps progression routes and identifies gaps and barriers. Subsequent work may include supporting partners to address such gaps and barriers, including supporting curriculum development across partnerships. However Aimhigher partnerships will not fund course provision in partner institutions.

Example: course provision in partner institutions

An ASG identifies that local people on NVQ level 3 programmes in colleges and the workplace are having difficulty progressing to level 4 programmes (HNCs and foundation degrees) in local FECs and at the local HEI. Some who have progressed have not had the level of study skills required and have left the courses. The ASG therefore commissions the FECs, a work-based learning provider and the higher education institution to develop a study skills package for these learners to be delivered alongside their NVQ and to be used as a bridging unit to higher education. The unit, when developed, is accredited at level 3 by the Open College Network and offered to NVQ learners in the colleges and workplace. The delivery of this new programme is funded in the normal way in the partner institutions and not by Aimhigher. The admissions tutors for the higher education programme in the colleges and the HEI recognise successful completion of the study skills programme as evidence of the ability to study at this level.

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2.   It is useful to make a distinction between work-related and work-based learning, although learners may move between pathways several times during their progression to higher education.

Work-related or vocational provision

3.   This is largely taught in FECs or HEIs and may involve a period of work or professional experience. Qualifications include vocational GCSEs, vocational A-levels, BTEC certificates and diplomas, some foundation degrees, and vocational degrees. Part-time learners may be in work but the typical learner is 16-19 years-old and studying full-time in school or college before progressing to employment or higher education.

4.   The development of more vocational programmes for 14-19 year-olds through LSC Flexibility Funding, and vocational GCSEs and Centres of Vocational Excellence, will produce significant growth in demand for vocational pathways into higher education.

Work-based learning

5.   Work-based learning involves significant elements of work-based assessment, may involve attending courses in FE or HE, is focused on the needs of the employer and employee, is for people in employment, and can be at all National Qualification Framework and HE levels. Qualifications include NVQs, professional body qualifications, and foundation

degrees. One example is Modern Apprenticeship programmes, some of which require significant college attendance for the technical certificate but the NVQ is obtained through work-based assessment.

6.	Both work-related and work-based learning routes to HE are a priority for Aimhigher, and success in this area will contribute significantly to widening participation in higher education.

<u>Working with the local LSC</u>

7.	The LSC regards both P4P and Aimhigher (Excellence Challenge) activities as part of its local planning process. Ideally, the two initiatives are informed by and feed into local strategic plans and the new strategic area reviews (StARs). The role of the LSC in both programmes is to ensure that vocational pathways from school, college and work-based learning providers to HE are considered as part of LSC initiatives such as Centres of Vocational Excellence, and Success for All.

8.	The key links within the Aimhigher programme are with the National Skills Strategy[3] and the 14-19 strategy [4]. Aimhigher partnerships should ensure synergy with their local LSC's planning process and in particular the StARs. The other key local LSC links are with Centres of Vocational Excellence in FE, which are required to develop progression routes to HE, Work Force Development Plans, and Modern Apprenticeship plans. Some local LSCs are developing higher education strategies, and Aimhigher plans should link with these.

<u>Examples of vocational and work-based learning activities in Aimhigher plans</u>

9.	Work-related or vocational learning activities:

- working with Centres of Vocational Excellence to ensure progression routes are in place

- linking with 14-19 curriculum developments – vocational GCSEs, and LSC Flexibility Funding activities to develop progression routes to HE

- supporting the development of vocational Access to HE programmes, targeted for example at unemployed adults and women returning to work, in co-operation with the Open College Network and local FE and HE providers

- working with FECs and schools to ensure progression to HE from existing vocational programmes – vocational A-levels, BTEC, craft and technician programmes. (Current progression rates to HE from vocational programmes are half those for students with equivalent A-levels)

- supporting work which ensures the articulation and full credit recognition between HNC/HNDs delivered in FECs and other vocational HE and degree programmes.

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[3] '21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential', DfES, DTI, DWP, HM Treasury, July 2003.
[4] '14-19 Opportunity and Excellence', DfES January 2003.

10.   Work-based learning activities include:

- mapping and supporting the development of routes into foundation and other degrees, and supporting the development of new foundation degrees for Modern Apprentices. This includes working with Sector Skills Councils, and ensuring linkage with the local LSC plans for developing Modern Apprenticeships

- working with Sector Skills Councils, employer organisations, and trade unions to identify and support the development of work-based learning progression to higher education, including foundation degrees

- working with higher education providers to support the development of learning, teaching and support strategies which reflect the needs of work-based learners who are studying part time

- identifying regional skills shortage areas at level 3 and supporting the development of progression to HE in those areas

- working with the LSC and local employers to identify adults in the workforce with existing level 3 qualifications and encouraging them to progress to HE

- linking with any local LSC pilot projects with employers

- working with the local LSC to identify cohorts on work-based (in-house) learning programmes leading to NVQ 3, for whom continuing professional development programmes could be developed

- supporting the development of accreditation of prior (experiential) learning schemes for vocational pathways.

11.   Other learning activities in Aimhigher plans could include:

- supporting work to raise awareness among HE admissions tutors of vocational and work-based learning qualifications

- working with the LTSN on the development of teaching and learning strategies for vocational and work-based learners

- working with Connexions and Information, Advice and Guidance Partnerships to develop personal advisers' awareness of new learner pathways, and to create local referral networks across all guidance providers including schools, colleges and higher education

- supporting staff development for careers advisers in schools and colleges about new curriculum and learner pathways

- working with disabled people, whose impairments might provide additional challenges in taking part in work-based learning, which has knock-on progression issues.

Annex C
Partnerships for Progression and Excellence Challenge

Partnerships for Progression

1.   Partnerships for Progression (P4P) is a programme funded by HEFCE and the LSC, operating between April 2003 and March 2006. It aims to support and extend partnerships between higher and further education, with dedicated staff to develop and deliver regional plans of work in schools, further education and training provider programmes. It has a regional (and sub-regional or local) structure for planning, monitoring, strategic direction, staff development and dissemination.

2.   Regionally co-ordinated P4P activities include summer schools, mentoring and shadowing, developing HE in FE, HE progression for work-based learners and Advanced Modern Apprenticeships. There is also a national programme of research, evaluation and dissemination.

3.   Within all regions there is a sub-regional structure responsible for the organisation and co-ordination of activities locally, against an agreed plan. An explicit aim of this programme is cultural change within further and higher education. The programme is monitored by HEFCE and the LSC.

Aimhigher (Excellence Challenge)

4.   This programme is funded by the DfES, and is operating between September 2001 and 2006. It funds partnerships and collaborative working between schools, colleges and universities in disadvantaged areas. The aim is to encourage and support young people to increase attainment, raise aspirations and enable them to apply successfully to higher education. It is organised through EiC areas, EAZs and Excellence Clusters, and is therefore more locally focused than P4P in terms of the planning and organisation of activities.

5.   Activities include study support programmes in schools and colleges; a variety of extra classes, summer schools and mentoring programmes; visits to and taster programmes at FECs and HEIs; and information, advice and support to young people and their families about higher education, application procedures, choice of institutions, study support and financial matters. The activities are spread across schools, further education providers and training providers.

Annex D
Planning for Aimhigher activities

1.   The planning, organisation and support of Aimhigher activity will fall naturally into three levels: national, regional, and local areas or sub-regions. (Activities may be organised at each level but with differing levels of engagement.)

National activities

2.   These will add value to what can be delivered at a more local level, in particular bringing together aspects of activity that will benefit the deliverers. Further details will be available separately. We will invite bids to deliver activity that would operate more effectively at national level, or innovative practice which it would be beneficial to roll out nationally. For example this may include translating good practice at a sub-regional level into a national environment.

Regional activities

3.   Regional activities will build on those delivered at a local area level. They will include activities that can be most appropriately co-ordinated at a regional level, and through which good practice can be identified and shared across area boundaries. Examples include:

a.   Staff development for co-ordinators, teachers, lecturers and trainers.

b.   Dissemination events.

c.   Summer schools co-ordinated over the region, including those for work-based learners.

d.   Training and development of steering group members.

e.   Development of specific aspects such as progression agreements, working with employers, work-based learning, addressing regional higher level skills needs and working with disabled people.

f.   Raising awareness of teachers about the benefits and experience of HE.

Local area activities

4.   These could include:

a.   Student ambassadors.

b.   Master classes.

c.   Mentoring.

d.   Aiming for a College Education (ACE) days.

e.   School-based or college-based attainment and awareness raising activities.

f.   Joint school/FE/HE curriculum planning and development to articulate vocational progression routes, linking with Centres of Vocational Excellence.

g.   Summer schools.

h.   Foundation degrees:

- supporting the development of HE in FE

- promoting progression agreements, including employer compacts

- facilitating HE progression (especially to foundation degrees) from work-based learning, including Modern Apprenticeships.

i.   Working with Information, Advice and Guidance Partnerships to develop guidance networks to support progression to HE.

j.   Specific 'taster days' to enable disabled students to experience HE.

k.   Seminars bringing together a range of stakeholders to share knowledge and existing practice, and to identify priority issues for the area.

Activity Management Groups

5.   Management within an area can be self-determined. However one possible model is the formation of Activity Management Groups, to assist with the co-ordination and planning of a key activity. All parties in an area involved in the activity should be members of this group, which would be responsible to the sub-region for the delivery of a particular strand. A co-ordinator would need to be appointed for a specified period. Reports on strand activity would be sent to the sub-region to inform their monitoring reports, and to assure the sub-region that activities are progressing as expected.

6.   Membership of the Activity Management Group would vary according to the activity. So, for student ambassadors the group might represent Aimhigher (Excellence Challenge), schools, HE and FE. For work-based learning, members might represent employers, training providers, FE and HE. A number of activities will relate directly to local LSC activities (work-based learning, vocational pathways to HE, Modern Apprenticeship pathways), and it would be appropriate to have a member of the local LSC.

Annex E
Existing Aimhigher (Excellence Challenge) commitments

1.   This annex sets out what is meant by existing commitments in relation to existing Aimhigher partnerships.

2.   EAZs only have guarantees until they cease operations. Existing Aimhigher plans run to the end of March 2004, but we would expect partnerships to continue the planned activities to 2006, and to develop these alongside the existing Aimhigher: P4P plans and plans for additional funding. All existing Aimhigher partnerships in EiC areas will continue to receive funding at their current levels until 2006. Excellence Clusters that were receiving Aimhigher funding on 31 December 2003 also have funding guaranteed until 2006.

3.   In addition, some funding may switch to Aimhigher from EiC provision for activities with gifted and talented young people aged 14-16; how this process will work will be clarified in upcoming guidance. These funds for gifted and talented provision will also be guaranteed and ring fenced until 2006. Arrangements on gifted and talented funding depend crucially on whether or not the partnership or cluster is protected by the funding guarantees. Former EAZs transforming into clusters and new clusters that are not covered by the funding guarantees will continue to receive funding for gifted and talented education for 14-16 year-olds through the Excellence Clusters programme. Before the expiry of the guarantees in April 2006, they will not receive dedicated funding to extend their gifted and talented strand to 16-19 year-olds, because they have not received funding for this purpose under the existing Aimhigher (Excellence Challenge) programme. They will however be free to use their funding for 14-16 year-olds to make transitional arrangements for gifted and talented students moving on to post-16 education on completion of Year 11. They will also have access to all resources and materials developed to support 14-19 gifted and talented education within Aimhigher. ASGs and Regional Forums may wish to consider sympathetically any requests from clusters to support such transitional arrangements.

4.   Table 4 below sets out the guarantees for EAZs, and those Excellence Clusters that do not have guarantees until 2006. This clarifies which LEAs or areas will be affected, and the date at which the commitment ends.

Table 4 Guarantees for EAZs and Excellence Clusters

Group	LEAs/Areas	Commitment
Excellence Clusters starting September 2003	Ashford Bexley Boston Chesterfield Grantham Gravesend Harlow Havering Maidstone Northampton Scunthorpe Spalding Swindon	These Excellence Clusters will join the new programme and will be able to seek funds via their ASGs. There is no funding associated with these clusters in the sub-regional commitments.

EAZs transforming to Excellence Clusters from 31 December 2003	East Basildon East Brighton Halifax Plymouth Thetford Leigh (Wigan)	We will provide bridging funding from 1 January to 31 July 2004 to ensure that there is no gap in funding. These clusters will need to seek funds for the period after July 2004 from the ASG.
EAZ transforming to Excellence Clusters from 5 September 2004	Hamilton Oxford	The commitment to the activity within this EAZ ends in September 2004; the resulting cluster will need to seek funds through discussion with its ASG, but this is a matter for partnerships to decide.
EAZs transforming to Excellence Clusters from 1 December 2004	Dudley Kent Somerset (Ramsgate) Telford & Wrekin NE Derbyshire coalfields Slough Southend Hastings & St Leonards	The commitment to the activity within these EAZs ends in December 2004; the resulting cluster will need to seek funds through discussion with its ASG, but this is a matter for partnerships to decide.
EAZs transforming to Excellence Clusters on 10 January 2005	Ashington Barrow Bedford Bridgewater Bolton Camborne, Pool & Redruth Clacton & Harwich Corby Coventry Easington & Seaham Gillingham Gloucester Ellesmere Port Leigh Park Peterlee Wakefield Withernsea	The commitment to the activity within these EAZs ends in January 2005. The resulting cluster will need to seek funds through discussion with its ASG, but this is a matter for partnerships to decide.
EAZs transforming to Excellence Clusters in April 2005	Derby Great Yarmouth NW Shropshire SE England Virtual (Bromley)	The commitment to the activity within these EAZs ends in April 2005. The resulting cluster will need to seek funds through discussion with its ASG, but this is a matter for partnerships to decide.

Annex F
Summary of consultation process

1. The funding bodies responsible for these two initiatives began a process of discussion and consultation in the spring of 2003, seeking the views of current deliverers on how the new integrated programme would be taken forward. In May and July 2003, Action on Access organised two seminars where representatives of both initiatives met to start identifying issues, and generating ideas and options for a strategy for integration.

2. Out of these seminars arose:

a. The Aimhigher Transition Task Group formed to consult and steer the process, to develop a plan for what was to happen between July 2003 and 2006, and to plan for further seminars aimed at larger groups in the autumn of 2003.

b. Development of a structure for Aimhigher including the National Partnership Board, Regional Partnership Boards, and Area Steering Groups.

c. Information on the Action on Access web-site for those working within the two initiatives, setting out progress and plans on Aimhigher integration.

3. The discussions from the seminars identified the major strategic and operational issues, and produced a range of often detailed suggestions and options which have been taken up by the Task Group. These have been firmly built into the principles underpinning the new integrated Aimhigher programme, as expressed in this document, and including the clear desire for merger.

4. In November 2003 the Aimhigher guidance was released in draft, so that people working in both initiatives could start considering the regional and area structures to be developed from 1 April 2004. This also gave other stakeholders an opportunity to comment on the guidance and inform its final development.

5. The process of consultation had three elements:

a. Test beds. Four test beds were established, with the support of Action on Access, to carry out pilot work to address many of the operational concerns raised by partnerships from both initiatives. The work took place during October and November, and fed into the planning workshops in November, the DfES-organised conference in December, and the final planning guidance.

b. Workshops. Action on Access ran regional planning workshops in November to help develop the approach to the integrated programme and address some of the issues that emerged from the test beds.

c. Consultation. Practitioners and planners not attending the workshops or involved in the test beds were given the opportunity to comment on the development of the guidance, by e-mail. Eleven responses were received through this channel.

6.   The web-sites for Action on Access and Aimhigher have been and will be used by the Task Group to communicate with those planning and delivering the activities, and to send messages from the NPB. This will be supported by regular electronic bulletins and information through meetings.

List of abbreviations

ASG	Area Steering Group
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EAZ	Education Action Zone
EiC	Excellence in Cities
FE	Further education
FEC	Further education college
HE	Higher education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher education institution
LEA	Local education authority
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
NPB	National Partnership Board
OFTSTED	Office for Standards in Education
RPB	Regional Partnership Board
StAR	LSC strategic area review
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service