The National Evaluation of Aimhigher
Survey of Higher Education Providers 2003

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The Aimhigher programme was established in 2001 (when it was known as Excellence Challenge) with the aim of improving access to higher education for able young students from poorer backgrounds. The evaluation is being carried out on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) by a Consortium comprising the National Foundation for Educational Research, the London School of Economics and the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

The evaluation is multifaceted with a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods being used to evaluate the programme: large-scale surveys of students and tutors in schools and further education sector institutions; surveys of higher education providers; surveys of young people eligible for Opportunity Bursaries; interviews with Aimhigher coordinators and area-based studies of specific partnerships and higher education institutions. The overall aim of the evaluation is to explore the effectiveness of the Aimhigher programme in terms of the extent to which it appears to contribute to increasing and widening participation in higher education.

In the Summer Term of 2003, the second survey of higher education providers in England was conducted. The aim of the survey was to gather information about the relevant activities that had been undertaken by higher education providers as part of their widening participation initiatives and, in particular, as a result of the Aimhigher programme. This report provides key findings that emerged from the 2003 survey (see West *et al.*, 2003a for results from the 2002 survey).

Methods

Postal questionnaires and an accompanying letter were sent to 120 higher education institutions and thirteen further education (FE) sector colleges (in England) providing higher education. All had been allocated Opportunity Bursaries for the academic year 2002/03. Completed questionnaires were returned from a total of 67 institutions (28 pre-1992 universities, 31 post-1992 universities, three classified as 'other' institutions and five FE colleges), giving an overall response rate of 50 per cent.

The proportion of pre-1992 higher education institutions responding to the survey was somewhat higher than that in England (45 per cent versus 39 per cent in England); a similar proportion of post-1992 institutions responded as in England (50 per cent versus 52 per cent); and fewer 'other' institutions, such as specialist colleges, responded than in England (five per cent versus nine per cent).

Widening participation activities

The most frequently reported widening participation activities were presentations to schools about university (mentioned by 93 per cent of respondents), followed by summer schools (91 per cent), and visits made to reinforce school links by university staff (84 per cent). In 73 per cent of institutions it was reported that outreach work with community groups took place and in 66 per cent that open days/ACE (Aiming for a College Education) days for widening participation were held. Parent-focused activities and student ambassador schemes were each in place in 61 per cent of institutions. More outreach activities were reported in 2002/03 than in 2001/02. The largest increase was in the proportion of institutions reporting that they undertook outreach work or planned to carry out outreach work with community groups, an increase of 22 percentage points over the two years (from 51 per cent to 73 per cent). However, for all outreach activities increased activity was reported over the two years.

- Respondents reported that the Aimhigher programme had enabled particular outreach activities to be introduced and/or extended. Twenty-eight per cent of institutions had introduced summer schools and 25 per cent had introduced 'other' master classes[1] as a result of the programme. Activities extended as a result of the programme included: presentations to schools (extended in 34 per cent of institutions), visits to schools (30 per cent), open days/ACE days (28 per cent) and summer schools (25 per cent).

- Most outreach activities were targeted on students identified as being in the 'widening participation' cohort. Summer schools were targeted on this group in 60 per cent of institutions; presentations to schools about university in 51 per cent; and open days/ACE days in 46 per cent of institutions.

- Widening participation activities were provided, in the main, for school students aged 14 to 16 years or school/college students aged 16 to 19 years. Relatively few activities were provided for pupils below the age of 14.

- 'Other' master classes (i.e. not Advanced Extension Award Master Classes) were targeted on the gifted and talented cohort in 36 per cent of institutions; summer schools were targeted on this group in 34 per cent of institutions.

- When asked which of the institution's outreach activities were the most effective for raising aspirations, the activity mentioned most frequently was summer schools – mentioned by 30 per cent of respondents.

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[1] 'Other' master classes are master classes other than those provided in connection with the Advanced Extension Award.

Funding

- Seventy-eight per cent of respondents reported that their institution was in receipt of HEFCE summer school funding for 2002/03.

- Sixty-nine per cent of respondents indicated that at least one of their outreach activities was funded or part-funded by the 'postcode premium'.

- Where widening participation activities were reported to be funded or part-funded by schools and colleges using Aimhigher funding allocated to partnerships,[2] this had most frequently been used for generic master classes (reported by a third of respondents).

Collaboration and partnership

- Most higher education providers (84 per cent) were providing outreach activities in collaboration with other higher education providers. The mean number of partners was 4.6 (range 1 to 17).

- Many types of activities were provided in collaboration with other higher education providers. Summer schools and 'other' master classes were each reported to be provided collaboratively in 27 per cent of institutions, and a quarter of respondents reported that both presentations to schools and open days/ACE days were provided in collaboration with others.

Staffing and widening participation

- Sixty-four per cent of respondents reported that additional staff with responsibility for widening participation had been recruited in 2002/03. The mean number of academic/academic-related staff recruited was 1.6 full-time equivalent (fte); the mean number of outreach staff was 1.4 fte; and the mean number of administrative staff was 1.1 fte.

- Ninety per cent of respondents reported that there had been widening participation staff in post before 2002/03. The mean number of outreach staff in post was 2.6 fte; the mean number of academic/academic-related staff was 2.2 fte; and the mean number of administrative staff was 1.8 fte.

- Three-quarters of respondents reported that explicit training/guidance for admissions staff to help with widening participation had been provided during 2002/03. This was most frequently provided via workshops, seminars and newsletters/circulars, specific training and conferences.

Recruitment and special admissions strategies

- A variety of factors were reported to be taken into account by admissions staff when recruiting students in the context of widening participation. Sixty-three per cent of respondents reported that admissions staff took into account recommendations from schools/colleges with which the institution had links. Sixty-one per cent reported taking account of compacts/ partnerships with schools, colleges or LEAs. Attendance at university-run schools/classes was mentioned by 45 per cent of respondents and

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2   Via Strand 1 of the programme (see Section 2).

attendance at a school with lower than average GCE A level results was reported by 30 per cent of respondents.

♦ Nearly half of the respondents (48 per cent) reported that applications from schools taking part in outreach activities had increased since 1999. Forty per cent reported that the number of applications from state schools had increased over this period. Around a third of respondents reported that there had been more applications from those in areas with low rates of participation in higher education (36 per cent), from lower income groups (34 per cent), from young people with no family background of higher education (34 per cent), from disabled students (33 per cent) and young people from minority ethnic groups (30 per cent).

♦ Respondents were asked whether, in their opinion, their widening participation initiatives had had an impact in terms of increased applications. Forty-three per cent considered that they had had an impact, five per cent that they had not, 45 per cent felt it was too early to say or did not know (seven per cent did not respond).

♦ In 52 per cent of institutions it was reported that admissions targets for recruitment had been introduced in the context of widening participation. These were most frequently set in relation to HEFCE benchmarks.

♦ In two-thirds of institutions (67 per cent) special admissions strategies for students from disadvantaged backgrounds had been adopted. Strategies most frequently mentioned were provision of foundation or bridging courses and compact schemes (mentioned by 69 per cent and 64 per cent of respondents respectively). A further 27 per cent of respondents reported that additional background information was sought and 24 per cent reported that mature and disabled students received guaranteed interviews.

Support strategies and student retention

♦ Respondents were asked if their institution had adopted any special support strategies for students from disadvantaged backgrounds as part of its widening participation programme. Eighty-two per cent of respondents reported that they had; those most frequently reported were support for disabled students, study skills and enhanced student services (e.g. financial support, careers advice). Two main reasons were given for their introduction: as a result of a university initiative to widen participation and as a result of the HEFCE widening participation initiative.

♦ The types of staff most frequently reported to provide support were academic staff, followed by staff in the central administration and administrative staff at the departmental/faculty level.

Monitoring and evaluation of widening participation activities

♦ Ninety-one per cent of respondents reported that their institution carried out its own monitoring and evaluation of widening participation activities.

♦ A variety of methods were reported including monitoring through the HEFCE operating statement (reported by 85 per cent), analysing recruitment and retention data (76 per cent), preparing reports for the widening participation strategy committee or similar body (73 per cent) and tracking students who took part in outreach activities (55 per cent). In terms of the individual widening participation events a large majority of respondents (87 per cent) reported that feedback was sought from participants.

Opportunity Bursary scheme

♦ Respondents were asked what measures had been taken to identify applicants who might be eligible for an Opportunity Bursary. A variety of measures were adopted; those most frequently mentioned were informing students when an offer was made (mentioned by 30 per cent of respondents) and sending information to all those meeting the DfES criteria (27 per cent).

♦ Thirty-six per cent of respondents considered that Opportunity Bursaries had been 'broadly successful' in encouraging young people to enter higher education whilst 18 per cent felt they had been 'broadly unsuccessful' in this regard. Nearly a third were not able to say (33 per cent) and 13 per cent did not respond.

♦ Fifty-seven per cent of the respondents did not report any problems associated with deciding who should be awarded an Opportunity Bursary. Thirty-one per cent felt that there had been problems (12 per cent did not respond). The major problem identified was the limited supply of Opportunity Bursaries. Six institutions (nine per cent) reported that they had not been able to allocate all the bursaries. The main reason given was insufficient applicants who met the criteria.

Views about the Aimhigher Policy

♦ Respondents were generally very positive about the increased links that Aimhigher has engendered between higher education institutions, schools and FE colleges. The majority also felt that the programme had had a positive effect in expanding the number of widening participation activities that take place in higher education.

Emerging issues

♦ A number of implications for policy arise from this survey of higher education providers.

  ➢ Widening participation activities were reported to have increased between 2001/02 and 2002/03. In particular, it was reported that funding from Aimhigher had been used to both introduce and extend

outreach work. This suggests that the policy of focusing attention on widening participation, by both the DfES and HEFCE, has had the effect of increasing the focus within higher education institutions on access to higher education.

➢ Summer schools had been introduced and expanded as a result of Aimhigher in a significant minority of institutions. There was a suggestion that summer schools were particularly effective in terms of widening participation.

➢ There was a concern about the limited supply of Opportunity Bursaries. The re-introduction of student grants from autumn 2004 will address this issue.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1   The Evaluation of Aimhigher

The evaluation of the Aimhigher programme is being carried out on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) by a Consortium comprising the National Foundation for Educational Research, the London School of Economics and the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

The Aimhigher programme was established in 2001 (and was known at that time as Excellence Challenge) with the aim of improving access to higher education for able young students from poorer backgrounds. Its six strands aim:

to develop partnerships between schools, colleges and higher education institutions in order to raise aspirations and attainment in Excellence in Cities (EiC) areas and Education Action Zones (EAZs) and so encourage greater progression to higher education (**Strand 1**);

♦   to increase funding to higher education institutions to reach out to more young people (**Strand 2**);

♦   to provide clearer information and better marketing of the route to higher education for young people (**Strand 3**);

♦   to pilot new forms of extra financial help through 26,000 Opportunity Bursaries to young people, worth £2000 per student over three years (DfES, 2003a) (**Strand 4**);

♦   to 'identify what works, for whom, and under what circumstances' (DfES, 2003a) via an evaluation of the Aimhigher programme carried out by a consortium comprising the National Foundation for Educational Research, the London School of Economics and the Institute for Fiscal Studies (**Strand 5); and**

♦   to provide payments, through the student associates pilot programme to undergraduates to do work in schools and further education colleges (**Strand 6**); the aim is that the undergraduates will provide role models for the young people concerned and help them to learn more about higher education (DfES, 2003b).

The Government White Paper 'The Future of Higher Education' (DfES, 2003c), announced that the coverage of the programme would be widened so that by 2006, 86 new local partnerships would be in place. In addition, the Excellence Challenge programme would be brought together with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Partnerships for Progression (P4P) initiative, which began in 2003, to deliver a coherent outreach programme, called 'Aimhigher'. In 2003, HEFCE also announced changes to the way in which it funds universities for

widening participation activities, replacing the 'postcode premium' (see West *et al.*, 2003a) with the widening participation allocation.[3]

The evaluation is multifaceted with a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods being used to evaluate the programme. Methods include:

- large-scale surveys of students and tutors in schools and further education sector institutions, in order to provide information about such factors as activities undertaken as part of the Aimhigher programme and students' attitudes towards education; the information obtained from these surveys (combined with administrative data sources) will also be used to look at the impact of Aimhigher on attainment and progression;

- surveys of higher education providers to establish information about activities aimed at widening participation, and policies and practices in relation to access to higher education and perceived effectiveness;

- surveys of young people eligible for Opportunity Bursaries to ascertain their characteristics, financial circumstances and experiences;

- interviews with Aimhigher coordinators;

- area-based studies of specific partnerships and higher education institutions to explore policy and practice at a local level and the perceived effectiveness of the various strands of the programme.

The overall aim of the evaluation is to explore the effectiveness of the Aimhigher programme in terms of the extent to which it appears to contribute to increasing and widening participation in higher education. Whilst the quantitative methods will enable associations to be established between activities and outcomes, the qualitative methods will seek to explore the processes involved and identify practice that is perceived to be effective in terms of the overall programme aims.

1.2   The Survey of Higher Education Providers

In the Summer Term 2003, the second survey of higher education providers in England was conducted. The aim of the survey was to gather information about the relevant activities that had been undertaken by higher education providers as part of their widening participation initiatives and, in particular, as a result of the Excellence Challenge programme (see West *et al.*, 2003a for details of the first survey).

This report provides key findings that emerged from the survey. An outline of the Aimhigher programme is given in Section 2. Section 3 provides an overview of the methods adopted and Section 4 presents key findings. Section 5 concludes the report.

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[3]   From 2003-04 a combination of geo-demographics (postcode in 2003-04) and prior educational attainment have been used to reflect the costs associated with pre-application costs (the costs of aspiration raising) and post-application costs (the costs and risks that institutions are incurring by recruiting students that are more likely to drop out). This allows the widening participation allocation to be used for both raising aspiration and supporting students (HEFCE, 2003a).

2. THE AIMHIGHER PROGRAMME

The Aimhigher programme at the time the evaluation commenced, was for a duration of three years, beginning in September 2001. The programme builds on the widening participation strategy funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (see Higher Education Consultancy Group (HECG) & National Centre for Social Research (NCSR), 2003). The aim of the programme is to increase and widen participation in higher education among young people, including those from poorer backgrounds who apply for and enter higher education. Another key related aim is to improve the links between schools, colleges and universities. The programme is divided into six strands, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1.   Strands of the programme

- ◆ **Strand 1** funds a range of activities in schools and colleges to provide the encouragement and support that young people need to increase attainment, raise aspirations and successfully apply to university.

- ◆ **Strand 2** provides extra money to universities and other higher education providers for summer schools, outreach work and to help institutions with the extra costs involved with supporting students who come from areas with low participation rates in higher education.

- ◆ **Strand 3**, the Young People's Publicity Campaign provides advice, information and promotes higher education to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in a variety of ways.

- ◆ **Strand 4** provides extra financial support for students through 26,000 Opportunity Bursaries each worth £2,000 over three years.

- ◆ **Strand 5** is the evaluation of the programme; this is being carried out by a consortium comprising the National Foundation for Educational Research, the London School of Economics and the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

- ◆ **Strand 6** provides payments, through the student associates pilot programme to undergraduates to do work in schools and further education colleges; the aim is that they will provide role models for young people and help them to learn more about higher education.

Source: DfES (2003a; 2003b)

This report relates primarily to **Strands Two** and **Four**. The focus on Strand Two is on the particular activities and strategies that relate to widening participation, admissions and support. Our interest in Strand Four relates to the administration of the Opportunity Bursary scheme (see also West *et al.*, 2003b).

The specific objectives of **Strand Two**, as identified by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE, 2001a) are to:

- encourage institutions to widen participation in higher education by under-represented groups;

- raise the aspirations of all to attend the institution that is best able to match their abilities, interests and needs;

- ensure that all students have the best possible chance of succeeding in their studies.

Under Strand Two, higher education providers, have been given £60 million over the first three years of the programme, via HEFCE. Institutions have been given some discretion as to the use of this funding, in recognition of the fact that 'one size does not fit all' (DfEE, 2000), and perhaps more importantly, that institutions already had diverse approaches to widening participation. As examples of good practice in widening participation, the DfES (2000) provided a list of activities that had been 'shown to work' (p. 19). These included:

- appointment of recruitment staff, including 'ambassadors' to reach out to talented young people and to encourage applications;

- better training and development opportunities for staff engaged in selecting students to ensure a uniformly high quality of selection;

- action to ensure that admission and selection arrangements are free of any inadvertent bias;

- enhanced contact between higher education institutions and local schools and further education institutions, including more mentoring and assistance by staff and students;

- expansion of summer schools and other opportunities for young people and their teachers/tutors to come into contact with higher education institutions, their staff and students;

- better support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to ensure that they are retained once they enrol in higher education;

- appointment of a person who will co-ordinate all the outreach work to ensure maximum impact and a clear focus across the institution.

According to Lewis (2002), from the early 1990s widening participation became a priority for higher education institutions and, in particular, for HEFCE (see HECG & NCSR, 2003) which is responsible for distributing government funds to English higher education institutions – although even before this time, some individual institutions were active in this field (Lewis, 2002). Public funds to higher education institutions for widening participation are allocated and distributed by HEFCE (see West *et al.*, 2003a). In this context it is important to note that between 2001-02 and 2003-04, £60 million is being distributed under **Strand Two** to higher education providers through HEFCE via three funding streams:

- the postcode premium;
- the aspiration premium; and
- the summer school scheme.

Both the postcode premium[4] and the summer school scheme were pre-existing HEFCE funded initiatives, which Aimhigher supported through additional resources (see West *et al.*, 2003a). However, the **aspiration premium** was a new funding stream under Aimhigher providing £6 million a year for each of three years (2001-02 to 2003-04), designed to support outreach work to raise the aspirations of state educated pupils (primarily – but not necessarily – in Excellence in Cities (EiC) and statutory Education Action Zone (EAZ) areas), 'to attend the institution from which they will derive maximum benefit' (HEFCE, 2000). This funding is only provided to institutions with an intake of less than 80 per cent of students from state schools and further education sector colleges.

The third funding stream relates specifically to the higher education **summer schools** initiative, which started in 1999-2000 as part of the EiC initiative. In 2001-02, it came under the remit of Excellence Challenge. Each year, £4 million is being allocated to support the summer schools programme for students in Years 11, and initially in 2001 for students in Year 12 as well, from state schools and further education sector colleges in Aimhigher areas (i.e. EiC areas and statutory Education Action Zones). The scheme aims to give students a taste of university/college life for one week, and in particular, to encourage students from families and educational backgrounds who may not usually consider higher education, to apply for higher education programmes and also to consider a wider range of institutions and or subjects (HEFCE, 2001a).

It is important to stress that Strand Two of Aimhigher builds on widening participation initiatives already in place in universities. It should also be noted that there is a linkage between Strand Two and Strand One of the programme as schools and colleges in Aimhigher partnerships are able to commission widening participation activities directly from higher education providers or enable activities that are already provided to be extended to additional numbers of students.

By way of contrast, **Strand Four**, the Opportunity Bursary scheme was a new initiative, providing certain eligible students with £2,000 over the course of three years with £1,000 given in the first year and payments of £500 made for the second and third years. Opportunity Bursaries are for young people from low-income backgrounds with little or no family experience of higher

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4   The postcode premium was introduced in 1999-2000 and allocates additional funding to institutions in respect of students from areas with lower than average rates of higher education participation. This is in recognition of the additional costs involved in teaching these students. Additional funding is also allocated when institutions recruit students with disabilities, in recognition of the additional costs of supporting them (HEFCE, 2002b). From 2003-04, a new method of distribution is to be used (see footnote 3).

education and aim to help students meet the initial costs of starting a course in higher education, and to offer them some financial confidence when applying for, and completing their studies in higher education (DfES, 2003a).

Opportunity Bursaries are allocated to all institutions with full-time undergraduates, and selected further education colleges providing higher education. For 2001/02 and 2002/03, the bursaries were to be allocated first of all to young people from state schools and colleges in Phase 1 and Phase 2 EiC areas and statutory EAZs, 'provided that the school or college is talking part in the Aimhigher programme, and is receiving funding to support this' (DfES, 2002). In 2001/02, up to a maximum of 7,000 Opportunity Bursaries were made available for allocation (DfES, 2002).[5]

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[5] 6,580 bursaries were allocated in 2001/02 and 8,210 new bursaries were allocated in 2002/03 (Hansard, 2002).

3. METHODS

In April 2003, postal questionnaires and an accompanying letter were sent to 120 higher education institutions and 13 further education (FE) colleges (in England) providing higher education. The institutions were selected in conjunction with the DfES. All had been allocated Opportunity Bursaries for the academic year 2002/03.

Completed questionnaires were returned (after reminder letters and telephone calls) from a total of 67 institutions, giving an overall response rate of 50 per cent. Twenty-eight were pre-1992 universities, 31 were post-1992 universities, three were classified as 'other' institutions and five were FE colleges.

The proportion of pre-1992 higher education institutions responding to the survey was somewhat higher than that in England at 45 per cent (compared with 39 per cent in England) while the proportion of post-1992 institution was slightly lower at 50 per cent (compared with 52 per cent in England) and the proportion of 'other' institutions, such as specialist colleges was substantially lower than in England (five per cent versus nine per cent).[6] The universities that responded to the survey were similar to those in England in terms of key indicators (see Annex).

Fifty-one percent of the respondents (34) were widening participation coordinators; the remainder included the institution's vice principal or similar; the academic or assistant academic registrar; admissions tutors; and one specifically designated Aimhigher coordinator.

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[6] N=131 – higher education institutions in England; N=62 – sample of higher education institutions.

4. KEY FINDINGS

This section presents selected findings from the survey, focusing in particular on: widening participation activities; sources of funding; collaboration; staffing; admissions; support strategies; monitoring and evaluation; the Opportunity Bursary scheme; and views about the Aimhigher programme.

4.1 Widening participation activities

Respondents were asked to indicate the scope of the widening participation outreach activities provided. They were asked to indicate from a list of possible activities those that had been planned or had taken place in 2002/03 with particular reference to activities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. They were also asked about activities that had taken place in 2001/02.

Table 1.   Widening participation activities in institutions

Widening participation activity	Actual/planned activities 2002/03 %	Actual activities 2001/02 %
Presentations to schools about university	93	84
Summer schools	91	88
Visits to reinforce school links by university staff	84	75
Outreach work with community groups	73	51
Open days/ACE days	66	63
Student ambassador scheme	61	49
Parent focussed activities	61	51
Master classes*	55	43
Mentoring of school pupils by undergraduates**	52	42
Tutoring of school pupils by university students	51	42
Road shows	46	33
Shadowing of university students by pupils	43	31
Specialists classes on degree subjects	40	31
Saturday schools	31	28
Participation in National Mentoring Pilot	30	22
Revision classes	25	16
Advanced Extension Award Master classes	24	19
Winter schools	18	13
Other	30	13
N=67		

* Excluding Advanced Extension Award Master Classes.
** Excluding the National Mentoring Pilot.
More than one answer could be given; total does not equal 100.

As shown in Table 1, the most frequently reported outreach activity in 2002/03 was presentations to schools about university, followed by summer schools (each mentioned by around nine out of ten respondents) and visits to schools by university staff. Nearly three-quarters of respondents mentioned that they were involved in outreach work with community groups and two-thirds that they had held or planned to hold open days/ACE (Aiming for a College Education) days for widening participation. The mean number of activities offered was 10.1 (range 0 to 19). For pre-1992 institutions the mean number was 11.4 and for post-1992 institutions it was 9.7. For each outreach activity more institutions were planning or had provided that activity in 2002/03 than in 2001/02. The largest change over the two years was in the number of institutions reporting that they had carried out, or planned to carry out, outreach work with community groups; 51 per cent of institutions reported such involvement in 2001/02 compared with 73 per cent in 2002/03, an increase of 22 percentage points.

Only one statistically significant difference[7] was found in the activities offered by pre- and post-1992 universities with more pre- than post-1992 institutions offering tutoring of school pupils by university students (61 per cent versus 39 per cent).

Institutions were then asked to indicate whether particular activities had been specifically introduced or extended as a result of the Aimhigher programme. Table 2 shows those activities where at least ten per cent of respondents reported that particular activities had been introduced and/or extended as a result of the programme.

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[7]   All differences reported as statistically significant are significant at the 0.05 level or beyond using chi-squared analyses.

Table 2.   **Activities introduced/extended by institutions as a result of Aimhigher**

Widening participation activity	Introduced as a result of Aimhigher %	Extended as a result of Aimhigher %
Summer Schools	28	25
Master classes*	25	22
Road shows	19	16
AEA Master classes	15	4
Open days/ACE days	12	28
Mentoring of school pupils by university students	10	18
Parent focused events	9	21
Presentations to schools about university	6	34
Outreach work with community groups	6	12
Specialist classes on degree subjects	4	13
Saturday Schools	4	10
Shadowing of university students	3	10
Student ambassador scheme	3	19
Tutoring of school pupils by university students	3	12
Visits to reinforce school links	1	30
Other activities	10	12
None	22	18
N=67		

Excluding Advanced Extension Award Master Classes
More than one answer could be given; total does not equal 100.

As shown in Table 2, around a quarter of institutions reported that summer schools and 'other' master classes (not Advanced Extension Award (AEA) Master Classes) had been introduced as a result of the Aimhigher programme. Similar proportions indicated that these activities had been extended as a result of the programme.[8]   Around a fifth of respondents reported that road shows had been introduced as a result of Aimhigher and slightly fewer that they had been extended as a result of the programme. Interestingly, in around one in three institutions, more longstanding activities, presentations to schools and visits to reinforce school links, had been extended as a result of the programme. By way of contrast, around a fifth of respondents reported that no activities had been introduced as a result of the programme and a similar proportion that no activities had been extended as a result of the programme.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, most outreach activities were targeted at students identified as being in the 'widening participation cohort'. Table 3 shows the percentage of institutions targeting widening participation activities on this

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[8]   It is noteworthy that around one in ten respondents indicated that summer schools (12 per cent) and 'other' master classes (ten per cent) had been both introduced and extended as a result of the Aimhigher programme.

group (activities targeted by less then ten per cent of institutions are not included).

Table 3. Activities provided for the widening participation cohort

Widening participation activity	Institutions %
Summer schools	60
Presentations to schools about university	51
Open/ACE days	46
Mentoring of school pupils by undergraduates*	36
Visits to schools by university staff	34
Outreach work with community groups	30
Student ambassador scheme	27
Road shows	27
Shadowing of university students by pupils	27
Master classes**	25
Parent focused events	25
Tutoring of pupils by university students	24
Specialist classes	18
Saturday Schools	16
National Mentoring Pilot Project	10
Other activities	27
N=67	

Excluding the National Mentoring Pilot.
*** Excluding Advanced Extension Award Master Classes*
More than one answer could be given; total does not equal 100.

As shown in Table 3, six out of ten respondents mentioned that summer schools were provided for the widening participation cohort. Presentations to schools about university and open/ACE days were reported to be provided for the widening participation cohort by around half the respondents.

Fewer of the outreach activities were reported to be focused on the 'gifted and talented cohort'. Master classes, particularly those not associated with the Advanced Extension Award and summer schools were the most frequently mentioned (by 36 per cent and 34 per cent of respondents respectively), followed by AEA master classes (16 per cent), Saturday schools (15 per cent) and specialist classes (ten per cent). In almost a quarter of institutions (24 per cent) no activities were specifically targeted on the gifted and talented.

Widening participation activities were most frequently provided for school students aged 14 to 16 years or school/college students between 16 and 19; relatively few activities were provided for those below 14 years of age. In the case of summer schools around three-quarters of respondents reported that provision was made for those aged 14 to 16 (73 per cent) and about a third (31 per cent) for those aged 16 to 19. In comparison, only 15 per cent reported that such provision was made for those aged 11 to 14 and only four per cent for younger age groups. For 'other' master classes a similar proportion of

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respondents reported that those aged 16 to 19 and those aged 14 to 16 took part in this activity (33 per cent and 30 per cent respectively) compared with less than five per cent of the younger age groups.

In an open-ended question, respondents were asked which of their institution's outreach activities, in their opinion, were the most effective in raising the aspirations of young people and which were the least effective. Figure 2 gives their responses.

Figure 2.   Activities perceived to be the most effective in raising aspirations

% Institutions N=63
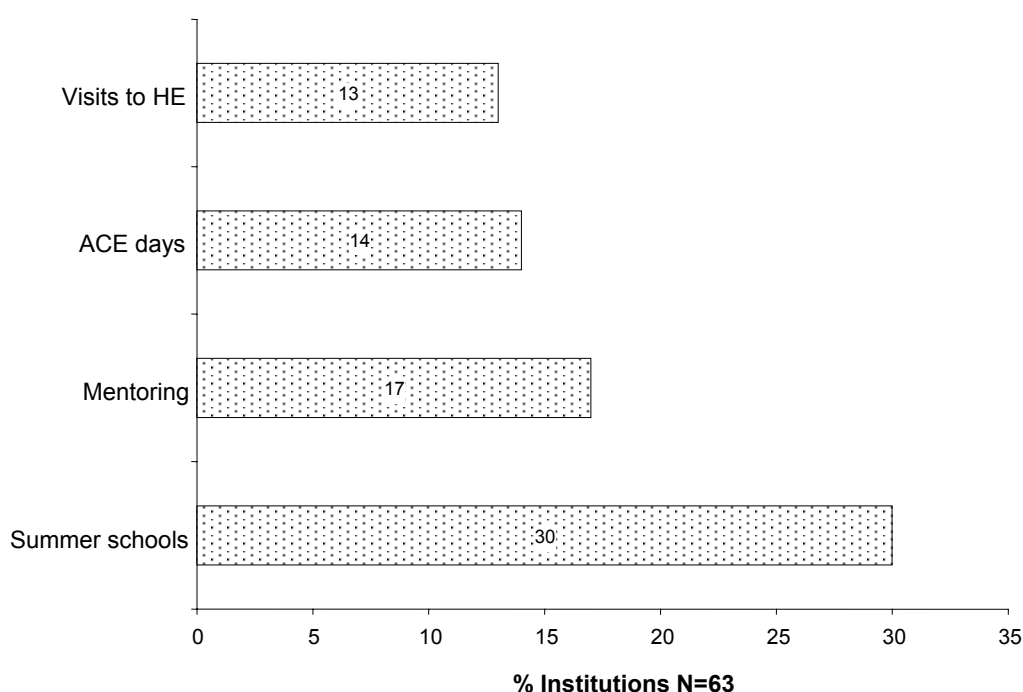
The activities mentioned most frequently (N=63) as being the 'most effective' in terms of raising aspirations were summer schools (30 per cent (19 respondents)), followed by mentoring (17 per cent (11)), ACE days (14 per cent (nine)) and visits to higher education institutions (13 per cent (eight)). One respondent noted:

> *Because summer schools are residential and last at least five days in length their impact is greater and longer lasting. The pupils also have the opportunity to see all facets of student life and the barriers to university are broken down more effectively as a result of increased confidence.*

Far fewer respondents identified any particular activity as being the 'least effective' (with more than a third – 25 of the 67 respondents – not answering this question). Indeed no particular type of activity was identified as the 'least effective' by more than six respondents. One respondent commented: '*we have abandoned activities that don't work*'.

More generally, 'effective' and 'ineffective' activities were seen by some respondents as having particular characteristics, rather than being of a particular type. Successful aspiration raising events were seen as being focused and with a clear objective and outcome; they were targeted/tailored to meet the needs of specific groups; and carried out over a long period. The use of higher education students as role models was also seen as being a very important component of a successful widening participation activity. One respondent described the most effective activities as:

> *Allowing the young people to explore their own creativity alongside students from similar backgrounds to themselves in a new and exciting environment for a sustained period. This allows them to develop and really grasp what the potentials of education are.*

Unsuccessful activities, on the other hand, were described as being less targeted; involving little interaction by the students themselves; and lacking higher education students as role models. The lecture model ('talking heads') was singled out by several respondents as being particularly ineffective:

> *Having a group of young people sat in a group being talked at provides no inspiration or real sense of what they themselves can achieve.*

> *One-off events need to be part of a consistent programme throughout a pupil's school life. If not their impact is short-lived.*

4.2   Sources of funding

A series of questions relating to the funding of widening participation activities were asked. Given that there has been a particular focus in the Aimhigher programme on summer schools (see Section 2), we asked whether institutions were in receipt of this funding stream. In total, 78 per cent of respondents (52) reported that their institution was in receipt of HEFCE summer school funding for 2002/03.

Another major funding stream was the post-code premium. Respondents were asked if any of their outreach activities had been funded or part-funded using this allocation. Sixty-nine per cent of respondents (46) indicated that one or more of their activities were funded in this way whilst seven per cent (five) reported that no activities were funded in this way (nine did not know and seven did not answer the question). Of those institutions providing information (N=46), postcode funding was most frequently used to fund the following activities (percentage and number of institutions in brackets):

♦ presentations to schools (67 per cent (31));

♦ visits to schools (61 per cent (28));

♦ student ambassador scheme (43 per cent (20));

- open/ACE days for widening participation (43 per cent (20));
- 'other' master classes (41 per cent (19));
- 'other' mentoring (39 per cent (18));
- parent-focused events (37 per cent (17));
- outreach work with community groups (37 per cent (17)).

A unique aspect of the Aimhigher programme is that under Strand 1 of the programme funding is provided directly to the Aimhigher partnerships, enabling the partnership and/or schools or colleges to 'purchase' widening participation activities directly from higher education providers.

Respondents were asked to indicate which, if any, of their outreach activities had been provided in this way; those reported by at least ten per cent of respondents (N=67) were 'other' master classes (33 per cent (22)); open days/ACE days (18 per cent (12)); presentations to schools (16 per cent (11)); AEA Master Classes (15 per cent (ten)); summer schools (12 per cent (eight)); visits by university staff to schools (ten per cent (seven)); and Saturday schools (ten per cent (seven)). A quarter of respondents reported that no activities had been funded using this funding stream (two per cent did not know).

4.3   Collaboration and partnership

Respondents were asked to provide details of the number of LEAs and Aimhigher partnerships/areas[9] that were involved in their outreach activities. On average, higher education providers were working with ten LEAs (median 6) (range 1 to 150). The mean number of Aimhigher partnerships taking part in outreach activities was reported to be five (median 4), however one institution reported that it was working with 20 Aimhigher areas and three respondents indicated that they did not work with any.

In terms of the number of schools, sixth forms and FE colleges taking part in particular outreach activities, road shows involved by far the largest number of institutions (an average of 140), followed by visits to schools (63), summer schools (58) and presentations to schools (53).

Eighty-four per cent of respondents (56) reported that they provided outreach activities in partnership with other higher education providers[10] (96 per cent of pre-1992 and 81 per cent of post-1992 institutions). The mean number of

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[9]   Excellence in Cities, Education Action Zones or Excellence Cluster areas.

[10]   Of the nine (13 per cent) that reported that they were not operating in partnership with others, seven (ten per cent) planned to do so and two (three per cent) did not have any such plans. A further two (three per cent) did not answer the question.

partners was 4.6 (range 1 to 17).[11] More than three-quarters of respondents had plans to increase collaboration in the future (78 per cent (52)).[12]

Respondents reported a wide range of factors that had prompted them to collaborate with other higher education providers. Most frequently the links had been established as a result of particular initiatives or funding streams such as HEFCE-funded widening participation projects or HEFCE's Partnership for Progression (P4P) but in other cases there were other reasons. Comments included the following:

> *We were already a member of a consortium and widening participation was identified as an area in which collaboration could build capacity and add value.*

> *There is a long history of working in collaboration on this agenda particularly through HEFCE/FEFC Special Initiative Funding 1999-2002. We are now building on this huge volume of work.*

> *We had common concerns and aims* [as our partners]*; we all provide courses related to health and medicine.*

Generally, respondents felt very positive about the collaboration that had taken place with other higher education providers: three-quarters (50) reported that collaboration had been 'successful' and only 1 respondent thought that it had been 'unsuccessful'; a further 24 per cent (16) did not answer the question. The following comments were typical:

> *We have developed a strong sense of partnership in our work and we have been able to cover more ground. A very positive aspect has been the sharing of good practice.*

> *More cost effective – we can target a whole year group at one time if half visit one institution and the other half go elsewhere.*

> *Provides potential students with a broader range of experience and options about higher education.*

> *It is successful because we have chosen to concentrate on areas that are non-competitive i.e. younger age groups.*

Activities reported to be provided in conjunction with other higher education providers by ten per cent or more of respondents are presented in Table 4.

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[11] For pre-1992 institutions the mean was 4.0 (range 1 to 17) and for post-1992 institutions it was 5.2 (range 1 to 10).

[12] Five (seven per cent) had no plans to increase collaboration and ten (15 per cent) did not answer this question.

Table 4.   Activities provided in collaboration with other providers

Widening participation activity	Institutions %
Summer schools	27
'Other' master classes*	27
Presentations to schools about university	25
Open/ACE days	25
Parent focused events	21
Visits to schools by university staff	18
Road shows	16
Tutoring of pupils by university students	15
Outreach work with community groups	15
Student ambassador scheme	12
Shadowing of university students by pupils	12
Specialist classes	10
Other activities	19
N=67	

* Excluding Advanced Extension Award Master Classes.
More than one answer could be given; total does not equal 100.

As can be seen in Table 4, around a quarter of respondents reported that summer schools, 'other' master classes, presentations to schools about university and open/ACE days for widening participation were provided in collaboration with other higher education providers.

4.4 Staffing and widening participation

A series of questions about staffing in the context of widening participation within the institution were asked; in addition, respondents were asked about activities targeted at individual school or college teachers in respect of widening participation.

Respondents were asked whether any **additional** staff had been recruited with responsibility for widening participation issues in 2002/03. Sixty-four per cent (43) reported that they had recruited such staff[13]; the mean number (full-time equivalent) of each category of staff are given in Table 5.

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[13]   Twenty-eight per cent had not recruited such staff (19) and seven per cent did not answer the question.

Table 5.   Number of additional full-time equivalent (fte) staff recruited

Category of staff	Mean number of staff (fte)	N
Academic/academic-related	1.6	15
Outreach staff	1.4	14
Administrative	1.1	11
Clerical	1.0	7
Other	4.6	5

A filter question: all those reporting that additional staff recruited and providing data.

Because of the longstanding nature of universities' involvement in widening participation, respondents were also asked if any staff were in post **before** 2002/03.   Only four institutions (six per cent) had no staff engaged in widening participation before 2002/03, three others (four per cent)) did not answer the question.   The mean number (full-time equivalent) of different categories of staff are given in Table 6.

Table 6.   Number of full-time equivalent widening participation staff in post before 2002/03

Category of staff	Mean number of staff (fte)	N
Outreach staff	2.6	30
Academic/academic-related	2.2	28
Administrative	1.8	30
Clerical	1.5	18
Other	3.4	10

A filter question: all those reporting staff in post and providing data.

As shown in Table 6, the mean number of outreach staff in post was 2.6 fte; the mean number of academic/academic-related staff was 2.2 fte; and the mean number of administrative staff was 1.8 fte.

Three-quarters of respondents (51) reported that explicit training/guidance for admissions staff to help with widening participation had been provided during 2002/03.[14]   The methods of delivery most frequently used were (N=51):

♦   workshops (75 per cent (38));

♦   seminars (57 per cent (29));

♦   newsletters (57 per cent (29));

♦   specific training e.g. courses (49 per cent (25));

♦   conferences (47 per cent (24)).

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[14]   Nineteen per cent (13) reported that no training had been given and five per cent (three) did not answer the question.

In an open-ended question respondents were asked which method of delivery they found to be the most effective. Workshops followed by seminars (mentioned by 24 per cent (16) and 12 per cent (eight) respectively) were preferred because they offered more opportunity for questions to be answered and for interactive discussion to take place. One respondent considered that:

> *Conference participation was usually too broad. Workshops, especially at a faculty level were far more effective for discussing specific issues, for example, ethnic representation on different programmes and modules, and associated discussion of teaching and learning strategies.*

However, a range of different fora for training were also suggested as being effective in local contexts including interview training for admissions staff 'to ensure fair treatment for applicants', 'courses tailored precisely to staff needs', 'lunchtime staff development with visiting speakers' and one respondent suggested that working alongside staff was the most effective way 'to convert hearts and minds'.

In relation to the provision of activities for staff outside the institution, respondents were asked about any activities that they provided that were targeted at individual school or college teachers in respect of widening participation in higher education. Forty-two per cent of institutions (28) were providing continuing professional development for teachers[15] and 31 per cent (21)[16] were providing Excellence Fellowship Awards.[17]

A range of other activities targeted at school or college teachers was reported by a small number of respondents. These included the shadowing of higher education staff by teachers (reported by three respondents), conferences and curriculum enhancement activities (each reported by two respondents).

4.5 Student recruitment and admissions

A series of questions were asked about student recruitment and selection. Respondents were asked for details of the factors taken into account when making decisions about who should be offered places and the impact of widening participation activities on the number of applications.

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[15] Forty per cent (27) were not providing such training and 18 per cent (12) did not answer the question.

[16] Fifty-one per cent were not (34) and 18 per cent (12) did not answer the question.

[17] Excellence Fellowship Awards were introduced by the government to support widening participation in higher education and enable teachers in schools and FE colleges to spend a term in an HEI in order to undertake a project that is directed at encouraging progression to higher education among their students (HEFCE, 2002a).

Recruitment of students

Respondents reported that a range of factors was taken into account when they were recruiting or selecting students in the context of widening participation as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3.   Factors taken into account when recruiting or selecting students
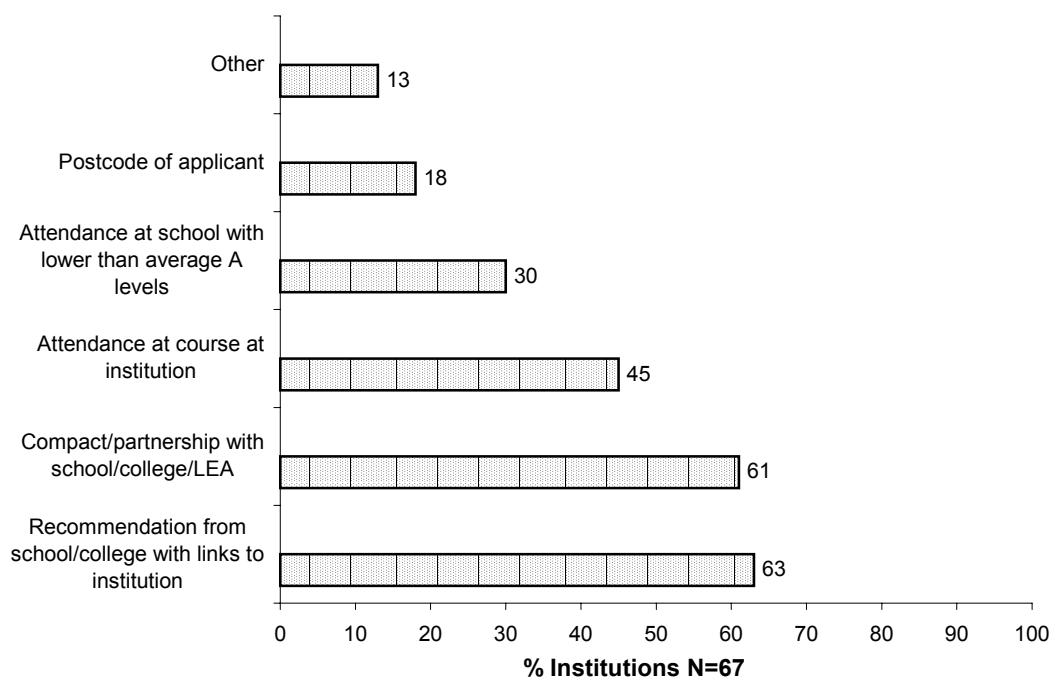
As can be seen in Figure 3, around two-thirds of all respondents[18] reported that they took into account recommendations from schools and colleges with which the institution had links, and a similar proportion indicated that they took into account compacts or partnerships (with schools, colleges or LEAs). Other factors taken into account included applicants who had participated in an event at the institution and the performance of students from schools with lower than average A level performance. The postcode of applicants was taken into account in a minority of cases, as were other factors (e.g. evidence of potential or attendance on an access scheme).

Impact of widening participation on student recruitment

Respondents were asked whether in their opinion the institution's widening participation activities had had an impact in terms of increased applications. Forty-three per cent (29) reported that in their view they had had an impact compared with five per cent (three) who felt that there had been no impact. Forty-five per cent (30) felt that it was too early to say or did not know and seven per cent (five) did not answer the question.

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18   Sixteen per cent of respondents (11) did not answer this question.

20

Respondents who indicated that the activities had had an impact in terms of increased applications were asked an open-ended question about which appeared to be most effective. From their responses, the most effective activities appeared to be those that involved a sustained relationship between the higher education provider and the schools or FE colleges taking part in them; these included admission compacts, other partnership arrangements and a range of specific activities such as summer schools, students mentoring/volunteering and specific curriculum projects. However, one respondent noted:

All activities have contributed to general awareness of the offer, the institution and the support they are likely to get post entry.

Respondents were asked if there had been increased applications from particular groups of students since 1999/2000. Their responses are given in Table 7.

Table 7.   Percentage of institutions reporting increased applications

Increased applications from…	Institutions %
Young people from state schools/colleges participating in outreach activities	48
Young people from state schools/colleges	40
Young people from areas with low rates of higher education participation	36
Young people with no parental experience of higher education	34
Young people from lower income groups	34
Disabled students	33
Young people from minority ethnic groups	30
Mature students	24
N=67	

As can be seen in Table 7, nearly half of the respondents reported that there had been increased applications from young people from state schools/colleges participating in outreach activities since 1999. Four out of ten reported that there had been increased applications from young people from state schools. In the view of around a third of respondents there had been more applications from areas with low rates of higher education participation, lower income groups, young people with no family background of higher education, disabled students and students from minority ethnic groups[19].

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[19] More respondents from post- than pre-1992 institutions reported increased applications from young people from minority ethnic groups (12 versus 5). This difference did not quite reach statistical significance (p=0.058). There were no other differences that were statistically significant, or bordering on statistical significance, between pre- and post-1992 institutions in the other categories of applicants.

Special admissions strategies

Respondents were asked if, as part of their widening participation programme, their institution had adopted any special admissions strategies for students from disadvantaged families. Two-thirds of institutions (45)[20] reported that they had adopted such strategies and 30 per cent (20) had not (three per cent (two) did not answer the question). The modal year for the introduction of such strategies was 2000.

In those cases where special admissions strategies had been adopted, respondents were asked which of a series of strategies had been used. Their responses are shown in Table 8.

Table 8.   Special admissions strategies for disadvantaged students

Strategies adopted	Institutions %
Foundation/bridging courses prior to degree course	69
Compact scheme/progression accord or similar	64
Additional background information	27
Guaranteed interviews to mature students	24
Guaranteed interviews to disabled students	24
Offer linked to attending university widening participation activity	22
Lower points offer for students from disadvantaged backgrounds	22
Lower points offer for students from lower performing schools	13
Other (e.g. psychometric testing, aptitude testing)	16
N = 45	

A filter question: all those reporting special admission strategies for disadvantaged students.
More than one answer could be put forward; total does not equal 45.

As shown in Table 8, the admissions strategies most frequently adopted were the provision of foundation or bridging courses and compact (or similar schemes). These two strategies were each mentioned by around two-thirds of those respondents who had special admissions schemes in place. Around a quarter of respondents mentioned that additional background information was sought in the case of students from disadvantaged backgrounds; a similar proportion said that mature and disabled students were guaranteed interviews.

Of the 45 institutions that had introduced special admissions strategies, 30 (67 per cent) considered that these strategies had had a positive effect in terms of widening participation.[21] One respondent described the foundation scheme run at her university, which, it was reported had a 70 per cent pass rate:

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[20] Seventy-nine per cent (22) of pre- and 64 per cent (20) of post-1992 institutions (one 'other' higher education institution and two further education sector institutions). The difference was not statistically significant.

[21] Only one respondent thought that the strategies had not had a positive effect (two per cent), 14 did not answer the question (31 per cent).

> *The Science and Engineering Foundation course recruits approximately 200 students per year. The majority are local, from ethnic minorities, and who do not meet the entry requirements of Year 1.*

Among the compact schemes described and found to be successful was the following scheme in which:

> *Special consideration was given to students attending state high schools* [in the local area] *whose personal circumstances may affect their ability to succeed at the levels that would normally be expected by admission tutors. This can be for a variety of reasons including lack of tradition of progression to higher education, genuine financial hardship, personal crisis, family responsibilities and educational disadvantage.*

Another respondent noted the positive impact of their institution's summer schools programme:

> *The prospect of a lower grade offer has encouraged summer school participants* [from low participation schools/areas] *to apply.*

Other respondents found that applications from specific groups had increased following the introduction of schemes to widen access for students with disabilities and learning support needs. One institution, for example, had developed a progression agreement for students who needed to study locally for medical or dependency reasons:

> *Some students have received slightly less challenging offers and all (2002/03) have received enhanced support at the pre-entry/transitional phase.*

Fifty-two per cent of respondents had adopted widening participation targets for their institution in respect of recruitment.[22] Thirty-two of these 35 respondents provided information about how targets were set. The majority (19) referred to HEFCE benchmarks, for example:

> *The targets are set down in the Institution's Strategic Plan 2000-03 and are based on HEFCE Performance Indicators.*

> *For 2003/04: five to ten more state school pupils and five to ten more pupils from low participation neighbourhoods/social classes IIIM-V* [skilled manual, partly skilled and unskilled]. *The targets were set in relation to HEFCE benchmarks.*

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[22] Forty per cent (27) had not set any targets, seven per cent (five) did not answer the question. There were no statistically significant differences between pre- and post-1992 institutions in terms of the percentage reporting setting targets for recruitment.

Targets are two per cent better year on year above the benchmark and are set out in the Strategic Plan 2002-2005/06.

4.6 Support strategies

In order to achieve the objective of widening participation in higher education, it is important not only to recruit students from disadvantaged backgrounds on to higher education courses but also to retain them once they have commenced these courses.

Respondents were asked if as part of its widening participation programme, their institution had adopted any special support strategies for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Eighty-two per cent of respondents (55)[23] reported that they had such strategies in place;[24] the modal year for the introduction of such strategies was 2000. Table 9 provides information on the support strategies adopted.

Table 9.   Strategies to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds

Support strategies adopted	Institutions %
Support for disabled students	85
Study skills (e.g. literacy and numeracy, workshops)	76
Enhanced student services (e.g. financial support, careers advice)	71
Mentoring by other students	58
Support for mature students	51
Additional guidance (by academic tutor)	47
N = 55	

A filter question: all those reporting that the institution had adopted one or more special admission strategies for disadvantaged students.
More than one answer could be put forward; total does not equal 100.

As shown in Table 9, where special support strategies were reported to be in place, the most frequently mentioned strategies were support for disabled students, the provision of study skills and enhanced support services.[25] When asked what prompted these strategies to be introduced, 51 of the 55 respondents considered that it was the institution's own initiative; 18 considered that HEFCE's initiative to widening participation had also played a part in initiating the support; and a further five also cited the Aimhigher programme.[26]

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[23]   Seventy-nine per cent (22) of pre- and 90 per cent (28) of post-1992 institutions (three 'other' higher education institutions and four further education sector institutions). The difference was not statistically significant.

[24]   Eight per cent (five) did not have a support strategy in place and ten per cent (seven) did not answer the question.

[25]   It is likely that the support for disabled students is linked to the Special Educational Needs and Discrimination Act 2001.

[26]   More than one response could be given.

Respondents were also asked whether they had any evidence of the efficacy of the strategies adopted. Of the 55 respondents who reported having adopted such strategies, 20 felt there was no evidence of their efficacy as yet while 15[27] felt there was some evidence (20 did not respond). Where positive evidence was cited this tended to take the form of reports of increasing retention rates or maintenance of an already high retention rate.

Respondents were asked about the types of staff involved in providing support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Table 10 gives details of the type of staff providing support.

Table 10.   Type of staff involved in providing support

Type of staff providing support	Institutions %
Departmental/faculty academic staff	82
Staff within central administration	78
Departmental/faculty administrative staff	58
College/school teachers	20
N = 55	

A filter question: all those reporting special support strategies for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
More than one answer could be put forward; total does not equal 100.

Table 10 shows that in around eight out of ten institutions that reported special support strategies for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, academic staff and staff located in the institution's central administration were involved in providing this support. Administrative staff at a departmental or faculty level were involved in providing support in about six out of ten institutions.[28]

4.7   Monitoring and evaluation of widening participation activities

Respondents were asked whether their institution carried out its own monitoring and evaluation of its widening participation activities. Ninety-one per cent of respondents (N=61) reported doing so.[29]

Overall, across all institutions surveyed (N=67), the following types of monitoring took place at a macro level:

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[27]   More respondents from post- than pre-1992 institutions considered that there was evidence of the efficacy of the strategies adopted (9 versus 2). This difference just failed to reach statistical significance (p=0.052).

[28]   No statistically significant differences were found between pre- and post-1992 institutions in terms of the type of staff providing support.

[29]   No statistically significant differences were found between pre- and post-1992 institutions in terms of the percentage reporting that monitoring and evaluation took place.

- 85 per cent (57) reported monitoring through HEFCE operating statement;

- 76 per cent (51) analysed recruitment/retention data;

- 73 per cent (49) prepared reports to widening participation strategy committee or similar.

At a micro level, the following type of monitoring took place:

- 87 per cent (58) reported monitoring the feedback of participants;

- 55 per cent (37) tracked students who took part in outreach activities.

- 39 per cent (26) tracked students' progress on undergraduate programmes.

In short, whilst very high percentages of respondents reported macro level monitoring and evaluation, fewer reported tracking of students who took part in outreach activities and students' progress on undergraduate programmes.

Respondents were asked to provide further details of the monitoring that took place at their institution. Some reported on the tracking of school and college students who had taken part in widening participation activities including one respondent who reported that tracking of students to the institution in question and its partner college was undertaken as students moved into higher education. Another reported that widening participation activities were evaluated internally through follow-up questionnaires to school students, teachers and outreach centres. However, the problems of tracking students were raised by two respondents:

> *Tracking of* [widening participation] *students is only possible within the institution. If students go elsewhere it is impossible to track them.*

> *There is a tracking deficit nationally.*

Several respondents provided information on the organisation of monitoring and evaluation within their institution. In one case this appeared to be quite informal with a report being prepared to the appropriate deputy vice-chancellor; in others it tended to be more formal via a widening participation steering committee or similar body. One respondent provided details on the extensive reporting mechanism in operation:

> [The widening participation] *committee meets regularly and updates are given; the widening participation officer also provides updates at the disabilities liaison committee, the student services group, the learning and teaching committee, the faculty boards and the equal opportunity group on a regular basis.*

Eighty-two per cent of all respondents reported that information on widening participation was disseminated to staff within their institution.[30] Of these 55 respondents, the majority (43) reported that information was disseminated to all departments and faculties, whilst only one reported that it was not (11 respondents did not answer the question).[31]

A range of methods of disseminating information was used by those respondents reporting that information on widening participation was disseminated to staff within their institution (N=55). The most frequently mentioned were:

♦ workshops/seminars/conferences (78 per cent (43));

♦ university widening participation policy/strategy/targets (76 per cent (42));

♦ advice/guidance (64 per cent (35));

♦ updates/circulars/ newsletters (64 per cent (35));

♦ HEFCE circulars (44 per cent (24).

Other methods of dissemination, which were mentioned by smaller numbers of respondents, included use of websites or intranets, e-mails, via faculty widening participation representatives and papers or reports to committees or boards of various types.

Respondents were then asked which methods of dissemination they considered to be the most effective. Although a number of respondents suggested a combination of methods in order to ensure that the widest possible audience was reached, others favoured particular approaches such as face-to-face contact of various types, publications of various kinds or other approaches.

Workshops and seminars tended to be favoured because of the level of interaction that they allowed as well as the possibilities that such settings offered for the sharing of practical strategies. One respondent also suggested that they helped to combat 'paper fatigue'. Others favoured faculty or departmental meetings, as at these meetings attendance would be high, although one respondent suggested that faculty-specific workshops 'secured a higher level of engagement'. Yet others preferred the regular committees at which widening participation issues were discussed (e.g. widening participation committee, academic board) because 'key people were informed' even though it was recognised that they were attended by relatively few people in the institution.

A range of publications were found to be effective by respondents for purposes of dissemination; these ranged from the annual operating statement,

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[30] No statistically significant differences were found between pre- and post-1992 institutions in terms of the percentage reporting that dissemination took place within the institution.

[31] No statistically significant differences were found between pre- and post-1992 institutions in terms of dissemination of information to departments.

the annual admissions report and the key mission statement to newsletters and circulars and the institution's newspaper – the latter because everyone received a copy. Several respondents favoured use of e-mail because of the widespread coverage that such a method allowed or the use of a website as it was easily accessible and easy to maintain. Others favoured more direct links with academic heads, meetings with admissions tutors or one to one contact between WP staff and others. One respondent noted that:

> *Having a* [widening participation] *link in each department was most effective as it was a single conduit into the department who could then target others that they worked with.*

4.8 Opportunity Bursaries

In and open-ended question respondents were asked what steps were taken to identify applicants who may be eligible for an Opportunity Bursary. The responses were categorised and those mentioned by ten per cent or more of respondents are presented in Table 11.

Table 11.   Measures taken to identify those eligible for an Opportunity Bursary

Measures taken to identify students…	Institutions %
Information sent to all students made an offer	30
Information sent to those meeting DfES criteria	27
Institutional publicity including website	12
Identified via code on application form	10
No response	16
N = 67	

More than one answer could be put forward; total does not equal 100.

As can be seen from Table 11, nearly a third of those responding to this question reported that information was sent to all students made an offer; just over a quarter noted that information was sent to those meeting DfES criteria. Just over one in ten respondents reported identifying those eligible for bursaries from a particular fee code on application forms. Other measures included linking publicity to outreach work and analysing postcodes.

Respondents were also asked how decisions were made about the individuals to whom Opportunity Bursaries should be awarded; their responses were categorised and those mentioned by over ten per cent of respondents are presented in Table 12.

Table 12.   Decisions about awarding Opportunity Bursaries

How decisions were made…	Institutions %
Against set criteria	54
Committee/panel of key individuals	24
Funding office in liaison with other staff	22
No response	18
N = 67	

More than one answer could be put forward; total does not equal 100.

As shown in Table 12, over half of all respondents reported that decisions about awarding Opportunity Bursaries were made against set criteria, as outlined by HEFCE or DfES documentation. In around a quarter of institutions a committee or panel made the decision and in just over a fifth of cases the institution's funding office made the decision in liaison with key staff. A wide range of other approaches were used, with seven per cent of respondents specifically mentioning using a 'first-come-first-served' basis.

Given that priority for Opportunity Bursaries was, in the first instance, to be given to applicants from EiC and statutory EAZ or Excellence Cluster areas, respondents were asked when they informed applicants from these areas about the scheme. Fifty-one per cent (34) reported that applicants were informed when an offer was accepted and 48 per cent (32) when an offer was made; 13 per cent (nine) informed students at both stages. Eighteen per cent of respondents (12) gave other responses such as informing students as part of their outreach activities, in publicity to schools and colleges and in response to enquiries or requests.[32]

Over half of all respondents (57 per cent (38)) had not experienced any problems in deciding who should be awarded an Opportunity Bursary. However, 31 per cent (21) felt that there had been problems (12 per cent (eight) did not answer the question). Where concerns were expressed the major problem identified was the limited supply of Opportunity Bursaries. This issue was raised by three-quarters of those expressing concern (15). Comments included the following:

> *Demand is greater than supply and all those applying are eligible.*

> *There are insufficient bursaries available for the number of appropriate qualifying applicants, hence we have to use extended criteria.*

In addition, several respondents had found it difficult to identify suitable applicants. One respondent explained:

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[32]   Respondents could give more than one response.

> *Applicants do not always use* [the relevant code on the application form] *so we have to depend on the efficiency of faculty staff. It is also hard to determine financial eligibility especially if there is no P60* [tax form] *or self-employed parents.*

Another reported:

> *Very late and incomplete list of schools sent by DfES and a lack of guidance on means testing for 'non-traditional' families e.g. remarriages, and the self employed.*

Although 76 per cent of respondents (51) stated that their institution was able to award all the Opportunity Bursaries that were allocated to them, nine per cent (six) were unable to do so (15 per cent (ten) did not answer the question). The main reasons given by those not able to allocate all the bursaries was that there were insufficient applicants who met the criteria.

Finally, respondents were asked how successful they considered Opportunity Bursaries had been in encouraging young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter higher education. Thirty-six per cent (24) felt that Opportunity Bursaries had been 'broadly successful' whilst 18 per cent (12) felt that bursaries had been 'broadly unsuccessful' in this regard. A third of respondents were not able to say whether they had been successful or not, in the main because it was 'too early to say' (13 per cent (nine) did not respond).

4.9   Views about Aimhigher

In order to gauge their views on Aimhigher, respondents were presented with a number of statements about the programme and asked whether they agreed or disagreed with each of them. For this purpose a five-point scale was used which allowed respondents to provide one of the following responses: 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree or 'strongly disagree' to signify their level of agreement or disagreement with the statement. Table 13 presents the percentage of respondents who 'strongly agreed' and 'agreed' with each statement.

Table 13.   Views about Aimhigher Policy

Aimhigher…	Respondents %
has increased institution's links with schools and colleges	72
has increased institution's widening participation activities	69
has increased institution's links with LEAs	55
addresses the issue of inequality in higher education	42
appears to be having an impact on widening participation at institution	42
N=67	

As shown in Table 13, around seven out of ten respondents agreed that the Aimhigher programme had increased their institution's links with schools and colleges and had increased the institution's widening participation activities. Over half agreed that the programme had increased the institution's links with local education authorities (LEAs).[33] Sizeable minorities of respondents agreed that the programme addressed the issue of inequality of education and appeared to be having an impact on widening participation at their institution.

Respondents were also given the opportunity to make additional comments about the Aimhigher programme and just over half (52 per cent) provided comments on how they thought it was working and its impact.

The comments were wide ranging, however, several broad themes emerged. A number of respondents pointed to the overall benefits of the Aimhigher programme either in **general** or in particular in **developing links and networks**.

> *This is a well worthwhile initiative, which is working extremely well in this institution; the extra support it gives to those students who may have dropped out in past years is priceless.*

> *The work is challenging, interesting and has helped us to build upon an excellent network of local links. Overall the work is well received and appears to be achieving greater HE* [higher education] *awareness…*

> *The Policy has enabled* [higher education institutions] *and LEAs to develop closer links. The LEA and the university have appointed two 0.5* [full-time equivalent] *posts* [using Aimhigher funding]: *One inside the university as development officer for* [outreach] *activities and the other as Connexions adviser to link activities to schools as part of the information and guidance offer.*

Some concern was expressed about the **co-ordination of widening participation initiatives** although others pointed to the **benefits of the new Aimhigher programme.**

> *The evolving plethora of initiatives is complex and costly and difficult to implement within many already overburdened schools. Why not just have one national strategy managed by one government organisation or funding council.*

> *We welcome the coherence that will be achieved through the pulling together of Aimhigher and Partnerships for Progression.*

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[33] More pre- than post-1992 respondents considered that Aimhigher had increased their institution's links with LEAs. This difference was statistically significant. No other statistically significant differences were found in the views of pre- and post-1992 respondents.

A wide range of views on different aspects of **funding** was expressed. One respondent would like to see more coherence in funding widening participation activities:

> *It is becoming increasingly difficult to know which activity is to be credited to which pot of money.*

Another would like to see more certainty of funding over time:

> *Continuity of funding over say 5 years at a time would make it possible to set up links (takes time) and to follow through with meaningful interventions that see pupils through all their secondary education not just part of it.*

Others were concerned about the deterrent effect of the fear of debt on increasing participation in higher education.

> *The money would be more effectively utilised in restoring grants to applicants from low-income families. Financial fears/problems are the major deterrence to participation in HE.*

5. SUMMARY AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Summary

This report highlights key findings to emerge from the survey of higher education providers carried out in the spring term 2003 as part of the national evaluation of the Aimhigher programme. Outreach activities most frequently offered or planned by higher education providers during 2002/03 were presentations to schools about university, and summer schools. More outreach work was reported in 2002/03 than in 2001/02.

Outreach activities had been introduced and/or extended as a result of Aimhigher. Around a quarter of respondents reported that both summer schools and non-AEA master classes had been introduced and a quarter that they had had been extended as a result of the programme. Where outreach activities were more longstanding, Aimhigher had also made an impact: around a third of respondents reported that presentations to schools about university had been extended as a result of Aimhigher.

When asked which outreach activities were most effective in raising the aspirations of young people, summer schools were most frequently mentioned (by one in three respondents). From their comments, an effective activity appeared to be one that was targeted, carried out over a period or part of a programme rather than an unrelated one off event, and where appropriate, would include higher education students as role models. An ineffective activity was likely to be a one off event with little interaction by the students themselves and without higher education students as role models.

Extensive collaborative links between higher education providers, schools and FE colleges were reported. Of particular note was the amount of collaboration that is taking place between higher education providers; more than eight out of ten respondents reported that outreach activities were provided in partnership with other higher education providers and more than three-quarters reported plans to increase collaboration in the future.

The majority of institutions took into account additional factors when recruiting/selecting students for higher education courses in the context of widening participation.   The factors most frequently reported were: recommendations from schools/colleges with which the institution had links and compacts or partnerships with schools and colleges. About half reported that applications from schools participating in outreach activities had increased since 1999. Four out of ten respondents reported that the number of applications from state schools had increased over the same period.

Two-thirds of respondents had adopted special admissions strategies for disadvantaged students. Those most frequently reported were foundation courses/programmes or bridging courses prior to degree and compact schemes, progression accords or similar schemes.

Over eight out of ten respondents reported that special support strategies had been adopted for students from disadvantaged backgrounds; most frequently these were support for disabled students, the provision of study skills and enhanced support services (e.g. careers advice and financial support).

Over nine out of ten respondents reported that their institution carried out monitoring and evaluation of widening participation activities. The most frequently mentioned methods were: through HEFCE operating statements; by analysing recruitment or retention data; and through reports to the institution's widening participation strategy committee or similar.

Around eight out of ten respondents reported that information on widening participation was disseminated within their institutions. The most frequently mentioned methods of providing this information were via: workshops, seminars or conferences; through the institution's widening participation strategy, targets or statistics; through advice and guidance; and through newsletters or similar publications.

Turning to the administration of the Opportunity Bursary scheme, around one in three respondents reported experiencing difficulties in deciding who should be awarded a bursary. Where difficulties were reported, the major problem identified was a limited number of bursaries to meet the number of young people eligible to receive one.

5.2   Policy implications

To conclude, the majority of respondents felt that the Aimhigher programme had increased links with schools and colleges and were positive about the impact that Aimhigher had had in expanding the number of widening participation activities in higher education. They were less sure, however, about the impact that Aimhigher was making on issues of inequality in higher education with respondents divided on this issue.

A number of implications for policy arise from this survey of higher education providers.

> Widening participation activities were reported to have increased between 2001/02 and 2002/03. In particular, it was reported that funding from Aimhigher had been used to both introduce and extend outreach work. This suggests that the policy of focusing attention on widening participation, by both the DfES and HEFCE, has had the effect of increasing the focus within higher education institutions on access to higher education.

> ➢ Summer schools had been introduced and expanded as a result of Aimhigher in a significant minority of institutions. There was a suggestion that summer schools were particularly effective in terms of widening participation.

> ➢ There was a concern about the limited supply of Opportunity Bursaries. The re-introduction of student grants from autumn 2004 will address this issue.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ANNEX: Representativeness of Sample

Table A1.   Comparison of pre-1992 institutions 2001-02 in England and in survey

Performance indicators	Pre-1992 institutions Mean (N=43)	Survey pre-1992 institutions Mean (N=27)
Total entrants	2493	2351
Number young entrants	2072	1973
% young entrants	82	83
% with known data from state schools	88	89
% from state schools	77	76
State school/college benchmark	81	80
State school/college location adjusted benchmark	79	78
% with known data from manual social classes	90	90
% from manual social classes	20	20

Source: HEFCE (2003b)

Table A2.   Comparison of post-1992 institutions 2001-02 in England and in survey

Performance indicator	Post-1992 institutions Mean (N=65-69)	Survey post-1992 institutions Mean (N=27-30)
Total entrants	2494	2332
Number young entrants	1660	1571
% young entrants	68	71
% with known data from state schools	71	70
% from state schools	95	95
State school/college benchmark	93	93
State school/college location adjusted benchmark	93	93
% with known data from manual social classes	75	73
% from manual social classes	33	32

Source: HEFCE (2003b)