

International Centre for Guidance Studies

# Researching the Aimhigher Greater Manchester Graduate Officer Programme

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**June 2011**

FINAL Report

Nicki Moore, Margaret Christopoulos, Konstantia Dimitriou & Jo Hutchinson



International Centre for  
Guidance Studies (iCeGS)

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## Executive summary

Aimhigher is a government funded initiative which was established in 2001 to help encourage more learners to participate in UK higher education – particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds, minority groups and individuals experiencing learning difficulties and disabilities. The numbers of young people meeting the criteria for Aimhigher support in the Greater Manchester area is high at 60%. This rises to 90% in some districts. As part of its strategy, the Greater Manchester Aimhigher Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Strategy Group allocated resources to deploy a team of 9 graduate officers in 2009 whose remit was to ensure that learners receive appropriate IAG services which support career decision making. Whilst the programme has been established a number of policy driven changes have occurred including

- The closure of Aimhigher, with projects being wound down to finish in July 2011
- Changes in University funding regimes and their approach to widening participation which places a higher requirement on students to self-finance their studies whilst individual institutions can adopt approaches to widening participation that suit their particular circumstances
- Changes in policy driven by the Education Bill (2011) that are likely to impact upon the nature of IAG offered within schools to all young people including those from the “Aimhigher cohort”
- Financial constraint within the public sector due to a comprehensive spending review

The population of 18 year olds in Greater Manchester is due to reduce overall over the next 10 years. This will have a bearing on the allocation of resources for future information, advice and guidance services.

### **The graduate officer model of delivery**

Aimhigher targeted activities are currently intended to reach 2,500 learners per year group per annum, representing 7% of the Greater Manchester cohort of 15 -19 year olds.

Aimhigher in Greater Manchester operates through a partnership which involves 7 higher education institutions, 10 local authorities, 23 colleges and 150 schools, and providers of Connexions services.

The nine Aimhigher graduate officers work across the 10 Greater Manchester boroughs. During the course of the programme graduate officers worked with 20,165 participants during the period August 2009 – July 2010 (Aimhigher Greater Manchester 2010) and with 3,774 learners from August 2010 to February 2011. This means that over the life of the project to date 23,939 learners have received graduate officer support. Evidence from the research suggests that graduate officers are working actively but not exclusively with the target group.

### **Assessing the effectiveness of the graduate officer role**

Whilst it is difficult to make an assessment of the extent to which each of the beneficiaries made adjustments to their behaviours or to their career planning as a result of the graduate officer interventions, the research does indicate that young people have responded very positively to the support offered by the graduate officers and many reported having been inspired or motivated as a result of their contact.

Variations in the way that the role is implemented have developed over time and in response to local priorities. The role can be summarised as twofold: adding and supporting existing IAG provision and developing and delivering new activities. The study has shown that graduate officers have the flexibility to operate in a demanding and changing environment and are responsive to both individual and organisational information and advice requirements. Whilst it is difficult to isolate the impact graduate officers' intervention

from those provided by a range of other IAG practitioners and external influences, the research does provide evidence of the type of activities which young people and learning providers value, notably one to one and small group interventions. These are favoured because they provide greater opportunities for personalised responses to their needs. There are times however when learners feel exposed due to the targeting approach and this raises concerns about the messages which are communicated to young people at an institutional level.

Learning providers also value the graduate officer role as it provides additional resources particularly at times of greatest need such as at UCAS application times particularly for support in developing personal statements and completing application processes.

### **Factors which facilitate the graduate officer role**

The research examined evidence at borough, institutional and learner levels and found that a number of factors were required to ensure that the role of the graduate officer is effective. Evidence provided during the study shows that graduate officers experience a number of enablers which improve the effective delivery of their role. These can be summarised as;

- The development of borough wide IAG strategic thinking and planning is essential to ensure that resources such as those of the graduate officer are developed and implemented in an effective, complementary and cost effective manner. This will avoid duplication and ensure that an effective evaluation of future programmes can be made.
- The role of the graduate officer as a product of partnership activity was examined and the research noted that whilst the implementation of the role is complicated to some extent by complex regional and local management and supervision issues this does not seem to detract from the overall implementation of the role and has been significant in facilitating the success of the programme. There are lessons to be learned however in terms of developing a coherent multi-agency strategy and any future iteration of this role should reflect a robust understanding by all partners of their individual roles and responsibilities.
- Amongst the most significant enabler is the support provided by the borough co-ordinators. Over the period of the graduate officer programme borough co-ordinators have provided ongoing support and advice and have been instrumental in developing the relationships between graduate officers and learning organisations. The success of any future version of this type of programme therefore will be dependent on the strong support of an advocate and mentor at local level.
- Graduate officers' personal attributes were a significant enabler in both their engagement with learners and with learning organisations. The research sought to explore the role of graduate officer as role models. The youth and recent experience of higher education of the graduate officers meant that young people responded very positively to this aspect of the role and this was a significant enabler in the process of engagement with learners. Whilst the gender of the graduate officer was generally viewed as not significant in their ability to engage with learners, in some boroughs being a male graduate officer had positively impacted on young male learners' engagement. In one borough specifically where boys' participation in HE was low, a male graduate officer made a significant positive impact. Whilst gender is not the most important factor when considering the recruitment and selection of graduate officers it is a point to note that in areas where the widening participation agenda is aimed at young males, the appointment of male graduate officers might have a beneficial impact on learner outcomes. The graduate officers also demonstrated flexibility and enthusiasm and these were highly valued aspects of the role particularly by learning providers. Any future version of this type of programme will need to ensure that the recruitment and selection process identifies the most appropriate candidates for these posts.

- The nature of the graduate officer programme means that the 'shelf life' of the graduate officers is limited as experience soon becomes dated. The resources which are used to develop these individuals is however significant and thought should be given to the management of the graduate officers transitions from their role into the next stage of their career so that the area does not lose a useful resource. This may have the effect of motivating the graduate officers to remain in the system and to reduce staff turnover.
- The line management of graduate officers was also seen as a positive aspect, specifically the opportunities provided through the Aimhigher IAG project manager for team meetings and opportunities to share good practice and problem solve. The training and development which graduate officers received was also significant in helping them to perform effectively. Future versions of the role will only be effective where robust and effective line management provision is made.
- Graduate officers face a number of challenges in implementing their role. The most significant of these challenges was the ability or willingness of learning providers to engage with the graduate officers or to release learners from lessons in order for the graduate officer to undertake activities. The success of future versions of the role will require careful marketing which links the activities of the graduate officers to the potential impact on both learners' aspirations and attainment and learning provider strategic aims.

### **Graduate officers in relationship to the greater Manchester IAG strategy**

Throughout the research, graduate officers were represented as effective and flexible individuals who had negotiated successfully in a range of settings. However, this has been difficult and challenging at times. Where learning providers have allocated a staff link, provided a base and have a clear idea of how the graduate officer resource can be utilised, graduate officers feel supported, and are able to develop good and effective skills.

Graduate officers work in an environment which is populated by many individuals providing an aspect of careers IAG. The study has shown however that the graduate officers have forged a role for themselves which has enhanced existing IAG services and created benefits for learners, schools and the wider IAG community. The IAG community is currently in a state of continuous change with Connexions services having been reduced. The graduate officers continue to provide a level of service which would otherwise have ceased to exist in many instances during the transition from Connexions to the proposed national all age careers service.

### **The implications of losing the graduate officer role**

Changes in national priorities have seen a change in responsibility for the provision of IAG services and further alterations to provision are proposed in the Education Bill 2011. Whereas careers IAG provision is currently met through partnership arrangements, new proposed legislation will see the statutory duty to provide access to careers IAG for years 9-11 transfer to schools. The commissioning of careers IAG services will take place within a competitive market. The funding for Aimhigher will cease in July 2011 and responsibility for the widening participation agenda will pass to individual universities. Whilst the overall impact of these changes is yet to be determined, the implications of these changes will be felt at regional and local level and particularly by individual institutions and by learners. These can be summarised as follows;

- The changes in national and local context will require a re-visioning of the Greater Manchester IAG strategy to incorporate the new requirements and funding mechanisms.
- Schools will need to ensure that young people's entitlement (through the Education Bill 2011) to access careers IAG is being met and will need to consider a number of issues such as the provision of specialist IAG provision regarding access to higher

education in relation to the new requirements in order to respond to individuals' careers IAG requirements.

- In commissioning IAG services, institutions will need to have made an accurate assessment of the career guidance requirements of their student cohort. In addressing the issue of inequality of access to higher education for some disadvantaged groups, schools and colleges will need to consider how to target and support learners whose situations would suggest that they would not traditionally access higher education.
- In the absence of any duty to provide career education, schools and colleges will need to develop adequate curriculum and IAG responses which ensure that all young people receive the impartial information and advice about all of the options they require in order to make well informed and realistic decisions about higher education.
- Difficult decisions will need to be made about the targeting of school and college resources to gain the maximum impact for learners in terms of ensuring progression. Failing to provide adequate support of this type may lead to a reduction in sustainable progressions and adversely affect institutions positions in league tables regarding the measurement of progression.
- Graduate officers have supplemented the work of existing school and college careers staff. In their absence, institutions will need to reassess the resources required to support the transition processes to further and higher education institutions in order to ensure that all young people are able to progress and make sustained transitions.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the project

Aimhigher is a government funded initiative which was established in 2001 to help encourage more learners to participate in UK higher education – particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds, looked after children and individuals experiencing learning difficulties and disabilities. The numbers of young people meeting the criteria for Aimhigher support in the Greater Manchester area is high at 60%. This rises to 90% in some districts.

As part of its strategy, the Greater Manchester Aimhigher Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Strategy Group allocated resources to deploy a team of 9 graduate officers in 2009 whose remit was to ensure that learners receive appropriate IAG services which support career decision making. Whilst the programme has been established a number of policy driven changes have occurred including

- The closure of Aimhigher, with projects being wound down to finish in July 2011
- Changes in University funding regimes and their approach to widening participation which places a higher requirement on students to self-finance their studies whilst individual institutions can adopt approaches to widening participation that suit their particular circumstances
- Changes in policy driven by the Education Bill (2011) that are likely to impact upon the nature of IAG offered within schools to all young people including those from the “Aimhigher cohort”
- Financial constraint within the public sector due to a comprehensive spending review

Aimhigher Greater Manchester commissioned staff from the International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) at the University of Derby to research the role of the graduate officers. The research was conducted during March and April 2011.

The purpose of the research is to provide research into the Graduate Officer Programme that presents its impact. Alongside this the project will assess the potential for future activities that promote the widening participation agenda in the context of changes to the higher education system and careers education provision in schools.

This report therefore seeks to establish how effective the activities of the Aimhigher graduate officers have been, and explore how the information, advice and guidance needs of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds might be met to ensure that they continue to aspire to higher education.

## 1.2 Research aims

The overarching aim of the research was to establish how effective Aimhigher graduate officers have been in improving young people’s aspiration, applications and transitions to higher education, and establish the policy environment in which lessons and good practice can be captured and taken forward.

The research tests the hypotheses that:

- Through the local partnership model and borough linkages the graduate officers support borough-wide strategies and approaches to implementing the Aimhigher learner progression framework approach involving a series of activities which build on each other throughout the learner life-course and at key transition points.

- Through effective working relationships with IAG providers, and the Aimhigher school and college co-ordinators, the graduate officers support practitioners in meeting institutional-level objectives.
- Through being a positive role-model to young people, the graduate officers motivate learners to seek other information and support on careers/progression from other IAG professionals and including participation in other Aimhigher activities.
- By increasing learners' awareness and understanding of the options available to them, the graduate officers help to convince learners of the value of progression to higher education.
- By giving practical information on higher education for example around the higher education application process, and funding etc, the graduate officers contribute to increased progression to higher education by Aimhigher learners.

In order to test these hypotheses the project sought evidence which addressed the following questions:

1. How effectively is the graduate officer model addressing the IAG needs of the Aimhigher target cohort, priority target groups, and other learners across Greater Manchester?
2. Which aspects of the graduate officer model and specific type of interventions have the best results in terms of the priority IAG outcomes for learners and actual progression in education?
3. For the graduate officer model to be most effective, what factors need to be in place including borough wide, institutional and learner level factors?
4. How does the approach fit with the wider policy context for IAG in Greater Manchester? Which aspects, if any, are likely to be sustained after the end of the Aimhigher programme in 2011?
5. What lessons and recommendations can be learnt from the Graduate Officer programme for policy makers and practitioners at all levels in Greater Manchester? How can the lessons and recommendations best be taken forward after the end of July 2011?

### 1.3 Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions have been used:

**Information** refers to the provision of facts and figures relating to life, learning and work, but without discussion about the relative merits of different options. Information can be imparted verbally by a personal adviser or by printed material and the internet.

**Advice** requires more in-depth interaction with the client. It includes the explanation of information and explanations about how to access and use information (sometimes called signposting).

**Guidance** involves an in-depth session or series of sessions between the client and adviser, in which the adviser helps the client through the process of making and implementing decisions about life, learning and work.

**Beneficiaries** is the total of those attending an activity.

**Learners** are the individuals in the programme counted once regardless of the number of activities attended.

**Interventions** are the number of exchanges between a graduate officer and a learner such as a one off event.

## 1.4 Methodology

The research was undertaken using a number of interlinked methodological approaches. The different approaches were selected in consultation with the Aimhigher project management team and reflect the complexity of arrangements for implementing the graduate officer programme across a wide geographical area and within boroughs with a number of demographic differences. Each of the phases of the research are presented below and indicate the methods adopted and rationale for the sampling strategy at each stage.

### **Inception**

The earliest phase of the research involved a telephone conference between Aimhigher project managers and the research team. This ensured that all aspects of the research were fully understood and provided an opportunity to agree a detailed project plan. At this stage the identification of stakeholder participants was made and suitable data for analysis and incorporation into the research was agreed.

### **Analysis of management information data**

This phase involved the analysis of management information data provided by the Aimhigher project team. Information about the range of activities of the graduate officers was analysed and this provided a basis for the selection of the sample learning organisations to visit for stakeholder interviews and learner focus groups.

### **Interviews with graduate officers**

The project team used the opportunities afforded when visiting schools to interview graduate officers and borough co-ordinators. In total, 8 graduate officers covering 9 out of the 10 boroughs (One graduate officer post was vacant at the time of the research but has more recently been filled) and the graduate officer team leader were interviewed. The interviews were used to explore a range of issues against a pre-agreed interview schedule. A copy of this can be found in appendix 1. Each interview was digitally recorded and summarised for analysis.

### **Literature review**

The Literature review was carried out by iCeGS librarian who identified literature which was relevant to the research. Of particular interest was literature which provided evidence for the effective use of role models to influence the behaviour of young people particularly in raising educational and occupational aspirations. This part of the process provided an analysis of the current context for the development and delivery of IAG strategies in order to frame the recommendations arising from this research.

### **Stakeholder interviews**

Stakeholder interviews were carried out either by telephone or face to face during visits in each borough. Participants were selected in discussion with the Aimhigher managers to reflect a broad set of views from individuals who had experience of the graduate officers' activities. The sample included individuals from local boroughs, managers and staff from learning organisations, Connexions workers and university widening participation officers. The following individuals were interviewed

- 9 borough co-ordinators
- 4 Connexions staff\*
- 2 members of the widening participation team at Manchester University
- 1 member of the widening participation team at Manchester Metropolitan University
- 1 college careers adviser

- 1 school Aimhigher co-ordinator
- 2 assistant head teachers
- 1 college learning support adviser
- 2 college student quality managers
- 1 college tutor
- 1 college progression co-ordinator
- 1 college 14-19 co-ordinator

*\*It should be noted that Connexions services in Greater Manchester are currently undergoing considerable restructuring and this resulted in difficulties in establishing links with appropriate members of Connexions staff.*

Interviews were carried out using pre-agreed question schedules (see appendix 1). Each interview was digitally recorded and then summarised for analysis.

### **Focus group interviews with students**

Obtaining the views of individuals who have been supported by the graduate officers was an essential element of the research. This phase ensured that evidence was gathered concerning the extent to which the graduate officers have made an impact on young people's career decision making and transitions into higher education. A range of learners from the target cohort were interviewed in small groups using a pre-agreed question schedule (see appendix 1). Graduate officers were instrumental in arranging for these activities to take place in each school identified. The following table summarises the number of and year group of the student participants.

**Table 1:** Numbers and type of learner participants by borough

<b>Borough</b>	<b>Y7 - Y9 learners</b>	<b>Y10* learners</b>	<b>Y11* learners</b>	<b>Y12 and 13 learners</b>	<b>Borough total</b>
Salford		2	2	3	7
Tameside	10				10
Rochdale				3	3
Bury				7	7
Bolton				4	4
Wigan	9			4	13
Trafford					
Manchester					
Stockport	4				4
Oldham					
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>48</b>

*\*It should be noted that this study occurred during March and April 2011. Teachers were reluctant to allow year 10 and year 11 learners to leave lessons due to academic pressures.*

Each session was digitally recorded and summarised for analysis.

### **Reporting**

All data collected was analysed against the original research questions. Additional emergent themes have been included. Recommendations have been made throughout and are summarised in the conclusions and recommendations section of the report. In order to protect the identity of the graduate officers we have used 'she' to refer to all individuals.

## 2 Models of delivery

### 2.1 The graduate officer model

The graduate officer role was established in spring 2009 and is thought to be unique amongst UK Aimhigher partnerships across the country. Aimhigher graduate officers work across all ten boroughs of Greater Manchester delivering a range of information and advice activities about higher education options to a target group of primarily key stage 3, 4 and 5 learners up to the age of 19. Their role is to provide information and advice about progression to higher education, to inspire, and encourage learners to actively progress to higher education options and support learners in accessing further sources of IAG.

Nine graduate officers operate across the 10 Greater Manchester boroughs, with Trafford and Stockport sharing a full time post. The graduate officer for Salford is employed part-time (0.5) and supports other graduate officer colleagues for the rest of the working week. Each graduate officer is provided with a base in their allocated borough through the Aimhigher Borough Partnership. A number of models operate; some graduate officers are based in colleges of further education, some in local authority 14-19 teams and one is based in a Connexions centre.

Graduate officers are formally line managed through the Aimhigher Greater Manchester IAG project manager but day to day support and supervision is provided by Aimhigher borough co-ordinators. The graduate officer programme is one of a number of Aimhigher initiatives across the area and receives 5% of overall total Aimhigher grant

All graduate officers are supported to achieve their NVQ level 3 in Advice and Guidance and to date seven staff have achieved their award.

This section of the report will consider evidence which addresses the following question.

**Question 1:** 'How effectively is the graduate officer model addressing the IAG needs of the Aimhigher target cohort, priority target groups, and other learners across Greater Manchester?'

This section examines different components that contribute to an assessment of this question, namely the graduate officer role including how the role has developed over time, the nature and type of activity undertaken, and the extent to which graduate officers have engaged with learners.

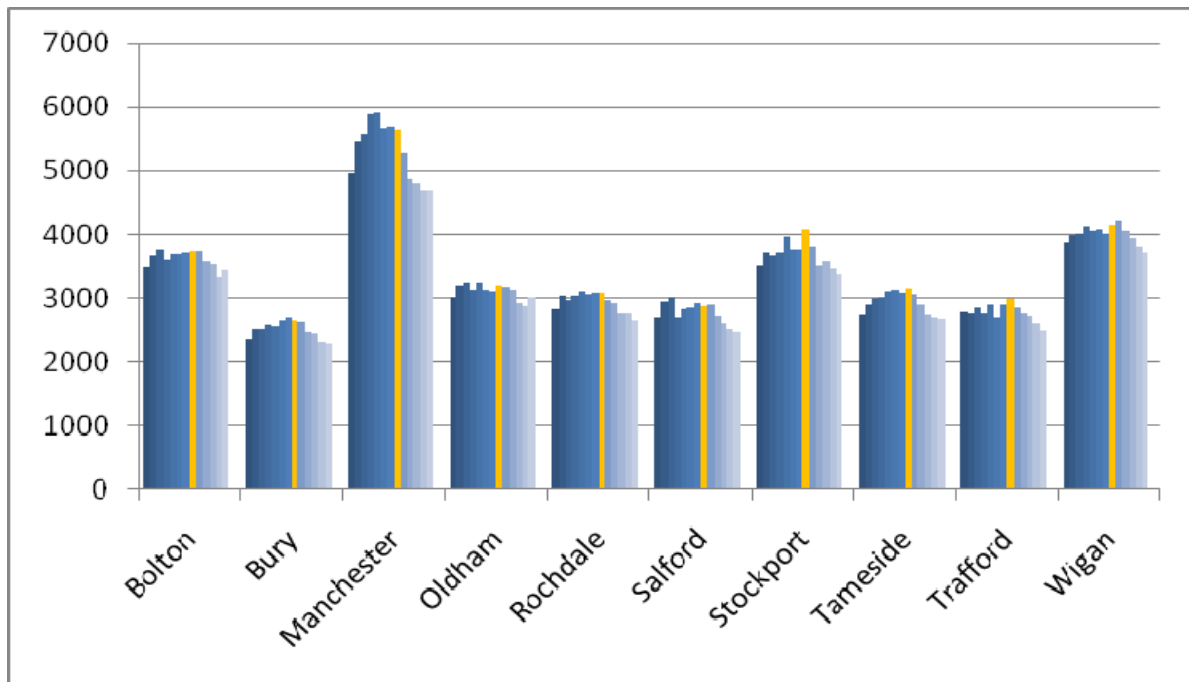
### 2.2 The IAG needs of Greater Manchester learners

Aimhigher in Greater Manchester targets young people from a range of age groups and who are receiving their education in a range of settings including primary and secondary schools, colleges and through work-based learning providers.

Attainment at level 2 and progression to post-16 learning for young people in the Greater Manchester area is lower than the overall average in England with up to a 30% difference in attainment between those who are and those who are not in receipt of free school meals. However progression rates to higher education for the area have been on the increase with a 47% increase in UCAS applications from the 40% most deprived areas between 2003 and 2009. Increase in success rates for applicants does not match those for applications however with older applicants and those applying from further education colleges less likely to succeed in securing a higher education place. Participation rates are increasing across all of the Greater Manchester area. More applications from females than males were received

with this being noticeable in the areas of highest deprivation. (Aimhigher Greater Manchester Annual Statistical Report 2010). The population of 18 year olds in Greater Manchester is due to reduce overall over the next 10 years. This will have a bearing on the allocation of resources for future information, advice and guidance services. Figure 1 shows the projected population changes for 18 year olds in the Greater Manchester area for the period 2002 to 2014 by area.

**Figure 1:** 18 year old population estimates for Local Authorities in Greater Manchester, 2002-2014<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 1** above shows the estimated size of the 18 year old population in the Greater Manchester area for 2002-2014. The yellow bar marks 2009, the peak population year in most areas. The area faces a decline of around 13% in the size of the 18 year old population, about the same as the region as a whole. Each of the ten boroughs faces a similar level of decline.

Aimhigher in Greater Manchester operates through a partnership which involves 7 higher education institutions, 10 local authorities, 23 colleges and 150 schools, providers of Connexions services, and other education and training providers.

Aimhigher provide a number of services and interventions with young people up to the age of 19 including:

- Referral to formal IAG services
- Role modelling
- Input into wider IAG related activities

<sup>1</sup> The data here is taken from unpublished ONS mid-year (2001-2007) population estimates by Super Output Area by single year of age. The estimates for 2002 to 2008 are based on the estimated populations of 17 year olds in the middle of the previous year, to avoid the distortions caused by 18 year olds moving, mostly to begin HE courses. The projections for 2009 to 2014 are taken from the numbers of 16 to 11 year olds respectively in the 2007 mid year estimates. The future projections do not take into account possible migration, and should be treated with caution.

Aimhigher targeted activities are intended to reach 2,500 learners per year group per annum, representing 7% of Greater Manchester 15 -19 year olds. The target group learners for Aimhigher are those from lower socio economic group households, disabled learners and looked after children. In some schools nine out of ten learners would meet the criteria. In order to focus the most highly intensive activities on those who can benefit most, schools and colleges have been asked to identify a named cohort of learners who will take part in a range of targeted activities aimed at improving progression to higher education. In addition Aimhigher works with 1,900 apprentices. In 2009 38% of the Aimhigher named cohort in years 10 and 11 were receiving free school meals. In 2009/10, 73% of the Aimhigher cohort were in the 20% most deprived areas nationally. Whilst the named cohort remains the priority of the Aimhigher work force, beneficiaries of the service include others in the target groups and non target group young people due to the nature of some of the interventions such as whole school or regional activities which involve young people with a range of IAG needs.

### **2.3 Conventional methods of meeting learner IAG needs**

The responsibility for the provision of careers IAG is shared between learning organisations on the one hand and government funded guidance services (previously Connexions Partnerships and more recently through statutory Local Authority funded initiatives as a result of the Education and Skills Act 2009) on the other. The report from the Careers Profession Task Force (DFE 2010) notes that *'The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development recognises the partnership model as the best way to provide CEIAG to young people, and this model has underpinned the provision of career guidance in England for many years'*.

Currently, schools have a statutory duty to provide careers education for learners from year 7 through to year 11. This careers education should be provided in an impartial manner, that is to say free from individual or institutional bias and in the individual learners' interest (Education and Skills Act 2009). Schools also have a statutory duty to provide information about individual learners to external career guidance providers. These statutory duties do not extend to post-16 education providers and are certain to change through the passage of the Education Bill 2011 which removes the requirements for local authorities to provide a universal careers service to young people and introduces a requirement for schools to provide access to impartial and independent guidance services for all of their learners. This new legislation will impact on the way in which services such as those provided by graduate officers are commissioned and deployed. Devolving responsibility for IAG services to schools will potentially reduce the role of partnerships in the provision of IAG and may reduce the demand for such services. IAG service providers will need to be more effective in promoting their roles to individual schools as an integral and important contributor in the widening participation and attainment agenda alongside the emerging contexts of social mobility, community development and global competitiveness.

Connexions services provided targeted support for young people deemed likely to become NEET (not in employment, education, or training). They also had responsibility for providing a universal career guidance service which supported all young people with decisions relating to their educational, training or employment decisions. This responsibility extended to providing career guidance on higher education options however the extent to which this was actually realised is not known. External career guidance was targeted specifically at young people in years 10 and 11 with limited external professional career guidance being provided to learners in year 12 and 13 who were intending to move on to higher education as a preferred post 18 option. With such a short fall in external guidance provision, school and college staff, particularly sixth form staff assumed responsibility for providing information, advice and guidance for those wishing to progress to higher education.

The government funded initiative 'Aimhigher' was conceived to raise the aspiration to higher education with a target group of young people for whom higher education would not traditionally have been considered. The graduate officer role was superimposed upon an existing, complex landscape of responsibility for young people's careers IAG. The following sections examine the evolution and implementation of the graduate officer role and its contribution to the IAG services available to learners.

## 2.4 The emergent role of the graduate officer

The role of the graduate officer is complex and was defined differently by many of the individuals interviewed as part of the study. Role definitions commonly had three elements: the formal role, as described in the job description (see appendix 2), the perceived role, as described by stakeholders and the personalised role as described by the graduate officer based on their experiences of working within the role.

The research revealed that there was some flexibility at the start of the programme about how the role was to develop, and local variations have evolved in order to allow graduate officers to respond to local needs. The list of graduate officer activities is generally consistent across Greater Manchester: - typically including one to one information and advice, group discussions and presentations to Aimhigher beneficiaries, interactions with tutors, parents and other stakeholders. However there were local differences about the expectations from the graduate officer in terms of the balance between different aspects of the work, for instance between percentage of graduate officer time to be spent with different age groups of beneficiaries, differences in time to be spent in different types of educational institutions and different types of beneficiaries. In three boroughs a distinctive model was conceived between founding stakeholders, two boroughs (Stockport and Trafford) designed a 'shared' graduate officer role, the incumbent worked half time in each borough, whilst another borough (Bury) built into the graduate officer job description the need for 50% of graduate officer time to be devoted to looked after children (LAC). A further model evolved in which a graduate officer, based within a college in Rochdale dedicated much of their time working with learners on particular programmes of study from which learners did not traditionally move into higher education. In most cases the graduate officers provided support to Aimhigher colleagues working across Greater Manchester, through specific local activities and by contributing to occasional Greater Manchester wide IAG events. This flexible model allows local, adapted and relevant delivery but there is a risk of mission drift.

The nature of the graduate officer role has changed over the duration of the programme. In year 1 much of the energy was focused on raising awareness, trying to 'get into' schools and college departments, and in clarifying roles. The second year was focussed on consolidation and development. In recent months there has been a significant change of government policy regarding university finances and there has been considerable demand for information about finance and more requests for help with writing supporting statements for UCAS. The responsive nature of the graduate officer role is regarded as a strength of the programme by many interviewed as part of the research. One graduate officer explained that she had become more recently involved in delivering training to college tutors about student finance. In general the following trends were noted in the development of the graduate officer role in the two year period:

- An increased clarity about the graduate officer responsibilities within each borough,
- Greater demand from beneficiaries, schools and colleges for the services of the graduate officer,
- A flexible alignment of graduate officer activities to local priorities,

- The development of a common understanding of graduate officer responsibilities between the graduate officer and the borough co-ordinator.

Although this varied from borough to borough the elements of the role were considered to be;

#### **Adding and supporting existing services.**

The primary area mentioned in this context was supporting individuals and groups with university applications and in particular the preparation of supporting statements. Interviewees mentioned that the graduate officer had enabled existing tutors and advisers to continue this existing support in greater depth, and that a greater number of young people had been supported. It was noted that individuals from the beneficiary groups normally required more help with UCAS issues than non beneficiaries as they had little family experience to help and confidence building was an essential element of this strand.

#### **Undertaking 'new' activities which had not received focussed attention in the past.**

The areas mentioned were:

- Giving information and advice related to the graduate officers own personal experiences of higher education and therefore providing new skills, knowledge and enthusiasm. Graduate officers provided examples which were intended to expand learners' horizons and thinking. One example provided was a graduate officer who had talked from their own experience about the value of relevant voluntary work.
- Workshops for beneficiaries on the financial arrangements for higher education which were considered to be very valuable by all parties

### **2.5 Nature and balance of graduate officer activities**

There were clear differences of perception about the graduate officer's role in relation to the delivery of IAG functions. All interviewees were clear that the graduate officers carried out information and advice, however many considered that one of the functions of the graduate officer was to deliver guidance. In part this can be explained by the use of the acronym IAG which has come to denote the services of anyone working to support individuals with decision making. The NVQ 3 (required as part of the graduate officer training) helps graduate officers to differentiate between information, advice and guidance however some of the graduate officers and borough co-ordinators think of the role as providing guidance because their role falls within the IAG strand of the Aimhigher programme. Some also have an eye on their futures and wish to train as Careers Advisers. These factors combined provide an explanation for graduate officers' frequent use of the term guidance to describe their work and their aspirations for higher training and development. It should be noted that whilst this was a common occurrence, some of the graduate officers and borough co-ordinators were clear on the differences between information advice and guidance and articulated the role of the graduate officer as providing information and advice.

Describing graduate officers as IAG workers however can cause confusion when communicating messages about the role of graduate officers and in making distinctions between the different roles of various information, advice and guidance providers and the extent and level of the services provided. Some graduate officers reflected on the level of training they had received to denote the type of activities they were involved in.

*'I made referrals to Connexions and gave handouts to students with key contacts. I did not have any training though to deliver IAG.'*

*'If I feel I don't know much then I will tell them where to go and with whom to talk to. If they start talking about guidance then I tell them I can't help and refer them either to Connexions or the career adviser.'*

During the study, a number of terms were used to describe the graduate officers' role. Terms such as role model, advocate and motivational coach, were regularly used whilst others chose to describe the activities of the graduate officer such as events organising, partnership working, and relationship building. There was a general acknowledgement that graduate officers existed to improve aspiration and attainment specifically but not exclusively related to higher education options. A full analysis of graduate officer activity can be found in section 2.6 below.

Whilst the study did reveal differences in the way that the roles of the graduate officers had evolved across the Greater Manchester area this does demonstrate that the role has developed in response to the individual identified needs and local contexts of each of the boroughs. In each of the areas graduate officers and borough co-ordinators had reached an understanding of how to use the graduate officer resource in tackling local issues consistent with widening participation in higher education. As the graduate officer role has evolved it has become easier to incorporate the resource they offer into planning differentiated IAG services across boroughs and the Greater Manchester area as a whole.

The nature of the graduate officer role requires a carefully negotiated balance of activities in line with the expectations of both their Aimhigher managers and those of the borough co-ordinators. The graduate officers are primarily autonomous para-professionals who are required to select appropriate approaches for a targeted cohort. This can however prove very difficult. The study reveals that over time the role of the graduate officer has become more valued by learning providers and partners and this has introduced increasing demand on graduate officers. To some extent the graduate officers could be seen to be victims of their own success. Some graduate officers reported a pattern of accelerated activity and some felt overwhelmed by the demands on their time and struggled to manage competing priorities and expectations. One borough co-ordinator explained:

*'The graduate officer role has become more effective over time. It takes some time to develop the creativity of the graduate officer, now she is just beginning to find her feet and grow and her work is becoming embedded in school work.'*

Thus graduate officers can find themselves juggling the competing priorities of many including school and college staff who on occasion can be tempted to use the graduate officers as an additional resource to support wider events rather than for working with the named Aimhigher cohort. Having worked hard to be accepted by education providers and learners, graduate officers can feel obliged to accede to all requests for help in order to prove their worth however this can leave them feeling overstretched at times. In some organisations, the only means of establishing a presence is to respond to more general requests, and some graduate officers feel that a pragmatic approach is to respond positively in order to establish a relationship which can then be developed in response to the needs of the named cohort in that institution. There was a feeling expressed by some stakeholders that there was insufficient graduate officer time generally and that the demand for the graduate officer service was significant. One group of learners explained:

*'She always replies to her emails. She definitely gives as much help as possible. There is not enough of her!'*

## 2.6 Engaging with learners

Aimhigher graduate officers work across all ten boroughs of the Greater Manchester region providing support, information and advice activities to the Aimhigher target groups. A large proportion of the graduate officers' work is being delivered to target learners in years 9-13 in schools and colleges which are identified as 'cohort'. The table below (table 2) summarises the activities delivered by graduate officers across the Greater Manchester area during the periods August 2009- July 2010 and August 2010 – January 2011. It should be noted that graduate officers reported difficulties in classifying and recording their activities particularly in year one of the project. This limits the accuracy of the data sets used and makes comparison difficult however one interesting trend to note is that in year one, activities provided by the graduate officers were more evenly spread across the full range of available activities whereas in year two they were more focussed on ensuring that individuals secured progression by concentrating resources (50% of interventions) to support UCAS applications.

**Table 2:** Summary of graduate officer interventions by type of intervention

Activity type	Numbers delivered August 2009 - July 2010	Numbers delivered August 2010 - January 2011	Total numbers delivered 2009 - 2010	Percentage of the total for 2009 – 2011*
General HE awareness	366	15	391	24%
Post-16 learning options	42	10	52	3%
STAR	139	19	158	10%
Student life	110	7	117	7%
Other**	127	5	132	8%
Aimhigher stand	87	25	112	7%
Summer school	45	2	47	3%
HE applications	280	109	389	23%
HE Finance	204	7	211	13%
Introduction to Aimhigher /GO scheme	26	15	41	3%
Moving on	14	0	14	1%
E mail enquiry	0	5	5	Less than 1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,440</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>1,659</b>	

\*The figures do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

\*\*The activities described as other include support with developing interview skills, help completing higher education accommodation forms, accompanying individuals with additional support needs to university open days and activities as part of enterprise events at school (Aimhigher Greater Manchester 2010).

The numbers of graduate officer interventions by type was not consistent across each of the boroughs. In part this can be explained by the different numbers of days or hours worked per week and the numbers in the target cohort in each area. Additionally, where graduate officers have been deployed to work in one to one situations with learners this is a more labour intensive approach. More interventions with learners can be seen if the number of large group activities is higher. However, whilst large group activities ensure that the maximum numbers of young people are engaged with the graduate officers, the impact of working less intensively might not be so great. This is reflected in section 3.3 of this report where young people acknowledge that one to one or small group activities are a preferred model as they allow individualisation of responses. It is worth noting however that based on the figures for interventions with learners for the period August 2010 to February 2011, the graduate officers made an average of 18 interventions with learners per week per borough<sup>2</sup>. The aim of the graduate officers' work is to ensure that learners in the Aimhigher target groups have the skills, knowledge and information to make informed, realistic choices about progression to higher education and to enable them to act upon the decision made. The target group for Aimhigher are learners with the potential to benefit from higher education who come from under-represented communities. Overwhelmingly these learners are from lower socio-economic groups and those from disadvantaged backgrounds who live in areas of relative deprivation where participation in higher education is low. Disabled students are also a target group for the graduate officers. Examples of how borough co-ordinators explained the process of targeting can be found below.

*'We have a specific way of targeting. They have to have the ability. We look at where they live i.e. in the most deprived areas. We have a lot of young people who live in deprived areas. Depending on the data available we look at indicators of deprivation. Also where there is no history of families with history of higher education. They come from families from multiple deprivations. I also look at the make up of schools. We look at the key features of schools and this is used to identify the schools which we work with.'*

*'Students who take free school meals, who are from deprived areas, where neighbourhoods have high unemployment rates, who have a disability or who are poor or who wouldn't go to University otherwise.'*

All the graduate officers interviewed in the Greater Manchester area reported that they are engaging with the target groups. Graduate officers are targeting their session and activities to the named cohort of students which were identified by the borough co-ordinator with the help of the school or college they are working with. However, in many cases graduate officers, borough co-ordinators and school/ or college staff have reported that even though the graduate officers are expected to work mainly with named cohorts within the Aimhigher target groups there were instances where they were asked or expected to work with non-priority groups as well. It was reported that in many cases where the graduate officer was working with a large number of students through interventions such as assemblies or an Aimhigher stand, non-priority groups were also attending and this outside their control. Graduate officers explained:

*'I work with Aimhigher cohort schools. Occasionally we have events where there are a few non-target students. I sometimes say for general events to schools that if they can't fill the places with the cohort then fill them with others. Occasionally we have schools putting forward students who they think would benefit.'*

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<sup>2</sup> This figure is based on the assumption that during the 28 week period August 2010 to February 2011 graduate officers worked for 21 term-time weeks.

*'I have always worked with priority groups but sometimes I worked with non-priority groups because I was asked to.'*

Stakeholders also related experiences of graduate officers engaging with non-priority groups

*'She [school link] has included non priority groups as well because you can't exclude students when they are already there.'*

*'The graduate officer has engaged very well with non priority groups. The graduate officer was very enthusiastic and provided a lot of support to all students when her help was needed.'*

There was also a case where the graduate officer worked in one to one sessions with non-priority groups because she was asked by the school. The school had identified the need for non-target learners to work with the graduate officer and since the graduate officer had some free time she provided those sessions.

*'When they are in school (the school) might think the graduate officer will be beneficial to see students on a one to one basis or even to see students who weren't included in the target group. So the graduate officer has worked with them when needed.'*

The research reveals that whilst the graduate officers in Greater Manchester have mainly worked with target groups identified by the borough co-ordinator and the schools or colleges, on many occasions they were expected to provide information to non-priority groups which they did willingly. Where young people from priority target groups and non priority target groups attend large events and activities it is difficult for graduate officers to distinguish between the different groups. This makes accurate recording of the activities undertaken with target group and named cohort young people very difficult and an accurate assessment of the extent to which target group learners IAG needs have been met very difficult to ascertain. Available data for 2010-2011 does not differentiate activities with the target group from those of the non-target group. What is clear however is that of the numbers of young people who have received support during 2010-2011, the rate of working with this group is significant and participants in the study provided evidence that targeting strategies are effective in identifying those who fall into the Aimhigher target group and therefore need the support of graduate officers.

## **2.7 Summary**

The nine Aimhigher graduate officers work across the 10 Greater Manchester boroughs. Graduate officers worked with 20,165 participants during the period August 2009 – July 2010 (Aimhigher Greater Manchester 2010) and with 3,774 participants from August 2010 to February 2011. This means that over the life of the project to date 23,939 participants have received graduate officer support. Evidence from the research suggests that graduate officers are working actively but not exclusively with the target group. All graduate officer activities are valued by providers and by target and non-target group learners alike. In many instances, for example in large group activities such as assemblies, graduate officers are unable to differentiate between the support they provide to the Aimhigher target group and non-target group individuals and it is therefore difficult to make an accurate assessment of the numbers from the target group and named cohort which have benefited. It is also very difficult to make an assessment of the extent to which each of the beneficiaries made adjustments to their behaviours or to their career planning as a result of the graduate officer interventions. The research does indicate however that young people have responded very

positively to the support offered by the graduate officers and many reported having been inspired or motivated as a result of their contact.

Variations in the way that the role is implemented have developed over time and in response to local priorities. The role can be summarised as two fold: adding and supporting existing IAG provision and developing and delivering new activities. There are large variations in the numbers and types of activities which graduate officers deliver and this is often dependent on the base from which the graduate officer operates and the needs of the learning organisations and learners. The study has shown that graduate officers have the flexibility to operate in a demanding and changing environment and are responsive to both individual and organisational information and advice requirements.

### 3 Assessing the effectiveness of the graduate officer model

Graduate officers are by nature inexperienced in the field of information and advice for young people, being recent graduates and relatively young themselves. The role is complex and requires graduate officers to operate as autonomous practitioners, juggling competing priorities and expectations. The graduate officers provide a range of activities based on an assessment of the IAG needs of the learners and in conjunction with requests and plans by both learning organisations and borough co-ordinators.

This section explores a range of issues associated with assessing the effectiveness of graduate officer performance and aspects which contribute to the effective implementation of the role. It examines evidence which seeks to answer the question:

**Question 2:** Which aspects of the graduate officer model and specific type of intervention have the best results in terms of the priority IAG outcomes for learners and actual progression in education?

#### 3.1 Assessing outcomes

The overarching aim of Aimhigher is to raise aspirations and increase the number of young people participating in higher education, particularly among students from non-traditional backgrounds, minority groups and individuals experiencing learning difficulties and disabilities. Establishing the impact of the graduate officer role in improving learner engagement in and transition to higher education is complicated by a range of factors including the number of local and national initiatives which have been implemented or have run during the period of the graduate officer programme including other Aimhigher Greater Manchester initiatives. It is impossible to distinguish between the impact of the graduate officer programme in isolation and the extent to which graduate officers themselves have had an impact across the Greater Manchester area will probably never be known. The number of young people in Greater Manchester who meet the criteria for Aimhigher support is high at 60% across the whole area and rises to 90% in some boroughs. Establishing the numbers of young people from this group who have made applications and sustained transitions to universities as a direct result of graduate officer intervention is difficult to quantify, particularly as many of the beneficiaries are yet to reach an age when they are ready to make applications to higher education. However, the Greater Manchester IAG strategy includes a number of learning outcomes for the key target groups at several key stages which can be found below in table 3.

**Table 3:** Aimhigher learning outcomes by key stage

Year Group	Priority IAG Learning Outcomes
KS3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners can understand how their specific interests link to real HE opportunities.</li> <li>• Learners understand the implications of KS4 choices in relation to HE.</li> </ul>
KS4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners understand how the broad HE offering fits into an overall career plan &amp; can demonstrate some understanding of graduate destinations.</li> <li>• Learners have developed personal profiling skills &amp; can write a personal statement for use as part of an application process.</li> </ul>
Post 16 Level 2 Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners understand how their vocational programme provides a pathway to HE</li> </ul>
Level 3 Year 1 (Year 12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners can compare and contrast a range of institutions/courses in relation to their individual ambitions and circumstances.</li> <li>• Learners can describe the main components of the student finance package.</li> </ul>
Level 3 Year 2 (Year 13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsuccessful applicants can review their situation and put alternative plans into action</li> </ul>

In seeking to determine the outcomes of the graduate officer programme, anecdotal evidence has been considered and some examples of comments made by the young people who were interviewed have been used as an illustration. It should be noted that schools were reluctant to release learners in year 10 or year 11 to participate in the research and as such no comments from this group have been included in the analysis. It is difficult to generalise from the outcomes of the research due to the small numbers of young people interviewed relative to the overall numbers of beneficiaries and therefore the results should be taken as indicative of the outcomes of the programme as a whole.

One way of measuring impact would be to consider the number of learners who progress to higher education. Graduate officers make judgements about their impact in a number of ways. Using progression data is not always the most effective method of judging impact as many of the young people who have had contact with the graduate officers will not go on to university and some will certainly delay their transition due to other factors such as their personal situation. Kirkpatrick (1994) describes four levels of evaluation.

- Reaction - how the learners react to the learning process
- Learning - the extent to which the learners gain knowledge and skills
- Behaviour - changes in behaviour which result directly from an intervention in this case improved motivation and greater aspiration
- Results - the ultimate outcomes which result from the intervention such as an increased number of transitions to higher education.

To some extent these levels represent the staged process which a young person goes through in making the journey from no engagement in higher education options to having made a successful application and managed the transition. This study makes the assumption that anecdotal evidence that young people have been motivated by the graduate officer interventions provides evidence that a young person will be more likely to make a successful transition to higher education as a result.

### 3.2 How learners engage with the graduate officer

The study provided evidence that learners are benefiting from the graduate officers' input. The study provided many examples of young people who had enjoyed the activities and had been engaged by the presence of the graduate officer. Learners gave examples of 'feeling comfortable' around the graduate officer and feeling happy to be involved in their activities.

The extent or level of engagement with graduate officer activity is dependent on the knowledge and interest of the learner at the start of the programme. This will have a bearing on the learning which takes place during sessions. One graduate officer explained:

*'For some it cements the idea of going to HE and for some it introduces some new concepts. It depends on their starting point.'*

Graduate officers evaluate at least one activity per month and this information is provided to the Aimhigher IAG project manager who scrutinises the feedback. This information is also regularly provided to borough co-ordinators. Examples were provided where there was an obvious change in individual's level of knowledge and understanding about and attitudes to higher education options. One graduate officer explained,

*'It helped make a difference to some to make that step, give them the confidence to make that step and help them make successful applications to Universities.'*

A year 12 learner in one borough was quite clear that the graduate officer had influenced their decision making. He explained the complexities of choosing the correct course from many different options.

*'Just cos' I wanted to go on a Physics course there are loads. [The graduate officer] helped me to understand the differences.'*

Learners explained the impact that losing a graduate officer would have on young people.

*'We would miss the support - young people need the support today.'* (year 12 learner)

*'People will feel lost.'* (year 9 learner)

*'They won't be as inspired to go to University.'* (year 9 learner)

There were examples provided however where despite the programme, young people made a decision not to go to university. One borough co-ordinator provided an explanation:

*'It is very effective but we are in a context of low participation and a culture where there is no history of participation in higher education. Despite the graduate officers there are still those who make the decision not to go but applications and participation rates have increased.'*

### 3.3 What learners value

The learners who participated in the study all spoke highly of the support provided by the graduate officers. Of particular note was the high level of visibility and availability of those graduate officers who were based within colleges. The drop-in style provision was particularly valued by learners at times when UCAS personal statements needed checking,

or questions about aspects of the UCAS application process or student finance applications needed answering.

Small group and 1:1 sessions were valued by the majority of learners as an opportunity to share concerns and have questions answered. Some young people appreciated a time when they had undivided attention. One graduate officer confirmed this to be the case.

*'I recently asked someone about this and they told me that it is just the fact that someone has taken the time to talk to them. The groups we work with are not the high fliers and often go unnoticed. They are overlooked and activities like Aimhigher make them feel that they belong - that something good will happen. It is about letting them know that it is ok to have aspirations.'*

This was not the case however for all learners. On one occasion learners explained that they sometimes felt self conscious because they were getting special attention. They were particularly concerned about being judged because of the area that they came from and would prefer to be known as the group which had potential rather than as being from an identifiable geographical or residential area. A group of year 9 learners made the following statements:

*'They [teachers] chose us just because we are from an area, we were angry!'*

*'They can't judge us on what other people have done.'*

*'We would have liked it if they had told us we had more potential than others rather than [just selecting us] because of our background.'*

*'We felt they were saying to us we are dumb!'*

This raises a concern about how messages about graduate officer support and Aimhigher targeting are communicated to learners at an institutional level. One graduate officer corroborated this concern:

*'When I started there was a stigma about Aimhigher. They thought it was just for the stupid kids. They didn't want to engage. More recently this has been less of a problem. When I started there were whole classes who thought it wasn't for them. By seeing groups regularly the message has been more high profile.'*

It is not always possible to tailor activities to meet the individual IAG needs of the named cohort. The activities which graduate officers provide to learning organisations are offered as a menu of activities and institutions select from this according to numbers, timetabling available resources and other determining factors. This approach is aimed at raising the named cohort and members of the wider Aimhigher target groups' awareness of higher education. One to one and very small group sessions and activities such as parents' events allow graduate officers to tailor their responses to individual requests and identified information and advice requirements.

### **3.4 What learning providers value**

During the course of the research, a range of individuals representing a variety of education provider interests gave their views about the graduate officer programme. Despite some early uncertainty about the role, the overwhelming majority of those interviewed spoke very highly of the graduate officer programme. Individual graduate officers were in high regard due to their flexibility and willingness to be adaptable. The provision of an additional resource was appreciated particularly at the times of year when the requirements of UCAS

personal statements and applications and discussions about student finance would have placed a heavy burden on busy teaching staff.

Staff also valued the fact that graduate officers presented a different perspective to learners regarding higher education. The fact that graduate officers were individuals from outside the learning organisations and ‘not teachers’ was seen as a very positive aspect in a number of cases and enhanced their ability to engage with the learner group. One school stakeholder explained:

*‘Weirdly someone that isn’t based in school is actually a bit of a treat. It worked because [graduate officer] presented herself as ‘not a teacher.’ The youth and enthusiasm, and recent experience is the key. They [the learners] ask pertinent questions and they get the real answers.’*

### **3.5 Summary**

The research was conducted over a small timescale and as such has made the determination of impact and outcomes very difficult to evaluate. This is a complex issue and requires a longitudinal approach to assess changes in behaviour over time and would require sophisticated techniques to isolate the impact of graduate officers’ intervention from those provided by a range of other IAG practitioners and external influences. The research does provide evidence of the type of activities which young people and learning providers value.

Graduate officers are providing a range of activities based on an assessment of learners’ IAG needs and determined by learning organisations and borough requirements. The research has revealed that learners value 1:1 and small group sessions most as they provide greater opportunities for personalised responses to their needs. There are times however when learners feel exposed due to the targeting approach and this raises concerns about the messages which are communicated to young people at an institutional level. It was not possible through the course of the research to determine whether or not differences existed between the types of activities which the target group and non-target group either valued or benefited from.

Learning providers also value the graduate officer role as it provides additional resources particularly at times of greatest need such as at UCAS application times

## 4 Factors which facilitate the graduate officer role

The graduate officer role appears unique to the Aimhigher Greater Manchester Partnership and as such the role was experimental at its inception. The implementation of the role at a local level has ensured that it has evolved to meet the IAG needs of local young people. The localisation of the role however has introduced differences in approach which have been determined by local need and the inter-relationships between the partners. The research sought to examine evidence which seeks to answer the question:

**Question 3:** For the graduate officer model to be most effective, what factors need to be in place including borough wide, institutional and learner level factors?

This section of the report explores a range of issues which determine which factors facilitate the role of the graduate officers including a study of the enablers and barriers and the significance of partnership relationships in supporting the role.

### 4.1 Enablers for effective engagement

The research revealed that the effectiveness of the graduate officer role improved over time due to a number of factors such as improved networks, growing confidence, training and experience. Even though school engagement was a key barrier to some graduate officers initial engagement in schools and colleges, once graduate officers had managed to build good relationships their contribution was significant.

#### 4.1.1 The role of the borough co-ordinator

Both graduate officers and borough co-ordinators reported the significance of the borough co-ordinators role in helping to establish and shape the early relationships with schools. Borough co-ordinators had significant and extensive prior experience of the schools and colleges in their areas and were able to make introductions to the most appropriate individuals who were then able to make decisions about the use of the graduate officer resource. Borough co-ordinators provide ongoing advice and support from a local authority perspective which ensures that the graduate officers' activities comply with and contribute to the borough and Greater Manchester IAG strategies. Borough co-ordinators also provide feedback to the Greater Manchester Aimhigher IAG project manager which contributes to the graduate officers' performance management process and such can be seen as facilitating the role by offering support for improvement. The line management of graduate officers will be covered further in section 4.1.4 below.

#### 4.1.2 Graduate officers as role models

The use of role models and mentoring to encourage people to go into higher education has been a popular approach within Aimhigher. For example, the Aimhigher Associate scheme (which began in 2008) allows young people to build relationships with undergraduate students from state school backgrounds who are already in higher education.

In terms of mentoring, an evaluation of Aimhigher Kent and Medway mentoring scheme (Smith, 2010) found that 46% of students who were mentored in Year 11 progressed into higher education (and just under half continued into Further Education). They also found that learning mentors contributed significantly to impact on GCSE attainment, as eight out of every ten learners who received Aimhigher mentoring went on to achieve higher total GCSE points than their Year 9 estimates, considerably more than learners who were not mentored.

Evaluating the true effectiveness of role models and mentoring is difficult as with other Aimhigher programmes because of the lack of a true control group (HEFCE, 2008) and the complexity of factors impacting on progression and achievement. Due to these constraints a

number of Aimhigher programmes have developed evaluations based around learner outcomes that include: confidence level of learner, motivation and attainment, advocacy and support, impact on students' current activity, impact on future aspirations and impact on schools. MacCallum and Beltman (2002) developed a framework for evaluating role model programs within youth services. They noted that the key characteristics of role models which make them relevant to young people are:

- role models who can relate to young people and display a range of relevant knowledge, skills and personal characteristics such as a non-judgemental, caring approach;
- role models who provide a safe and supportive environment;
- role models who focus on purposeful activity;
- role models who support the development of independence; and
- role models who provide opportunities for support and encouragement.

During the study, the overwhelming majority of participants spoke of the graduate officers in positive terms. They were all popular with staff and learners alike and participants were very positive about the characteristics which made the graduate officers 'good' role models. All thought that the fact that the roles were being fulfilled by youthful, recent graduates was a positive aspect of the role. Paradoxically, graduate officers became more effective in their role with the passage of time and careful consideration is needed of the balance between recent HE experience on one hand and the increase in effectiveness through establishment in the post on the other. Some participants in the research gave other indicators such as being a local person with experience of the local education system, having a local accent or having recently graduated from a local university as being particularly useful elements and provided 'good role models'. However, despite the fact that graduate officers have most of the characteristics to be role models there are also some tensions. Being a local person who has attended the local university can limit the perception by young people that graduate officers can provide information or advice on universities from across the UK and this needs to be considered when communicating messages to young people about the benefits of working with a graduate officer. Graduate officers tend to be younger people with limited experience of the wider world who are being asked to perform a complex role in giving information and advice to young people some of whom are vulnerable due to the nature of their academic, personal and social needs. The nature of the role means that graduate officers require close supervision. This will be covered further in section 4.2.1 below. Throughout the study, student participants expressed a belief that the potential drawbacks of youth and inexperience in advisory work were heavily outweighed by the benefits of being young, local, enthusiastic recent graduates. For the learners it is particularly important to have someone they can relate to. One borough co-ordinator explained:

*'The fact that she was young and a recent graduate has helped young learners engage more. Of course a Connexions adviser is more specialised to provide support and guidance on higher education but they have been doing this job for 15-20 years. They cannot provide the same information as a recent graduate who is also young and very near their age.'*

Some stakeholders also noted that young learners feel more comfortable to ask certain questions to other young people regarding University than people of an older age mainly because of their recent experience of University. One Connexions worker explained:

*'They can be seen as role models because if I talked to a young person about University they would ask me different questions; they would ask for more official information. Approaching the graduate officer is easier for students because of their age as well.'*

A lot of young learners have reported that being young, having recent experience and being a recent graduate has helped them engage more with the graduate officers and the activities they organised. Young learners also reported how satisfied they have been with the range of information graduate officers have provided. A year 9 learner explained:

*'Because she's gone through it, the information she is able to give is relevant. Sometimes the information available on the internet is outdated. The fact she is young has helped as well. Older people's experiences might be outdated.'*

Being local also appears to be a factor which can enable graduate officers to engage with young learners. When the graduate officer was local to the area – even if he/she wasn't born there - and had knowledge of the higher education system, local universities and local life they were more likely to be regarded as approachable. One graduate officer explained:

*'Coming from the borough and having progressed through education I guess the students can see me as a role model. Being local has helped me and the learners engage more to me and my activities'*

This view was corroborated by borough co-ordinators and stakeholders alike. One borough co-ordinator explained:

*'The fact she is local, she has gone to University they can relate to her and her experiences. Being a role model is important and relating to the students as well. Pupils will relate more to young people but again if they don't have the experience it can be difficult. It can be down to the individual and their personality.'*

A stakeholder shared their reflections on the impact of previous visitors to the school in comparison to the impact of the graduate officer:

*'The graduate officer was very friendly. She was young, close to their age, and she could talk about student's experience. They like to know what it's like to be a student. IAG doesn't give that. It's that personal relationship. Most of them [the learners] didn't have a personal experience with university and [graduate officer] was the next to contact if they needed more help and guidance. The fact she was young was very crucial and the fact she studied at Manchester University and had local experience. A year before we had some Cambridge Ambassadors who came at the college and tried to inform the students about the University and apply if they wanted. The feedback from the students though was that they couldn't relate to them they said 'they are not like us, I wouldn't fit in there.'*

In one case, the graduate officer reported that not having the local accent had affected their ability to engage in some sessions in certain occasions:

*'My lack of .....accent didn't help in many cases.'*

As with many aspects of the graduate officer role however, there were occasional contradictions. In one borough where the graduate officer was a local person who had attended a local university, young learners reported that he didn't have experience and knowledge to discuss the possibility of studying at a university in London with them:

*'I would like more people with general knowledge rather than just being local. I wanted to apply to a University in London but I couldn't ask anyone from Rochdale. We need people with more experiences. At the same time if they are from the same area as you they understand the problems we are going through.'*

It was noticeable that the majority of graduate officers were female (6 out of 8). In most areas it was reported that the gender of the graduate officer was not important and young learners could engage despite the gender of the graduate officer. Participants reported that the engagement of learners was mostly due to the graduate officers' personality rather than their gender. One borough co-ordinator explained:

*'I don't think being a girl or a boy affects learners' engagement. It's more about their personality.'*

However, in some boroughs being a male graduate officer had positively impacted on young male learners' engagement. In one borough specifically where boys' participation in HE was low, a male graduate officer made a significant positive impact. A borough co-ordinator explained:

*'For guys to have another guy as their graduate officer it played a significant role because they could relate to him more. He proved to be a role model for both sexes but he has been a great support for young lads as well. The fact he was a guy was an added extra. Teaching has become feminised and it was good for them to have a guy as a role model. I think gender is a factor but not THE factor.'*

Whilst gender is not the most important factor when considering the recruitment and selection of graduate officers it is a point to note that in areas where the widening participation agenda is aimed at young males, the appointment of male graduate officers might have a beneficial impact on learner outcomes.

#### 4.1.3 Line management

Graduate officers are line managed by the Aimhigher IAG project manager<sup>3</sup> who is an experienced guidance practitioner and who offers line management support with day to day issues such as annual leave, equipment etc., ongoing supervision and who coordinates Greater Manchester wide team meetings. These ensure that good practice is shared and graduate officers have an opportunity to come together to problem solve. All of the graduate officers found this level of support helpful and spoke positively of their experiences with this regard. One graduate officer explained:

*'The strength is that there is a team. You can learn lessons from other boroughs but also be able to develop approaches which work for the borough.'*

Team meetings also helped the Aimhigher IAG project manager to monitor individual graduate officers' engagement and the extent to which their professional development was proceeding. The project manager explained:

*'Occasionally there are meetings which draw every one together and this helps to get a sense of who is who. When every one is remote it is hard to keep a track, getting to know people.'*

The Aimhigher IAG manager also provides one to one support in the form of supervision. This takes place approximately every month and provides an opportunity for graduate officers to share their concerns and experiences and to plan strategies for improving their effectiveness. Other support includes an annual appraisal and six monthly reviews

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that during the implementation of the Aimhigher Graduate Officer programme, there have been two IAG project managers who have had responsibility for line managing the graduate officers.

(including a 6 month probationary review) which include feedback from stakeholders such as borough co-ordinators.

Graduate officers produce an annual plan in agreement with borough co-ordinators and the Aimhigher IAG project manager. These plans are then used as a basis for monitoring and reviewing graduate officer activity. The work of the graduate officer is quality assured in a number of ways. Graduate officers are required to evaluate one activity per month which is used to form the basis of a reflective review of their performance.

#### 4.1.4 Training and support

Graduate officers had a comprehensive induction programme when they started in their roles. The induction covers such issues as an introduction to Aimhigher, the safeguarding of vulnerable young people, monitoring and evaluation and key elements of IAG. The initial training and induction provided an opportunity for the graduate officers to get to know each other and develop a cross city support group. One graduate officer explained:

*'I did initially have training at the start. Doing the NVQ in advice and guidance definitely helped. Those initial sessions really helped.'*

Graduate officers including those more recently appointed, have also been required to undertake an NVQ 3 in advice and guidance. This gives them the competences to operate effectively at an appropriate level for the expected outcomes of the role. Some graduate officers have aspired to undertake NVQ level 4 however the Aimhigher IAG project Manager explained that the role does not require them to use advanced level guidance skills and this has not therefore been agreed.

During the Aimhigher Graduate Officer Programme there have been a number of changes in staff including two team leaders and some changes in individuals fulfilling the graduate officer role. This has resulted in some perceived differences in the training and support activities being offered. The lack of initial team building opportunity for some newly appointed individuals however was compensated for by an increased level of one to one and peer support and the team aspects were developed through ongoing team meetings.

All graduate officers have benefited from mentoring and support from both borough co-ordinators and colleagues in schools who have offered ongoing advice on such issues as classroom management. One graduate officer explained:

*'Basically you learn from the 'bad sessions.' Not every session is good, it all depends on the learners. Now I'm very confident at delivering the sessions too.'*

The research has revealed that some borough co-ordinators have adopted a subtle strategy to support graduate officers in developing the competences required to be effective in their roles. One borough co-ordinator explained:

*'There were gaps initially in terms of classroom management skills, and developing strategies to deal with students. Almost like she was thrown in at the deep end. But she had lots of support from this school especially to overcome that. I purposefully picked the schools that I knew would be receptive and accepting and willing. I was the only one responsible for choosing those schools.'*

This type of support was regularly supplemented through meetings with borough co-ordinators who used the opportunities to identify graduate officer training and support requirements. An example was provided by one borough co-ordinator who described an example of the graduate officer being left alone with a large difficult class. In this instance the borough co-ordinator intervened and helped to manage the situation. Both borough co-

ordinators and graduate officers reported that as graduate officers' confidence and competence grew, the need for ongoing support diminished. One graduate officer explained:

*'I wasn't sure at first on how to prioritise my work but throughout my work I have learned how to do that. We all have learned working together.'*

## 4.2 Challenges to engagement

Whilst the research found many positive contributors to the effectiveness of the graduate officers' support, it also revealed a number of challenges faced by graduate officers. These are summarised below.

- Schools and colleges were often reluctant at the start of the programme to engage with the graduate officers and this often required perseverance in order to market the advantages to schools and colleges.
- There was some initial confusion about the demarcation of roles between members of the school / college guidance community which lead to some uncertainty about how to deploy the graduate officers.
- School staff are often reluctant to release learners from lessons because of concerns about them missing valuable learning time.
- Inexperience of working in a school setting hindered graduate officers' ability to take the initiative at the start of the project.
- Some graduate officers reported feeling ill prepared to manage classroom behaviour issues and felt that their training did not support them adequately in this part of their duties.
- The perception by students and their parents that the increased costs of higher education were too high to even consider this as an option.

## 4.3 The graduate officer model in a partnership context

The Aimhigher Greater Manchester partnership involves 7 higher education institutions, 10 local authorities, 23 colleges and more than 150 schools. The coordination unit is based in the Open University's regional office but the Aimhigher team includes key staff in all ten boroughs and all universities and higher education institutions

Aimhigher Greater Manchester is led by an Area Partnership Committee consisting of senior representatives of all partners in the area. Ten borough partnership groups report to the Area Partnership Committee. The lead institution for the Greater Manchester Aimhigher partnership is The Open University in the North West which provides a base for the Aimhigher IAG project manager who oversees the work of the graduate officers and provides line management support. The Aimhigher partnership have produced a Greater Manchester wide IAG strategy which is used to inform local borough wide variations in approach to meeting the IAG needs of the local population of young learners. Local borough decisions about graduate officer bases and the identification of the Aimhigher target group are made at a borough level in conjunction with the Aimhigher IAG project manager. This section explores a number of issues relating to the partnership model which have had an effect on the overall graduate officer role.

### 4.3.1 The location of the graduate officer base

There was some uncertainty at the start of the project about how the role was to develop and this had an impact on other individuals providing similar or aligned services and on

occasion was reflected in uncertainty about where to base the graduate officers within each institution. One college careers adviser explained:

*'it was hard for [the graduate officer] because at the beginning she didn't know what to do in college, what her role was and because of that we were all moved around the college.'*

Graduate officers' bases are an important factor in determining the type and number of activities undertaken across the borough. In four boroughs the graduate officers were based in a college of further education. In some of these instances, the graduate officer was often located within a student services team – working alongside college careers advisory staff and other advisory staff. On other occasions, graduate officers were based within student service teams but away from the centre for careers IAG. By and large the model adopted in each instance seemed to suit the particular locality but the factors which determined this were regularly about the availability of office space and not necessarily a decision based on an identified strategy for improving IAG within organisations. One college careers adviser explained:

*'It's very difficult to get a prominent display in college. A bigger area like a student services/ Aimhigher/ IAG area so that people know where to go would be much easier so it's much more prominent. At the moment it's all so scattered. A bit more 'branding' would be good.'*

Where graduate officers were based within colleges many appeared to have a reduced level of activity with schools in their borough. There could be number of explanations for this (see section 4.1 and 4.2 for discussion on barriers and enablers) however it could be argued that school work has been marginalised because of the location of some graduate officers in colleges. It is worth noting that the numbers of interventions were much higher where graduate officers were based in colleges (average 674 interventions between 2010 and 2011) in comparison to the number of interventions by graduate officers who were not based in colleges (average 258 interventions between 2010 and 2011)<sup>4</sup>.

In many of these instances, graduate officers felt that they had become incorporated into the staff body of the institution and were often seen in this way by learners. The fact that they were based in colleges gave rise to an 'always open door' approach which increased the level of engagement between the graduate officer and college learners.

The location of the graduate officer base was significant for many aspects of the development of the role and although no type of location was considered to be ideal the base contributed to the following parts of the role:

- Identification with the base organisation. Being based in a college for instance, may have led clients from other organisations to have uncertainty about contact details or identifying with the graduate officer
- Building of networks. Stakeholders based in colleges noted that the graduate officer was increasingly known and valued in the college
- Referral to others. Having a base in a connexions service was regarded as positive for referral to other IAG specialists in one case

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<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to make a statistically significant comparison as graduate officers work in different ways across different sized geographical areas and have different working terms, conditions and expectations. A more effective comparison would be to compare the number of interventions per graduate hour worked however this data was not available to the researcher team.

#### 4.3.2 Developing a strategy for multi-agency delivery

The management of the graduate officer was complicated by the number of individuals involved in different functions of line management. One borough co-ordinator described the process as *'a continual learning curve'*. There were a number of determining factors which contributed to the overall approach adopted at a local level. Boroughs vary as to the importance placed on the Aimhigher service and all vary with regard to the extent to which they have an overarching strategy for IAG and higher education progression. Where boroughs have a coherent strategy for IAG and higher education progressions there appears to be a corresponding clarity about the line management and work load planning and management of the graduate officers.

There was a continuum of support and direction for the graduate officer from the borough co-ordinator, ranging from close supervision and direction to a more relaxed 'hands off' approach with occasional reporting meetings. Within this range there was a changing degree of independent decision making by the graduate officer. Several influencing factors were mentioned such as the actual time availability of the borough co-ordinator, the degree of self management which they encouraged and the relationship of trust which had developed. Some mentioned that it was important that the graduate officer was a 'self starter' and could work well independently and self manage much of their own activities. One borough co-ordinator explained:

*'She's never wanted her hand holding. Right from the beginning she's gone off and done it herself. This is great because she's been in such a unique situation too.'*

Other borough co-ordinators appeared to work more closely together with the graduate officer supporting others to have more and different types of intervention.

Many of the graduate officers' independence as autonomous workers has gradually increased over time. One borough co-ordinator explained:

*'She's been able to develop better relationships and develop a longer programme.'*

The relationship between graduate officers and borough co-ordinators was regarded as good and well coordinated, with 'trust' being mentioned as a key element. One borough co-ordinator explained:

*'It's a matter of trust. I trust her and I know what she is doing. If there are any issues she can talk to us.'*

Despite the complicated arrangements, the study found little evidence to suggest that the systems were ineffective. Good working relationships were observed between graduate officers, borough co-ordinators and the Aimhigher IAG project manager and these arrangements were managed to take into account local requirements and the evolving levels of autonomy developed by the graduate officers themselves.

#### 4.4 Summary

The research examined evidence at borough, institutional and learner levels and found that a number of factors were required to ensure that the role of the graduate officer is effective. Evidence provided during the study shows that graduate officers experience a number of enablers which improve the effective delivery of their role.

- The development of borough wide IAG strategic thinking and planning is essential to ensure that resources such as those of the graduate officer are developed and

implemented in a effective, complementary and cost effective manner. This will avoid duplication and ensure that an effective evaluation of future programmes can be made.

- The role of the graduate officer as a product of partnership activity was examined and the research noted that whilst the implementation of the role is complicated to some extent by complex regional and local management and supervision issues this does not seem to detract from the overall implementation of the role and has been significant in facilitating the success of the programme. There are lessons to be learned however in terms of developing a coherent multi-agency strategy and any future iteration of this role should reflect a robust understanding by all partners of their individual roles and responsibilities.
- Amongst the most significant enabler is the support provided by the borough co-ordinators. Over the period of the graduate officer programme borough co-ordinators have provided ongoing support and advice and have been instrumental in developing the relationships between graduate officers and learning organisations. The success of any future version of this type of programme therefore will be dependent on the strong support of an advocate and mentor at local level.
- Graduate officers' personal attributes were a significant enabler in both their engagement with learners and with learning organisations. The research sought to explore the role of graduate officer as role models. The youth and recent experience of higher education of the graduate officers meant that young people responded very positively to this aspect of the role and this was a significant enabler in the process of engagement with learners. Whilst the gender of the graduate officer was generally viewed as not significant in their ability to engage with learners, in some boroughs being a male graduate officer had positively impacted on young male learners' engagement. In one borough specifically where boys' participation in HE was low, a male graduate officer made a significant positive impact. Whilst gender is not the most important factor when considering the recruitment and selection of graduate officers it is a point to note that in areas where the widening participation agenda is aimed at young males, the appointment of male graduate officers might have a beneficial impact on learner outcomes
- The graduate officers also demonstrated flexibility and enthusiasm and these were highly valued aspects of the role particularly by learning providers. Any future version of this type of programme will need to ensure that the recruitment and selection process identifies the most appropriate candidates for these posts.
- The nature of the graduate officer programme means that the 'shelf life' of the graduate officers is limited as experience soon becomes dated. In order for graduate officers to maintain the currency of their knowledge it is imperative that they find opportunities to refresh and update their awareness of current higher education trends. The resources which are used to develop these individuals is however significant and thought should be given to the management of the graduate officers transitions from their role into the next stage of their career so that the area does not lose a useful resource. This may have the effect of motivating the graduate officers to remain in the system and to reduce staff turnover.
- The line management of graduate officers was also seen as a positive aspect, specifically the opportunities provided through the Aimhigher IAG project manager for team meetings and opportunities to share good practice and problem solve. The training and development which graduate officers received was also significant in

helping them to perform effectively. Future versions of the role will only be effective where robust and effective line management provision is made.

- Graduate officers face a number of challenges in implementing their role. The most significant of these challenges was the ability or willingness of learning providers to engage with the graduate officers or to release learners from lessons in order for the graduate officer to undertake activities. The success of future versions of the role will require careful marketing which links the activities of the graduate officers to the potential impact on both learners' aspirations and attainment and learning provider strategic aims.
- Throughout the research, graduate officers were represented as effective and flexible individuals who had negotiated successfully in a range of settings. However, this has been difficult and challenging at times. Where learning providers have allocated a staff link, provided a base and have a clear idea of how the graduate officer resource can be utilised, graduate officers feel supported, and are able to develop good and effective skills.

## 5 The graduate officer in relationship to the Greater Manchester IAG strategy

The research into the role of the graduate officers has been conducted at a time of rapid and extensive change in the careers education and information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) sector. It is of importance to this study to note that the implementation of the Graduate Officer Programme has taken place during a period of political change which has established new national priorities.

The Aimhigher Greater Manchester IAG Strategy group, in conjunction with the IAG project manager, have devised an IAG strategy which sets out priorities for the allocation of resources and funding which aims to meet the following broad intentions

- To ensure that Aimhigher target groups have the skills, knowledge and information to make informed & realistic choices about progression to higher education and to enable them to act upon the decisions made.
- To support the target group to access and benefit from other appropriate sources of IAG. and
- To work with partners to build their capacity to deliver activities that meets the agreed Aimhigher IAG learning outcomes.

Aimhigher graduate officers are responsible for delivering activities to meet these priority learning outcomes, however, they operate in a complex environment populated with many professionals and para-professionals providing various aspects of information, advice and guidance regarding progression to study at university level. The list of individuals providing IAG activities in Greater Manchester includes family members, tutors and teachers, Connexions personal advisers, college careers advisers, university widening participation officers, members of voluntary and statutory organisations such as social workers, and Job Centre staff. This section seeks to assess evidence which addresses the question:

**Question 4:** How does the approach fit with the wider policy context for IAG in Greater Manchester? Which aspects, if any, are likely to be sustained after the end of the Aimhigher programme in 2011?

This section will examine the changing national policy context and then explore a number of issues relating to the role of the graduate officer which address the changing policy context namely

- The graduate officers' role in relationship to the wider IAG community
- The graduate officers' role in referral
- Focussed support versus impartiality
- Added value
- Cost effectiveness

### 5.1 National context

Prior to the UK elections in May 2010 a number of documents were published which influenced decisions about the development and implementation of CEIAG services to young people. Of particular note was the Milburn report (Cabinet Office 2009) which highlighted that young people from less well off backgrounds were failing to access professional jobs. Milburn noted that although only 7% of the UK population attend independent schools, more than half of people working in professional jobs have done so. The report notes that in order to improve social mobility young people need to be able to

access better jobs through fairer chances to access the necessary higher level educational courses. Milburn underlines the role that universities play in helping young people from all social backgrounds to realise their potential and to improve their lives. The report notes that social class is a strong determinant of participation in higher education and that success in improving social mobility will be determined by the extent to which widening participation strategies are implemented. It is widely accepted that the difference in uptake of university courses by social class is unacceptable in an equitable society, and the report welcomes the progress which has been made in improving participation. A recent report by the Higher Education Funding Council for England notes that *'In the most disadvantaged areas there have been substantial and sustained increases in the proportion of young people entering higher education since the mid-2000s* (HEFCE 2010). There is however a continuing social gap in the university population as a whole and particularly in highly selective universities.

Sir Martin Harris notes in his report for the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) that there has been a 50% increase in the likelihood of young people from lowest participation areas accessing higher education during the preceding 5 years however the reasons for this increase are less clear because the outcomes of a number of government initiatives which were intended to result in social change have been implemented during that period. Harris notes that the increased expenditure in schools has contributed to the overall improvement in attainment and aspiration alongside other initiatives such as the Education Maintenance Allowance and the national Aimhigher programme (OFFA 2010).

The link between educational mobility and social mobility has been made by both Milburn and Harris however the Sutton Trust in its recent report (Sutton Trust 2010) note that the education mobility for young people in England remains lower than for those young people growing up in other developed countries. They express a concern that *'if England compares unfavourably in the international comparisons of education mobility now, it may fall even further behind when it comes to international comparisons of social mobility'*. The government re-asserts this point in their recent strategy for social mobility (Cabinet Office 2011). They note that the lack of social mobility is damaging for individuals and leaves the countries economic potential unfulfilled. Those making the important link between a good education and improved social mobility are seeking to ensure that the UK remains competitive in the global market.

In undertaking the review of higher education, Browne (2010) made recommendations for a new fees structure for universities which changes the short term financial implications of undertaking higher level study for students and moves to a more flexible repayment system post qualification. Browne promotes this system as one which will improve education mobility. However, the resulting media messages about the rapidly rising cost of a university education particularly in the current financial climate may be counter-productive in trying to raise the aspirations of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. In their review of literature Crawford, Johnson, Machin and Vignoles (2011) note that:

*'One potential explanation for low HE participation rates amongst students from disadvantaged backgrounds is that they underestimate the returns to obtaining a degree; if this is true, then providing such students with better information about returns should increase participation. Another potential explanation is that individuals overestimate how much it will cost them to go to university; if this is true, then providing them with information about financial aid should increase participation.'*

### **Changes in the regulations for CEIAG provision**

New provisions in the Education Bill (2010-11), currently progressing through Parliament will change the statutory requirements for schools and colleges with regard to CEIAG. Schools will no longer be required to provide programmes of careers education to learners from year 7. However whilst the statutory duty is to be removed the government is clear that these

changes do not remove the assumption that careers education is an effective method of preparing young people for the world of work. Rather there is an assumption that schools will still help young people to develop career competences through a range of activities.

There will however be a new duty for schools to provide all pupils in years 9-11 with access to independent, impartial career guidance. This duty may be extended to include year 8 and year 13 learners in line with earlier option choices on one hand and the raising of the learner leaving age on the other. This guidance should be available from sources external to the school and from individuals who are trained and accredited according to guidelines and standards which will be issued by the Careers Profession Task Force. In order to ensure value for money, there is an expectation that commissioning processes will be competitive and guidance will therefore be subject to market forces. In the future, providers of graduate officer services will be competing with other providers of similar support.

The Equality Act (2010) introduces new positive action provisions that will allow schools to target measures that are designed to alleviate disadvantages experienced by, or to meet the particular needs of pupils, such as those individuals who experience disability. It could be argued for example that providing targeted careers education, information advice and guidance at those pupils who experience social disadvantage will help improve educational achievement and mobility and contribute to the wider government aims of social mobility.

### **The future of the national Aimhigher strategy**

On 25 November 2010, the Minister of State for Universities and Science, David Willets, confirmed that funding for the Aimhigher programme would cease at the end of its current phase, in July 2011. This announcement followed the Browne Review of higher education funding and the Comprehensive Spending Review which outlined large cuts in the funding for education. In future individual universities will be responsible for widening participation, will still have to submit a Widening Participation Strategic Assessment to the Higher Education Funding Council for England and will be required to hold an Access Agreement with the Office of Fair Access (OFFA). Willets stated that "We will place on universities an obligation to achieve the things that were previously being achieved" by schemes like Aimhigher. Included in the proposals is a £150 million National Scholarships Programme. The national scholarship will provide students from disadvantaged backgrounds help with the cost of attending university and it is expected that universities will provide matched levels of funding. It is envisaged that around 50,000 students a year could be awarded a scholarship from 2014.

This new strategy re-locates Aimhigher provision within the narrower widening participation initiatives of universities. However there is a clear difference in provision. Aimhigher provision was provided in an impartial manner in that it presented a range of options for gaining higher level skills at a range of institutions, and as such would fit within the new legislative requirements for schools to provide independent, impartial careers IAG under the current Education Bill (2011). Whilst the broader objectives of individual institutions are to engage learners in higher education through widening participation initiatives, their efforts will be mediated by organisational objectives.

## **5.2 The graduate officers role in relationship to the wider IAG community**

Opinions were divided about the extent to which working relationships between the graduate officer and other IAG providers were effective. In the majority of instances the graduate officer was seen to be working in helpful and supportive relationships with other IAG practitioners. The relationships between graduate officers and other IAG practitioners have developed over time as the role has evolved and individuals have learned more about what the role can offer in terms of support to organisations and to individual practitioners. Initially there were some misgivings about duplication and the level of expertise that the

graduate officers could offer however with time concerns have diminished and the graduate officers have become a valued source of support by other IAG practitioners. One borough co-ordinator explained:

*'I think IAG advisers were threatened to start of with. The problem was many didn't understand how the graduate officer was going to fit in. They were threatened perhaps, but I work closely with Connexions, and as there was more understanding about her role, this decreased. Within Connexions they have a universal IAG offer however; they may not be working with the Aimhigher cohort. Adding value isn't the way to describe it, it is vital that that message is still there on higher education, especially recently with it in the news.'*

On a number of occasions examples were provided of graduate officers being seen as supplementing a stretched workforce and providing a specialist service. One Connexions personal adviser explained:

*'They are offering something different, another pair of hands and they top up what we do. They are other specialists on university life and experience...we didn't see them as a threat but as an advantage.'*

One borough co-ordinator explained the extent to which the graduate officers' different background enhanced the overall IAG offer:

*'The fact he was young and a recent graduate has helped young people engage more. Of course a Connexions advisor is more specialised in providing support and guidance on higher education but they have been doing this job for 15-20 years. They can't provide the same information as a recent graduate who is also young and very near their age. Young people are more enthusiastic.'*

This was corroborated by a senior manager in a college:

*'It gave them that human face. A recent graduate who could talk about universities. I can tell them about UCAS applications and finance but at the end of the day I am just an old guy with glasses.'*

To some extent the level of engagement with other IAG practitioners was dependent on where the graduate officers were based. Where they were based in Connexions centres for example it was noted that graduate officers had a very good understanding of the roles of other practitioners (see section 3.2 for further discussion about this issue). A Connexions personal adviser explained:

*'There is some involvement in each of the boroughs with Connexions. In one the graduate officer is based in Connexions. There is a good understanding of each others roles.'*

There were occasions where participants in the study expressed concern about the duplication of services or a lack of clarity about the demarcation of roles. This was particularly the case with regard to widening participation officers who have a similar role to that of graduate officers. One widening participation officer explained:

*'I get the feeling some times they are more wary of our work because we are doing something similar.'*

Whilst there are similarities between the two roles; both require improving the aspirations of young people and increasing the numbers progressing to higher education, there are some

clear differences. Graduate officers are not specifically linked to any one institution and as such are seen as impartial where as widening participation officers work to encourage learners to consider their university as a preferred option.

There was an overall lack of any formal processes which support partnership working at an institutional level. The study revealed no examples of formal partnership agreements or formal letters of understanding which explicitly identified the different roles of the members of IAG practitioner workforce. Agreements of this sort provide the basis for ongoing dialogue and regular monitoring and review. Given the complex nature of IAG arrangements across Greater Manchester and within each of the boroughs to some extent this is understandable. For example it is not entirely clear what individual or mechanisms exists to facilitate and review such agreements however this type of negotiation and agreement would bring clarity and coherence across the different stakeholders and IAG practitioners and would almost certainly reduce duplication and improve creativity and effectiveness.

### 5.3 The graduate officers role in making referrals

Referral is the process by which individuals access support, either themselves or on behalf of another, this being the result of a decision based on an analysis of need. This section will explore good practice in referral procedures and examine the extent to which graduate officers' work within good practice guidelines for referral.

The role of graduate officers often lacked clarity regarding the extent to which they practiced guidance however in most instances stakeholders and graduate officers alike were clear about the need to seek sources of expert advice with regard to various issues. In all cases referral was referred to as an informal process often conducted through email or word of mouth. Graduate officers most frequently made informal referrals to college based careers advisers, Connexions workers and in some instances other tutors or college staff. One Connexions personal adviser explained the informal nature of the referral system:

*'If the graduate officer had concerns then they would tell me and I would follow that up.'*

Referrals are made for various different reasons and often related to the graduate officers' lack of knowledge about particular issues or their ability to provide the level of service required by the learner. One graduate officer illustrated these issues:

*'It depends on circumstances; basically when my knowledge ends. If I feel I don't know much then I will tell them where to go and with whom to talk to. If they start talking about guidance then I tell them I can't help and refer them either to Connexions or the career adviser.'*

This was confirmed by a borough co-ordinator:

*'[Graduate officer] has NVQ qualifications and knows when is right to refer to another IAG specialist'*

Although the graduate officers provide a specialist service regarding higher education, the study found little evidence to suggest that careers advisers were making referrals to the graduate officers for information and advice on this topic although there were a number of examples of tutors signposting learners to graduate officers for advice on personal statements, UCAS form completion and for information about student finance.

Although referral was a frequent outcome of graduate officer activity the study provided no evidence of good practice in recording or monitoring referrals. Robust systems for making and recording internal and external referrals offer a mechanism for monitoring learners to

ensure that their needs have been met. In turn they also offer approaches for identifying any trends or gaps in provision which need to be met through referral in order that these might be addressed in discussion with curriculum planners or other IAG practitioners. Overall this particular aspect of the graduate officer role was under developed. Although formal referral tends to be a more advanced level guidance activity it is likely that the graduate officer programme would benefit from a review of referral procedures including consideration of the role of referral in supporting aspiration and effective transitions and the development of clear processes and guidelines for making and monitoring referrals. Effective referral procedures ensure that young people's IAG needs are monitored and reviewed and this would ensure that no learners' requirements remained unmet. This would strengthen the relationship between roles and levels of guidance practice and ensure that learners receive support from the most appropriately qualified individuals.

#### 5.4 Focussed support versus impartiality

At the time of the development and implementation of the graduate officer programme, a number of government initiatives were in place which offered elements of IAG. Connexions, the young peoples' IAG service provided universal careers advice and guidance as well as targeted support for those who were in danger of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training). Whilst one of the remits of the service was to provide careers IAG, the resource for this element was spread thinly and as a consequence many young people who had the potential to achieve good grades at GCSE and to progress to higher education were not always provided with adequate support for higher education option choice and applications. The graduate officer role was therefore one element of an holistic IAG support package which ensured that all learners received an IAG programme which was tailored to their specific needs. At around this time the Education and Skills Act 2008 required schools to provide impartial careers education for all learners (years 7-11). The Act also transferred the responsibility and funding for Connexions Services to the Local Authorities although the funding was not ring fenced and as a consequence, the delivery for careers IAG was reviewed and in some places diminished as local government priorities began to change through financial constraints. The recent changes in funding and responsibilities has changed the IAG environment and created new demands and opportunities for graduate officers. It has also introduced a level of concern as the extent of the provision of qualified and experienced practitioners has diminished. Given the requirements for schools to deliver impartial careers education, it has caused some to challenge the nature of the HE focussed IAG service provided by the graduate officers.

Participants in the study indicated a continuum of understanding of the term impartiality. The Education and Skills Act (2008) defines the term as '*promoting the best interests of pupils and which does not seek to promote the interests of the school over other options*'. The graduate officers are offering young people insight into one option but are not recommending this as an option. In this context, graduate officers see themselves as impartial. The Aimhigher IAG project manager explained:

*'I think we are just presenting an option. It might not be for them. University might not be for everyone. They should never be saying this is for you. Just have you considered it?'*

A clear part of the role of the graduate officer was seen by both themselves and others as 'advocacy', that is to say promoting the benefits of higher education to the target group and raising their aspirations. The graduate officers and borough co-ordinators all considered that higher education had considerable benefits for young people. All of the graduate officers felt that they have personally benefited in many ways from their experiences in higher education and wished to promote the advantages to others. In this sense, the graduate officers see

themselves as being impartial as they are promoting an option which is beneficial. Graduate officers also reported that they gave a balanced view of higher education and often spoke of the draw backs. One function that graduate officers did fulfil was to provide information and advice on student finance and the draw backs to university were regularly couched in this context. There were however a number of stakeholders who were concerned that some young people who were studying 'A' levels were only considering higher education as an option and not considering alternatives due to the focused work of the graduate officers. In this sense they felt that the information and advice was not impartial as it did not give a balanced view to selected learners but rather promoted one option to the disadvantage of others.

## 5.5 Added value

Whilst graduate officers provide a valued service for targeted individuals around the issues associated with higher education they are operating in a crowded market place populated by individuals providing a range of IAG services which can include those activities provided by the graduate officers. The graduate officer role has provided a useful resource to an overstretched IAG network however, in order to establish future strategies about the deployment of this type of role it is important to understand whether or not the role provides additional benefits to learners or whether there is duplication amongst those offering IAG.

Given the complex and changing funding arrangements for IAG graduate offers have provided a consistent level of information and advice which has been beneficial in a number of ways. Schools have valued the role in various ways. Graduate officers have been an additional resource, a spare pair of hands and a way of targeting some learners with additional support. In addition, graduate officers introduce the idea of higher education early in a young persons' education when the norm would be to concentrate on post 16 options alone. One borough co-ordinator explained:

*'It brings an added dimension across the borough. Particularly in the 11-16 schools the focus is not on what happens when you are 18. This does vary from school to school. The graduate officer role brings an added dimension. It not only adds to the role [of other IAG practitioners] it also complements it. The IAG support will not be available in the future and the graduate officer could provide valuable support.'*

For schools and colleges the benefits are quite clear. There is a link between aspiration and motivation (Careers Scotland 2004). Where under-aspiring young people are encouraged to aim higher there is likely to be a corresponding improvement in learner outcomes, higher grades and more sustained transitions into further education and beyond. This is important for schools and colleges who are often judged on their performance using attainment data.

For young people, the opportunity to gain insights into the experiences of someone who has already been to university has been very important. For many this is a unique opportunity and establishes a local role model who inspires and motivates. Two graduate officers explained:

*'It takes some of the pressure from them [other IAG practitioners]. They are too busy. I am another person to take that pressure. It has helped students a lot that I am a recent graduate and have recent experience. It matters when someone has a recent experience even if they are older.'*

*'I know it has been my help which helped these students most because I have spent significant time with them trying to help them fill in their UCAS applications and their personal statements.'*

The evidence of the benefits of higher education is stark (The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions 2009) and as such young people who act on the examples of the graduate officers undoubtedly benefit through increased future earnings and the resulting social mobility.

## **5.6 Cost effectiveness**

Determining the cost effectiveness of the graduate officer programme is complicated by a number of variables. Graduate officers work in different ways across areas with differencing geography and demography. Differences in base, working hours, expectations and priorities all make a definitive quantitative judgement about the value and cost effectiveness of the graduate officers' role difficult. A lack of availability of data on the cost effectiveness of other IAG workers also makes a comparison difficult.

## **5.7 The implications of losing the graduate officer role**

The funding for Aimhigher will cease in July 2011 and responsibility for the widening participation agenda will pass to individual universities. Whilst the overall impact of these changes is yet to be determined, the implications of these changes will be felt at regional and local level and particularly by individual institutions and by learners.

The changes in national and local context will require a re-visioning of the Greater Manchester IAG strategy to incorporate the new requirements and funding mechanisms. Despite a reduced emphasis on partnership working, Greater Manchester will need to investigate the provision of IAG services in the context of other priorities such as regional development, community engagement and poverty reduction strategies.

Individual institutions, particularly schools will be faced with new legislation which places a duty on them to commission independent, impartial career guidance and to make this accessible for their learners in years 9-11. The mechanism for ensuring that this takes place is still unclear but is likely to be through an openly communicated 'progression measure' which will be incorporated into school league tables. One assumption will be that schools with poor progression to further and higher education will be failing in their duties to provide adequate support to young people who are moving through the career decision making process. Schools will need to ensure that young people's entitlement (through the Education Bill 2011) to access careers IAG is being met and will need to consider a number of issues in relation to the new requirements.

In commissioning IAG services, institutions will need to have made an accurate assessment of the career guidance requirements of their student cohort. In addressing the issue of inequality of access to higher education for some disadvantaged groups, schools and colleges will need to consider how to target and support learners whose situations would suggest that they would not traditionally access higher education.

In the absence on any duty to provide career education, schools and colleges will need to develop adequate curriculum and IAG responses which ensure that all young people receive the information and advice they require to make well informed and realistic decisions about higher education. This will be increasingly important in the context of the increased costs of accessing higher education and the implications of the relative merits of the type or nature of higher education institutions offering suitable programmes. One method of providing this support might be through 'compact arrangements' with local universities however this may not be viewed as impartial and therefore provision will need to be explored which provides learners with comprehensive and impartial information and advice about all available options.

The value of role models and mentors has been demonstrated through initiatives such as the Aimhigher graduate officer programme. In the absence of such initiatives, schools will need to evaluate the relative merits of providing role models and mentors of this type. Difficult decisions will need to be made about the targeting of school and college resources to gain the maximum impact for learners in terms of ensuring progression. Failing to provide adequate support of this type may lead to a reduction in sustainable progression and adversely affect institutions positions in league tables.

Graduate officers have supplemented the work of existing school and college careers staff. In their absence, institutions will need to reassess the resources required to support the application processes to further and higher education institutions in order to ensure that all young people are able to progress and make sustained transitions.

## **5.8 Summary**

The current policy context is complicated by an emerging government agenda regarding careers IAG. It is by no means clear how future iterations of career services will be delivered at the point of writing this report however the indications are that the responsibility for the commissioning of careers IAG will rest with schools and colleges and there will be a level of competitiveness about the process. The changes to the statutory duties extended to schools and the changes in funding to CEIAG services will have number of implications for individual organisations who will need to respond though a reassessment of their CEIAG policies and processes.

Graduate officers work in an environment which is populated by many individuals providing an aspect of careers IAG. The study has shown however that the graduate officers have forged a role for themselves which has enhanced existing IAG services and created benefits for learners, schools and the wider IAG community. The IAG community is currently in a state of continuous change with Connexions services having been reduced, the graduate officers continue to provide a level of service which would otherwise have ceased to exist in many instances.

The research notes that links have been made between social mobility and young peoples' ability to access professional jobs through the higher education route. Robust arguments could be constructed which highlight the roles which graduate officers could play in improving the social mobility and economic development of the region.

## 6 Lessons and recommendations

### 6.1 Summary

The overarching aim of the research into the graduate officer role was to establish how effective Aimhigher graduate officers have been in improving young people's aspiration, applications and transitions to higher education, and establish the policy environment in which lessons and good practice can be captured and taken forward. During the research a number of hypotheses were tested.

Throughout the research many examples were found to suggest that the partnership model whilst being varied across the region provided a foundation for graduate officers which enabled them to implement the Greater Manchester IAG strategy. The partnership model offers a range of advice and support and ensures that graduate officers are able to develop bespoke approaches which meet individual and local IAG needs.

The graduate officer role was developed and implemented during a period of change in the delivery of IAG services to young people. Graduate officers have used their abilities and attributes to forge a role for themselves in a busy market place but have managed to ensure that their activities complement and enhance existing provision rather than duplicate it.

Although little explicit evidence was found which suggested that learning organisations viewed the graduate officers' role as helping them to achieve their wider goals, this was implicit throughout the research. Learning providers regularly provided evidence that the role was valued in supporting the organisation at times of high IAG need such as at UCAS application time. Schools league tables compare the attainment of their learners at key stage 4 and 5 and the implication by schools that graduate officers raise aspirations and attainment link to the overarching aims of schools and colleges to improve aspirations and transitions of their learners.

Anecdotal evidence throughout the research suggests that the role model aspect of the graduate officer programme has been highly effective in engaging young people in the idea of higher education. Both learners and learning providers provided many examples and views regarding this particular aspect of the programme citing youth and recent experience of higher education as the most significant factors in motivating large numbers of non-traditional higher education applicants to aspire to a university education. This is a unique aspect of the graduate officer role in comparison to other IAG providers and has given graduate officers a heightened level of credibility with young people.

The information and advice role of the graduate officer programme has been significant in helping young people make decisions about appropriate routes for progression. Not all young people chose to progress to higher education however the role of the graduate officer ensures that decisions of this sort are based on a thorough understanding of the options available with regards to courses and institutions as well as regarding the availability of student finance.

It is very difficult to differentiate between the impact of the graduate officers' role and that of others within the guidance community when judging the extent to which graduate officers have increased the numbers progressing to higher education however throughout the research young people of all age ranges reported an increased interest and aspiration to higher education courses as a direct response to the graduate officer activity. If this interest is pursued and converted to applications and effective transitions it is possible to say that on an individual level, graduate officers have had an impact.

## 6.2 Conclusions

The research into the role of Aimhigher Greater Manchester graduate officers sought to assess evidence which addressed a number of research questions determined by the Aimhigher Greater Manchester team. The research was conducted across all 10 boroughs of Greater Manchester using a range of methods including an analysis of data provided by the Aimhigher Greater Manchester team, a literature search, and interviews with learners, graduate officers, borough co-ordinators and a wide range of stakeholders. The research was conducted a time of great change in the career guidance sector and as the funding to Aimhigher projects around the country was drawing to an end. The combination of changes to the sector including a substantial restructuring to the Connexions service across the Greater Manchester area and reluctance by schools to release learners in key stage 4 due to timetabling and examination pressure has meant that the views of these groups have been difficult to collect. However substantial numbers of learners from other key stages and a wide range of stakeholder participants has meant that a thorough exploration of the issues has taken place, and whilst the findings can only be viewed as indicative rather than conclusive, the research team feels confident that the findings and recommendations which result from this research reflect an overall view of the role which provides a useful foundation for future considerations of similar roles in the future.

The research aims and conclusions are presented below:

### **Question 1: How effectively is the graduate officer model in addressing the IAG needs of Aimhigher the target cohort, priority target groups, and other learners across Greater Manchester?**

The nine Aimhigher graduate officers work across the 10 Greater Manchester boroughs. During the course of the programme graduate officers worked with 13,000 learners during the period August 2009 – July 2010 (Aimhigher Greater Manchester 2010) and with 3,774 learners from August 2010 to February 2011. This means that over the life of the project to date 16,774 have received graduate officer support. Evidence from the research suggests that graduate officers are working actively but not exclusively with the target group. All graduate officer activities are valued by providers and by target and non-target group learners alike. In many instances graduate officers are unable to differentiate between the support they provide to target group and non-target group individuals and it is therefore difficult to make an accurate assessment of the numbers from the target group which have benefited. It is also very difficult to make an assessment of the extent to which each of the beneficiaries made adjustments to their behaviours or to their career planning as a result of the graduate officer interventions. The research does indicate however that young people have responded very positively to the support offered by the graduate officers and many reported having been inspired or motivated as a result of their contact.

Variations in the way that the role is implemented have developed over time and in response to local priorities. The role can be summarised as twofold: adding and supporting existing IAG provision and developing and delivering new activities. There are large variations in the numbers and types of activities which graduate officers deliver and this is often dependent on the base from which the graduate officer operates and the needs of the learning organisations and learners. The study has shown that graduate officers have the flexibility to operate in a demanding and changing environment and are responsive to both individual and organisational information and advice requirements.

### **Question 2: Which aspects of the graduate officer model and specific type of intervention have the best results in terms of the priority IAG outcomes for learners and actual progression in education?**

The research was conducted over a small timescale and as such has made the determination of impact and outcomes very difficult to evaluate. This is a complex issue and

requires a longitudinal approach to assess changes in behaviour over time and would require sophisticated techniques to isolate the impact graduate officers' intervention from those provided by a range of other IAG practitioners and external influences. The research does provide evidence of the type of activities which young people and learning providers value.

Graduate officers are providing a range of activities based on an assessment of learners' IAG needs and determined by learning organisations and borough requirements. The research has revealed that learners value 1:1 and small group sessions most as they provide greater opportunities for personalised responses to their needs and this corresponds to an increase in the number of graduate officer individual interventions over the course of the programme. There are times however when learners feel exposed due to the targeting approach. It was not possible through the course of the research to determine whether or not differences existed between the types of activities which the target group and non-target group either valued or benefited from.

Learning providers also value the graduate officer role as it provides additional resources particularly at times of greatest need such as at UCAS application times such as information about student finance and support with the development of personal statements and the completion of applications.

**Question 3: For the graduate officer model to be most effective, what factors need to be in place including borough wide, institutional and learner level factors?**

The research examined evidence at borough, institutional and learner levels and found that a number of factors were required to ensure that the role of the graduate officer is effective. Evidence provided during the study shows that graduate officers experience a number of enablers which improve the effective delivery of their role:

- The development of borough wide IAG strategic thinking and planning is essential to ensure that resources such as those of the graduate officer are developed and implemented in a effective, complementary and cost effective manner. This will avoid duplication and ensure that an effective evaluation of future programmes can be made.
- The role of the graduate officer as a product of partnership activity was examined and the research noted that whilst the implementation of the role is complicated to some extent by complex regional and local management and supervision issues this does not seem to detract from the overall implementation of the role and has been significant in facilitating the success of the programme. There are lessons to be learned however in terms of developing a coherent multi-agency strategy and any future iteration of this role should reflect a robust understanding by all partners of their individual roles and responsibilities.
- Amongst the most significant enabler is the support provided by the borough co-ordinators. Over the period of the graduate officer programme borough co-ordinators have provided ongoing support and advice and have been instrumental in developing the relationships between graduate officers and learning organisations. The success of any future version of this type of programme therefore will be dependent on the strong support of an advocate and mentor at local level.
- Graduate officers' personal attributes were a significant enabler in both their engagement with learners and with learning organisations. The research sought to explore the role of graduate officer as role models. The youth and recent experience of higher education of the graduate officers meant that young people responded very positively to this aspect of the role and this was a significant enabler in the process of engagement with learners. The graduate officers also demonstrated flexibility and

enthusiasm and these were highly valued aspects of the role particularly by learning providers. Any future version of this type of programme will need to ensure that the recruitment and selection process identifies the most appropriate candidates for these posts.

- The nature of the graduate officer programme means that the 'shelf life' of the graduate officers is limited as experience soon becomes dated. The resources which are used to develop these individuals is however significant and thought should be given to the management of the graduate officers transitions from their role into the next stage of their career so that the area does not lose a useful resource. This may have the effect of motivating the graduate officers to remain in the system and to reduce staff turnover.
- The line management of graduate officers was also seen as a positive aspect, specifically the opportunities provided through the Aimhigher IAG project manager for team meetings and opportunities to share good practice and problem solve. The training and development which graduate officers received was also significant in helping them to perform effectively. Future versions of the role will only be effective where robust and effective line management provision is made.
- Graduate officers face a number of challenges in implementing their role. The most significant of these challenges was the ability or willingness of learning providers to engage with the graduate officers or to release learners from lessons in order for the graduate officer to undertake activities. The success of future versions of the role will require careful marketing which links the activities of the graduate officers to the potential impact on both learners' aspirations and attainment and learning provider strategic aims.
- Throughout the research, graduate officers were represented as effective and flexible individuals who had negotiated successfully in a range of settings. However, this has been difficult and challenging at times. Where learning providers have allocated a staff link, provided a base and have a clear idea of how the graduate officer resource can be utilised, graduate officers feel supported, and are able to develop good and effective skills.

**Question 4: How does the approach fit with the wider policy context for IAG in Greater Manchester? Which aspects, if any, are likely to be sustained after the end of the Aimhigher programme in 2011?**

The current policy context is complicated by an emerging government agenda regarding careers IAG. It is by no means clear how future iterations of career services will be delivered at the point of writing this report however the indications are that the responsibility for the commissioning of careers IAG will rest with schools and colleges and there will be a level of competitiveness about the process.

Graduate officers work in an environment which is populated by many individuals providing an aspect of careers IAG. The study has shown however that the graduate officers have forged a role for themselves which has enhanced existing IAG services and created benefits for learners, schools and the wider IAG community. The IAG community is currently in a state of continuous change with Connexions services having been reduced, the graduate officers continue to provide a level of service which would otherwise have ceased to exist in many instances due to uncertainty about transition arrangements to a new all age guidance service in the future.

Changes in national priorities will mean that funding for Aimhigher as a whole and for graduate officers specifically will cease to exist in July 2011. As a result there will be a number of implications at regional, local and institutional level. For Greater Manchester as a

whole and for local boroughs, there will be a need to review provision of IAG services in the context of regional and local development, community engagement and poverty reduction strategies. Individual schools and colleges will need to re-assess their policies and processes for delivering CEIAG. This will include an accurate assessment of the CEIAG needs of specific groups of learners and the development of institutional responses to meet these needs.

The research notes that links have been made between social mobility and young peoples' ability to access professional jobs through the higher education route. Robust arguments could be constructed which highlight the roles which graduate officers could play in improving the social mobility and economic development of the region.

### **6.3 Key lessons and recommendations**

The graduate officer role was created as a new and unique approach to inspiring and supporting young people to consider higher education, particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds. As such the graduate officer programme provides a useful opportunity to reflect on a new and innovative approach. The research into the graduate officer role has examined a range of evidence which has resulted in a number of observations and recommendations which could form the basis of any future plans for a similar role. These are listed below.

The research has found the graduate officer role to have been an effective method of supporting young people. Graduate officers bring a fresh, new perspective to young people which cannot be replicated by experienced IAG practitioners who can be seen as 'old school'. Young people particularly value the youth and recent experience of graduate officers as they feel it gives them a level of credibility which is not present with older individuals whose experiences of higher education are seen as not relevant to the young people. Whilst this is a positive aspect of the role however, it does introduce a dilemma as this aspect of the graduate officer role has a 'limited shelf life'. What has been evident from the research however is that whilst graduate officers have a restricted contribution to make over a longer period of time as young role models, the role has provided them with an opportunity to develop some useful skills in working with young people in a multi-agency context. It should be noted that considerable investment has been made in training and developing these skills and it would be unfortunate to lose this resource across the Greater Manchester area as a result of the current financial constraints and changes in the guidance community. However as with all new programmes there are lessons to be learnt and any future development of similar roles may need to take place in the light of the following observations.

The guidance sector is complicated with many individuals operating at different levels and with different training and skills. The Careers Profession Task Force (DFE 2010) recommends that guidance professionals should be qualified at level 6 in order to practice in depth guidance. This will affect the type and nature of IAG services commissioned by schools and colleges in the future. This does not however exclude the provision of advice or guidance at other levels and it will be important in developing future roles of this sort to have a clear view of how the scope and level of the role fits into the wider IAG provision. The changes announced to the widening participation agenda mean that much of the support currently being provided by graduate officers will be located within individual universities. Whilst this may provide more impetus for local universities to engage with learners in a local catchment area it will not necessarily address the needs of learners making complex decisions about the choice of programmes delivered at universities of different types and with different funding structures. The scope of the role will need to be clearly communicated to all individuals involved in the commissioning and provision of future guidance services. Individuals need to understand the boundaries of their professional competence and this is

essential in ensuring that referrals are made to appropriate services where necessary. Robust and clearly articulated referral systems need to be implemented, which ensure that everyone understands the process of referral and that referrals are monitored in order that young people's IAG needs are recognised and met. Graduate officers could have an important role in following up referrals to ensure that young people have used the services of those providing specialist inputs where this has been identified.

Graduate officers are based in a number of different types of base. It was noticeable that where they are based in learning providers premises this has the effect of raising their profile and improving their accessibility. Whilst this research does not advocate the provision of a graduate officer to each learning provider the results do suggest that the base of the graduate officer is a crucial element in their success and this should be considered in any future versions of the role.

The graduate officer programme should be seen as a success. This success has been dependent on a number of factors including good support systems in a multi-agency context. Whilst graduate officers have used their skills of communication, negotiation and considerable resilience in implementing their role, their success would have been limited had the support mechanisms been less effective. Any future role will need to consider how the effectiveness of the role can be maximised through the provision of adequate support systems.

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## 8 Appendix 1: Discussion guides

### Researching the Aimhigher Greater Manchester Graduate Officer Programme



### Graduate Officers and Borough Co-ordinators questionnaire

#### Informed consent

Go through the informed consent process. Where this is a face to face interview ensure that the participant has read through the informed consent letter, providing support where necessary) and then ask the participant to sign the slip.

Where this is a telephone interview, read out the informed consent document, ask that the participant has understood and then ask them if they agree to continue. Record this on the electronic form.

#### Information about the participant

1. Please give your name,
2. Which borough/s do you work in? Please describe how your resource is allocated to each borough
3. How have you been involved with the Graduate Officer programme?

#### Participants understanding of Aimhigher

4. How would you describe the role of Aimhigher in the Greater Manchester area?
5. What are your priorities for Aimhigher in your area?
6. How would you describe the Aimhigher target group?
7. Which are the priority target groups within the local programme?

#### Graduate Officer activity

8. How well do you think the Graduate Officers have been in engaging with the target groups?
9. What have been the barriers and enablers to engagement of young people into the Aimhigher programme generally and in your local area?
10. What have been the barriers to engagement for the Graduate Officers?
  - with regard to organisations?

- with regard to young people?
11. What have been the enablers to engagement for the Graduate Officers?
- with regard to organisations?
  - with regard to young people?
12. What activities have you/ they been involved in?
- with young people?
  - with staff?
  - with parents?
13. Which of these activities have been the most successful and why?
14. Which of these activities have been least successful and why?
15. Are there any activities which you would like to have developed/been involved in which did not take place?
16. What were the barriers to this?
17. To what extent have you/ the Graduate Officers engaged with non-priority groups?
18. To what extent have Graduate Officers been effective in making referrals to other IAG specialists?
19. What have been the specific management/ relationship issues associated with the work of the Graduate Officers?
- planning the programme,
  - managing the workload,
  - maintaining links with schools/colleges,
  - others (IAG specialists),
  - day to day delivery,
  - reporting

### **Impact of Graduate Officer activity**

20. Please describe how the priority and non-priority groups have benefitted from the support of the Graduate Officers?

What is your evidence for this?

How do you monitor progress?

21. How does the graduate officer programme add value to the existing IAG provision?

What is your evidence for this?

How do you monitor progress?

22. Overall, how would you rate the effectiveness of the Graduate Officer programme?

- Please provide specific examples of an activities which you feel had a particularly good impact and why?

**Future developments /enhancing the service**

23. Does the need for Graduate Officers still exist?

- For which groups?
- In what areas?
- What is the evidence?

24. What would be the consequence when the Graduate Officer programme goes?

25. Do you know of any plans to continue the activities? What are these?

26. Are there any lessons to be learned which could influence future programmes?

## **Researching the Aimhigher Greater Manchester Graduate Officer Programme**

### **Graduate Officers Team Leader questionnaire**



#### **Informed consent**

Go through the informed consent process. Where this is a face to face interview ensure that the participant has read through the informed consent letter, providing support where necessary) and then ask the participant to sign the slip.

Where this is a telephone interview, read out the informed consent document, ask that the participant has understood and then ask them if they agree to continue. Record this on the electronic form.

#### **Information about the participant**

1. Please give your name,
2. How have you been involved with the Graduate Officer programme?

#### **Local information**

3. What is the pattern of education across Greater Manchester?  
11-16  
11  
19 in some places etc.

#### **Participants understanding of Aimhigher**

4. How would you describe the role of Aimhigher in the Greater Manchester area?
5. What are the priorities for Aimhigher?
6. How would you describe the Aimhigher target group?
7. What proportion of the Aimhigher grant is apportioned to the Graduate Officer programme?
8. Is any AH grant used to pay the Borough Co-ordinators

#### **Information about the graduate officer programme**

9. When did the graduate officer programme start?

10. Is the graduate officer programme unique to Greater Manchester
11. What were the issues which were considered when drawing up their job descriptions?
12. Can we have copies of their job descriptions please?
13. What training have the graduate officers received?

General?

Specific?

14. Please describe the support which is given to the graduate officers
15. How is the work of the graduate officers quality assured?
16. How are the resource allocations calculated?

### **Graduate Officer activity**

17. How well do you think the Graduate Officers have been in engaging with the target groups?
18. What have been the barriers to engagement for the Graduate Officers?
  - with regard to organisations?
  - with regard to young people?
19. What have been the enablers to engagement for the Graduate Officers?
  - with regard to organisations?
  - with regard to young people?
20. How do the graduate officers decide on which activities to use with different groups of learners?
21. Which of these activities have been the most successful and why?
22. Which of these activities have been least successful and why?
23. Are there any activities which you would like to have developed/been involved in which did not take place?
24. What were the barriers to this?
25. To what extent have you/ the Graduate Officers engaged with non-priority groups?
26. To what extent have Graduate Officers been effective in making referrals to other IAG specialists?
27. What have been the specific management/ relationship issues associated with the work of the Graduate Officers?
  - planning the programme,
  - managing the workload,
  - maintaining links with schools/colleges,
  - others (IAG specialists),

- day to day delivery,
- reporting

28. How are agreements negotiated?

with schools?  
with borough co-ordinators?

29. How are these agreements been reviewed?

30. What is STAR? Was it commissioned specifically for the Greater Manchester area?

31. To what extent have graduate officers been providing training to staff in schools and colleges?

32. Are there patterns across Greater Manchester with regard to the main contacts in schools and colleges?

33. Where do Gifted and talented co-ordinators feature?

### **Impact of Graduate Officer activity**

34. Please describe how the priority and non-priority groups have benefited from the support of the Graduate Officers?

What is your evidence for this?

How do you monitor progress?

35. How does the graduate officer programme add value to the existing IAG provision?

What is your evidence for this?

How do you monitor progress?

36. Overall, how would you rate the effectiveness of the Graduate Officer programme?

37. Please provide specific examples of an activities which you feel had a particularly good impact and why?

38. Currently and in the future schools are required by law to provide impartial IAG. How are graduate officers required to work within this requirement?

39. What are the tensions with regard to impartiality versus targeted approaches?

### **Future developments /enhancing the service**

40. Does the need for Graduate Officers still exist?

For which groups?

In what areas?

What is the evidence?

41. What would be the consequence when the Graduate Officer programme goes?
42. Given that the funding for IAG is changing and responsibility will now fall to schools, how might this affect the Graduate officer programme?
43. What will your own role be in the future with regard to the graduate officer programme.
44. Do you know of any plans to continue the activities? What are these?
45. Are there any lessons to be learned which could influence future programmes?

**And finally**

46. Do you have information on the projected number of young people who may wish to access HE in general?
47. What information exists to describe the progression pathways for young people in the Greater Manchester area, particularly with regard to progression to the Greater Manchester Universities?

## Researching the Aimhigher Greater Manchester Graduate Officer Programme



### Stakeholder questionnaire

#### Informed consent

Go through the informed consent process. Where this is a face to face interview ensure that the participant has read through the informed consent letter, providing support where necessary) and then ask the participant to sign the slip.

Where this is a telephone interview, read out the informed consent document, ask that the participant has understood and then ask them if they agree to continue. Record this on the electronic form.

#### Information about the participant

Please give your name, and the name of your organisation

Please describe your organisation and its role in supporting young people.

What is your role within the organisation?

How have you been involved with the Graduate Officer programme?

#### Participants understanding of Aimhigher

1. What are your local priorities for Aimhigher?
2. How would you describe the Aimhigher target groups?
3. What do you think the main support needs are for this group in terms of aspiration and progression to higher education?

#### Graduate Officer activity

4. How well do you think the Graduate Officers have been in engaging with the target groups?
5. What have been the barriers and enablers to engagement by the GOs?
6. What activities have they been involved in for example what have they delivered, or supported?
7. Which of these activities have been the most successful and why?
8. Which of these activities have been least successful and why?

9. To what extent have the Graduate Officers engaged with non-priority groups?

10. To what extent have Graduate Officers been effective in making referrals to other IAG specialists?

### **Impact of Graduate Officer activity**

11. Please describe how the priority and non-priority groups have benefited from the support of the Graduate Officers?

12. Give an example with particularly good benefits and why?

13. Overall are the activities meeting the needs of the participants? How do you judge this to be the case?

14. Do beneficiaries have other needs for HE-related support which aren't being met? (eg. other information/types of support)

15. How does the Graduate Officer programme enhance the existing IAG provision (including external and internal provision)? Please give examples?

16. Has the graduate Officer Programme helped you to achieve any of your/ your organisations strategic objectives?

What are these?

17. Overall, how would you rate the effectiveness of the Graduate Officer programme?

### **Future developments /enhancing the service**

18. Does the need for Graduate Officers still exist?

- What is the evidence?

19. How does the Graduate Officer programme fit into local policy objectives?

20. How does the Graduate Officer programme fit into national policy objectives?

21. What would be the consequence when the Graduate Officer programme goes?

22. Will any of the activities continue/how?

23. Are there any lessons to be learned which could influence future programmes?

## Researching the Aimhigher Greater Manchester Graduate Officer Programme



### Learner focus group discussion guide

#### Informed consent

Go through the informed consent process. Where this is a face to face interview ensure that the participant has read through the informed consent letter, providing support where necessary) and then ask the participant to sign the slip.

Read out the consent letter with learners and ask them to complete their details

#### Ice breaker

1. Tell me about your learning provider. What are the best bits about learning here?
2. When you started secondary school what did you want to be?
3. How has this changed?
4. How have you been involved with the Aimhigher Graduate Officers (Use GO Name)?

#### Participants understanding of Aimhigher

5. What types of activities do the Graduate Officers offer (in school/ college or other activities that you are aware of)?
6. Are you part of the general Aimhigher group?
7. How were you recruited to the Graduate Officer project?
8. Why were you chosen?
9. How do you feel about this?

#### Graduate Officer activity

10. Are you happy with the information that you were given about the activities you have been involved in?
11. How well was the event/ activity organised?
12. What was the best thing about the activity?

13. Were there any aspects that you didn't like?

14. Were you asked to give feedback?

### **Impact of Graduate Officer activity**

15. Where do most young people in this area go to for help with decisions about going to university?

16. What general help have you had in school/ college about thinking about university?

17. How have the Graduate Officers enhanced this support?

18. How have the Graduate Officers worked with you?

- Taken you on visits?
- Introduced you to anyone?
- Done activities with you?
- Been there at parents evenings and other careers events
- Anything else?

19. If you have had questions about career related issues have the Graduate Officers been able to answer your questions?

20. If they couldn't answer your questions, what action did they take?

21. What would you miss if the Graduate Officers stopped working in this area?

22. How would you grade the contribution of your **parents/ carers** in helping you think about the future?

1 is not at all helpful. 5 is really helpful?

Explain why you have come to this decision?

23. How would you grade the contribution of the **school / college** in helping you think about the future?

1 is not at all helpful. 5 is really helpful?

Explain why you have come to this decision?

24. How would you grade the contribution of the **Graduate Officers** in helping you think about the future?

1 is not at all helpful. 5 is really helpful?

Explain why you have come to this decision?

### **Future developments /enhancing the service**

25. How might we improve the Graduate Officer Programme for the future?

## 9 Appendix 2: Graduate officer job description



### **AIMHIGHER GREATER MANCHESTER**

### **Aimhigher Graduate Officers (IAG) Fixed**

**Term Contract until 30 June 2011**

**Salary: £16k – £18K per annum plus 10% pension**

### **FURTHER PARTICULARS**

#### **CONTENTS CHECKLIST**

You should find enclosed the following:

- Information about Aimhigher
- Information about the Graduate Officer Posts
- Duties
- Person Specification
- How to Apply

## ***Aimhigher***

Aimhigher is the national widening participation initiative to encourage more people to enter higher education from underrepresented groups in order to narrow the gap in higher education between the social classes. The Aimhigher programme is jointly funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS). For information about the Aimhigher national programme, please look at the Aimhigher national website: [www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner](http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner) or go to [www.actiononaccess.org](http://www.actiononaccess.org). For information about widening participation in higher education, go to the HEFCE website at [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk)

Aimhigher activities aim to increase awareness of higher education and raise aspirations to progress to higher education in young people who may otherwise not consider higher education as an option for them. The key target groups for Aimhigher are young people from lower socio-economic groups, those taking vocational qualifications who may not consider higher education, and those in particular social or subject groups whose progression rates are low.

Across England, Aimhigher is organised through 45 area partnerships, of which Greater Manchester is the largest both in terms of the number of partners and in terms of the level of resource. There are ten local authorities in Greater Manchester with a borough co-ordinator in each reporting to the Aimhigher Area Partnership Committee (APC). There are also seven higher education institutions (HEIs) in Greater Manchester, within each of which are staff with responsibility for Aimhigher outreach projects. In addition, Aimhigher works closely with other organisations including work based learning providers, Connexions, LSC and the Greater Manchester Lifelong Learning Network. For more detailed information about the work of Aimhigher in Greater Manchester, its structures and priorities, please visit the Aimhigher Greater Manchester website on [www.aimhighergreatermanchester.com](http://www.aimhighergreatermanchester.com).

Aimhigher Greater Manchester is led by an Area Partnership Committee (APC) consisting of senior representatives of all partners in the area. Reporting to the APC are ten borough partnership groups, a Finance and a Monitoring subgroup, and four operational groups which plan and oversee activities.

The Open University in the North West is the lead institution for the Greater Manchester Aimhigher partnership. A team of eleven staff are based in the Open University's regional centre in Sharston in South Manchester. This team includes the Aimhigher Director, Assistant Director, Project Managers and two support staff. This central team works with Aimhigher partners to define the strategic objectives, administer and monitor the programme and support all aspects of programme delivery. They report to HEFCE, organise partnership meetings and area-wide events and take leading roles in specialist areas including Information,

Advice and Guidance, Work- based learning and Communications.

***Aimhigher - Information, Advice and Guidance***

The Aimhigher Greater Manchester IAG Strategy group, in conjunction with the IAG project manager, are responsible for devising an IAG strategy which sets out priorities for the allocation of resources and funding. The vision for IAG within Aimhigher Greater Manchester is set out below alongside priority learning outcomes for our key target groups.

*Vision & Purpose of Aimhigher IAG activities*

To ensure that Aimhigher target groups have the skills, knowledge and information to make informed & realistic choices about progression to HE and to enable them to act upon the decisions made.

To support our target group to access & benefit from other appropriate sources of IAG. To work with partners to build their capacity to deliver activities that meet the agreed Aimhigher IAG learning outcomes.

<b>Year Group</b>	<b>Priority IAG Learning Outcomes</b>
KS3	Learners can understand how their specific interests link to real HE opportunities.  Learners understand the implications of KS4 choices in relation to HE.
KS4	Learners understand how the broad HE offering fits into an overall career plan & can demonstrate some understanding of graduate destinations.  Learners have developed personal profiling skills & can write a personal statement for use as part of an application process.
Post 16 Level 2 Learners	Learners understand how their vocational programme provides a pathway to HE.
Level 3 Year 1 (Year 12)	Learners can compare and contrast a range of institutions/courses in relation to their individual ambitions and circumstances.  Learners can describe the main components of the student finance package.
Level 3 Year 2 (Year 13)	Unsuccessful applicants can review their situation and put alternative plans into action.

The IAG strategy group have allocation the central IAG budget to the development of a team of Aimhigher Graduate Officers responsible for delivering activities to meet these priority learning outcomes. Aimhigher Greater Manchester are supported by Manchester Solutions to recruit and manage the Graduate Officer team.

## **Aimhigher Graduate Officers**

### **Overall purpose of job**

The post holder will be responsible for supporting the Aimhigher Borough Partnership to deliver information and advice activities as part of the Aimhigher progression framework. They will seek to act as a role model for students in the Aimhigher cohort and ensure learners access formal sources of IAG as required. They will also act as part of a team of Aimhigher Graduate Officer supporting activities across the Greater Manchester area.

### **Reporting**

The post holder will report on a day to day basis to the relevant Aimhigher Borough Co-ordinator but will be formally managed by the Aimhigher Greater Manchester IAG Project Manager.

### **Location**

Post holders will be based at a location agreed with the relevant Aimhigher Borough Co-ordinator, and in the first instance this will be at Salford City College. The nature of the post is that much of the post holders time will be spent delivering activities at schools, colleges and Higher Education Institutions. Attendance at Manchester Solutions city centre offices and at The Open University in Sharston will be required on an ad hoc basis for induction, staff development and probationary review meetings.

### **Posts Available**

A full time post is available located for at least 2-3 days a week in the borough of Salford, however contribution to activities being delivered across the other boroughs of Greater Manchester will be required.

### **Duration of post**

These posts are funded for a fixed term until May 31<sup>st</sup> 2011 in the first instance.

## **Main Duties**

- To work in a group of schools and FE institutions to organise, develop and deliver a series of activities which deliver the priority IAG learning outcomes.
- To work with existing sources of IAG within schools and /or colleges to ensure services provided meet the needs of the Aimhigher cohort.
- To provide informal support to Aimhigher Associates based within their link schools and/or FE institutions.
- To recognize the limits of their own knowledge and refer Aimhigher cohort to existing sources of IAG.
- To promote local, regional and national sources of information about HE and provide feedback to Aimhigher Greater Manchester about additional resources needed by the cohort.
- To motivate students to participate in Aimhigher activities and act as a role model.
- To maintain records of activities delivered and evaluate activities as agreed with Aimhigher Borough Co-ordinator.
- To take part in the activity programmes at school / FE, borough and partnership levels.
- To work to increase the knowledge and understanding of parents as directed by the Aimhigher Borough Co-ordinator.
- To develop and sustain effective working relationships with IAG providers, Aimhigher School and College Co-ordinators, members of the Aimhigher Borough Partnership and the Aimhigher Greater Manchester co-ordination unit.
- To work as part of a team of Aimhigher Graduate Officers to develop innovative ways of delivering the priority IAG learning outcomes and to develop coherence in IAG activities across GM.
- To use all learning opportunities to develop the knowledge and the personal skills necessary to effectively carry out the role.
- Keep abreast of changes in relevant national and regional policy developments, changes to pre-entry qualifications and admissions developments.
- To work in a way that demonstrates commitment to equal opportunities and to promote non discriminatory practices in all aspects of the work.
- To ensure that all work functions are undertaken in accordance with relevant policies and procedures, including Child Protection and Health and Safety.

## **Person specification**

### **Essential Knowledge, Skills and Experience**

- A basic understanding of the information and advice learners need to successfully progress to HE, for example

HE student finance Vocational pathways into HE Support for disabled

learners

Support services for looked after children and care leavers

Local IAG provision

Useful website and resources

- A familiarity with learning provision offered at schools, colleges and universities across Greater Manchester
- Excellent oral and written communication skills
- Good presentation skills
- Excellent IT skills including use of Email, Internet, Word and PowerPoint
- Ability to relate to and work with learners in a range of settings
- Excellent organisational skills
- Enthusiasm for learning and for the value of HE
- Ability to work as part of a team but be able to self motivate
- A proactive approach to work and willingness to work on own initiative

### **Desirable Knowledge, Skills and Experience**

- Some experience of planning and delivering information or advice activities to young people.
- Involvement in Aimhigher or Widening Participation activities prior to or during your HE course, for example as an Ambassador, Associate, Mentor or similar role.

The post holder will be required to undertake a Criminal Records Bureau check.

Whilst this post will generally be for office hours, it is expected that potholders will be willing to work flexible hours from time to time in order to play an active role in events and activities which take place in the evenings or at weekends.

## International Centre for Guidance Studies

iCeGS is an independent, apolitical, not-for-profit Centre which aims to provide creative solutions to issues that are current for practitioners, policy makers and researchers in the areas of career learning and guidance that intersect with lifelong learning, skills development, social inclusion and workforce development.

### **iCeGS is committed to**

- Professionalisation of the careers advice workforce
- High quality careers learning for all young people
- Support for adults that transforms lives through careers advice.

All activities undertaken by iCeGS and its associates will reflect these commitments