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A Merry Christmas, Happy Winter Solstice, Joyful Yuletide, and etc., from FACE! The 2011 FACE calendars have arrived. Members will be sent their calendar next week with a seasonal letter from the Chair. If, for any reason, you are a member and don't receive a calendar, please request a calendar direct from Jackie at J.Leach@uel.ac.uk.

FACE Chair comments on the end of Aimhigher in THE

Low blow ignores evidence

9th December 2010. Article in Times Higher Education

David Willetts has announced that Aimhigher is to be abolished ("Black spots loom as Aimhigher shuts", 2nd December). It isn't clear why this decision has been made, as the minister said he recognises how much there is to learn from Aimhigher and how important it is to build on its achievements.

He then revealed that £150 million would be spent on a new National Scholarship Programme. As this will cost twice the current budget of Aimhigher, the decision to end funding for the programme, it would seem, cannot be explained as part of the coalition government's ongoing austerity measures. Indeed, according to all independent evaluations, Aimhigher represents excellent value for money.

Year on year, evidence for the beneficial impact of the Aimhigher programme, in particular its effects on the life chances of thousands of young learners, has grown incrementally.

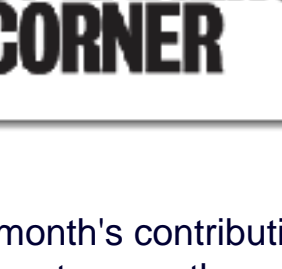
The work being undertaken so effectively by the Aimhigher partnerships, which ensures that young people from low-income families can benefit from and succeed in higher education, needs to be viewed without prejudice.

It should be understood not in the context of an ideological divide between this government and the previous one, but as part of the political consensus that the opportunity to access and participate in higher education should be distributed equitably, regardless of socio-economic status.

John Storan

FACE Chair

Speakers' Corner



SPEAKERS' CORNER

As a member-oriented organisation FACE would like to invite individual colleagues to have their say on any issue of concern in education policy and practice. Speakers Corner is a purely personal point of view and should not be thought to represent any institution, organisation, or official body. To contribute an article to speakers corner, email James.Tate@uwe.ac.uk



This month's contribution is from Tony Acland, Director of Aimhigher Hampshire and Isle of Wight, who comments upon the end of Aimhigher and the promotion of social mobility.

The Death of Social Mobility – or an exciting new approach?

Like many throughout England, I have spent some time campaigning for the continuation of Aimhigher or, at the very least, sustaining the key mission of raising aspirations, attainment and promoting progression to higher level study for disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.

This campaign has been wide-ranging, but it has been particularly interesting to engage in discussion with MPs from different political persuasions. This has proved quite an eye opener and has provided new insights into the opinions and priorities of politicians across the political divide. To my surprise, Conservatives, whether from the political centre or the right wing, seem to share with both Liberal Democrats and Labour a strong belief in the importance of promoting social mobility. In the words of one new Conservative MP, "it is not possible to be an MP without wishing to promote social mobility".

But what does social mobility mean for Conservative MPs and, indeed, their Liberal Democrat colleagues? Is this a genuine self-belief in social mobility or self-delusion? Does social mobility mean the same as it has been understood from the previous Labour government, with shared definitions and agreement on appropriate goals and the means to obtain social mobility?

In order to begin to answer these questions, it is useful to consider what promoting social mobility does not mean to the new Coalition government. The Conservative-Liberal Democratic Alliance has rejected the view that there should be a 50% participation target and they also reject the view that there should be a drive to promote progression to the higher education sector in general. In contrast, the Coalition's view seems to be that social mobility goals should focus on promoting higher participation rates of people from 'poor' backgrounds in Oxford and Cambridge and, perhaps, some of the higher status Russell Group universities. Participation rates for other HE institutions do not seem to be on their priority list as vehicles for social mobility. Indeed, even keeping some of the newer universities financially solvent is not seen as a priority at all, with their acceptance of the freedom of the market argument. It seems clear that David Cameron was not referring to the university sector as a whole when, in his first foreign policy keynote speech (Mansion House, London, 15th November 2010), he listed 'universities' alongside the BBC and 'our tolerant society' as Britain's three major assets.

In this changed policy context, the current government is dismantling a tried and tested successful way of promoting social mobility through higher education. In particular, the abolition of Aimhigher is seen by many as a major blow to the access movement, as Aimhigher has been a highly successful flagship programme where universities, colleges, schools, Local Authorities, 14-19 Consortia, Education Business Partnerships and others have collaborated so effectively to raise aspirations, attainment and support progression to further and higher education. In addition, the recent cancellation of the highly regarded EMA provision is potentially devastating for young people from poor urban and rural areas planning to study at college before progressing to higher education.

One lesson the Coalition seems to have learnt is that influencing attitudes at a young age is crucial to promote upward social mobility, particularly encouraging higher level achievement in schools and high aspirations. The government's plan is to introduce a pupil premium for schools with high percentages of pupils from poor backgrounds, as well as introducing a national scholarship scheme to encourage and support access to universities. The details are unclear at the moment, but initial concerns of critics focuses on the apparent low resource planned for these new measures and the government's concept of 'poor' would focus on a very small number of lower income groups. For example, a one parent family with two youngsters and a wage of £9,500 plus income credits does not currently qualify for Free School Meals and therefore would be denied the above benefits. If these proposals go through, it will not just be the middle income groups which are squeezed out of fee support, but large sections of the low income.

For Aimhigher practitioners it has been particularly galling to hear Coalition government ministers bitterly complaining that 'poor' groups simply do not understand that there is generous provision to support their progression to successful higher level study. They complain that appropriate IAG is not in place and there is no-one explaining the support available to these 'poor' families. As many outside the government understand, Aimhigher has been a major 'institutional neutral' vehicle for providing just the kind of independent information and guidance for which the government pines. The moral seems to be "never let rational judgement cloud your ideological position on the previous government's successes".

Of course, education is not seen as the only, or even the most important, vehicle for social mobility. To the astonishment of many, moving those above a certain income threshold out of council houses is seen as an important social mobility measure. Presumably, restrictions to those qualifying for disability allowances should be seen as another useful driver to encourage work and social mobility.

We are still in the early days of this new government and it will be interesting to observe further changes in the Coalition government's approach to social mobility and, in particular, what role governments will expect from universities, local authorities, schools and colleges to assist them in their access ambitions. At this important time, it is vital that access practitioners do not adopt a passive observer role as government measures are developed. Indeed, FACE has a crucial government lobbying and practitioner guidance role to ensure that the experience and enthusiasm of FACE members is heard.

Tony Acland

Director of Aimhigher Hampshire and Isle of Wight

Online News - The Uproar over Tuition Fees

- Save Aimhigher Online Petition - [Sign the Petition](#)
- BBC - [Q & A on University funding](#)
- Dept for BIS - [New rules for high charging universities](#)
- UCU - [One in three universities at risk of serious impact](#)
- Peter Lampl (Stton Trust) - [Tuition fees up, social mobility down](#)
- Guardian - [Tuition fees: university vice-chancellors welcome MPs' vote](#)
- BBC - [Protests due over education maintenance allowances](#)
- BBC - [Student protesters: 'We will continue to fight' \(Student Comments\)](#)

Report on the Botswana Conference

Co-sponsored by FACE, the 9th PASCAL International Observatory conference was held in Gaborone, Botswana from 1st to 3rd December 2010 with some 100 delegates from many countries in Africa, Europe, North America and Australia. Several FACE members were present as delegates.

The event was opened with addresses from Councillor Veronica Lesole, Mayor of the city of Gaborone, Professor Bojosi Othogile, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Botswana and Professor Jarl Bengtsson, Chair of the Pascal Advisory Board. There followed three days of keynotes, parallel paper sessions and symposia. Keynote speakers were Professor Olusola Oyewole from the African Union in Addis Ababa, Professor Steve Garlick, University of Newcastle, NSW, Professor Opha Pauline Dube, University of Botswana and Dr Paul Crawford, Northern Illinois University. An interactive meta-planning roundtable was facilitated by Dr Bob Gleeson, Northern Illinois University on the topic of Regional Prosperity (details of the PASCAL Regional Prosperity Project can be found on the [PASCAL website](#)).

On day 3 of the conference the focus was the work of Pascal's PURE project, which presented its interim final report to the conference. This session was introduced by Professor Chris Duke, PURE Academic Director with presentations by Professor Michael Osborne, University of Glasgow who gave an overview of the project's progress and Professor Bruce Wilson who discussed issues pertaining to the benchmarking of university engagement. A particular African perspective to engagement was then presented by the two PURE projects in Gaborone City and in Lesotho, and by members of the ITMUA team (Implementing the Third Mission of Universities in Africa). ITMUA is co-ordinated by Professor Julia Preece at the National University of Lesotho and involves joint work with projects in Lesotho, Botswana, Nigeria and Malawi.

The conference concluded with a session chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Botswana, Professor Frank Youngman, and final presentations by Professor Jarl Bengtsson and the Gaborone City Clerk, Mr. Thato Raphaka.

The conference proceedings will be available early in the New Year, both through the PASCAL website and on CD.

Mike Osborne,
University of Glasgow

Call For Papers

Call for submissions for the journal Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning.

Issue: Funding, Fees, and the Future of widening participation and lifelong learning.

In England, acquiescence to the argument that university represents a private good accruing to the individual have supported the current position of a politically agreed tripling of university tuition fees, compounding the effect of severe cuts to universities' teaching grants. The UK coalition government has approved in principle sharp rises in tuition fees, and in response current and future students and lecturers have protested widely, illustrating the emphatic emotional response to such a decision. This journal however seeks sober and balanced evidence and scholarly argument, on the possible effects of these changes, and similar changes to higher education across the globe. International papers are invited from policy makers, researchers, academics and practitioners that address the themes that will be explored in a special issue of Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning to be published in Spring 2011 to coincide with the release of the United Kingdom Higher Education White Paper.

The deadline for submissions is 21st January 2011. Submissions should be sent by email to wpll-journal@open.ac.uk More information at www.open.ac.uk/wpll-journal.

What else is in the News?

For the latest UK Education headlines and stories go to the [FACE News Feeds](#) page where you'll find the online news feeds of several of the sources listed below gathered together on one page for easy access.

The Department of Education news page <http://www.education.gov.uk/news>

The Guardian <http://education.guardian.co.uk>

The Independent <http://news.independent.co.uk/education>

The BBC http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/default.stm

The Times Higher Education <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk>

This is the December 2010 eBulletin from FACE (the Forum for Access and Continuing Education), offered to practitioners, policy-makers, researchers and others with an interest in access, widening participation and lifelong learning. The eBulletin is sent to colleagues in the sector, members and non-members alike. If you would prefer not to receive it, please contact James.Tate@uwe.ac.uk and your details will be removed from the circulation list.

If you wish to respond to anything in this eBulletin or contribute to the January 2011 issue, please email Jim at James.Tate@uwe.ac.uk