

COSMOS  
ENGAGEMENT

# AIMHIGHER WEST MIDLANDS

## IMPACT CASE STUDIES FULL REPORT



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# INTRODUCTION

The National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) is funded by the Office for Students (OfS) and aims to increase higher education participation rates of young people in particular disadvantaged areas. Aimhigher West Midlands is responsible for co-ordinating the NCOP across 25 local wards. In May 2018 Aimhigher commissioned Cosmos Engagement to conduct a qualitative evaluation, to establish the extent to which the local programme had supported positive learner outcomes and partnership working within local schools and FE colleges. It was felt that as many of the quantitative measures of success (e.g. HESA higher education entry rates) were too early to capture, that at this stage a qualitative case study approach would be the most appropriate method to establish the extent to which the programme had supported positive learner outcomes. The case studies employed a 360-degree approach which included feedback from learners, their parents / carers and school / college representatives. The case studies explored the distance travelled by NCOP learners in terms of where they were before and after they had participated within the NCOP programme. This included exploring if the programme had: increased learners' intentions to progress to higher education (HE) or other positive destinations; increased learners' knowledge and awareness of HE; increased learners' confidence and motivation to succeed; and improved learners' attitudes, behaviour, school attendance and attainment.

## National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP)

The National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) brings together 29 partnerships of universities, colleges and other local partners to deliver outreach programmes to young people in years 9 to 13. NCOP aims to increase the number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education by 2020 by supporting young people that have been identified as living in areas where young 'higher education participation is lower than might be expected given the GCSE results of the young people who live there'. OfS refer to this as an 'unexplained participation gap'. The national aims of phase one of the programme are to:

- Rapidly increase the number of young people from underrepresented groups who go into higher education
- Support young people to make well-informed decisions about their future education
- Support effective and impactful local collaboration by higher education providers working together with schools, colleges, employers and other partners
- Contribute to a stronger evidence base around 'what works' in higher education outreach and strengthen evaluation practice in the sector

Initially the OfS funded the programme from January 2017 to December 2018, with an extension period to July 2019. Confirmation of additional funding for phase 2 (2019-2021) of the programme is expected to be released by the OfS in the summer of 2019. After 2021 funding will be significantly reduced and allocated to outreach hubs to support and co-ordinate the signposting of school / FE colleges to university outreach activities.

## Aimhigher West Midlands

Aimhigher West Midlands is a partnership of six of the region's universities and includes Aston University, Birmingham City University, University College Birmingham, Newman University, University of Birmingham and the University of Worcester – and a number of FE colleges. Aimhigher has been allocated £5.8million from the OfS (January 2017 to July 2019) to support the progression of young people domiciled across twenty five wards which are distributed across urban and rural areas (Birmingham, Solihull, Sandwell, Worcestershire, Herefordshire, and Shropshire). There are 19,000 NCOP pupils domiciled within these wards across over 83 secondary schools and FE colleges. The Aimhigher partnership aims to address the 'unexplained participation gap' in NCOP wards by increasing disadvantaged learners:

- Participation in all forms of higher education
- Aspiration to higher education
- Awareness of higher education
- Attainment and learning in Key Stage 4 and 5

# DELIVERY MODELS

## Delivery models vary in rural and urban schools / FE colleges

The models of delivery vary across rural and urban schools / FE colleges in order to meet local needs. To ensure consistency the central Aimhigher co-ordination team (the hub) provide support to the partnership in terms of marketing, finance, monitoring and evaluation strategy, processes and procedures across NCOP.

### Urban area delivery model

There are five universities within the urban area. Each university is known locally as a spoke and has two members of staff to support the co-ordination of activities within schools / FE colleges. Within the urban areas, schools / FE colleges have been ranked in terms of the numbers and proportions of NCOP learners on roll. This data supports how schools / FE colleges are funded and targeted by the programme. Organisations with large proportions of NCOP learners receive higher levels of funding and resource and are locally known as being part of the embedded NCOP programme. Organisation with fewer NCOP learners receive less funding and are eligible to access 'wrap-around' NCOP activities.

Recent graduates known as Aimhigher Progression Ambassadors (APAs) are placed within embedded schools to deliver support to learners (mentoring, information, advice and guidance, and workshops for learners and parents / carers) and facilitate their access to wrap-around activities delivered by partners. Urban schools are provided with additional funding in the form of Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) payments which help to appoint a member of staff to build capacity to support the programme. Funding was allocated in this way, as before the NCOP programme commenced Aimhigher conducted a consultation with schools / FE colleges to identify the barriers in terms of engaging in widening participation activities. A key theme that emerged was a lack of resources and staff to co-ordinate the programme.

### Rural area delivery model

Due to the very nature and remoteness of some of the rural NCOP areas, it can be more difficult, expensive and time-consuming for schools and FE colleges to engage in widening participation outreach activities. The rural area has a number of NCOP co-ordinators linked to particular schools / colleges in order to support their participation within the programme. As these areas are often remote the programme does not provide Aimhigher Progression Ambassadors. Instead Graduate Ambassadors and Further Education mentors are commissioned to visit and offer online support. The rural area runs a commissioning model, where schools / FE colleges bid for funding to deliver activities to meet the needs of learners and address gaps in provision within their organisation.

The NCOP programme is still in the early stages and it is not currently possible to identify the impact of interventions on learners' higher education entry rates. However, a benchmarking report from the OfS outlines that the Aimhigher West Midlands programme is progressing very well when performance is benchmarked against other consortia. The programme was recently ranked fourth out of twenty nine NCOP consortia in terms of the proportions of NCOP learners engaged (over 34% against a minimum target of 20% from January 2017 to June 2018). Furthermore, the Aimhigher West Midlands NCOP research strategy has been identified as sector-leading in an assessment commissioned by the OfS.

# OBJECTIVES AND EVALUATION OUTPUTS

## Primary Evaluation Objectives

As it is too early to assess whether the programme had supported improved higher education progression rates, the partnership felt that a qualitative case study approach would be able to provide an indication of how the programme was progressing. The evaluation consisted of a suite of multi-media case studies. This included 360-degree feedback from the learner, their parent / carer, and school / college representatives. Such an approach allows evidence to be presented in terms of the distance travelled by NCOP learners in terms of where they were before and after (shifts) they had participated within the NCOP programme.

The primary aim of this evaluation was to complete and in depth exploration of:

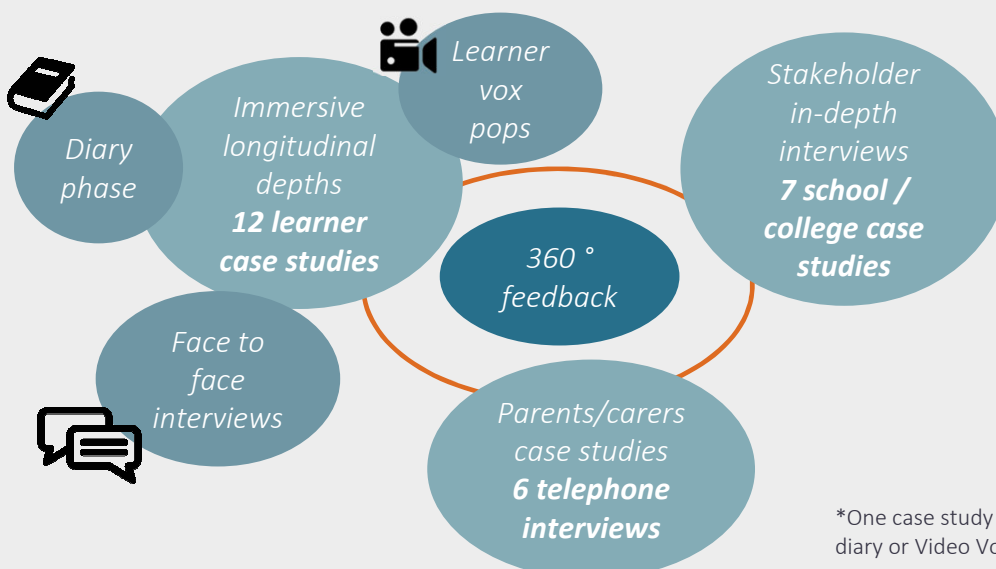
- The impact of the Aimhigher programme on learner outcomes (learner case studies) and;
- The impact and key challenges of embedding the programme and partnership working between Aimhigher, schools and FE colleges (school / college case studies)

The key goal of the project was to gather and assess qualitative evidence of the impact of the programme on learners': intentions to progress to higher education (HE) or other positive destinations; knowledge and awareness of HE; confidence and motivation to succeed; attitudes and behaviour; and school attendance and attainment.

This was explored within a sample of the schools and colleges in which Aimhigher operates. The project also explored the views and perspectives of parents / carers and school and college representatives. The outputs of the project include:

- Case Studies exploring the perceptions and experiences of twelve individual young people, the educational progression barriers they experience and the extent to which the programme has benefitted them
- Case Studies exploring the broader impacts of the programme within seven schools / colleges and reviewing the partnerships between Aimhigher and the schools
- A full report summarising the overall evaluation, synthesising outcomes and exploring the impact of the programme more generally

## Evaluation Approach



## Evaluation Outputs

- ✓ Full Report
- ✓ Learner Case Studies  
– individual write ups x11
- ✓ Learner Video Vox Pops x10
- ✓ Learner Video Compilation  
– including all learners\*
- ✓ School Case Studies  
– individual write ups x7

\*One case study from the rural area did not complete a diary or Video Vox Pops

# METHODOLOGY DETAIL

## Learner Case Studies

Twelve learner case studies were selected and completed from a selection of 30+ nominations from Aimhigher Progression Ambassadors and teachers, based on their having experienced significant benefits and progression as a result of their involvement in Aimhigher activities. This evidence-base would supplement large-scale quantitative data previously gathered that infers the programme has had a positive impact on learners.

**In-depth Interviews** | We conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews with each of the learners to understand their experiences of Aimhigher, and explore any benefits and / or impacts these experiences had as well as any other feedback. Interviews were also conducted with school / college representatives as outlined in the next section.

**Diary Phase** | To supplement the feedback gathered from the initial interviews, learners were also invited to complete a 'diary phase' where they could share further feedback and experiences over a period of six weeks and anything that might have been missed in the initial interviews. Diaries were completed by nine of the learners, however there was little additional activity experienced within this period, so feedback largely complemented views already captured in the interview – demonstrating consistency and re-affirming the feedback already received.

**Learner vox pops** | We also recorded short 'vox pop' video clips with each of the learners to summarise highlights and key impacts of their experiences with Aimhigher. This also served as a secondary 'catch-up' with learners to ensure that we had a complete and up-to-date account of all feedback and experiences.

**Parent / carer interviews** | In order to gain a 360-degree perspective of impacts and feedback (complementing the learner and school interviews) we also invited parents of case study learners to complete a telephone interview to provide their perspective on their child's involvement in Aimhigher activity. This included capturing any impacts they had observed, to assess their understanding of the Aimhigher programme more broadly, and to capture any other feedback or suggestions. We were able to complete interviews with parents of six of the case study learners.

## School / College Case Studies

We collected in-depth feedback from eight members of school staff and four Aimhigher Progression Ambassadors (APAs) from all eight schools attended by the case study learners. These were collected via in-depth telephone interviews (one was collected) via a short survey. We gathered perspectives and feedback from stakeholders including; overall impacts on learners (affecting the broader student population, not only our case study learners), the school's partnership with Aimhigher, activities experienced and any suggestions for improvement.

We received feedback from:

- Two teachers and one APA from John Willmott School
- Two teachers from Shenley Academy
- One teacher from Hereford Sixth Form College
- One teacher from Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School
- One teacher from Bishop Perowne C of E College
- One APA from Balaam Wood Academy
- One APA from Park Hall Academy
- One APA from John Henry Newman Catholic College
- One APA from Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School (survey only)

### Methodological Limitations

This impact evaluation used a case study approach which, by its very nature, focused on a small sample of positive examples. As a result of this, there was very little in the way of negative feedback provided by either learners or schools.

Any feedback points included within this report are deemed to be valid and noteworthy within this context, even if these are mentioned by only a small number of stakeholders. We have used words such as all, many or some, where applicable, to indicate the commonality of various insights. However, this approach does not lend itself to any more specific quantification of findings, for which a much larger sample size would be necessary.

# BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

## Schools / College Characteristics

Case studies were conducted across nine NCOP schools / colleges within the West Midlands. All schools were either community, voluntary aided or academy secondary schools. The final case study was conducted within an Further Education College. Six of these schools are situated within the urban area (Birmingham or Solihull) of the partnership and the remaining three within more rural areas (Worcestershire / Herefordshire).

Table 1 below provides a summary of the characteristics of the schools and college that took part within the research. Just over half of the institutions have sixth forms. All but one of the schools show a high level of disadvantage, with Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility rates far above the England average of 12.9%. In summary, the data shows that these NCOP schools generally have high levels of disadvantage, lower attainment at all stages (KS4 and KS5) and varying higher education entry rates, with three below and two above than the national average.

**Table 1: School Characteristics**

School / College	Age Range (yrs)	% FSM Eligible	Grade 5 or above in English & maths GCSEs	A-level points	HE entry rates
Balaam Wood Academy	11-16	46.6%	14%	N/A	N/A
The Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School (rural)	11-16	3.5%	45%	N/A	N/A
Bishop Perowne C of E College (rural)	11-16	21.9%	40%	N/A	N/A
Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School	11-16	43.6%	27%	N/A	N/A
Hereford Sixth Form College (rural)	16-18	N/A	N/A	32.5	55%
John Henry Newman School	11-18	20.5%	39%	32.3	54%
John Willmott School	11-18	25%	23%	26.1	45%
Park Hall Academy	11-18	18.9%	37%	27.2	40%
Shenley Academy	11-19	34.9%	29%	23.3	48%
England Average (all schools and colleges)	N/A	12.9%	39.9%	32.3	51%

All data sourced from DfE school performance tables (January 2018)

# BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

## Schools / College Characteristics

Table 2 below summarises the characteristics of the schools / colleges that took part within the case studies in terms of the proportions of NCOP pupils on roll and the breadth and scope of each school's engagement within the programme (from January 2017 to January 2019). In general, most (six) schools that participated within the case studies had larger proportions of NCOP learners on roll than the average for the Aimhigher West Midlands programme (19.7%).

All of the urban schools showed engagement in a large number of NCOP activities compared to the Aimhigher West Midlands programme average (27).

In all but one school and college student engagement in a sustained progressive programme (SPP) was higher than the programme average.

In summary, the data shows that most schools selected for the case studies had large proportions of NCOP learners with high proportions of these learners engaging in many activities. Engagement within the rural schools is generally lower as NCOP learners are more widely dispersed across schools within these areas.

**Table 2: Schools' NCOP Populations and Engagement**

School / College	% (#) NCOP pupils on roll <sup>2</sup>	August 2018 to January 2019	
		# activities school / college engaged in	% students engaged SPP <sup>3</sup>
Balaam Wood Academy	77% (180)	100	69%
The Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School (rural)	14.5% (87)	14	67%
Bishop Perowne C of E College (rural)	18.2% (89)	3	25%
Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School	55.8% (179)	48	70%
Hereford Sixth Form College (rural)	8.8% (162)	23	60%
John Henry Newman School	69% (454)	139	69%
John Willmott School	39.7% (239)	53	73%
Park Hall Academy	41.3% (312)	93	80%
Shenley Academy	23.7% (128)	88	60%
Average <sup>1</sup>	19.7%	27	52.4%

1 | Average across all 83 NCOP embedded and wraparound schools / colleges.

2 | Based on 18 / 19 academic year (year group 9-11 / 13).

3 | % of learners engaged in a sustained progressive programme – this can include a learner engaging in one intensive activity over a number of days or weeks (e.g. summer school, mentoring or tutoring) or a learner that has engaged in two medium / less intensive activities (e.g. campus visit, IAG activity etc.)



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# LEARNER CASE STUDIES | OVERVIEW

Twelve learner case studies from seven secondary schools and one FE college were selected from a shortlist of over thirty nominations. All learner case studies were nominated by either Aimhigher Progression Ambassadors or teachers, based on their having experienced significant benefits and progression as a result of their involvement in Aimhigher activities.

The case studies included two learners in year 10, three learners in years 11, 12, two learners in year 13 and one learner in the second year of their FE studies. Eight case studies are from urban areas and three from rural areas. Seven of the case studies are female and four are male.

The case studies included:

- An in-depth face-to-face interview with each learner, school representatives and some parents / carers
- A 'diary phase' completed by nine of the eleven learners
- A secondary 'catch-up' and recording of 'Vox Pop' video summaries

Please note, the following tables include the total number of NCOP activities in which the learners engaged. The case studies may not include details of every activity. The case studies depend on learners' recall of activities. Some learners engaged in further activities after their interview.

*Note: the young people included in these case studies are likely to have experienced a range of personal developments throughout their period of involvement with Aimhigher. We are not always able to specify that any changes are due to Aimhigher exclusively, but have reported where the programme has had a significant contribution.*

## Parris - Year 12, urban school (See page 14 for full case study)

Parris has struggled academically at times and has taken the decision to re-sit year 12. Parris has become much more focused and confident after taking part in the NCOP Business Challenge Day and the Next Step trip, and now plans to study Education and become a primary school teacher.



Activity Type	Parris' NCOP Engagements
Mentoring	28
Masterclasses	11
IAG	8
<b>Total engagements</b>	<b>47</b>

## Connor - Year 12, urban school (See page 15 for full case study)

A capable student who suffered from bullying and low-confidence, Connor has been a vocal member in a NCOP Pupil Voice group and the Aimhigher Progression Ambassador network. Connor's confidence and communication skills have flourished during his engagement with Aimhigher, so much so that he wants to become an Aimhigher Progression Ambassador in the future.



Activity Type	Connor's NCOP Engagements
Mentoring	21
Tutoring	5
Summer Schools	2
Masterclasses	1
IAG	4
<b>Total engagements</b>	<b>33</b>

# LEARNER CASE STUDIES | OVERVIEW

## Taylor - Year 13, urban school (See page 16 for full case study)

Taylor always did well in school but was anxious and unsure about her future. Though initially apprehensive, Taylor attended the NCOP Apprenticeship Residential and won Apprentice of the Week. Taylor has been offered an apprenticeship place and is pursuing a career in civil engineering.



Activity Type	Taylor's NCOP Engagements
Mentoring	4
Summer Schools	2
Masterclasses	4
IAG	5
Campus Visits	2
<b>Total engagements</b>	<b>17</b>

## Christian - Year 13, urban school (See page 17 for full case study)

Christian, quiet and studious at school, is strongly encouraged and influenced by his mother to succeed. Christian found sixth-form challenging but NCOP mentoring helped him with time management and study skills. The NCOP Apprenticeship Residential and NEC Skills Show increased Christian's awareness of higher education options, and he is pursuing a degree apprenticeship in engineering.



Activity Type	Christian's NCOP Engagements
Mentoring	4
Summer Schools	1
Masterclasses	1
IAG	6
Campus Visits	2
<b>Total engagements</b>	<b>14</b>

## Jess - Year 12, urban school (See page 18 for full case study)

Jess has always enjoyed sport, and her NCOP mentor helped her to manage her sports commitments alongside her school work. Jess was very stressed by exams, but her grades and confidence improved a lot, particularly in Maths, thanks to her NCOP MyTutor sessions. With her mentor's help, Jess has outlined a clear plan to become a PE teacher.



Activity Type	Jess' NCOP Engagements
Mentoring	12
Tutoring	8
Masterclasses	3
IAG	3
<b>Total engagements</b>	<b>26</b>

# LEARNER CASE STUDIES | OVERVIEW

## **Dominic - Year 11, urban school (See page 19 for full case study)**

A hardworking and dedicated student, Dominic was stressed about exams and worried about the financial cost of university. Both the one-to-one NCOP mentoring and the Cultural Capital trip to London have helped him with stress-management, planning for the future and gaining independence.



Activity Type	Dominic's NCOP Engagements
Mentoring	4
Masterclasses	1
IAG	5
Work Experience	5
<b>Total engagements</b>	<b>15</b>

## **Kiri - Year 11, urban school (See page 20 for full case study)**

Kiri faced some personal challenges in the past. The NCOP Speak Out Challenge helped her overcome her shyness and she became Head Girl thanks to this growth in confidence. She would like to set up her own business in future, selling art and clothing.



Activity Type	Kiri's NCOP Engagements
Mentoring	12
Tutoring	2
Summer Schools	1
Masterclasses	4
IAG	21
Campus Visits	2
<b>Total engagements</b>	<b>42</b>

## **Christopher - Year 11, urban school (See page 21 for full case study)**

A talented student who was unsure of his future direction, NCOP one-to-one mentoring helped Christopher to better manage schoolwork and football training. Christopher uncovered his leadership skills at the Media Careers event and now aims to train as a football coach, having learnt about Sport Fitness courses at UniFest.



Activity Type	Christopher's NCOP Engagements
Mentoring	6
Summer Schools	1
Masterclasses	2
IAG	16
Campus Visits	2
<b>Total engagements</b>	<b>27</b>

# LEARNER CASE STUDIES | OVERVIEW

## Olivia - Year 10, rural school (See page 22 for full case study)

Well-supported at home and in school, Olivia showed particular motivation and dedication after the NCOP Medical Mavericks and Forensic Science programme, which encouraged her to take Triple Science as the first step in her path to becoming a vet.



Activity Type	Olivia's NCOP Engagements
Masterclasses	4
IAG	1
Total engagements	5

## Rhiannon - Year 10, rural school (See page 23 for full case study)

Having initially struggled after moving to a different high school than her friends, Rhiannon has now settled. Since taking part in the NCOP Medical Mavericks, the Forensic Science workshop and a Mind Mapping session, teachers have noted her increase in attainment and focus.



Activity Type	Rhiannon's NCOP Engagements
Masterclasses	4
Total engagements	4

## Julia - FE Year 2, rural school (See page 24 for full case study)

Julia initially struggled at school during her GCSEs and sixth form and was disappointed with her progress. Through hard work Julia has improved her grades to A\*. Julia has been offered a place at Cambridge University which she feels was fundamentally supported by NCOP.



Activity Type	Julia's NCOP Engagements
Masterclasses	5
IAG	4
Campus Visit	1
Total engagements	10



*Parris talks to her mother a lot about her education and future plans. Her family have supported her through some challenging times in her school life.*

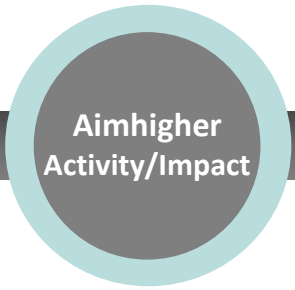
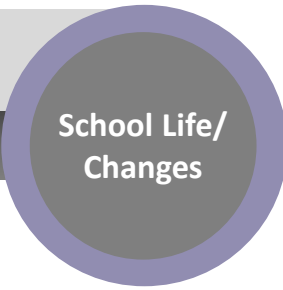
*Parris is sociable but she lacks confidence.*

**“ I think overall, Aimhigher has been a positive experience. It’s changed my views on school and education massively. Now I know school will help me get to where I want to go, which is to go to university to become a primary school teacher. ”**  
- Parris

*Parris has had 47 engagements in total with Aimhigher, including: Mentoring; Masterclasses; and Information, Advice and Guidance.\**

Parris, Year 12

Urban school



Parris has had to overcome multiple setbacks in her education. She failed her Maths GCSE a number of times and, last year, she decided to drop out of three of her A level courses so that she could focus on resitting her maths GCSE and continue with just one A Level. This year, she is removed from her peers as she is resitting year 12.

**Aimhigher mentoring has been an important source of social and academic support and advice during this upheaval.** Parris is now taking three A Levels that she enjoys – business, health and social, and sociology. Her performance in school has improved since taking part in Aimhigher activities.

**“ The kind of thing that we’ve been working on most is keeping her motivation levels up and a lot of our focus has been on her revision and maybe creating strategies for her that work. ”**  
- Aimhigher Progression Ambassador

After taking part in the **Next Steps trip**, Parris confirmed her goal of becoming a primary school teacher. She gained a better understanding of what a career in teaching entails, what grades she will need, and which university courses she will need to take.

The **Business Challenge Day** helped Parris improve her confidence through working as a team with a mix of people, which stood her in good stead in making new friends while she resits her A levels.

Parris also attended a **Skills to Get By workshop**, ran by the Aimhigher Progression Ambassador, which taught Parris a range of life skills such as banking and interview etiquette.

**“ She isn’t that confident, but since Aimhigher her outlook has completely changed and she has been talking about universities. ”**  
- Parris’ mother

Parris had not previously wanted to go to university. However, with the knowledge and confidence gained through Aimhigher activities, **Parris has made a defined plan for her future.**

After she **completes her A levels**, Parris wants to study **education at university** and then she hopes to **train to become a primary school teacher.**

**Aimhigher has given Parris a reason to persist in her education;** she knows that qualifications will lead to a job in the future.

**“ My goals for the future are to become a primary school teacher and to go to university. Aimhigher has helped me to look into universities and decide which one I might want to go to. ”**  
- Parris

*\*Full details on number of activities engaged in and activity objectives are detailed in the Appendices. Please note, learners may not have mentioned each NCOP activity engaged in during their interviews.*



Connor balances good grades with school commitments and a part-time job. He feels supported by his family about his education but he doesn't talk to them much about his future career plans.

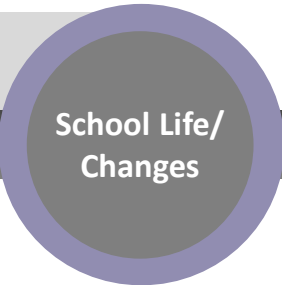
He previously suffered socially, but is now much more confident.

“ **My goals for the future are definitely to go to university and study engineering, because I've got a passion for that and I've learnt that through Aimhigher.** ”

- Connor

Connor has had 33 engagements in total with Aimhigher, including: Mentoring; Tutoring; Summer Schools; Masterclasses; Information, Advice and Guidance.\*

Connor, Year 12  
Urban school



Connor has always been an academically confident, capable and dedicated student. Having succeeded in his GCSE exams, he is studying maths, physics and chemistry A Levels.

Socially, he suffered from bullying at the start of his secondary school life, but he has grown in confidence **thanks to his practising public speaking and teamwork during Aimhigher activities.** Connor is now the Vice President of the College Council and he is proud that he pushed himself out of his comfort zone to get this role, as he had to write and present a speech in front of staff and his peers.

“ **He was quite reserved at the start but he's someone who's flourished and is now able to speak his mind and be himself.** ”

- Aimhigher Progression Ambassador

Connor took part in **Pupil Voice**, during which he formed friendships with the other students in the group while creating a video about Aimhigher.

Connor has become well-integrated into the Aimhigher Progression Ambassador network; he **presented his experiences of Aimhigher at the Aimhigher Progression Ambassador conference.**

He also learnt a lot about the academic and social aspects of university during **UniFest** at University College Birmingham.

The **Revision Weekend** helped Connor with techniques which he uses to help him revise the topics he finds most difficult.

“ **Aimhigher's definitely worth it. It's very helpful. You wouldn't expect something like this to help you make friends but it helps all round.** ”

- Connor

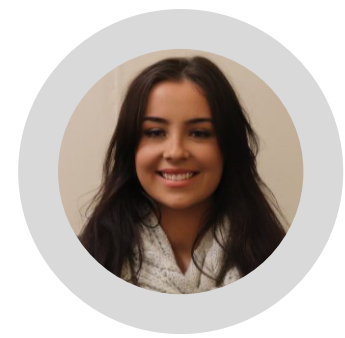
Connor is using Aimhigher resources and knowledge, such as how to write personal statements and how to access funding, to help him to plan to go on to study **engineering at university.**

After very positive engagement with Aimhigher Progression Ambassadors, **Connor wants to become an Aimhigher Progression Ambassador himself after he graduates,** to continue as an advocate of the educational and social benefits of Aimhigher.

“ **They invited me to talk about what I thought about Aimhigher in front of all the Aimhigher Progression Ambassadors. I think it's helped quite a lot and I would like to become an Aimhigher Progression Ambassador.** ”

- Connor

\*Full details on number of activities engaged in and activity objectives are detailed in the Appendices. Please note, learners may not have mentioned each NCOP activity engaged in during their interviews.



Taylor finds it difficult to expose herself to new opportunities and because of her lack of confidence she feels that she does not always work to her potential.

Taylor previously planned to go to university, as that is what her friends were doing. Her mother was keen for Taylor to do this as she'd be the first in the family to attend university.

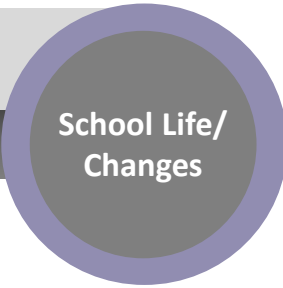
**“ I’m glad that I stepped out of my comfort zone because now I’m somewhere where I can say, “if I want to do something, I can do it”. If everyone else is going to university it doesn’t mean I have to. I can follow my own path. I wouldn’t have realised this without the help of Aimhigher. ”**

- Taylor

Taylor has had 17 engagements in total with Aimhigher, including: Mentoring; Summer Schools; Masterclasses; Information, Advice and Guidance; and Campus Visits.\*

Taylor, Year 13

Urban school



Taylor enjoys Sixth Form a lot, as it gives her the familiarity and routine of school, but with more independence.

Taylor achieved good grades in her GCSE and A level exams, but she did not have a clear idea of what she was working towards. Her favourite subject has always been English but more recently she’s been working on her maths so that she can fulfil her **new ambition of civil engineering, which she decided on during an Aimhigher activity.**

**“ She was very apprehensive about going but she went and she got Apprentice of the Week and she came back and spoke to me and said, “my confidence is now so much better because I went on this.” ”**

- Aimhigher Coordinator / 6<sup>th</sup> Form Academic Mentor

Taylor was nervous about attending the **Apprenticeship Residential**, however it had a significant impact on her. She was surprised by her aptitude and engagement in the engineering activities during the trip. Taylor overcame her shyness and worked in teams with others on the residential, and her confidence grew after winning **Apprentice of the Week**.

Taylor also visited **Birmingham City University**. She was grateful for the chance to test out the university experience as **she realised that university would not suit her**. Taylor also enjoyed the social aspect **Future Fest** and the chance to reflect on a trip to **Birmingham Council**.

**“ The Apprenticeship Residential was the best because it got me engaged in a lot of things and gave me more of an idea of where I wanted to be. After it, I thought “why don’t people go for apprenticeships more?” ”**

- Taylor

Taylor’s prospects have improved, as **the Aimhigher activities helped her become more comfortable in trying unexplored options and speaking to new people**, and she is now more self-assured in her abilities.

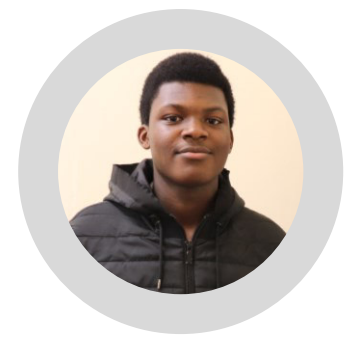
Taylor was encouraged to do more research into Civil Engineering Apprenticeships and to consider options other than university after her experience with Aimhigher. **As a direct result of her Aimhigher engagement, Taylor applied to a number of apprenticeship schemes in civil engineering.**

**“ Nobody in our family has really relished the challenge to actually go and take something head on, so Taylor is the first one to show an ounce of intelligence and drive to actually get some kind of higher education. ”**

- Taylor’s mother

\*Full details on number of activities engaged in and activity objectives are detailed in the Appendices. Please note, learners may not have mentioned each NCOP activity engaged in during their interviews.



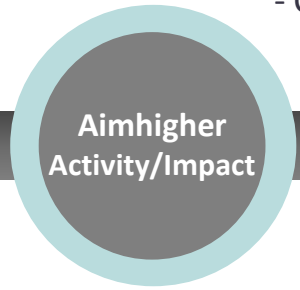
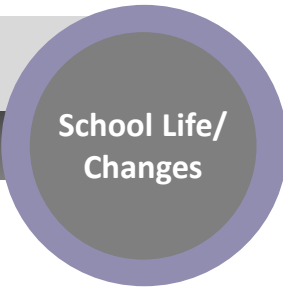


When making decisions about his education and career, Christian is strongly encouraged and influenced by his mother, who has high aspirations for him.

Christian had struggled with motivating himself at school, but now that he has a clear goal, he is finding it easier to persevere.

Christian, Year 13

Urban school



“ **Aimhigher had a significant impact on me because it helped me change my habits and ways in how I was going about life in general, and helped me focus more on what’s important. I am now looking into completing a degree apprenticeship in engineering.** ”

- Christian

Christian has had 14 engagements in total with Aimhigher, including: Mentoring; Summer School; Masterclasses; Information, Advice and Guidance; and Campus Visits.\*

Christian is a quiet, studious and polite student. During his first year of A level study, he found it difficult to balance his workload and keep up with his coursework. He often feels under pressure to succeed, and particularly feels the strain around exam periods, however, **Aimhigher is helping him deal with the demands of 6<sup>th</sup> Form.**

He has always been interested in cars and mechanics. Christian thought that he might want to pursue an apprenticeship in engineering, although maths was a problem area for him. He worked hard and resat his GCSE maths to come out with a better grade. **Aimhigher has given Christian better study skills to improve his exam and revision techniques in the future.**

“ *When I first went into the school he was a shy individual. He’s definitely improved his awareness in what decisions he can make at the end of Year 13.* ”

- Aimhigher Progression Ambassador

A **Time Management session** taught Christian new methods of timetabling, which enabled him to **keep track of his work** and **reduce the pressure** he was feeling during his A level study.

The **Apprenticeship Residential at Aston University** reaffirmed for Christian that an Apprenticeship was not the best option for him. After this residential, Christian attended the **NEC Skills Show**, where he learnt about the degree apprenticeship route, which he feels would be a **much better fit**.

Christian also enjoyed the **Birmingham City University Residential** and the **Make a Move session**.

“ *The Skills Show was probably the most useful event I attended because I gained lots of knowledge on how businesses offer apprenticeships along with degree apprenticeships.* ”

- Christian

Christian has changed his priorities now that he has a deepened knowledge of the various apprenticeship options. He has talked about his future with his Aimhigher Progression Ambassador, and his new goal after Sixth Form is to plan a **career path in engineering**.

He is focused and studying hard to get the required A level grades to apply to universities and he wants to pursue a **degree apprenticeship in engineering**.

“ *I wasn’t very sure whether or not I wanted to go to university. My Aimhigher Progression Ambassador helped me decide and pick the right path on how to achieve that goal.* ”

- Christian

\*Full details on number of activities engaged in and activity objectives are detailed in the Appendices. Please note, learners may not have mentioned each NCOP activity engaged in during their interviews.



Jess' main area of interest is sports. Her mother is very encouraging and they talk a lot about Jess' future.

Jess has a very positive nature and she makes the most of every opportunity.

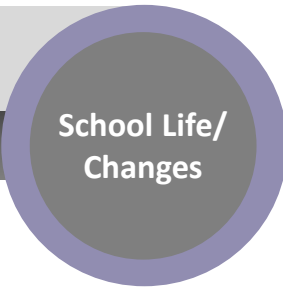
“ Aimhigher was 100% one of the best experiences I've ever had. I'd recommend it to anyone. It's a really big help, I feel a lot less stressed and I've improved my schoolwork. ”

- Jess

Jess has had 26 engagements in total with Aimhigher, including: Mentoring; Tutoring; Masterclasses; Information, Advice and Guidance.\*

Jess, Year 12

Urban school



Jess is heavily involved in sports and she is now studying three A levels in Sport at college.

Jess has always done well at school, and she gets along well with her teachers and her peers. She was getting stressed by revision, exams, and the pressure to do well. Jess' main problem was her maths – she was finding it difficult to get a C grade at GCSE level.

Thanks to her participation in Aimhigher activities, Jess is less stressed and her maths has improved significantly.

“ Aimhigher has definitely developed my confidence and given me a more positive attitude. Even when I feel like giving up, I persevere. ”

- Jess

Through **mentoring**, Jess learnt various revision techniques and schedules so that she could **balance her schoolwork and her sports commitments**. Jess' mentor also helped her to **manage exam stress and academic pressure**.

After-school **MyTutor** sessions in Maths gave Jess the extra support she needed to develop her skills and confidence in the subject.

Thanks to the combination of Aimhigher activities, Jess felt more **resilient and reassured** about her GCSE exams, which helped her to achieve the required grades to get to college. In her Maths GCSE, and she was two marks away from an A, which she is very proud of.

“ She was really committed to the MyTutor programme and engaged well. They really helped her confidence in Maths, which was an area she was struggling with. ”

- Senior Assistant Headteacher

Jess has wanted to be a **PE teacher** from a very young age. She talked a lot with her mentor about the various sports-based course options, teacher training courses, required grades, and university life.

Now, Jess has a firm plan in place to achieve her career goal; she wants to progress on to university to do a **degree in Physical Education**, after which she will complete a **Teacher Training Qualification**.

She is on the right track to achieve this, as she is planning to use her new revision and study skills to get good grades in her **sports A levels**.

“ Aimhigher has showed me where I could go, what grades I need. I have someone to point me in the right direction and to advise me. ”

- Jess

\*Full details on number of activities engaged in and activity objectives are detailed in the Appendices. Please note, learners may not have mentioned each NCOP activity engaged in during their interviews.



Dominic does not talk to his family much about his education or career, but they support his choices.

Dominic's passion is in music; learning to play guitar was a big achievement for him.

“ **Aimhigher has had a big impact on me as a person and career-wise. It's helped me focus more on grades and my future and develop my knowledge of things outside of school.** ”

- Dominic

Dominic has had 4 engagements in total with Aimhigher, including: Mentoring; Masterclasses; Information, Advice and Guidance; and Work Experience.\*

Dominic, Year 11

Urban school

School Life/  
Changes



Aimhigher  
Activity/Impact



Future Goals/  
Prospects

Earlier on in school Dominic had a more relaxed attitude towards his studies, but since he started revising for his GCSEs, he has become more focused. Dominic is a conscientious student who tries his hardest and takes his education very seriously.

Before Aimhigher, he worried a lot about his exams and often became overwhelmed about his workload. He also felt frustrated about the lack of independence he feels in the school environment. **After engaging in Aimhigher activities, Dominic feels calmer and more self-directed.**

“ *Through his experiences with myself and the programme, I have seen him grow in self-confidence and self-esteem. He is more motivated for his future now and with the continued support of the programme I don't doubt he'll achieve his goals.* ”

- Aimhigher Progression Ambassador

Dominic greatly benefited from his one to one sessions with his **Aimhigher Progression Ambassador**, who encouraged him to consider **university course options**, gave him advice on having back-up plans, and supported him to **manage his stress**.

Dominic enjoyed the **Cultural Capital trip to London**, which helped him to feel more **independent and confident**, as he experienced a lot of new things - he had never been to London or seen a theatre production before.

Dominic feels more **in-control and focused** at school as a result of being more informed about university and career paths.

“ *My mentor helped me a lot course-wise, showing me what my future could hold. She calmed me down and helped a lot.* ”

- Dominic

Dominic hadn't considered university before Aimhigher as he thought he wouldn't be able to afford it. His Aimhigher Progression Ambassador explained Student Finance to him and now he is confident that he can go.

Dominic is calmer and more self-assured and he has been able to think more clearly about his future. He plans to go to college and then to **university to study musical performance**.

Dominic's Aimhigher Progression Ambassador also helped Dominic to **write his CV** and to find **work experience**.

“ *I know either way, as long as I try my best, I can go anywhere.* ”

- Dominic

\*Full details on number of activities engaged in and activity objectives are detailed in the Appendices. Please note, learners may not have mentioned each NCOP activity engaged in during their interviews.



*Kiri is very creative and enjoys Music and Art lessons. She has had a difficult life at times and has faced some personal challenges. She talks to friends and teachers about her education and her future.*

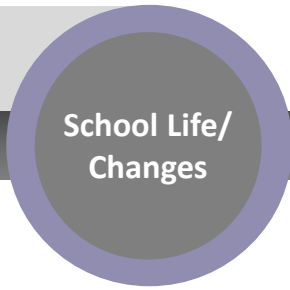
*Kiri is also shy by nature, but she is working on improving her confidence.*

“ ***Aimhigher has really helped me to understand more what I want to do when I’m older and what paths I have available to me, which helps me be less stressed about it*** ”  
- Kiri

*Kiri has had 42 engagements in total with Aimhigher, including: Mentoring; Tutoring; Summer School; Masterclasses; Information, Advice and Guidance; and Campus Visits.\**

Kiri, Year 11

Urban school



Kiri has always enjoyed school but she is also quite shy and quiet. **With the help of Aimhigher, Kiri has significantly grown in confidence and gone on to become Head Girl. Kiri has become a proud ambassador of the school at open evenings,** actively portraying the school positively when taking visitors on tours of the school.

Kiri had previously struggled with revision, but is working hard to pass her GCSEs and is concentrating on raising her grades in Maths.

“ ***The confidence developed has been the biggest thing for her. Seeing that change has been amazing. She’s a real testament to what Aimhigher can do for people.*** ”  
- Aimhigher Progression Ambassador

**The Speak Out Challenge had a significant impact on Kiri’s confidence and positivity.** Kiri is very proud to have overcome her shyness and fear of public speaking, as **she presented and won best speech** at the Speak Out event. She then went on to present again at the **Speak Out Regional Final**, held at the University of Birmingham. This experience helped her become **more comfortable with speaking to new people and making friends.**

Kiri also attended **Unifest** and went on several university visits, which familiarised her with a campus setting. She also attended in-school sessions on **Revision and Study Skills**, which gave her tips on maintaining focus.

“ ***I presented my speech to over 100 people in a regional competition and I got 5th in the region.*** ”  
- Kiri

Though Kiri wants to keep her options open in terms of her career, she is currently looking at college applications. **Exposure to universities**, through Aimhigher activities, has **driven Kiri to consider university courses**, and, significantly, she now feels that **she is far more likely to go to university.**

Kiri’s **engagement in Aimhigher activities has also given her the confidence and ambition to run her own business.** She has a particular interest in designing and selling artwork or clothing, in line with her creative passions.

“ ***I like small businesses – like a one-person thing, not like big corporations, just like people that have literally built a business from home, with no outside input, money or funds. I think that is so cool.*** ”  
- Kiri

*\*Full details on number of activities engaged in and activity objectives are detailed in the Appendices. Please note, learners may not have mentioned each NCOP activity engaged in during their interviews.*



Christopher talks a lot to his mother about his future and has often thought about following in her footsteps and becoming a teacher, as he has completed work experience with her previously. He also considered playing football professionally; Christopher's biggest achievements to date are his football trophies.

“ **Aimhigher's really helped with my knowledge of school and how it is really important, and helping me know what I need to get in my GCSEs to get to where I need to.** ”  
- Christopher

Christopher has had 27 engagements in total with Aimhigher, including: Mentoring; Summer School; Masterclasses; Information, Advice and Guidance; and Campus Visits.\*

Christopher, Year 11

Urban school

School Life/  
Changes



Aimhigher  
Activity/Impact



Future Goals/  
Prospects

Christopher is a talented and diligent student who sees school as important. Christopher's favourite subjects are art, PE and maths. In the past, he had lacked application at times and he was quite confused about his future options.

He received good grades in his mock GCSEs and he is very focused on revision for the final exams. **Since taking part in Aimhigher, he has changed the way he plans his schedule so that he can manage football training alongside revision and homework.** He has noticed that the extra effort studying at home is paying off at school.

“ *He was someone who was a high achiever but he could be doing better, and that was to do with him applying himself more to lessons. It was really important to identify to him that he could achieve great things if he fully applied himself.* ”  
- Aimhigher Progression Ambassador

Christopher attended the **Media Careers event**, during which he surprised himself after taking on the role of directing a video about higher education options. He grew more confident about his leadership and communication skills.

The **UniFest Residential** gave Christopher an idea of what a degree in Sports Fitness and Coaching would be like, and he particularly enjoyed the communication aspect of this activity.

The **Cultural Capital Trip** was a new experience for Christopher, as he'd never been to London.

**One on one mentoring** has given Christopher greater insight into university lifestyle, degrees, costs, etc.

“ *I've never been the person who was actually the leader, but I actually had the opportunity to be the leader and direct everyone.* ”  
- Christopher

Through Aimhigher, Christopher realised that he could combine his talent in football and his **newfound communication and leadership skills** to become a **football coach** - an alternative option to becoming a professional footballer or a teacher.

He is looking into courses and options in this area, using the knowledge and confidence gained from Aimhigher activities.

“ *My goal in the future is to become a football coach. Aimhigher has given me the opportunity to know what courses I needed to go on and where I needed to go.* ”  
- Christopher

\*Full details on number of activities engaged in and activity objectives are detailed in the Appendices. Please note, learners may not have mentioned each NCOP activity engaged in during their interviews.



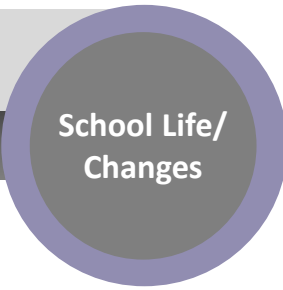
Olivia is a conscientious student who has been planning ahead and working hard to prepare for her GCSEs since year 9. She talks to her parents about her education and future career, and her mother helps her to research university courses and explains student finance options.

“ I was just worried that science was going to be a hard topic and not that interesting, but the Aimhigher programme definitely helped me decide that I want to be a vet. ”  
- Olivia

Olivia has had 5 engagements in total with Aimhigher, including: Masterclasses; Information, Advice and Guidance.\*

Olivia, Year 10

Rural school



School Life/  
Changes



Aimhigher  
Activity/Impact



Future Goals/  
Prospects

Olivia enjoys the variety of school life and she has a supportive group of friends at school.

Olivia's year 9 target grades suggested that she would not be eligible to take Triple Science at GCSE level. **She revised and worked hard to boost her grades, particularly in Science, because of her engagement with Aimhigher.**

She has since been accepted onto the Triple Science programme largely because the head of science recognised Olivia's enthusiasm and determination to become a vet, which she gained after taking part in **Medical Mavericks**.

“ **Medical Mavericks gave me the boost to opt for Triple Science and not think that I might not be accepted.** ”  
- Olivia

**Medical Mavericks has had a significant impact on Olivia's attainment in school and on her future career path.** Her enjoyment of this masterclass reaffirmed her goal to become a veterinary surgeon, which gave her the motivation and confidence to achieve higher grades.

Olivia also benefited from the **Forensic Science masterclass**, which enhanced her interest in Science, as well as teaching her deeper analytical skills and perseverance, which in turn has helped her schoolwork.

A **Mind-Mapping Assembly** gave Olivia new revision methods, which she is using in her Science classes.

“ **The sessions showed me that science is different, and it stands out. It changes your whole perception of the world.** ”  
- Olivia

Now that **Olivia has solidified her career choice, largely thanks to the Aimhigher masterclasses**, she is looking into university courses and **researching specialisms within her chosen pathway.**

She plans to take **science and maths A Levels**, after which she wants to go to **university to do a veterinary degree.** With her new perception of science and her confidence in her abilities, she is on-track to achieve the grade 7s she needs in her GCSEs to follow this path.

“ **She seems pretty dedicated to pursuing a career in that field and has said specifically that she wants to go to university, which she wasn't talking about before those sessions.** ”  
- Acting Deputy Headteacher .

\*Full details on number of activities engaged in and activity objectives are detailed in the Appendices. Please note, learners may not have mentioned each NCOP activity engaged in during their interviews.



Rhiannon is very sporty and she swims for her city. Her favourite subjects in school are chemistry, biology and art.

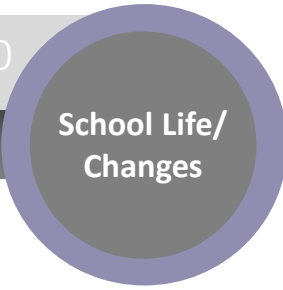
Rhiannon's parents have encouraged her to consider medicine as her future career choice, although Rhiannon is also keen to study astronomy.

“ **Medical Mavericks opened up a whole new spectrum of jobs I could go for. I still look through the booklet they gave us.** ”  
- Rhiannon

Rhiannon has had 4 engagements in total with Aimhigher, all of which were Masterclasses.\*

Rhiannon, Year 10

### Rural school



School Life/  
Changes

Aimhigher  
Activity/Impact

Future Goals/  
Prospects

Rhiannon was shy and lacked confidence when she started in secondary school because most of her primary-school friends went elsewhere. She made friends, gained confidence and is now settled.

Rhiannon enjoys school and she sees her education as very important. She wants to excel and uses the pressure she sometimes feels to encourage her to work hard and do well in exams.

**After engaging in Aimhigher activities, her science grades have increased dramatically as she is more motivated and focused.**

“ *She's been very motivated, not just in Science, but across the board. She's on track and she knows what she wants to do.* ”  
- Acting Deputy Headteacher

Rhiannon gained a lot from the **Medical Mavericks Masterclass**. She thoroughly enjoyed the various tasks and the session gave her ideas and aspirations about her future career and influenced her to be proactive about finding work experience in a hospital.

The **Forensics Workshop** provided further exposure of applying science outside of the classroom, and it also supported Rhiannon's understanding of her biology lessons at the time.

Because of the **enthusiasm Rhiannon demonstrated for science after the masterclasses**, the school worked with her on her science grades to ensure that she was eligible to take **Triple Science**.

“ *Medical Mavericks helped me in giving . . . pointers for later in life. They showed us all the jobs you can do with different equipment.* ”  
- Rhiannon

With the knowledge she gained from the Aimhigher Masterclasses, **Rhiannon has solidified her interest in medicine**. She is continuing to use the resources given to her in Medical Mavericks to help her make a **decision regarding work experience**.

Rhiannon is planning a **career as a surgical nurse**, but is also considering becoming a **general practitioner**. She is studying Triple Science at GCSE level and she is very engaged, focused and excited about what she can achieve in the future.

“ *I had wanted to be an astronomer when I'm older, but now I've veered and made a path to think maybe I want to be a surgical nurse.* ”  
- Rhiannon

\*Full details on number of activities engaged in and activity objectives are detailed in the Appendices. Please note, learners may not have mentioned each NCOP activity engaged in during their interviews.



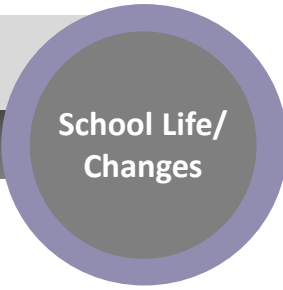
Julia comes from a single parent household. Her background has made her very ambitious with clear goals for the future. Julia's biggest achievements are being offered a place at Cambridge University and becoming a member of the Royal Geographic Society. Her family don't understand the ins and outs of university, but they are very proud.

“ **Aimhigher and college support has been fundamental in my offer from Cambridge University, mainly in terms of helping to turn my dream into a reality by providing funding, access to knowledge and support.** ”  
- Julia

Julia has had 10 engagements in total with Aimhigher, including Masterclasses, Information Advice and Guidance and a Campus Visit.\*

Julia, FE Year 2

Rural school



School Life/  
Changes



Aimhigher  
Activity/Impact



Future Goals/  
Prospects

Julia achieved mainly **C grades** in her **GCSEs** and did not value the importance of education. At the beginning of Sixth Form, Julia was on course to achieve a **grade E**, which she was really disappointed in. It was a reality check and **switched her attitude.**

Julia has found the college environment incredibly supportive and has tutors who have helped to build her confidence. Her next assessment was **graded at an A\*** and she's never gained below that since. Julia is now **confident in her abilities to achieve the grades for Cambridge** as she has invested lots of hard work.

“ *My GCSE grades could have really held me back - no one would have imagined the grades I was capable of - but I was determined enough to prove that I could achieve higher grades.* ”  
- Julia

The **'Fund my University Visit'** (NCOP) had the biggest impact on Julia, supporting a visit to Liverpool University and Cambridge for her interview. Julia lives in a rural area (Hereford) where train travel is expensive and a major barrier. **Without the fund**, she doesn't know how she could have afforded the travel and would have felt **limited to look at universities close by, missing the opportunity to attend her interview at Cambridge.**

An NCOP Student Finance workshop gave Julia confidence and knowledge to navigate and access as much support as possible. **One-to-one NCOP careers support** helped Julia to **choose which course to apply for at university.** Julia attended masterclasses, trips and debates funded by Aimhigher. These **helped to demonstrate her curiosity during the interview for Cambridge.**

“ *Aimhigher opportunities are wide ranging and potentially life changing. The extra support offered to Julia has been a tremendous help ..... and have certainly made a difference to her life.* ”  
- Assistant Principal

Julia is excited to be the **first person in her family to explore university** and has been offered a place at Cambridge University. One-to-one NCOP careers support helped Julia to choose which course to apply for and really focussed her mind. Julia loves Archaeology, but was concerned about career prospects. This one-to-one guidance has supported her to opt to study for Archaeology, with an affiliate year in Law and Politics.

Julia has a very enquiring mind and would love achieve a **doctorate and have a career in academia and publish books.**

“ *In Hereford students have less exposure to university, it is difficult for them to imagine what a university experience is and to imagine leaving Hereford - so they don't open themselves up to the prospect of HE.* ”  
- Julia

\*Full details on number of activities engaged in and activity objectives are detailed in the Appendices. Please note, learners may not have mentioned each NCOP activity engaged in during their interviews.



# LEARNER CASE STUDIES | KEY INSIGHTS

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES | LEARNERS

- Assess the impact that the programme has had on the learner through in-depth case studies
- Explore the **perceptions & experiences** of individual young learners, in relation to the programme
- Evaluate the outcomes of the learner experiences using the **NCOP objectives**, the **five NERUPI** evaluation framework themes and the **four Kirkpatrick event evaluation themes** as a basis to formulate the key questions – to evidence success
- Explore and understand learners' **aspirations and attitude towards higher education**, before and after participation in activities
- Identify and understand any perceived **barriers they feel they face when progressing on to HE**

## KEY IMPACT AREAS OBSERVED

### Increased likelihood of progression to HE

Almost all of our learner case studies agreed (as did their parents, teachers and mentors) that they were more likely to progress to HE study following their involvement in Aimhigher West Midlands activity. This is a positive indication of benefits towards the NCOP objectives of improving progression among those targeted students in our learner case studies.

Many are already actively pursuing this, making choices and completing HE applications led by Aimhigher West Midlands experiences. Some specific impacts to note are:

- Students **feel better equipped to succeed in whichever choices they ultimately take**, with the help of **revision, time management and study skills** they have learned through Aimhigher West Midlands
- Two students are actively pursuing **apprenticeship routes (benefits not limited to university)**

### Benefits to performance in school

Students and staff both report benefits to **behaviour** and **motivation** towards school following involvement in Aimhigher West Midlands activity. Some specific impacts to note are:

- Students feel more motivated in their school work as a result of having a clearer idea of what they want to do in the future and by **knowing the importance of how what they do now will affect them**
- **Attendance and attainment** improved in a number of the case studies and improvements were reported more broadly by many of the schools

### However, more general personal developments are just as significant, if not more so

Many students report 'life-changing' impacts of their experiences, far beyond any links to HE.

- All round **confidence was significantly improved**, to varying extents, across all twelve case studies
- Students are often reluctant to attend events initially but gain a great deal from **breaking out of their comfort zone**, meeting new people and **developing presentation and leadership experience**
- **Cultural Capital Days** were truly eye-opening experiences for some students who had rarely left their hometown before or even travelled on a train
- Many **now have big ambitions for the future** which they would not have previously considered

# LEARNER CASE STUDIES | KEY INSIGHTS

## KEY IMPACT AREAS OBSERVED (CONT.)

### Range of activities helps increase learners' awareness of opportunities

Some specific points to note are:

- **University visits help to make future pathways real** by showing students what to expect and what they can achieve
- **Practical elements** including 'fun', hands-on and engaging tasks are, unsurprisingly, most popular, e.g. Medical Mavericks
- The programme not only helped students find out more about what they already enjoy, it also gave them the opportunity to find out what they do not want to do. If students are not sure about a particular subject / pathway before an event and are able to rule this out, this is a positive step

**“ Before this I was basically the one who just sat in the corner and followed everyone. I'm glad that I stepped out of my comfort zone because now I'm somewhere where I can say if I want to do something I can do it. I can follow my own path. I wouldn't have realised this without the help of Aimhigher. ”**  
- Taylor, Learner

### Aimhigher Progression Ambassador / mentor relationship a key benefit

Students' ongoing relationships with Aimhigher Progression Ambassadors are perhaps more important than any single event:

- The **tailored approach** gives students more specific support, which cannot always be offered at larger events
- All of the case study students report a **strong, trusted relationship** with their Aimhigher Progression Ambassadors (where available)
- **Regular meetings provide an opportunity for reflection**, keeping students' progression goals as their focus

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# SCHOOL CASE STUDIES

The seven school case studies include feedback from six members of teaching staff and four Aimhigher Progression Ambassadors (APAs). The schools selected for the case studies provide a good overview of NCOP schools in the area, representing a variety of age brackets of learners, numbers of NCOP learners on roll, free school meals learners on roll, GCSE and A-level attainment and HE entry rates.

In-depth interviews (and one self-completion survey) were designed to capture perspectives and feedback from stakeholders regarding the schoolwide reception of the Aimhigher programme. These are presented under the following headings in the case studies:

- Schools and Partnership: Context about the school and its relationship with Aimhigher
- Activities: Numbers and examples of Aimhigher activities in which the school engaged
- Impact: The effects felt across the school as a whole, as well as the impacts on individual learners, as a result of Aimhigher activities
- Challenges and Considerations: The school's reflections on any challenges that arose while engaging with Aimhigher activities

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The school case studies can be found on the following pages:

**Balaam Wood (See page 29 for full case study)**

Feedback from one APA

**The Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School (See page 30 for full case study)**

Feedback from one teacher

**Bishop Perowne C of E College (See page 31 for full case study)**

Feedback from one teacher

**Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School (See page 32 for full case study)**

Feedback from one APA

**John Henry Newman Catholic College (See page 33 for full case study)**

Feedback from one APA

**John Willmott School (See page 34 for full case study)**

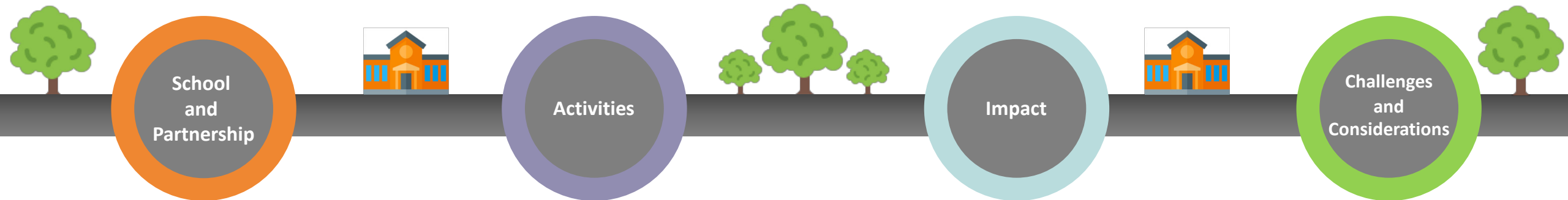
Feedback from two teachers and one APA

**Shenley Academy – (See page 35 for full case study)**

Feedback from two teachers

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“ **Having Aimhigher Progression Ambassadors embedded in schools makes such a difference. We’re able to do the work that teachers don’t have the time to do. Having this and the money to put into resources has been amazing for this school.** ”  
- Aimhigher Progression Ambassador



Balaam Wood Academy is an 11-16 school with 77% of learners on roll living in NCOP wards. The school’s proportion of free school meal learners on roll is significantly above the national average. GCSE attainment is below the national average.

The partnership between Balaam Wood and Aimhigher is **very positive**. The school coordinator, the Aimhigher Progression Ambassador manager and the NCOP officer at the University of Birmingham communicate well and have a **good working relationship**.

From January 2017 to January 2019, Balaam Wood Academy engaged in **100 Aimhigher activities\***.

The school will repeat many of these activities next year as **feedback from staff and learners was very positive**.

Undergraduate students visited Balaam Wood Academy as part of the **coaching programme**. Combined with **university campus visits**, learners gained vital **insight into university life**.

A key activity was the **Speakers Trust Public Speaking workshop**, which engaged even the more withdrawn learners and gave them **communication skills** and **confidence**. It also **complemented the learners’ English speaking exam preparation**.

Another notable activity was the **Cultural Capital trip to London**, which gave learners the opportunity to **meet learners from other schools**, and introduced them to **new experiences**. Some of these learners had never left Birmingham prior to the trip.

The Aimhigher programme has helped learners to **increase their knowledge of higher education** overall and they now understand the difference between college and university, and degrees and apprenticeships.

Learners have **clearer, higher ambitions** and have a better idea of how to achieve them. Teachers have noticed that learners have become more **aware of their own capabilities and potential**, and this filters through into a **positive attitude towards schoolwork**.

Individual learners have demonstrated huge **increases in confidence and perseverance**, and have expressed more **positive outlooks** towards their futures.

Aimhigher Progression Ambassador related negative feedback in relation to two of the activities in which Balaam Wood Academy engaged. Firstly, **MyTutor suffered from technical difficulties** and it was difficult to organise. If the school had been more informed, they could have done more to engage learners. Secondly, although learners enjoyed the **Reach Higher** rock climbing trip, the school felt that it **lacked a direct link** to planning for learners’ futures.

More generally, the Aimhigher Progression Ambassador commented on the internal communication within the school and the possibility of aligning expectations with central teams at Aimhigher. In a school environment, it can be difficult to provide information quickly and meet the deadlines set by the Aimhigher central team.

The Aimhigher Progression Ambassador was our sole interviewee for this school case study.  
\*Full details on number of activities engaged in and activity objectives are detailed in the Appendices

# The Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School Rural

“ *It's a great opportunity for students to be able to access more than they would otherwise. It's difficult for schools to be able to afford things or to dedicate time to HE [higher education] activities, so the dedicated funding helps us to put this as a higher agenda item for students.* ”  
- Acting Deputy Headteacher

## School and Partnership

The Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School is an 11-16 school with 14.5% of learners on roll living in NCOP wards. (The NCOP learners are a potentially isolated cohort and this presents additional challenges.) The school's proportion of free school meal learners on roll is below the national average. GCSE attainment is above the national average.

The Acting Deputy Headteacher is in the second year of contact with Aimhigher and submits bids for funding directly. The Aimhigher representatives are generally seen by school staff as **helpful, open, supportive and quick to respond**. However, the school is **unclear about exactly what is available via Aimhigher and what they are entitled to ask for**.

## Activities

From January 2017 to January 2019, the Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School participated in **14 Aimhigher activities\***.

The school has found that **the programme works best when supplementing an area that the school has already identified would benefit from extra support**.

As well as having the opportunity to take part in activities, learners at this school have access to a **Careers Package** which allows them to **look up opportunities and track their career paths**.

Visits to the University of Birmingham and the University of Worcester **introduced learners to university facilities**. The Positively Mad revision session (Year 9) and Study Skills workshop (Year 11), online English and Maths tuition, the Two-Faced Dance Workshop and the University Student Life talks were reviewed as helpful and well-delivered.

## Impact

The Aimhigher programme has **opened up opportunities for learners**, inspiring them to carry on in education. **Last year, every learner continued into FE (no NEETs)**.

**Grades have increased**, particularly for the learners who attended the **Forensic and Medical Mavericks workshops**. Those who attended the Forensics and Medical Mavericks workshops have been inspired to take Triple Science and to **pursue careers they otherwise would not have considered**.

Teachers have also noticed **improvements in behaviour**. Learners are more focused and motivated, which has led to calmer and more attentive classes.

**Revision and study skills** have improved for the learners who attended the relevant workshops, and **Study Skills sessions with parents and carers** have increased their abilities to support learners at home.

## Challenges and Considerations

The feedback from the school on the Aimhigher engagement was predominantly positive. Hence, the school is **disappointed that the Aimhigher funding has been reduced**, because they were **greatly benefitting from the opportunities**.

The only activity to receive any suggestions or recommendations was the **online tuition**. Initially, the school selected learners on the AHWM/NCOP list, but now that the school has a **better understanding of the activity**, they will target learners who will be more likely to engage with it.

The Acting Deputy Headteacher was our sole interviewee for this school case study.

\*Full details on number of activities engaged in and activity objectives are detailed in the Appendices

“*Aimhigher has had a massive impact. Without their funding we wouldn't have been doing these trips. Actually going to a university and actually seeing the halls of residence and the facilities... Students are talking about applying to university, it's absolutely amazing.*”  
- Head Subject Leader

## School and Partnership

Bishop Perowne C of E College is an 11-16 school with 18.2% of learners on roll living in NCOP wards. The school's proportion of free school meal learners on roll is above the national average. GCSE attainment is in line with the national average.

The Head Subject Leader has been working with Aimhigher for three to four years so is **comfortable to directly approach Aimhigher. Communication from Aimhigher is very good**; Aimhigher contacts the school when funding is available and the coordinator puts in bids for funding.

Aimhigher funding has been spent on **coach hire and resources**, enabling trips that were previously out of the school's budget.

## Activities

Bishop Perowne C of E College participated in **3 Aimhigher activities\*** between January 2017 and January 2019.

Importance is placed on **educational experiences that the school cannot offer.**

The Dell/Gloucester University workshop gave learners **direct access to an industrial leader who took learners out of their comfort zones and helped build future goals.** The university trips gave learners an **insight into university life** (accommodation and facilities), **supplementing the careers and higher education advice services** offered by the school.

The Child Development students attended a **Mother and Baby Show** at the NEC which gave them **hands-on access to equipment and contact with professionals.**

All year 9 students attended a **Skills Show** at the NEC, giving learners more **awareness of career options.**

## Impact

The Head Subject Leader reports that **learners demonstrate significant changes** after taking part in Aimhigher activities.

Learners have a more **aspirational outlook towards higher education** and discuss applying to university having seen the facilities on the university trip.

Despite their initial apprehension about the university trip, especially regarding a presentation they were expected to give, learners gained a strong **sense of achievement and confidence** and spoke positively about the experience for a long time afterwards.

Learners on the Child Development course received **better coursework marks** thanks to increased understanding of course equipment.

## Challenges and Considerations

Feedback from the Head Subject Leader about Aimhigher was very favourable.

The school suggested that having **Aimhigher representation at staff training** would help to promote the programme. This would support the communication within the school about Aimhigher.

The Head Subject Leader noted that the school would like the opportunity to include more learners and **offer these opportunities to a wider cohort.**

The Head Subject Leader was our sole interviewee for this school case study.

\*Full details on number of activities engaged in and activity objectives are detailed in the Appendices

“ *The biggest impact the activities have had on the students is the way they think about HE [higher education]. Through their interactions with myself and the wider programme, their views have changed, and they now see HE as something that is more attainable for them.* ”  
- Aimhigher Progression Ambassador



## School and Partnership

Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School is an 11-16 school with 55.8% of learners on roll living in NCOP wards. The school's proportion of free school meal learners is significantly above the national average. GCSE attainment is below the national average. The school received a 'Good' Ofsted report in its most recent inspection.

The Aimhigher Progression Ambassador at Cardinal Wiseman commented that the **activities were aimed at the appropriate year groups**, and that events were **interactive, encouraging and engaging**.

## Activities

Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School engaged in **48 Aimhigher activities\*** between January 2017 and January 2019.

The **Speak Out challenge** was a particularly successful activity. One learner competed in the final, and was aware of the advantage this would have in **higher education applications and their future career**.

Having attended a **university trip** and having been in contact with current undergraduates, learners feel **more comfortable with the prospect of applying to university**.

The **mock lectures** demonstrated to learners that they have the ability and intelligence to attend university.

The university **taster sessions** led to some learners changing their mind about courses, as they were **exposed to subjects they had not previously considered**.

## Impact

The Aimhigher Progression Ambassador noted a **broad impact on the learners** who participated in Aimhigher activities.

Learners gained transferable skills, such as **public speaking skills** and they grew in **confidence and self-belief**.

Having participated in Aimhigher activities, learners **feel that higher education (HE) is more attainable**. As learners become **more aware of their FE/HE options**, they take **more of an interest in their education and strive to achieve the required entry grades**.

**Learners' contact with the Aimhigher Progression Ambassador has changed their views on HE:** "now they see **university as a prospect for themselves**."

## Challenges and Considerations

The Aimhigher Progression Ambassador reported that Aimhigher's involvement in the area of **careers and FE/HE guidance** was **crucial** to the school.

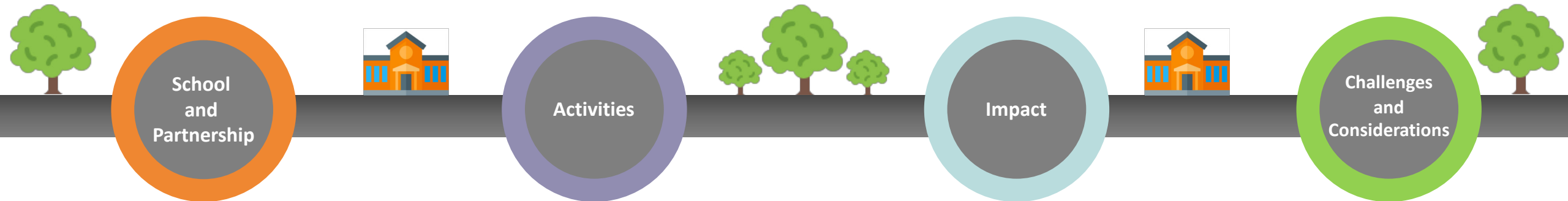
The only matter to consider regarding activities is that the school would have benefited from **more advanced notice about activities**, particularly the Speak Out final, as it would have given them a greater opportunity to promote it to learners and staff.

The Aimhigher Progression Ambassador was our sole respondent for this school case study.  
\*Full details on number of activities engaged in and activity objectives are detailed in the Appendices



“ *All of the students improve in some way or another and you can see that it's making a difference. It all contributes to the bigger picture and you feel like they're more ready to go out into the world.* ”

- Aimhigher Progression Ambassador



John Henry Newman Catholic College is an 11-18 school with 69% of learners on roll living in NCOP wards. The school's proportion of free school meal learners on roll is above the national average. GCSE and A-level attainment is in line with the national average. Higher education entry rates are above the national average. The school received a 'Good' Ofsted report in its most recent inspection.

The **Aimhigher Progression Ambassador** spends two days a week at John Henry Newman Catholic College and **finds the role very rewarding**. They see their position as a role model, mentor and organiser.

From January 2017 to January 2019, John Henry Newman Catholic College participated in **139 Aimhigher activities\***.

Workshops were provided in **goal-mapping, GCSE motivation, raising aspirations, apprenticeships** and **revision**.

The undergraduate coaching programme helped to **raise learners' confidence** and **leadership skills**. The activity encouraged them to be more independent, e.g. make phone calls, make reservations, plan a day-trip.

The **university visits** changed the learners' perceptions on their academic and financial ability to go to university, demonstrating to learners that **university is within their reach**.

Learners also participated in the **National Enterprise Challenge** and the **Manchester Cultural Capital Trip**.

**Ongoing mentoring** sessions address the **individual needs** of the learners.

After taking part in the Aimhigher activities, learners' aspirations have been raised and **they are now considering careers, degrees and apprenticeships** that **they had not previously been aware of**.

Learners have set **short-term and long-term goals relating to education and careers** based on knowledge gained through Aimhigher activities.

Learners who previously struggled with timekeeping are managing to **meet deadlines** and be punctual, and they have learnt techniques to **manage stress**.

Learners working with learning mentors demonstrated notable **improvements in behaviour**. Since they have a stronger focus, they are more likely to pay attention, engage and ask questions in sessions.

Specific feedback related to the **Roadshow**. Since it took place later in the year, it **repeated information** about university applications that the learners had already received via other Aimhigher activities. Therefore, a consideration would be to hold this activity earlier in Year 12 or at the end of Year 11.

In terms of challenges more generally, some **teachers were reluctant to give up lesson time** to take learners on trips. However, once the teachers saw the improvements and the positive learner engagement, this challenge reduced.

The Aimhigher Progression Ambassador was our sole interviewee for this school case study.  
\*Full details on number of activities engaged in and activity objectives are detailed in the Appendices

“*Aimhigher has engaged us in activities that we never would have had. Because of Aimhigher, we will be able to switch the students on to think about higher aspirations.*”  
- Achievement Coordinator/Head of Year



### School and Partnership

John Willmott School is an 11-18 school with 39.7% of learners on roll living in NCOP wards. The school's proportion of free school meals learners on roll is above the national average. GCSE and A-level attainment is below the national average. Higher education entry rates are below the national average.

John Willmott School has had a **very supportive and enthusiastic Aimhigher Progression Ambassador**, who acts as the point of communication between Aimhigher and the school. The **relationship between the school and Aimhigher has been brilliant**, which the teaching staff largely credit to the Aimhigher Progression Ambassador's attitude and belief in the programme.

### Activities

From January 2017 to January 2019, John Willmott School participated in **53 Aimhigher activities\***.

Year 9 visited **Cadbury World** and **Nando's**, which helped to build up the relationship between staff and learners. From this point, the staff were able to have meaningful discussions with learners about life skills.

Year 10 learners participated in the **Speak Out challenge**.

The **Make Your Move visit to the University of Birmingham** was well-timed – early in Year 12 – which encouraged learners to start planning early for their post-A level goals.

**Online tutoring** has been well-received and has given the sixth-form learners a chance to start thinking ahead.

**Elevate and Make Your Move workshops** taught learners study skills.

### Impact

Aimhigher has engaged the school in **activities that would not have been financially viable otherwise**.

According to the Achievement Coordinator/Head of Year, Aimhigher has had **immediate effects on learners**. For example, following a university visit, learners **researched university options and visited UCAS websites**.

A wider range of learners gain an **insight into possible opportunities** in further education. The Aimhigher programme begins in September, resulting in **learners being more purposeful from the start of the academic year**.

Learners have gained more **independence**. Many of the learners who participated in the trips had not previously planned a journey, dealt with money or been on a train.

### Challenges and Considerations

The Achievement Coordinator/Head of Year gave some points to consider. Firstly, from the school's perspective, it can be **difficult to differentiate between NCOP and non-NCOP learners**. Secondly, more **communication between workshop providers** would ensure that content is not repeated. Finally, the school does not have space to contain the **Aimhigher Roadshow Dome** so cannot engage with that activity. The Achievement Coordinator/Head of Year also noted that the school struggles with **work experience placements in jobs that require degrees or higher education (HE) qualifications** and queried whether Aimhigher could help with this.

The Aimhigher Coordinator reported that administrative tasks (internal paperwork and organisation of trips) were difficult to manage.

For this school case study we interviewed the Achievement Coordinator/Head of Year, the Aimhigher Coordinator and the Aimhigher Progression Ambassador.

\*Full details on number of activities engaged in and activity objectives are detailed in the Appendices

“ *The funding gets straight to where it needs to be, which is the students. They have access to a wealth of information and high-quality events. We absolutely believe in the programme and we are 100% committed.* ”  
- Senior Assistant Headteacher

## School and Partnership

Shenley Academy is an 11-19 school with 23.7% of learners on roll living in NCOP wards. The school's proportion of free school meal learners on roll is significantly above the national average. GCSE and A-level attainment is below the national average. Higher education entry rates are in line with the national average.

Shenley Academy has a **clear picture of the benefits to which they have access through Aimhigher**. The school has a very positive relationship with Aimhigher, and has regular contact with, and support from, Aimhigher and the partner universities.

## Activities

From January 2017 to January 2019, Shenley Academy took part in **88 Aimhigher activities\***.

**Learners engaged most positively when activities were offered in response to their expressed needs.** The Careers Fair and Games Development Workshop were based on learners' suggestions and they were very successful.

**Activities in school included** mentoring and MyTutor.

The Languages and Cultures Event (Aston University) and Bournemouth University Taster Day were offered among other **visits to universities**, as well as **cultural visits** to Bletchley Park and the National Museum of Computing, and Cultural Capital Trips to London and Birmingham.

Learners also engaged in **specialised workshops** such as the Art Workshop (Barber Institute) and STEM Day (Millennium Point) and **opportunities to meet employers**, for example, the Jaguar Land Rover Experience Day.

## Impact

There has been an **overwhelmingly positive response to the Aimhigher activities from both staff and learners.**

Learners have increased awareness of and **insight into future academic and career options**, and have an **increased desire to do well** in school in order to achieve their goals.

With the input from mentors and University visits, **learners can confidently make decisions** about courses, universities, and accommodation, and have a **better understanding of student finance.**

Learners feel more **empowered, proud and determined**, having **learnt new skills** or developed existing skills. This impact was demonstrated particularly in the Speak Out challenge and the Reach Higher activity.

## Challenges and Considerations

**The school is overwhelmingly enthusiastic about continuing to move forward with Aimhigher activities.** The Pastoral Support Manager/Leader of Careers Education acknowledged that it was **sometimes difficult to establish contact with learners** and some were initially reluctant to commit to activities. **The suggestion of an event to engage parents/carers** would help support learners in this regard.

**Time-consuming administrative and data-based tasks** were taken on by the Aimhigher coordinator, who has identified a **need for support** in the area of internal communication, particularly at the start of the year. The school had difficulty in getting returned **consent forms** from learners. The school suggested using Teacher-Pupil meetings as opportunities to sign forms.

For this school case study we interviewed the Senior Assistant Headteacher and the Pastoral Support Manager/Leader of Careers Education

*\*Full details on number of activities engaged in and activity objectives are detailed in the Appendices*

# SCHOOL CASE STUDIES | KEY INSIGHTS

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Assess the impact that the programme has had on five schools / colleges
- Explore practitioners' perceptions of the programme
- Explore and understand the impact of partnership working between schools / colleges and HEIs – to include the benefits and challenges

## KEY IMPACT AREAS OBSERVED

### Huge value placed on the breadth and scope of available opportunities

Schools largely appreciate the range of opportunities available; many say they wouldn't be able to afford if it wasn't for the support of Aimhigher. Key benefits included:

- Students were exposed to a **range of activities** to which schools would otherwise have limited access
- Activities were generally seen to be **well-organised by a variety of skilled practitioners / companies**
- General feedback was, "the more activities, the better"

**“ They have access to a wealth of information, great opportunities and high-quality events. The feedback has been immense when the students have come back into school. ”**

- Senior Assistant Headteacher, Shenley Academy

### Content generally seen as high quality and pitched at the right level

Some specific points to note are:

- Activities generally seen to be **pitched at the right level for students**
  - Only one instance in our learner case studies diverges from this; a year 9 student was overwhelmed by a Skills Show
- Overlap with **similar messages from the school** were seen as a positive
  - Schools acknowledge that **students often take messages on board more effectively when delivered by an external provider**, and / or through engaging activities, than by teachers

**“ Aimhigher has had a massive impact. Without their funding we wouldn't have been doing these trips. Actually going to a university and seeing the halls of residence and the facilities... Students are talking about applying to university, it's absolutely amazing. ”**

- Head Subject Leader, Bishop Perowne C of E College

# SCHOOL CASE STUDIES | KEY INSIGHTS

## KEY IMPACT AREAS OBSERVED

### **Students are thinking about their future more, during and following events**

Schools report increased engagement and **more talk about the future** across the student population after involvement with Aimhigher activities. Schools also report students **asking about future activities** and how they can get more involved.

Some of the school staff we interviewed **reported groups of students talking about and remembering positively** some of their experiences a long time afterwards

**“Just having students more inspired and wanting to carry on in education has been a really positive thing.**

- Acting Deputy Headteacher, The Bishop Hereford's Bluecoat School ”

**“The advice, opportunities and support that students have received .... are wide ranging and potentially life changing. Students are thinking about the full range of routes moving forward and Aimhigher has empowered them to take control of their academic journey.**

- Assistant Principal - Hereford Sixth Form College\* ”

### **Aimhigher seen as one arm of careers / progression focus**

Careers and progression are key goals for schools, with their own existing structures and staff involved in these areas, but Aimhigher's support helps to place them higher on the agenda.

In addition it also enables them to **dedicate time and funding towards** it (including TLR payment for urban schools [see page 4]), and provides access to resources they otherwise would not be able to afford e.g. Careers Package.

**“Aimhigher has engaged us in activities that we never would have had. Because of Aimhigher, we will be able to switch the students on to think about higher aspirations.**

- Achievement Coordinator / Head of Year, John Wilmott School ”

### **Longer term impacts are difficult to assess**

Whilst the longer term impacts were deemed to be difficult to assess at this point in time, the general feeling is that learners are more likely to progress following involvement in Aimhigher West Midlands activity. There are also some positive indications of progression towards FE / HE, in destination data of two of the schools we spoke to..

\*This quote was made during one of the learner case study interviews and was not part of the school / college case study research

## CHALLENGES / RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

*Note, all feedback and suggestions are derived from stakeholder interviews conducted as part of this impact evaluation, and do not take into account the context of reduction in funding for delivery of activities post-July 2019, which only came to light during this research project.*

### **Partnerships between schools and Aimhigher generally work well, but coordinators frequently struggle to implement and embed initiatives within school**

- Communication with Aimhigher is generally good. Staff are felt to be helpful and supportive
- Aimhigher Progression Ambassadors welcomed as part of the school team, as they help significantly with coordinating activities
- **Getting teachers on board is a key challenge** in schools, especially in the initial stages – teachers can be reluctant to lose lesson time to activities, but generally become more positive when they see the benefits first-hand
- Aimhigher Progression Ambassadors and coordinators would like **more support in promoting Aimhigher opportunities** and benefits within the school by letting teachers know what's available and how they can access it. Schools could benefit from Aimhigher attending staff training days to increase awareness and aid buy-in

**“ I don't think the difficulty has been working with Aimhigher. The difficulty is coordinating it within the school. ”**  
- Aimhigher Coordinator, John Willmott School

### **Support for parents is the missing piece**

Parents we interviewed were **positive** about the benefits of Aimhigher but received little or no communication and expressed that they would like to receive more information about the activities their children are involved in.

Schools agreed that parents are the missing piece that currently receive little support from Aimhigher and can provide significant impact in driving benefits to students. Schools would like **more activity and information geared specifically towards parents** to help provide them with the knowledge and skills to aid in their children's progression

**“ I would like to think they are more likely to go to HE, but knowing the students and their backgrounds it's an ongoing battle. Parents might brush it off or tell them 'that's not going to happen'. ”**  
**Head Subject Leader, Bishop Perowne C of E College**

# CHALLENGES / RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

## Other considerations

- **Possible gap for SEN NCOP students** – schools tend to focus on support of SEN students academically, but future progression can be an oversight
- **Aimhigher could support work experience with HE pathways** - this is another potential area that Aimhigher could explore (to further aid the learners' later career and progression opportunities)
- **MyTutor success largely dependent on the learner's levels of engagement.** Feedback suggests that this may have been opened up too widely in some cases, with reports of technical difficulties causing disengagement. More information / guidance would also be welcomed upon setup
- **Design Tech / Food Tech** may be another gap where activities could show progression opportunities, as these are subjects in which students have little awareness of related career pathways

## Barriers to engagement

Key barriers that were identified include:

- There is a strong appetite from schools for activities and support, however there can be an **initial challenge getting teachers on board** due to learners losing lesson time
- **Internal administration** was a small issue for a couple of the schools, as tasks such as ensuring returned consent forms and compiling risk assessments proved time-consuming
- Some teachers (particularly in rural areas, without an Aimhigher Progression Ambassador) can **struggle to access information on what activities are available for their school.** The more support and material from Aimhigher in helping overcome these hurdles, the better, e.g. visits and training
- **Learners can be apprehensive about their first activity** with Aimhigher, but are generally receptive when benefits are fully explained, and enjoy activities when they attend these
- Aimhigher Progression Ambassadors are key facilitators. **Question of how we ensure similar benefits are experienced in rural areas without Aimhigher Progression Ambassadors?** Some potential considerations could include:
  - Providing funding / guidance for existing staff in school to fulfil similar roles?
  - Graduates to carry out similar activities on a less frequent / small group basis?
  - Online / video conferencing option?

## Barriers to progression to HE

- The case studies strongly suggest that, **through Aimhigher activity, learners are better equipped to overcome existing barriers to progression**, in line with NERUPI themes (pages 40-41)
- Schools agreed that **parents are the missing piece** (page 38) that currently receive little support from Aimhigher and can provide significant impact in driving benefits to students
- There are a **multitude of social factors which could contribute to under-representation** of target groups in higher education, of which many may be beyond the remit of educational intervention. However, our evidence suggests that **Aimhigher provides a significant benefit within an education context to provide learners the greatest opportunity for progression**

# SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING POINTS

## Learners

**Strong evidence across case studies that learners were more likely to progress to HE study following their involvement in Aimhigher West Midlands activity, in support of NCOP objectives.**

Key areas of impact include:

- ✓ Benefits to performance in school
- ✓ General confidence and personal developments
- ✓ Range of activities increasing learners' awareness of opportunities
- ✓ Aimhigher Progression Ambassador / mentor relationship a key benefit
- ✓ Increased likelihood of progression to HE

## Using theoretical frameworks to measure & evaluate impact

When reviewing the programme's performance against the NERUPI and Kirkpatrick evaluation frameworks, there is strong evidence across the case studies that there has been significant impact and successes across the majority of the identified themes / areas.\*

### NERUPI Evaluation Themes

A	B	C	D	E
Develop students' <b>knowledge and awareness</b> of the benefits of higher education and graduate employment	Develop students' capacity to <b>navigate</b> higher education and graduate employment sectors and <b>make informed choices</b>	Develop students' <b>confidence and resilience</b> to negotiate the challenge of university life and graduate progression	Develop students' study skills and capacity for academic attainment and successful graduate progression	Develop students' understanding by <b>contextualising subject knowledge</b>

●	●	●	●	●
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- **Strong evidence** to support the positive impact of the programme across themes A-D
- **Theme D** particularly strong impact area for older students
- **Theme E** Some evidence to support partial success in this area, but that is due to a limited number of subject specific activities being included in the evaluation

### Kirkpatrick Event Evaluation Themes

1	2	3	4
Reaction	Learning	Behaviour	Results
●	●	●	●
Despite some initial apprehension, <b>reaction of learners to activities were hugely positive</b>	<b>Strong evidence</b> of increased knowledge and skills to facilitate progression	<b>Strong evidence</b> of positive behavioural changes and subsequent actions e.g. improved motivation	<b>Long-term results remain to be seen</b> but strong indications of positive impacts on learners

\*as outlined in the research objectives on page 25. The Frameworks are detailed on page 41.



# SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING POINTS

## Learners cont.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

#### **NERUPI theoretical framework**

*A praxis-based approach, combining theory and practice, the NERUPI Framework identifies the key elements of a Widening Participation (WP) programme or individual activity.*

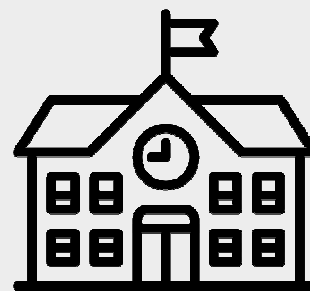
*There are five overarching NERUPI aims which set out defined aims and outcomes; these are considered key to effective WP evaluation.*

#### **Kirkpatrick Model**

*The Kirkpatrick Model is a similar theoretical framework and is a model that helps facilitate the analysis and evaluation of the results of training and educational programs. It takes into account any style of training, both informal or formal, to determine aptitude based on four levels of criteria.*

## Schools

- ✓ Schools, as a whole, value and appreciate the range of activities as well as positive relationships with Aimhigher, but could benefit from more support in embedding and implementing the programme within their schools
- ✓ **More support and information for parents** is the missing piece of the puzzle which should be filled in order to maximise positive impacts on learners
- ✓ Responses and feedback from school / college case studies was overwhelmingly positive due, in part, to the overall approach focusing on a small number of positive examples. In order to **fully understand and truly assess / evaluate Aimhigher partnerships with schools / colleges**, consideration of a further research enquiry would be recommended. It is anticipated that this would be conducted with a much larger and representative sample of external stakeholders
- ✓ The case studies strongly suggest that, **through Aimhigher activity, learners are better equipped to overcome existing barriers to progression.** As such, Aimhigher provides a significant benefit within an education context to **provide learners the greatest opportunity for progression**



*Note, all feedback and suggestions are derived from stakeholder interviews conducted as part of this impact evaluation, and do not take into account the context of changes in funding for delivery of activities post-July 2019, which only came to light during this research project.*

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# APPENDIX

The table below provides an overview of the Aimhigher Plus activities and programmes accessed by learner case studies.

Activity Name	Description/Objectives
Apprenticeship Residential	A 3 day, 2 night residential aiming to increase students' knowledge on apprenticeships and give them a practical taster experience of what it would be like to study an apprenticeships. Students received a one day placement at local apprenticeship providers (Health and Beauty, Business, Law, Construction and IT).
Business Challenge Day	The Business Challenge Day aims to give students a real insight into studying a Business related course at university. Students work alongside academics and current students to create, market and pitch a product of their own design. This day increases students practical understanding of Business and increases teamwork and confidence.
Careers in Film & TV	The Careers in Film & TV Event gives students who are interested in this career area a real insight into studying the subject in higher education, and careers in the industry. Students develop their team working skills by producing a film, supported by media professionals, about higher education.
Cultural Capital Day	Many of our NCOP learners have never left their immediate area. Our Cultural Capital day aims to develop their cultural capital, independence and confidence by taking them outside their comfort zone to experience something new. Students travel down to London on the train, take the London underground, visit museums and attend a matinee performance at the West End.
Education Interactive (Forensics)	This activity is delivered in conjunction with Medical Mavericks, to raise attainment and aspiration in science. The sessions work very closely to the CSI TV program model, showing how science and forensics can be used to solve crimes. Students are put in role as detectives and shown how to complete forensic based tasks. There is a 'body' and a description of the crime from 'cops' on the scene.
Elevate- Ace Your Exams	The Ace Your Exams workshop, run by Elevate Education, covers the highest value exam preparation skills, how to fix mistakes to ensure constant improvement, time allocation during exam preparation as well as how to manage stress and time pressure during exams.
FutureFest 2018	Future Fest Summer School provides encouragement to learners as they explore university life. They will meet undergraduate students and explore certain career pathways. Undergraduates support the learners by helping to increase their awareness of higher education and build confidence.
Campus Visit	The campus visits provides students with the opportunity to explore university. They encounter a higher education institute, meet undergraduate students who will support learners by increasing their awareness of university, deliver talks/workshops which enrich their knowledge about HE and reasons to go to Uni, career pathways, and budgeting techniques.

# APPENDIX

Activity Name	Description/Objectives
Make Your Move	The year 12 Induction day supports students by motivating and raising aspirations to help students reach their potential and progress to higher education. It informs students about a range of careers that their chosen subject areas can lead to and helps prepare them for the challenges of post- 16 study.
Medical Mavericks Masterclass	The activity aims to raise students aspirations to professional occupations (using healthcare as an example) and widening knowledge of allied healthcare professions as well of those that are well known and understood.
Mentoring	The Aimhigher Mentoring Programme provides encouragement to learners as they encounter challenges, opportunities and choices between Years 9 and 13. Undergraduates support their mentees by helping to improve their study skills, increasing their awareness of higher education and generally supporting their self-esteem, motivation and confidence that they need to succeed.
MyTutor	My Tutor is an online platform where tutors and students can talk, share documents and use interactive resources to reinforce learning and solve problems together. Tutors are undergraduate students who specialise in specific subjects to support pupils through GCSE and A-level qualifications.
Next Steps Trip	The year 12 preparation day allows students to undertake essential preparatory work in advance of the main round of UCAS fairs and open days. The conference prepares students for the university application process for a successful transition into higher education life and study.
Revision Weekender	The Revision Weekend offers year 11 students the opportunity to escape their hometowns for rural Shropshire. With little distractions around them, over 3 days the students learn new study skills and revision techniques whilst pushing themselves outside of their comfort zones with outdoor, challenging activities.
Skills Show	The Skills Show offers the opportunity for young people to explore a wide range of careers and develop the skills that employers need most. Aimhigher offers funding for transport to the Skills Show and delivered a range of talks and workshops to teachers, advisers, parents and carers at the events between 2016-2018.
Skills to get by Workshop	As part of an Enrichment programme, Aimhigher Plus offers workshops which focus on the importance of transferable skills in the workplace and everyday life. This workshop aims to increase students understanding of transferable skills, how they can be used in and out of school and the importance of developing these skills
Speak Out Challenge	The "Speak Out" Challenge is designed to build confidence and enable young people from all walks of life to speak with clarity, conviction and impact. Aimhigher funded the "Speak Out" Challenge for year 10 learners to equip them with the skills and desire to speak in public.

# APPENDIX

Activity Name	Description/Objectives
Student Voice/ Student Voice Launch	Student Voice is the opportunity for NCOP learners from across 20 different schools to help shape the Aimhigher Plus programme. This project aims to empower the students and ensure the provision delivered is in line with what students need/ want. In turn students confidence, teamwork and leadership skills are improved.
Time Management Session	This activity include a Goal Mapping session with Errol Lawson followed by a Maths workshop from AS Creatives. This was designed to allow the Year 12 students to begin to design their future whilst in a University environment. This session also highlighted the need of good time management and punctuality to achieve these goals.
Unifest/The AIM residential	Unifest provides year 10 students with an immersive and exciting opportunity to live as a student at one of Aimhigher's partner universities. Lasting up to 3 days, summer schools inspire, motivate and support young people to make informed decisions about higher education.
Year 10 Revision workshop	The revision session introduces students to a number of different revision techniques and makes them aware of ways to make their revision more effective. It encourages them to think about the way that they learn best as well as to experiment with new techniques.