
Guide

Revised plans for 2006-08 to be submitted
by 31 March 2006

Aimhigher: guidance for submitting strategic plans 2006-08

This document provides guidance for Aimhigher practitioners at local and regional level on the funding arrangements and management of the programme from 2006-08, and asks Aimhigher partnerships to submit revised strategic plans for this period. It supplements the guidance issued in January 2004 (HEFCE 2004/08).

Aimhigher...

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Aimhigher: guidance for submitting strategic plans 2006-08

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Aimhigher: guidance for submitting strategic plans 2006-08

To	Heads of HEFCE-funded higher education institutions Heads of HEFCE-funded further education colleges Chairs of Aimhigher partnerships (areas and regions)
Of interest to those responsible for	Widening participation, Learning and teaching, Strategic and corporate planning
Reference	HEFCE 2006/02
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Executive summary

Purpose

1. The Aimhigher programme is a key component of government policy to widen and thereby increase participation in higher education. This document provides guidance for Aimhigher practitioners at local and regional level on the funding arrangements and management of the programme from 2006-08, and asks Aimhigher partnerships to submit revised strategic plans for this period. It supplements the guidance issued in January 2004 (HEFCE 2004/08).

Key points

2. The aims, objectives and outcomes for the Aimhigher programme set out in HEFCE 2004/08 remain unchanged. Aimhigher will continue to direct activity towards groups of learners that are under-represented in higher education. Priority target groups continue to be young people aged 13-19 and adults under 30.
3. By July 2006 all funding guarantees to the Partnerships for Progression and Excellence Challenge programmes will end. From August 2006 Aimhigher partnerships at area and regional levels will be responsible for the allocation and distribution of funds to all partners.
4. Area Steering Groups and Regional Forums should review their membership, governance and management

arrangements to ensure that the interests of all stakeholders are represented.

Action required

5. Revised Aimhigher plans for 2006-08 are required from partnerships and should be submitted to HEFCE by **31 March 2006**. The intention is that all partnerships will demonstrate through their planning and monitoring arrangements that the Aimhigher programme represents value for money and that it is worthy of future investment.

Purpose of this guidance

6. The Aimhigher programme continues to be a key component of government policy to widen and thereby increase participation in higher education (HE). The aims, objectives and outcomes for the programme contained in 'Aimhigher: guidance notes for integration' (HEFCE 2004/08) remain unchanged. This guidance is primarily for practitioners at local and regional level who will be revising area and regional plans for August 2006 to July 2008. It supplements the guidance provided in January 2004. If there is any conflict between this document and the earlier guidance, this document takes precedence.

7. The main aspects where this guidance differs from HEFCE 2004/08 are:

- the distribution and allocation of funds to partners
- the planning and reporting requirements of partners, especially schools.

8. This document will be useful background for all stakeholders, especially those involved in the implementation of the programme. In particular it will be useful to stakeholders in schools, further education colleges, work-based training providers, higher education institutions (HEIs), local authorities, voluntary organisations and Connexions partnerships.

9. This document:

- sets out a vision for Aimhigher to the end of the present funding period in 2008
- provides advice on managing partnerships and funding allocations to 2008
- requires the submission of strategic plans for 2006-08

- describes how the funding bodies will approve plans and release funds.

10. It also provides partnerships with updates on:

- the Aimhigher healthcare strand
- summer schools
- the communications strategy
- monitoring and evaluation
- continuing support for Aimhigher.

Vision for the future of Aimhigher

11. Aimhigher began work in August 2004, carrying forward the commitments of the Excellence Challenge and Partnerships for Progression programmes. By 1 August 2006 the funding guarantees to these two programmes will end. Aimhigher partnerships will be free to develop further on the basis of what has been achieved to date. Area Steering Groups (ASGs) and Regional Forums will be able to use their Aimhigher funding allocations to provide those activities which are most likely to achieve the aims and objectives of the programme.

12. In May 2005 extensive consultation was undertaken with Aimhigher partnerships, schools, colleges, HEIs and other stakeholders. Stakeholders agreed that the fundamental principles of Aimhigher in terms of aims, objectives and outcomes, and the structure of partnerships, should remain unaltered.

13. After taking into account the responses both to the consultation on new school funding arrangements¹ and to the Aimhigher consultation², Ministers agreed that Aimhigher ASGs will:

- determine how to allocate funds to partners according to their agreed priorities

¹ 'Consultation on new school funding arrangements from 2006-07', February 2005, www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/

² 'Aimhigher: funding for 2006-08 and future of the programme', May 2005, [www.hefce.ac.uk/under Widening participation/Aimhigher](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/under/Widening%20participation/Aimhigher).

- agree the levels of funding allocated to each school, college, HEI or other provider involved in the delivery of the revised partnership plans from August 2006.

14. Funding to schools will be distributed by local authorities as a non ring-fenced grant via the DfES. Aimhigher ASGs will also decide the level of funding to be allocated by the local authority for Aimhigher co-ordinators (formerly Aimhigher Excellence Challenge co-ordinators), and for any other central co-ordination.

15. Government plans for the 'new relationship with schools', and the introduction of variable fees and access agreements in higher education, will change the environment for Aimhigher. However, Aimhigher will continue to make a distinctive contribution by providing opportunities for collaborative working within and between educational sectors. Collaborative working through Aimhigher:

- provides opportunities for synergy as individual stakeholders combine resources to pursue individual as well as partnership goals
- breaks down barriers that institutions, sectors and systems unwittingly create for learners
- enables schools, colleges and HEIs to connect with other local or regional initiatives (such as provision for 14-19 year-olds and Lifelong Learning Networks).

16. Aimhigher is enabling further and higher education to become part of the school experience for many pupils. In the same way, experience in the wider learning community serves to inform the mission of higher education and the way that it is delivered. At one level this means that learners have a more integrated learning experience wherever they are in the

system. At a deeper level it means that the boundaries between institutions and sectors are more permeable, with the learner taking centre stage.

17. Effective Aimhigher partnerships are characterised by:

- arrangements which enable all partners to participate in the agreement of priorities and resource allocation
- activity that has been informed by an input from all partners and integrated with the learning of pupils, students or apprentices in their everyday situations.

18. This does not mean that all relationships between institutions will be, or should be, collaborative. Institutions compete for students, perhaps more intensely than before. Schools and colleges – particularly schools with specialist status and colleges with Centres of Vocational Excellence – often have an interest in developing in-depth relationships with specific partner HEIs.

19. Engaging with schools remains a core part of what Aimhigher does. Only 30 per cent of 16 year-olds from semi-skilled and unskilled manual backgrounds achieve 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C. A step-change in HE participation requires close attention to the way educational outcomes are produced across the whole age range. It means assisting schools to improve attainment, particularly by pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds who are under-represented in higher education.

20. The 14-19 year-old age group remains a priority in Aimhigher but some attention is now paid to children in primary schools, and to adults in vocational and work-based learning. The breadth of Aimhigher activity is reflected in the series of case studies issued by Action on Access in 2005, 'Making a difference: the impact of Aimhigher'³.

³ www.actiononaccess.org under Resources/Documents from Action on Access.

21. The Government's 14-19 Education and Skills White Paper⁴ encourages schools and colleges to work together to develop a cultural expectation that young people will remain engaged in education until at least aged 19 years. This will require the provision of new qualifications such as specialist diplomas, together with information about progression routes into higher education. Schools will need to engage with further and/or higher education in order to make these changes. Aimhigher has an important role to play in all of these developments.

22. Aimhigher will also continue to engage with colleges because they provide links with:

- schools through developments in provision for 14-19 year-olds
- vocational and work-based learners, particularly those aged 16 to 30, who have not considered going on to HE.

23. Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) linking colleges and HEIs are beginning to develop in a number of regions. The core of any network will consist of providers with responsibility for funding and delivering programmes of learning. LLNs will look to Aimhigher to help:

- raise the aspirations and attainment of vocational learners
- create pathways into higher education.

In the period through to 2008 and beyond we would expect Aimhigher and LLNs to develop further.

Managing Aimhigher partnerships 2006-08

24. A key outcome of the Aimhigher consultation process was the Ministerial announcement (11 October 2005) that Aimhigher ASGs will decide how funds are to be allocated to all partners.

25. ASGs will be given funds to allocate for local use, as now. They will need to:

- produce a schedule for the delivery of plans by 31 March 2006
- secure the engagement of all partners in a review of existing plans in order to consolidate, reduce or extend existing activity and funding
- decide on the level of funding to be allocated to schools, colleges, HEIs and other partners for Aimhigher activity
- ensure that all partners are aware of the rationale and methodology for the allocation and distribution of funding
- ensure that local authorities and schools are aware that funding guarantees to former Excellence Challenge partnerships will end after 2005-06
- decide on the level of funding to local authorities for co-ordination of Aimhigher at sub-area level (for example, for the salaries of Aimhigher co-ordinators employed by local authorities).

26. Aimhigher funding to schools will be decided by the ASG and distributed by the DfES through local authorities to schools, in the form of a separate non ring-fenced grant. The institution acting as the area banker for Aimhigher will distribute funding to all other partners.

27. In 2004, the DfES announced a reduction in the Aimhigher budget for the three-year period 2005-08, in order to provide additional funds for the new student finance arrangements. This means that allocations to Regional Forums and ASGs have been reduced below 2004-05 levels. ASGs will need to inform school and college partners that their Aimhigher funding allocations will not necessarily be the same in 2006-07 and

⁴ Cm 6476 2005, www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/14-19educationandskills/

2007-08 as they were in 2005-06. Similarly, expenditure on Aimhigher activity provided by other partners will need to be reviewed for its effectiveness and value for money.

The role of Area Steering Groups

28. The revised arrangements for Aimhigher place significant responsibilities on ASGs. They will need to balance the diverse needs of partners and partnership priorities in the context of a reducing budget. It is important that schools, colleges and HEIs are represented on these groups. Consultation processes must be robust, especially where any change is expected in the budgets of individual schools, colleges, HEIs or other partners.

29. The way in which ASGs work will be important to the future of partnerships. We are concerned that decision-making processes are inclusive but, at the same time, minimise the burden upon partners. ASGs may wish to review:

- the arrangements for selecting a chair
- the process for revising the partnership plan within the necessary timescale
- the membership of the ASG
- how intentions and decisions are communicated to partners.

30. Stakeholders in Aimhigher already recognise the importance of the quality of partnership working to the overall success of the programme. Unanimity is rare, but if Aimhigher partnerships secure substantial commitment from all partners for decisions then those decisions are less likely to be challenged.

31. Information on the structure of Aimhigher, the roles of the National and Regional Partnership

Boards, Regional Forums and ASGs is provided in 'Aimhigher: guidance notes for integration'⁵, and in 'Working together: Aimhigher governance and management'⁶.

Aimhigher staffing and co-ordination

32. The commitment of Aimhigher staff has been widely acknowledged. ASGs will clearly want to do what they can within the resources available to secure the position of staff. Aimhigher funding provides direct support for some posts based in schools, colleges and other agencies. Decisions about such posts will be made by the ASG.

33. Aimhigher co-ordinators employed by local authorities are in a different position and specific arrangements will need to be made. ASGs will need to allocate funding to be retained by local authorities to secure the employment of these co-ordinators. This might apply to other posts where the local authority is the employer. For example, some schools have Aimhigher learning mentors employed by the local authority. As in other matters, it is for the ASG to decide what infrastructure is necessary and the level of funding required for co-ordination. Where changes are to be made to local management and co-ordination arrangements then ASGs must discuss them with the local authorities concerned.

Context for planning with principal partners

34. ASGs will need to take account of the planning requirements of various groups within the partnership. For example, schools plan budgets well in advance of the next academic year, and colleges work within the business cycle of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

5 HEFCE 2004/08, on the web at www.hefce.ac.uk under Publications.

6 www.actiononaccess.org under Resources/Documents from Action on Access.

Schools

35. The DfES' plans set out in 'A New Relationship with Schools'⁷ aim to provide more autonomy for schools and give them more discretion over budgets. They also describe a process for school improvement that will highlight issues of progression at ages 16 and 18. There will be new opportunities for Aimhigher to work with schools to deliver these improvements.

36. Aimhigher funding to schools will not be ring-fenced. Schools will be accountable for this funding through the DfES and not through Aimhigher ASGs. ASGs can discuss with school partners the type of feedback and reporting on activities that would be helpful, but cannot impose requirements on them. In practice what we seek to encourage is a culture of collaboration and transparency. It is in the interests of all partners to share information which demonstrates the impact of Aimhigher.

37. In much the same way, ASGs are discouraged from engaging schools in a bidding process for Aimhigher funding or activity. A bidding process places a bureaucratic burden on schools and is not within the spirit of the single planning arrangements of the Government's new relationship.

Colleges

38. Colleges continue to make a vital contribution to the work of Aimhigher through:

- the provision of HE
- the preparation of learners for HE
- their involvement in 14-19 area plans in association with local LSCs and local authorities

- their contribution to the Framework for Achievement, which will have considerable implications for progression to HE.

39. Aimhigher activities with older learners on vocational programmes have assumed greater significance both in work and at college. This has underlined the importance to partnerships of engagement with the further education sector. ASGs will need to consider the level of funding required to ensure that colleges' commitment to Aimhigher is facilitated and secured.

Higher education institutions

40. HEIs are no longer required by HEFCE to submit plans for widening participation. However, the Office for Fair Access requires all HE providers to produce Access Agreements if they set tuition fees at more than the standard rate. As a result of this, many providers are allocating more funds to outreach work with under-represented groups, and there will be opportunities to align this activity with that of Aimhigher. Further information on the planning context for partners can be found in two documents from Action on Access: 'A summary guide to 14-19 reform'⁸ and 'Widening participation – a rough guide for higher education providers'⁹.

Links with other strategies and plans

41. Aimhigher plans are 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:

- regional development plans and local area agreements, including plans agreed with local authorities for 14-19 provision

⁷ www.ofsted.gov.uk under Publications.

⁸ www.actiononaccess.org under Resources/Documents from Action on Access.

⁹ www.actiononaccess.org under Resources/Documents from Action on Access.

- Regional Skills Partnerships (including the work of Sector Skills Councils)
- plans arising from Ofsted/Adult Learning Inspectorate area inspections
- Connexions service plans and developments arising from the DfES Green Paper 'Youth Matters'¹⁰
- local authority education development plans
- Local Strategic Partnerships
- Neighbourhood Renewal Areas
- the widening participation and related strategies of HEIs and colleges (for example, equality and diversity plans relating to race, gender and disability)
- government plans to develop services for children and young people arising from its document 'Every child matters: change for children'¹¹
- Excellence Clusters, school federations and education improvement partnerships.

42. HEFCE, the DfES and the LSC are working together on a joint progression strategy to encourage progression into and through HE for vocational and work-based learners. One way of achieving this strategy is through Lifelong Learning Networks. LLNs bring HEIs and colleges together to make specific provision for vocational learners. Network progression agreements will underpin credit accumulation and transfer arrangements to offer the same clarity, coherence and certainty in progression for vocational learners as already exists for those on academic pathways.

43. Aimhigher partnerships will complement LLNs. LLNs will deliver the higher education

opportunities that Aimhigher has helped to promote. No proposal for an LLN is likely to be approved unless the business case shows how the network will work with Aimhigher.

44. Aimhigher partnerships will promote improved information, advice and guidance, and raise aspirations and attainment among vocational learners. They will also contribute to mapping existing progression opportunities. LLNs will therefore be an opportunity to realise many Aimhigher ambitions. Partnerships and LLNs need to work closely together to achieve these complementary objectives. Details of existing and developing LLNs are available at Annex C.

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

46. Aimhigher partnerships should provide assurances that they have taken account of the strategies of other relevant agencies. However, we do not expect plans to show in detail how links will be made with each strategy.

Target learner groups

47. The main target groups for Aimhigher were identified in HEFCE 2004/08. This document emphasises the continued importance of the contribution of Aimhigher to the achievement of DfES Public Service Agreement Target 14 (2004): 'By 2010 to increase participation in higher education towards 50 per cent aged 18 to 30 and also make significant progress year on year towards fair access, and bear down on non-completion'. Aimhigher should continue to prioritise activity which meets the needs of groups that are under-represented in HE. Examples of

¹⁰ www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/youth/

¹¹ DfES 1110/2004, www.everychildmatters.gov.uk under Publications

under-represented groups are given in paragraph 42 of HEFCE 2004/08. The main target groups for the Aimhigher programme remain:

- young people aged 13-19 from groups that are under-represented in HE
- adults under 30 from groups that are under-represented in HE.

48. Aimhigher makes an important contribution to gifted and talented provision, and the funding continues to include an element for work with gifted and talented students aged 16-19. ASGs will need to work with partners in schools and colleges to ensure a coherent experience for gifted and talented learners across the entire 14-19 age range.

49. HEFCE 2004/08 also recognised that Aimhigher needs to decide how much work should be done with younger learners in primary schools and with those over age 30. We now wish to emphasise the importance of work with these two groups. The under-representation that creates the need for widening participation is deep rooted and its origins lie in the early years. There is considerable evidence that attitudes towards learning are formed early. The educational inequalities that result can be addressed at any age, and appropriately targeted Aimhigher activity can help to do this.

50. Aimhigher will need to take account of developments in vocational education and the progression of vocational learners in general. Vocational and work-based learners are key target groups for Aimhigher activities.

Funding

51. Regional and area funds will be allocated by a formula that reflects measures of deprivation (a combination of educational attainment and participation in HE) and then 'smoothed' to

moderate large changes in funding levels. A funding allocation model has been agreed by the National Partnership Board (NPB) and was circulated to Aimhigher practitioners in the October 2005 bulletin¹².

52. A set of principles underpin funding arrangements:

- a. Funding will be concentrated on front-end activity in schools, colleges, HEIs and work-based training providers, with minimal amounts spent on overheads.
- b. Areas and regions will each have their own allocations of funds.
- c. Funding guarantees made to Aimhigher: Partnerships for Progression regional partnerships, to Aimhigher partnerships in Excellence in Cities areas, to Education Action Zones, and those Excellence Clusters receiving Aimhigher funding on 31 December 2003, have now been completed. However, funding has been moderated to enable each partnership, within an overall reducing budget, to continue to deliver the broad range of activities undertaken during the integration period.
- d. Aimhigher partnerships should consider where activity can be embedded within, and continuation of funding secured from, partners' other activities.

Funding allocations for activity at area, regional and national levels

53. In October 2005 HEFCE issued provisional funding allocations for areas and regions. The HEFCE Board confirmed the funding for Aimhigher at its meeting in January 2006. We are writing separately to ASGs and Regional Forums with details of their final allocations.

¹² www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner under News.

54. Funding allocations will be divided by academic years. However, ASGs and Regional Forums will be able to profile funding across the two years (2006-07 and 2007-08) in order to moderate changes in funding levels.

55. ASGs and Regional Forums will be permitted to carry forward unspent funding from 2005-06, subject to approval by the Regional Partnership Board (RPB). Where unspent funds exceed 20 per cent of the HEFCE budget for Aimhigher, the RPB must ask for a recovery plan with a timetable of intended activity and expenditure. RPBs should encourage ASGs and Regional Forums to implement monitoring and reporting arrangements which ensure that activities are completed in line with proposed spending profiles.

Funding allocations for area activity

56. In determining their allocations of funding to partners we expect ASGs to avoid disruption of existing activity, in so far as this is consistent with revised priorities.

57. It is expected that funding will be allocated to colleges to support contributions to widening participation in higher education and to deliver specific elements of partnership plans, such as provision for 16-19 gifted and talented students on vocational courses.

58. Similarly, it is anticipated that funding will be allocated to schools for the same purposes. Where new 'school clusters' or 'school federations' emerge, and wish to engage with Aimhigher area partnerships, then funding can be distributed to clusters of schools subject to the agreement of partners. In such an arrangement, one school might act as banker for the cluster.

59. Funding to go to schools will be distributed as a non ring-fenced grant via local authorities. Some Aimhigher partnerships currently provide and fund specific activities and/or services on

behalf of a school, or share the costs of a joint activity with one or more schools. Where such arrangements work well and have the support of all partners, they can continue.

60. However, HEFCE's funding powers are limited to supporting higher education, and activities directly linked to HE progression. We need to ensure that these limits are not exceeded. Where funding for schools is deployed directly by the school itself, such funding should be allocated via the local authority. Significant sums are almost always allocated in this way and we would expect this to continue.

Funding for regional activity

61. Funding allocated by HEFCE to regional partnerships will be used to implement plans agreed by the Regional Forums. Regional funding will be allocated using the same formula as the area funding, although the proportional reduction in funding will be greater. However, the proposed additional HEFCE funding to match European Social Fund (ESF) grants for summer schools during the period 2006-08 will give regions more freedom to determine the uses of their funding. In addition, ring-fenced funding will be available at the regional level for the healthcare strand (see paragraphs 77-80).

Funding for national activity

62. Funding has been set aside to continue activity at a national level. This includes support for:

- the national communications strategy
- the national co-ordination team (Action on Access)
- a small number of national projects.

63. The NPB has yet to consider how funds for national projects will be used but the level of funding will be less than that currently available.

The flow of funding

64. The Aimhigher programme will be managed by HEFCE, and area and regional funding will be distributed according to the wishes of each partnership. Funding will flow through two routes:

- a. Funds for schools (pre-16 provision and post-16 provision at sixth forms in schools) will flow through local authorities, as they currently do in nearly all cases.
- b. Payments for the other partners (such as sixth form colleges, further education colleges and HEIs) will be provided by HEFCE through the institutions appointed by ASGs as regional or area bankers.

65. We will issue the forms to implement these arrangements in February 2006, in time for allocations to flow from the start of the new academic year.

66. ASGs will need to inform HEFCE how much is to be paid to each local authority. They will also need to inform the local authority how much is to be paid to each school and how much is to be retained to support Aimhigher co-ordination work with schools. We envisage that ASGs will wish this part of the allocation process to be updated annually. As far as possible this process should be aligned with the budgetary processes of schools.

67. However, the allocations for 2006-07 will be agreed after schools and other partners have set their budgets. ASGs and Regional Forums can commit up to 60 per cent of published allocations for the following year before the NPB gives approval to their plans. This does not mean that the money can be paid or spent in advance. It does mean that a partnership can commit to planned expenditure secure in the knowledge that this funding will be received. This funding commitment applies to any partner involved in the delivery of the plan and can be used for purposes

agreed by the ASG or Regional Forum, for example to secure staff contracts that may otherwise come to an end. Ideally agreements on funding in future years can be made in time to be incorporated into schools' budgets.

68. Since the plans are likely to be a continuation of work already in progress, we will recommend to the NPB that plans are given 'in principle' approval by RPBs at their meetings in May 2006. RPBs will continue a dialogue with ASGs or Regional Forums if further clarification is required. The NPB will formally consider partnership plans in June and reserves the right to apply additional conditions or recommendations at that time. However, we hope that these arrangements will help ASGs and Regional Forums in the transition to the next stage of Aimhigher.

69. For money flowing through HEFCE, there are existing agreements with certain institutions to act as a banker for Aimhigher partnerships. These institutions have existing contractual arrangements within Aimhigher, and the HEFCE financial memorandum provides the framework for the contract as a whole together with audit arrangements. We would not wish to alter these arrangements.

70. The regional or area banker is responsible for receiving Aimhigher funds for the partnership and disseminating these 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. Regional Forums and ASGs should ensure that these administration costs are kept to a minimum and represent value for money.

The funding year

71. The programme will operate on the academic year. Future funding announcements will cover the full academic years 2006-08.

However, the situation for Aimhigher summer schools provided by regional partnerships will be different. HEFCE is to provide matched funding so that application can be made to the ESF to continue the Aimhigher summer schools programme beyond July 2006. Should the application be successful, ESF regulations will require that all summer school activity should be completed by 31 July 2008. The funding period for summer school provision will be from 1 October 2006 until 30 September 2008, to give regional partnerships sufficient time to complete financial procedures.

Timetable

72. Table 2 gives the timetable for funding.

Submission of strategic plans for 2006-08

73. By 31 March 2006, regional and area partnerships will need to submit revised strategic plans covering the period August 2006 to July 2008. Plans should show the extent to which existing activities planned by Aimhigher partnerships have been revised, and that a process of discussion and negotiation has taken

place with schools, colleges, HEIs and others involved in the delivery of the plan.

74. There is no expectation that existing plans should be entirely re-written. Aimhigher partnerships should take this opportunity to:

- review and build on the achievements to date
- refocus activity to address opportunities within the reduced Aimhigher budget and changing responsibilities placed on ASGs.

75. ASGs or Regional Forums should consider whether the aims and objectives of their original plans remain 'fit for purpose' in terms of what the areas and regions want to achieve in the two years to July 2008.

76. As a minimum, the revised plans need to provide details of:

- a. The partners involved in the planning and delivery of activity.
- b. Any changes to the existing governance and management arrangements which will be put in place from August 2006. ASGs or Regional Forums should review membership of management groups and

Table 2 **Timetable for allocation of funds**

January to July 2006	Aimhigher partnerships continue to receive funds according to the agreed payment profiles
February 2006	HEFCE distributes forms to enable ASGs and Regional Forums to set down how they wish their funding to be allocated and distributed within the principles in this guidance
By 31 March 2006	ASGs and Regional Forums submit their plans and completed funding forms to RPBs and HEFCE
August 2006 onwards	Partners begin to receive funds according to their profiles, and/or the funding arrangements for the relevant funding stream to schools via local authorities

committees to ensure that they remain inclusive. Existing management structures should be reviewed for their fitness for purpose.

- c. The priorities and needs of each area or region.
- d. Activities to be delivered. (Please also see paragraphs 84-90 below).
 - i. Plans should include a statement of the commitment made to existing and revised activity. Activity targets should be included, with a statement about how activities will be monitored for their delivery, quality, impact and value for money.
 - ii. Activities contained in the plans should be classified, as far as possible, using the following typology:
 - awareness and aspiration-raising: such as Aiming for a College Education (ACE) days, and events to give pupils a taste of higher education
 - attainment-raising: such as master classes in specific subjects
 - vocational: for example work-based learning activity
 - information, advice and guidance: for example community outreach, and advice aimed at parents and carers

- staff development and training: such as for Aimhigher staff or careers advisers
 - progression: for example, developing a curriculum for progression, or delivery of higher education modules
 - research and dissemination: such as through seminars and web-sites.
- iii. Plans should reflect the involvement of partners in discussion and agreement on any revised commitments.
 - e. The target groups for activities.
 - f. Funding arrangements. This section should include:
 - the rationale which underpins funding allocations
 - the recipients of Aimhigher funding
 - how the partnership has agreed the rationale for funding allocations
 - the partners involved in decisions about the rationale for funding allocations.
 - g. Which local authorities will receive Aimhigher funding via the DfES, and an indication of the amount of funding to be held back by local authorities to support Aimhigher co-ordination.
 - h. Where appropriate, plans should refer to local, regional and national plans of other related agencies.
 - i. An operational plan for the period 2006-07 containing development milestones.
 - j. Any changes to the banker institution (at regional and/or area level).

Updating partnerships

Aimhigher healthcare strand

77. In 2004 the Aimhigher healthcare strand was established following a joint commitment from the Department of Health and HEFCE to fund it. We confirmed funding from August 2006 to July 2008 in the October Aimhigher practitioner bulletin. This brings the healthcare strand into line with the overall Aimhigher funding timetable.

78. As with the first round of funding, regions will receive £200,000 per year in entitlement funding. The priority areas for this initiative remain the same as those outlined in the original invitation to bid (HEFCE Circular letter 06/2004), as do the criteria for funding. All proposals should:

- contribute to the overall aims of the Aimhigher healthcare strand
- create and/or develop partnerships with healthcare professionals and organisations as well as the relevant higher and further education institutions. At the very least each project should include involvement of one HEI, one further education college, and the local Strategic Health Authority
- build on existing health-related outreach activity wherever possible
- be designed to fit into existing Aimhigher plans and wherever possible use existing structures.

79. In order to receive funds for the healthcare strand, the regional partnership must provide details of activities scheduled for the two years covered by funding (August 2006 to July 2008). Regional Forums are free to determine the format

and structure of the healthcare plan. Regional Forums may decide to incorporate the strand within the regional partnership plan, as this will allow the strand's activities to be reviewed with other regional activities. Whether the healthcare strand is incorporated in the regional plan, or submitted as a stand-alone document, partnerships should follow the guidance provided in paragraph 78. If the regional partnership chooses to provide a separate healthcare plan, it should be submitted by 31 March 2006.

80. We acknowledge that many of the healthcare projects are delivered at local level and have established management groups to co-ordinate the activity. However, the Regional Forum is formally responsible for overseeing the activities and we therefore expect the chair of the Regional Forum to sign off the plan.

Summer schools part-funded by the European Social Fund 2006-08

81. HEFCE is applying to the ESF to enable the current summer schools programme that is part-funded by the ESF to be extended into the academic years 2006-07 and 2007-08. We will continue to work closely with the ESF Division, regional co-ordinators, HEIs and other stakeholders to ensure that all partners are kept informed of developments. (Further details are in Annex D.)

Communications strategy

82. The national communications strategy for Aimhigher¹³ was published in August 2004 and contains four elements:

- a. The production of national materials to promote and maintain positive responses from learners to national messages, and the

¹³ www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner under Resource Bank/Communications Resource Pack/Developing a communications plan.

integration of Aimhigher successfully into high profile education campaigns (such as on student finance).

- b. The Aimhigher Roadshow, managed by the DfES and its agents, which visits over 750 schools and colleges each year to raise awareness and understanding of the benefits of higher education, including key messages on student finance.
- c. A National Communications Resource Team to improve communications between Aimhigher partners at local, regional and national level. The team works with Aimhigher practitioners to help them integrate their activities with national campaigns. It also facilitates communication between the different areas and regions to enable practitioners to share best practice and learn from the communications challenges and successes of others.
- d. The development of a coherent web strategy, involving the Aimhigher student portal (www.aimhigher.ac.uk), area/regional Aimhigher sites, and a national site for Aimhigher practitioners (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner), which provides information on the programme and enables the exchange of good practice.

83. Although the current strategy is for 2004-06, we anticipate that these four strands will continue to be the basis for the communications strategy for 2006-08.

Monitoring and evaluation

84. We will continue with a monitoring and evaluation process which is consistent with that used in 2004-05. The funders will continue to measure the impact of Aimhigher nationally, and to disseminate findings and good practice. There is an expectation on the part of both the funders

and the NPB that Aimhigher should demonstrate value for money so that further investment in the programme can be justified.

85. Area and regional plans should contain both activity and impact targets which reflect local circumstances and priorities. The plans should also show how progress towards those targets will be measured. For example, ASGs and Regional Forums will want to monitor, as a minimum, what activities are being delivered and how funds are being spent, with details of the short- and medium-term impact. For example, plans might include the following:

- a. Activity monitoring: the types of activity that are being delivered, the volume of activities, and the target groups involved.
- b. Financial monitoring: how funds are being spent.
- c. Measuring the impact of the activities. Partnerships will not be expected to monitor the impact of each individual activity, but should consider the overall impact across different timescales.
 - i. Short term, for example:
 - increased positive attitudes and aspirations from the beginning of an event/activity to the end of the activity, such as a taster day
 - increased awareness of higher education including vocational routes
 - improvement in the level of involvement, and positive attitudes, among a range of other key people, including HE admissions tutors, parents and employers.
 - ii. Medium term, for example:
 - contribution to improvements in attainment at levels 2 and 3 by target groups

- impacts on the individual, for example at the end of a year of student mentoring
- attainments by schools or colleges: for example, improvements in key stage 3 results; increases in the proportion of learners gaining level 2 qualifications such as 5 GCSEs with grades A*-C; increased post-16 participation; improvements in attainment at level 3. (Details of these measures are available from the DfES and LSC.)

iii. Long term, for example:

- increased application rates to HE from target groups – using data from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service and the Nursing and Midwifery Admissions Service, and data from institutions about full-time and part-time undergraduate applications, including vocational routes.

86. As part of a cycle of continuous improvement, it is good practice to reflect on how and why things work. Consideration should be given to the following aspects:

- a. Evaluating the process:
 - i. How is the partnership functioning?
 - ii. Does the partnership include all the relevant partners?
 - iii. Is communication within the partnership effective?
- b. Evaluating individual activities and events:
 - i. Which activities are most and least effective? (It is important to learn from

failures as well as successes. However, in both instances the lessons learned should be widely disseminated.)

- ii. How could the activities be improved and developed?

87. Schools are accountable to the DfES for Aimhigher funding that passes to them in the form of a non ring-fenced grant. However, schools cannot be required to report on the number, type or impact of Aimhigher activities. The NPB and RPBs will not therefore require area or regional reports to include information from schools. However, ASGs and Regional Forums can include such information where local arrangements have made this available. Information will also be available from:

- the school's profile which will be available online, and will replace the annual governors' report
- the reports of school improvement partners
- the school's Ofsted self-evaluation form.¹⁴

88. Monitoring and evaluation should be kept simple and, where possible, use existing sources of data. For example, local authorities, schools, colleges and LSCs already have mechanisms for recording and publishing data on student attainment. In this way, the burden on partners caused by the need to monitor or evaluate for several audiences can be minimised. Building monitoring and evaluation into the planning stage can further minimise this burden and at the same time ensure an effective process.

89. Progress reports on targets, outcomes, budgets and activities, from regions and areas, should be returned to HEFCE in September each year, with reference to the previous academic year (1 August to 31 July). Detailed guidance and the

¹⁴ www.ofsted.gov.uk/schools/sef.cfm

monitoring and evaluation template will be published on the Aimhigher practitioner web-site each autumn. Impact data are not always available to ASGs and Regional Forums in time for submission of the September monitoring and evaluation report. For example, data on GCSE grades or post-16 progression are not available until late in the autumn term. In such circumstances, reports should be updated and sent to HEFCE by 1 March. (It will not be necessary for Regional Forums and ASGs to provide activity or financial measures at this time.)

90. The respective roles of the NPB and the RPBs, with criteria against which annual reports are assessed, are set out in HEFCE 2004/08. Further information on the monitoring and evaluation of Aimhigher, including the timetable for national evaluation findings, is available on the Aimhigher practitioner web-site.

Support for Aimhigher partnerships

91. Action on Access has recently been re-appointed as the national co-ordination team for widening participation and will continue to provide support for Aimhigher at national, regional and area levels.

92. The role of Action on Access is to:

- advise the Aimhigher partnerships in the regions
- support monitoring and evaluation processes
- help individual Aimhigher partnerships meet their aims and objectives.

93. Action on Access regional advisers will:

- help Aimhigher partnerships to develop peer support mechanisms so that the programme of support becomes self-sustaining

- provide advice on governance and management
- share information across Aimhigher partnerships, disseminating good practice and encouraging collaboration
- help to keep Aimhigher partnerships informed of national developments.

94. Action on Access advisers will continue to give wider support to development in Aimhigher by:

- attending development groups as appropriate
- providing reports and advice to a wide range of stakeholders
- acting as a channel of communication for regional partnerships, the NPB and the funding bodies.

95. Action on Access publications will continue to be published on its web-site, www.actiononaccess.org.

96. HEFCE has extended the contract with Action on Access to include advice and guidance on issues affecting pupils and students with disabilities. Action on Access will provide a single reference point for:

- advice about how staff development and training can be used to fully integrate disability issues into the work of partnerships, institutional widening participation strategies and outreach work in general
- advice on disability issues and resources, and a 'gateway' to other related service providers.

Key planning milestones to 2008

97. Table 3 sets out key milestones for the Aimhigher programme to 2008.

98. The planning cycle should be repeated for the period 2007-08. ASGs should note that, where possible, school and college partners should receive notification of their Aimhigher funding by the January before the start of the academic year in August.

What needs to be done next?

99. The new arrangements for Aimhigher will start on 1 August 2006. A revised plan is required from each area and region by 31 March 2006. However, we are emphasising the value of continuity. Just as this document supplements existing guidance, so we anticipate that Aimhigher partnerships will, in many cases, be able to supplement or update plans without the need for radical revision.

100. By 1 August 2006 we expect that:

- a. ASGs and Regional Forums will remain in place in each area and region. Any changes must be notified to HEFCE as soon as possible (for example, if Aimhigher partnerships propose to merge). Membership, governance and management arrangements will have been reviewed to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the partnerships in the new environment.
- b. There will be agreed plans which:
 - i. Set out the priorities and needs of each area and region.
 - ii. Summarise the activity under the existing plan which will roll forward during 2006-08.
 - iii. Indicate the main ways in which the plan will change and develop.

Action required

101. Regional Forums and ASGs should submit their revised partnership plan by 31 March 2006. We require an electronic version of the plan, which should be e-mailed to aimhigher@hefce.ac.uk; and two paper copies, signed by the chair of the Regional Forum or ASG. Please send these to:

Eleanor Christmas
Higher Education Funding Council for England
Northavon House
Coldharbour Lane
BRISTOL
BS16 1QD

Table 3 **Key milestones for Aimhigher**

January 2006	Guidance published
January-March 2006	Planning period, including meetings of ASGs and Regional Forums as appropriate
January-February 2006	Discussions between ASGs, Regional Forums and RPBs. Funding forms made available by HEFCE
31 March 2006	Plans and funding forms submitted to the RPBs and to HEFCE
April-May 2006	RPBs meet and make recommendations. Plans that are not approved will be referred to the NPB. Feedback provided by RPBs to Regional Forums and ASGs
End June 2006	NPB meets
Early July 2006	Feedback to Aimhigher partnerships on any funding conditions
August 2006	Funding flows and revised activities begin
30 September 2006	Aimhigher regional and area co-ordinators submit monitoring reports to HEFCE for the period 1 August 2005 to 31 July 2006
October 2006	RPBs consider monitoring returns and proposed action plans and make recommendations to the NPB
December 2006	NPB meets and considers annual monitoring reports
March 2007	(Optional) Partnerships submit supplementary monitoring and evaluation reports containing impact data which were not available in September 2006

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 authority member
LSC
LSC Council member
National Union of Students
Regional Development Agencies
Secondary Heads Association
Standing Conference of Principals
Training and Development Agency for Schools
Universities UK
UCAS
Observer: Action on Access

Regional Partnership Boards

The following should be invited:

Association of Colleges
Connexions service
Government Office
HE Regional Association
HEFCE
LSC
Regional Development Agency
Schools representative
In attendance: Action on Access

RPBs should invite the chairs of ASGs and Regional Forums, and the Aimhigher regional co-ordinators, to attend part of the RPB meetings as observers. Additional members can be co-opted

on to the group if necessary to ensure all sectors are adequately represented. RPBs may also invite occasional speakers to meetings to provide information on regional policy areas (for example, representatives from the Sector Skills Councils or Lifelong Learning Networks).

Area Steering Groups

Representatives from:

Further education
Higher education
Local authorities
Schools

Work-based training providers

Other stakeholders as appropriate (with consideration given to the need for parity)

In attendance: Action on Access

It would be helpful to ensure attendance by Aimhigher co-ordinators (formerly Excellence Challenge) as well as Aimhigher area managers.

Representatives from the funding bodies are not members of the ASGs, but may attend meetings as observers. They are represented on the regional and national governing bodies of Aimhigher. Given the local planning remit of the LSC, it is recommended that there is active participation by a local LSC representative.

Regional Forum

Lead institutions as bankers

Nominees from ASGs in the region

Regional co-ordinator

In attendance: Action on Access

Annex B

Indicative funds available for Aimhigher 2006-07 and 2007-08

Source	2006-07	2007-08
DfES	£43.9 M	£42.1 M
HEFCE*	£36.0 M	£35.0 M
Department of Health/HEFCE**	£1.8 M	£1.8 M
ESF/HEFCE†	£3.3 M	£3.3 M
Totals available	£85.0 M	£82.2 M

Budget	2006-07	2007-08
National work	£2.0 M	£2.0 M
Aimhigher regional funding	£4.0 M	£3.5 M
Aimhigher area funding	£73.9 M	£71.6 M
Healthcare strand**	£1.8 M	£1.8 M
Summer schools†	£3.3 M	£3.3 M
Totals available	£85.0 M	£82.2 M

* The HEFCE contribution includes £19M from the DfES Aimhigher budget.

** Funding is ring fenced due to matched sources.

† Funding is dependent on the outcome of a bid for further ESF funding.

Annex C

Lifelong Learning Networks

The following Lifelong Learning Networks have been, or are in the process of being established across the nine English regions.

North East

The North East Higher Skills Network

North West

Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance

Greater Merseyside and West Lancs LLN

Cheshire and Warrington LLN

Cumbria LLN

Yorkshire and the Humber

Higher York LLN

LLN Hull

South Yorkshire LLN

West Yorkshire LLN

East Midlands

Skills for Sustainable Communities LLN (Leicester)

Collaborative Higher Education Network

West Midlands

Higher Education Network (Worcester)

Birmingham and Solihull LLN

Coventry and Warwickshire LLN

Staffordshire and Shropshire LLN

East of England

MOVE LLN (East of England)

London

Thames Gateway LLN

Linking London LLN

South East London LLN

West London LLN

South-East

Sussex LLN

Hampshire and Isle of Wight LLN

LLN (Reading)

Kent and Medway LLN

South West

Western Vocational Lifelong Learning Network

South West LLN

National

National Arts Learning Network

VETNET LLN (Veterinary Science)

National Rural LLN

Annex D

Summer schools 2006-08

1. As set out in the May 2005 Aimhigher discussion paper, the possibility of accessing further ESF support for summer schools for an additional two years is being investigated.
2. The NPB has agreed that HEFCE can provide the whole 55 per cent matched funding required to complement the ESF proposal submitted on behalf of the regional Aimhigher partnerships.
3. The maximum amount of funding available from the ESF will be £3 million, and the matched funding available from HEFCE will be £3.6 million. The total allocation over two years (2006-07 and 2007-08) would therefore be £6.6 million. Application was made to the ESF in mid-January 2006. This funding will be in addition to the Aimhigher regional allocation. The NPB feels that this arrangement will ensure that summer school activity can continue while allowing funds for other activities at the regional level to be provided. Activities provided by regional partnerships could also include additional summer schools.
4. Changes to ESF regulations mean that HEFCE is only able to apply for ESF funds as a continuation of the current project. However, following discussions with regional summer school co-ordinators it has become apparent that there is no need to maintain previous Year 11 places. Some regional partnerships have stated that they would like to offer more Year 10 activity and some would like to offer more Year 12 activity. The decision to offer this type of summer school provision is based upon experience gained over the past two years.
5. HEFCE has agreed with regional partnerships that:
 - they do not need to maintain their previous level of Year 11 places

- Year 11 summer schools no longer have to be at least five days long. Regional partnerships may decide that it is more appropriate to offer residential or non-residential summer schools for between 2 and 10 days.

6. All other guidance previously issued to regions remains valid for any continuation of this programme part-funded by the ESF.

7. Regional partnerships have requested an indication of the level of funding that they can apply for during 2006-08. HEFCE will contact regions individually to inform them of their indicative allocation using the Aimhigher funding methodology. This figure reflects the funding available if each region chooses to apply for its full indicative allocation. However, the actual amount that a region applies for is decided by the Regional Forum. In some cases the Regional Forum may wish to apply for a higher level of funding than their published allocation, in order to express an interest should further funding become available. Payments for summer school activity will continue to be made through the regional banker as is the case with the existing ESF programme.

Regions with Objective 1 areas (such as Yorkshire and the Humber, North West and South West)

8. The ESF Division has advised that Objective 1 areas cannot benefit from any ESF funding for summer schools for 2006-08. This is because the application for ESF funding for 2006-08 will be an extension of the current programme and be subject to the regulations contained in the original proposal for 2000-06. Therefore regional partnerships which contain Objective 1 areas should ensure that sufficient funds are set aside from regional or area Aimhigher allocations to enable residents from Objective 1 areas to participate in summer schools.

Planning milestones for summer school activity

Mid-January 2006	Application by HEFCE to the ESF Division for an extension to the 2000-06 programme
April 2006	Consultation with regional partnerships about proposed provision
July 2006	Funding allocations to regional partnerships for planned provision confirmed
October 2006	Extended summer school provision begins
31 July 2008	Summer school activity part-funded by the ESF concludes
30 September 2008	Final accounts for summer schools part-funded by the ESF submitted to HEFCE

List of abbreviations

ASG	Area Steering Group
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
HE	Higher education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher education institution
LLN	Lifelong Learning Network
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
NPB	National Partnership Board
RPB	Regional Partnership Board

Higher Education Funding Council for England

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