

MPs from all major parties attend reception for Aimhigher programme

Listening to the Voice of Learners

On Tuesday 7th September, over 20 MPs drawn from all the major parties attended the first national Aimhigher Parliamentary reception at Portcullis House, Westminster. Aimhigher is the only national service supporting progression to Higher Education for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Dr Graeme Atherton and Dr. Ian Tunbridge from the West Central and North London Partnership and Jo Wiggans of the Greater Manchester Partnership all spoke of how significant the work of Aimhigher is and will continue to be for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially at a time of intense competition for University places. The support and guidance on offer through Aimhigher for has never been more important

The Reception aimed to show the work that Aimhigher does across the country with thousands of young people, through the nearly 1 million interventions made last year. The MPs had a chance to talk to their local partnerships and hear what was happening in their own constituencies. In total 20 MPs were able to learn about the effect Aimhigher has had on the lives of young people.

Siobhain McDonagh, the sponsoring Labour MP for the Reception, said afterwards; *"I was moved and heartened by the testimonies of the young people about the benefits that Aimhigher has given them. This is an initiative that we cannot afford to lose, for their sakes."*

Members of Parliament attending

Liberal Democrats:

Julian Huppert—Cambridge

Conservatives:

Graham Stuart—Beverley and Holderness

Martin Vickers—Cleethorpes

Nicky Morgan—Loughborough

Amber Rudd—Hastings and Rye

Tim Loughton—East Worthing and Shoreham

Neil Carmichael—Stroud

Labour:

Grahame Morris—Easington

Helen Goodman—Bishop Auckland

Hazel Blears—Salford and Eccles

Lisa Nandy—Wigan

George Howarth—Knowsley

Austin Mitchell—Great Grimsby

Jim Fitzpatrick—Poplar and Limehouse

Siobhain McDonagh—Mitcham and Morden

Tom Blenkinsop—Middlesbrough South & East Cleveland

Barry Sheerman—Huddersfield

David Lammy—Tottenham

Nic Dakin—Scunthorpe

Diana Johnson—Kingston upon Hull North

Louise Ellman—Liverpool Riverside

How Aimhigher changes learners lives

The learners personal experiences of Aimhigher were the centrepiece of the reception. Their stories were powerful and compelling:

Sophie, a Yr 13 student from the Joseph Swan School in Tyne & Wear, told the group of how her involvement in Aimhigher had transformed her self-belief & confidence. At the first attempt she had competed nationally in a national memory contest and achieved 3rd place.

Emily, is now entering year 11. As a result of her work with Aimhigher York and North Yorkshire she had changed her whole perspective on education & her future. From being a rebellious student, not interested in school or learning, she is going on to be Head Girl this year and was the partnership 2009-10 Aimhigher learner of the year.

Lizzie & Jenny are Yr 12 students from Greater Merseyside and part of this partnership's 'Young Researchers' Project. Lizzie told the audience how before Aimhigher she felt her future would be in hairdressing or childcare. Now, she was intending to study Politics at university & wanted one day to enter public life. Jenny spoke of how through the Associates scheme in particular she had received the key guidance to help her move onto post 16

Emma was an Aimhigher learner in Sheffield and is not at Manchester Metropolitan University studying English and American Literature and an Aimhigher Associate. The support that she had received from Aimhigher herself had inspired her involvement in the Associates programme. She is now giving younger students the same help and guidance that she got.

Sven de Cauter was an actual member of the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Aimhigher team. Sven had been in jail when he first received mentoring support from Aimhigher. The support he received truly turned his life around and as well as mentoring other inmates for Aimhigher he is taking a Foundation Degree in Business & Management. Sven's journey epitomises the impact that the Aimhigher programme can have.



Above—Siobhain McDonagh and Barry Sheerman discussing the work of Aimhigher taking place in their respective constituencies

Above, Right—Grahame Morris speaks to representatives of the Aimhigher County Durham Partnership

Right—New MP for Hastings and Rye, Ms Amber Rudd, listening to Mike Dixon recounting the Aimhigher activities taking place in Sussex



Aimhigher's future to be decided this year

The role of the Aimhigher Programme has never been more important than at this crucial time for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The learners stories showed the impact of Aimhigher on people's lives. Funding for the programme is confirmed until July 2011 and its future will be decided after the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Why should Aimhigher continue?

As Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg said in August 2010 ***Our determination to fix the deficit is matched by our determination to create a more socially mobile society.*** This can only be achieved if more disadvantaged learners go to university and we need Aimhigher for this to happen. The case for a future for Aimhigher is based on its ability to renew itself to support a range of policy objectives. Aimhigher is in a unique position to:

Improve HE Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

Improve vocational progression to Level 4 - in particular for apprentices

Maximise the value of the pupil premium

Increase social mobility

Support delivery of a new All-Age Careers Service

Emily Griffiths focuses on her notes, below, while speaking to delegates



Above, Sophie Stephenson from Tyne and Wear prepares to address the room

