

A Short Guide to...

Higher Education  
in the  
North West

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**Working together for business  
and the community**



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# The Role of Higher Education

Higher education (HE) has 3 broad functions:

- Learning and Teaching
- Research
- Knowledge Transfer

Higher education institutions (HEIs) will vary in how much emphasis they place upon each. Some concentrate on the learning and teaching element and, amongst this group, many prioritise widening participation for those who have not traditionally engaged in higher education. Others focus primarily on the research agenda, not least because they receive considerable income from this source. Knowledge transfer covers those activities falling outside the traditional areas of teaching and research. It generally involves working in partnership with businesses and other outside agencies. HEIs have become much more outwardly facing in recent years and knowledge transfer activities have increased significantly. Most institutions now have dedicated knowledge transfer offices to oversee this function.

## Learning and Teaching

The activity most people associate with HE is learning and teaching. The traditional HE learner is a school leaver with 'A' Levels but many students are mature entrants, those with more vocational Level 3 qualifications or those already in work and looking to update or enhance their skills. 30% of students enrolled in the North West are mature students<sup>(1)</sup>.

Study in higher education is undertaken in order to gain a higher level qualification at Level 4 or above. The most common is a Bachelors or first degree and this generally takes 3 or 4 years of full time study to complete, longer if part time. First degrees are available in a huge variety of subjects including combined honours degrees when more than one subject is studied. First degrees provide a detailed understanding of the subject being studied. Once a first degree has been completed,

students can opt for further study to undertake a Masters qualification at Level 5. Masters courses are more intensive and usually involve undertaking some element of original research. Beyond Masters level, Doctorates involve extremely high level learning and are mainly undertaken by those seeking a career in academia although some HEIs are now undertaking more work based PhDs involving applied research.

A relatively recent development is the Foundation Degree. Foundation degrees are qualifications designed in partnership with employers to meet their specific needs. They combine academic study, which can be undertaken flexibly, with work based learning and take 2 years to complete on a full time basis, longer if part time. After completion of a foundation degree, a further year of study will gain an honours degree, although Foundation degrees are recognised stand alone qualifications.

Other higher level qualifications include Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) which are usually delivered by Further Education (FE) colleges and are generally vocational courses. It is also possible to study individual units or modules and gain credits towards an HE qualification. This could assist in meeting employer requirements where a specific training need has been identified and the delivery of a particular course module will meet that need. Assessment methods for qualifications vary and could include written tests and exercises but also assignments and activities linked to the workplace.

The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Certificate	<b>C level</b>	Certificates of Higher Education
Intermediate	<b>I level</b>	Foundation degrees, ordinary (Bachelors) degrees, Diplomas of Higher Education and other higher diplomas
Honours	<b>H level</b>	Bachelors degrees with Honours, Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas
Masters	<b>M level</b>	Masters degrees, Postgraduate Certificates and Postgraduate Diplomas
Doctoral	<b>D level</b>	Doctorates

(Source: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education)

HE qualifications are normally based on a credit system. A first degree consists of 120 credits at each of 3 levels, a Foundation degree is 240 credits and individual modules will all have a credit value. It is envisaged that HEIs will become more flexible in future in allowing credits gained by an individual at different times and at different institutions to be linked in order to gain a qualification should they so wish.

HEIs continually seek to ensure that their provision is relevant and meeting the needs of students and employers. When new courses are developed, they need to be accredited to ensure they meet certain quality standards in terms of the level, curriculum content and assessment. The HEI has internal procedures to do this and is supported externally by the Quality Assurance Agency – [www.qaa.org.uk](http://www.qaa.org.uk).

Entry requirements vary widely between institutions and courses but broadly HE can be accessed via traditional (A-levels) or vocational (NVQs/BTECs) routes. However, as many HE entrants now come via non traditional routes such as those who are returning to study or undertaking study linked to their employment, HEIs are seeking to cater for this market by ensuring that entry routes are sufficiently flexible. One example of this is in recognising learning which has previously been undertaken via accreditation of prior learning (APL). This learning can be academic or vocational and can allow, for example, a student to join the course at a later stage or complete a qualification in a shorter time than the standard.

HEIs are also amending the mode of delivery of courses. Traditional HE courses last for 3 years of full time study, largely undertaken in lecture theatres and seminar rooms. It is now much more common for institutions to deliver courses on a part time or flexible basis and incorporate elements such as distance or e-learning and even delivery on site at an employers premises. There is also interesting work being undertaken to shorten the time for part time qualifications such as achieving an Honours degree in 2 years.

## Research

The second key mission of HEIs is research. Universities and associated research institutes are a prime source of research in the UK and responsible for numerous breakthroughs in knowledge and understanding in many different fields. Many HEIs regard themselves as primarily research institutions and have a global profile for this aspect of their mission.

Research functions in HEIs usually have well established links with relevant sectors of industry and institutions work collaboratively with their industrial partners. The North West Universities Association (NWUA) – [www.nwua.ac.uk](http://www.nwua.ac.uk) – has produced ‘capability matrices’ for a number of sectors to assist businesses who are seeking particular specialists or competencies.

### Knowledge Transfer

In recent years HEIs have extended their remit beyond teaching and research into what is commonly termed knowledge transfer or ‘third stream’ activity. The nature of this activity is varied but includes aspects such as:

- working with businesses of all sizes, from SMEs to multinationals, on a range of activities such as business support and consultancy
- formulation of ‘spin off’ enterprises and companies
- working with employers in addressing higher level skills needs. HEIs have traditionally had longstanding links with public sector employers, particularly in the health and social care sector, but these are now extending more widely, involving employers in the design and delivery of courses
- community activity, often linking to regeneration projects operating in the local area
- placement activity where students and graduates undertake work placements in companies

Examples of placement schemes include:

Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) – [www.ktponline.org.uk](http://www.ktponline.org.uk) – a national scheme which enables a company to access the resources and expertise of a HEI to address an internal business development issue or improvement project

Year in Industry – [www.yini.org.uk/companies.php](http://www.yini.org.uk/companies.php) – a not-for-profit organisation which provides companies with access to talented potential graduate recruits

Shell Step Scheme – [www.shellstep.org.uk](http://www.shellstep.org.uk) – a scheme which provides students with access to summer placement opportunities whilst undertaking undergraduate study

Business Bridge – [www.business-bridge.org.uk](http://www.business-bridge.org.uk) – a brokerage service which provides businesses with skilled staff and students with relevant work experience before they graduate. Operates in the North West

# The Structure of UK Higher Education

There are 132 Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded HEIs in England including 88 universities and 44 higher education institutions. HEFCE also directly funds 143 further education colleges providing HE courses and many other further education colleges receive funding indirectly from HEFCE via 'franchising' agreements with universities. HEIs vary widely and are sometimes grouped under the following broad headings:

- 'old' or 'redbrick' universities established in the 19th and 20th centuries
- 'new' universities – the former polytechnics given university status in 1992
- the ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge
- specialist institutions with provision in a particular area such as art or music
- former colleges of education which have only very recently become universities

Universities are autonomous institutions with their own charter and have degree awarding powers conferred by statute. The Vice Chancellor (VC) of a HEI is the equivalent of a company Chief Executive. The VC oversees the strategic leadership and management functions of the institution with the support of the Council or Board of Governors. Staff in HEIs are generally designated as either academic, administrative or support staff.

## Policy

Prior to July 2007, central government responsibility for higher education lay with the Department for Education and Science (DfES). Since July 2007, higher education issues are overseen by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) – [www.dius.gov.uk](http://www.dius.gov.uk). The portfolio of DIUS includes higher and further education, skills and science and innovation. The remaining elements of the work of the former DfES are undertaken by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).



## Funding

HEIs are funded from a variety of sources. The major sources of funding are:

- Higher Education Funding Councils (in England, this is HEFCE)
- Research Council Grants
- Tuition fees for teaching costs paid by students or Local Education Authorities
- Income from external sources such as business, linked to research or knowledge transfer activity
- European funds

The **Higher Education Funding Council for England** (HEFCE) is a non-departmental public body free from direct political control but working to a broad remit set out annually in their grant letter from DIUS. HEFCE provides an annual block grant to each funded institution based on the number and type of students, subjects taught and amount of research undertaken. HEFCE also funds HE provision in FE colleges on the same principles. Some FE colleges also receive HEFCE funding indirectly through an HEI, known as 'franchising'. Further education colleges with non HEFCE funded HE provision are funded by the Learning and Skills Council which covers provision such as NVQs at Levels 4 and 5. HEFCE also earmarks funding for widening participation and knowledge transfer activity.

HEFCE funding for **research** is allocated according to the quality of research in institutions, judged against national and international levels of excellence. This is assessed in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) undertaken by HEFCE and the other funding councils. The Exercise examines publications and other outputs from research activities and data on staff, students and income. It then grades institutions accordingly. The last RAE took place in 2001 and resulted in the distribution of over £5BN. The next RAE will occur in 2008 and will determine funding until 2014. The RAE is thus taken extremely seriously by the more research intensive institutions as it determines what research funding they will receive in subsequent years and ensures that their research activity is protected and developed. Research Councils such as the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Medical Research Council (MRC) and Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) provide significant funding for research activities.

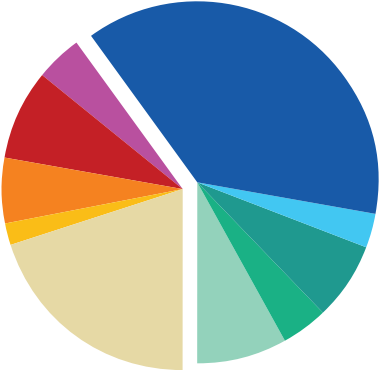
From September 2006, HEIs were given the opportunity to raise further revenue by charging variable tuition fees for full time undergraduate courses. In 2007/2008 the maximum tuition for a full time course is £3,070 a year, rising to £3,140 in 2008/09. **Tuition fees** for part-time study vary considerably depending on the course. Although HEIs receive this funding 'up front', students do not have to pay the fees back until after they graduate.

HEIs receive other income from sources such as government departments, European Union funding, professional societies, charities and from their commercial activities.

The chart below shows the split of funding for HEIs and colleges in 2005/06.

**Private finance**

- UK charities **£610M (4%)**
- Overseas student fees **£1,293M (8%)**
- Residences and catering **£972M (6%)**
- Other research income **£422M (2%)**
- Other income (fees, services, endowments, etc) **£3,182M (20%)**



**Public finance**

- HEFCE, Training and Development Agency, and Learning and Skills Council grants **£6,121M (38%)**
- Student Loans Company and local education authority fees **£446M (3%)**
- OSI/Research Council grants and postgraduate fees **£1,202M (7%)**
- Other government grants: research **£614M (4%)**
- Other government grants: non-research **£1,233M (8%)**

## Applications

Applications from school leavers to HEIs are handled centrally by the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) – [www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk). HEIs subscribe to UCAS which acts as a clearing house for applications. Most UCAS recruitment activity is now carried out online.

However, groups such as mature students and employees are more likely to apply directly to institutions which meet their needs in terms of course content and proximity to work/home. Each HEI has its own admissions function either centrally or within the recruiting department.

## Quality Assurance

HEIs are required to ensure that their provision remains of a sufficiently high quality. They have their own internal quality assurance procedures and these are reinforced externally by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) – [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk) – which periodically audits and reviews institutions.

Although there is no official ranking of HEIs, institutions, students and others involved in higher education frequently refer to league tables produced by the Times Good University Guide – [www.timesonline.co.uk](http://www.timesonline.co.uk) and the Education Guardian – [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk). These combine different sources of data and provide rankings of institutions and subjects.

# Student Funding and Finance

The system for funding the tuition and living costs of individual students has changed substantially in recent years and is complex. It is very much dependent upon:

- the individual circumstances of the student
- the course being undertaken and institution of study
- whether study is full or part time

Generally, for full time students, funding for the payment of tuition fees and living costs is via student loans. These are granted at a preferential rate of interest and do not have to be repaid until after graduation once an individual is earning over a set amount, currently £15,000. Some students may be eligible for a maintenance grant of up to £2,835 but, again, this depends upon individual circumstances such as household income, having dependent children or a disability.

To supplement loans, many institutions provide bursaries which are sometimes means tested. The amount of the bursary and eligibility criteria will vary between institutions. There may also be other sources of financial assistance from institutions such as the Access to Learning Fund.

For part time students, fee and course grants are available depending on household income and how much study is involved. Neither HEFCE or the LSC fund the living costs of individual students. Postgraduates are unlikely to be eligible for funding for fees and living costs and would need to look for support from the institution, their employer or apply for a Career Development Loan.

In general terms, there is little or no public subsidy (such as Train to Gain) available for higher level learning, other than the amount paid by HEFCE directly to institutions for each student. The Government considers that individuals and employers should cover the costs as the returns they receive are substantial. Increasingly, employers will be expected to contribute to the costs of their employees learning, in return for a role in designing the curriculum.

Useful guidelines on funding for full and part time students can be found at [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) under Education and Learning.

# Higher Education Institutions in the North West

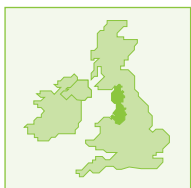
The North West has a significant HE presence across the entire region, with a total of 14 HEIs. The Open University (OU) is also represented here as it is in all UK regions. The OU provides distance learning courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. The most recent institutions in the North West to become HEIs are the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA) and the University of Cumbria, formed in August 2007 from the merger of St Martin's College and Cumbria Institute of the Arts.

This critical mass of HE attracts young people into the North West, many of whom remain after graduation as highly skilled employees contributing to the economy. But it also gives the region a world class resource for employers who can access knowledge and expertise to develop and grow their business. One example of this is in the provision of training and development for employees with higher level skills needs. North West HEIs are significant contributors to the regional economy. The most recent figures indicate that in 2005/06, North West HEI income included:

- £40,937,000 from the provision of CPD courses
- £43,691,000 funding for regeneration activity
- £9,057,000 from the sale of intellectual property<sup>(2)</sup>

<sup>(2)</sup> Source: HEFCE

The North West HEIs are listed below:



Additionally there are a large number of FE institutions which have some HE provision, both directly funded by and 'franchised' from a partner HEI. A list of these can be found at [www.hero.ac.uk](http://www.hero.ac.uk).

1. **The University of Cumbria**  
Fusehill Street, Carlisle  
CA1 2HH  
T: 01228 616234  
[www.cumbria.ac.uk](http://www.cumbria.ac.uk)
2. **The Westlakes Research Institute**  
Westlakes Science and  
Technology Park, Moor Row,  
Cumbria CA24 3JY  
T: 01946 514000  
[www.westlakes.org](http://www.westlakes.org)
3. **The University of Cumbria**  
Newton Rigg, Penrith, Cumbria  
CA11 0AH  
T: 01768 893400  
[www.cumbria.ac.uk](http://www.cumbria.ac.uk)
4. **The University of Cumbria**  
Rydal Road, Ambleside  
LA22 9BB  
T: 015394 30300  
[www.cumbria.ac.uk](http://www.cumbria.ac.uk)
5. **The University of Cumbria**  
Bowerham Road, Lancaster  
LA1 3JD  
T: 01524 384384  
[www.cumbria.ac.uk](http://www.cumbria.ac.uk)
6. **Lancaster University**  
Bailrigg, Lancaster LA1 4YW  
T: 01524 65201  
[www.lancaster.ac.uk](http://www.lancaster.ac.uk)
7. **University of Central  
Lancashire**  
Preston PR1 2HE  
T: 01772 201201  
[www.uclan.ac.uk](http://www.uclan.ac.uk)
8. **Edge Hill University**  
St Helens Road, Ormskirk,  
Lancashire L39 4QP  
T: 01695 575171  
E: [enquiries@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@edgehill.ac.uk)  
[www.edgehill.ac.uk](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk)
9. **University of Bolton**  
Deane Road, Bolton BL3 5AB  
T: 01204 900600  
[www.bolton.ac.uk](http://www.bolton.ac.uk)
10. **Royal Northern College of  
Music**  
124 Oxford Road, Manchester  
M13 9RD  
T: 0161 907 5200  
E: [info@rncm.ac.uk](mailto:info@rncm.ac.uk)  
[www.rncm.ac.uk](http://www.rncm.ac.uk)
11. **The Open University in  
the North West**  
351 Altrincham Road, Sharston  
Manchester M22 4UN  
T: 0161 998 7272  
F: 0161 945 3356  
E: [north-west@open.ac.uk](mailto:north-west@open.ac.uk)  
[www.open.ac.uk](http://www.open.ac.uk)
12. **The University of  
Manchester**  
Oxford Road, Manchester  
M13 9PL  
T: 0161 275 2000  
[www.manchester.ac.uk](http://www.manchester.ac.uk)
13. **Manchester Metropolitan  
University**  
All Saints Building, All Saints,  
Manchester M15 6BH  
T: 0161 247 2000  
F: 0161 247 6390  
E: [enquiries@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@mmu.ac.uk)  
[www.mmu.ac.uk](http://www.mmu.ac.uk)
14. **The University of Salford**  
Salford, Greater Manchester  
M5 4WT  
T: 0161 295 5000  
F: 0161 295 5999  
[www.salford.ac.uk](http://www.salford.ac.uk)
15. **Liverpool John Moores  
University**  
Rodney Street, Liverpool  
L1 5UX  
T: 0151 231 2121  
[www.livjm.ac.uk](http://www.livjm.ac.uk)
16. **The University of Liverpool**  
Liverpool L69 3BX  
T: 0151 794 2000  
[www.liverpool.ac.uk](http://www.liverpool.ac.uk)
17. **Liverpool Hope University**  
Hope Park, Liverpool  
L16 9JD  
T: 0151 291 3000  
[www.hope.ac.uk](http://www.hope.ac.uk)
18. **University of Chester**  
Parkgate Road, Chester,  
Cheshire CH1 4BJ  
T: 01244 375 444  
E: [enquiries@chester.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@chester.ac.uk)  
[www.chester.ac.uk](http://www.chester.ac.uk)
19. **University of Chester**  
Warrington Campus,  
Crab Lane, Warrington,  
Cheshire WA2 0DB  
T: 01244 375 444  
E: [enquiries@chester.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@chester.ac.uk)  
[www.chester.ac.uk](http://www.chester.ac.uk)
20. **Manchester Metropolitan  
University Cheshire**  
Crewe Green Road, Crewe,  
Cheshire CW1 5DU  
T: 0161 247 2991  
[www.cheshire.mmu.ac.uk](http://www.cheshire.mmu.ac.uk)
21. **The Liverpool Institute for  
Performing Arts (LIPA)**  
Mount Street, Liverpool  
L1 9HF  
T: 0151 330 3000  
[www.lipa.ac.uk](http://www.lipa.ac.uk)

# Higher Education Partners in the North West

## Foundation Degree Forward

Foundation Degree Forward (fdf) – [www.fdf.ac.uk](http://www.fdf.ac.uk) oversees the design, development, validation, delivery and assessment of foundation degrees. Foundation degrees are seen as a key method of ensuring effective employer engagement with HE. Employers are fully involved in the design and delivery of the qualifications which are delivered by HEIs or FE colleges validated by a HEI. Student numbers on foundation degrees have increased significantly over recent years.

## Lifelong Learning Networks

Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) – [www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/lln/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/lln/) were established by HEFCE to develop 'progression routes' for vocational learners through to higher education. They are geographically based partnerships of HE and FE providers and also have a role in developing suitable HE curriculum for lifelong learners. In the North West there are currently five LLNs – Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance (GMSA), Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire, Cheshire and Warrington, Lancashire and Cumbria Higher Learning.

## Aimhigher

The Government's aim is to increase participation in higher education to 50% of 18 to 30 year olds by 2010. Aimhigher – [www.aimhigher.ac.uk](http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk) is funded by HEFCE to support activities at a local level which increase awareness of and participation in higher education by, for example, those in disadvantaged communities, young people in care and the disabled.

## unionlearn

unionlearn – [www.unionlearn.org.uk](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk) is the TUC organisation that supports union led strategies on learning and skills. It seeks to encourage progression and learning at all levels, including higher levels. Union Learning Representatives in workplaces provide support to union members to access education and training opportunities and are becoming increasingly involved in higher education as workplace skills needs increase.



# Higher Education in the Future

Whilst HEIs are autonomous institutions, they need to respond to policy directions set by the government. At the present time, the two most important of these are employer engagement and widening participation.

## Employer Engagement

There has been a recent focus by the Government on the UK's current skills levels and how they will affect future productivity and prosperity. In the coming years many more jobs will require higher level skills and HEIs are being tasked to address the shortage by working more closely with employers to upskill the workforce. DIUS and HEFCE are piloting various approaches with HEIs to achieve this with the aim that, in the future, the education and skills system including HE, will be 'demand led'.

## Widening Participation

The Government's aim is to increase participation in higher education to 50% of 18 to 30 year olds by 2010. It is particularly concerned to target those groups who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education in order to increase their life chances. It has made funding available to assist this, primarily by establishing Aimhigher. Most HE institutions now have their own widening participation officer or function, often working in tandem with Aimhigher. HEIs are now monitored to ensure that they are meeting targets to widen access.

# Useful Websites

North West Universities Association – [www.nwua.ac.uk](http://www.nwua.ac.uk) – the regional association for HE in the North West

The Higher Education Funding Council for England – [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk) – the national funding council for HE in England

Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) – [www.dius.gov.uk](http://www.dius.gov.uk)

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) – [www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk)

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) – [www.qaa.org.uk](http://www.qaa.org.uk)

Online Gateway to Higher Education and Research in the UK – [www.hero.ac.uk](http://www.hero.ac.uk) – portal for HEIs, also provides links to FE colleges which have HE provision

Universities UK – [www.universitiesuk.ac.uk](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk) – represents the Vice Chancellors of HEIs

GuildHE – [www.guildhe.ac.uk](http://www.guildhe.ac.uk) – represents higher education colleges, specialist institutions and some universities

Association of Colleges – [www.aoc.co.uk](http://www.aoc.co.uk)

UK Government – [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) – information on student finance

Knowledge Transfer Partnerships – [www.ktponline.org.uk](http://www.ktponline.org.uk)

Year in Industry – [www.yini.org.uk/companies.php](http://www.yini.org.uk/companies.php)

Shell Step Scheme – [www.shellstep.org.uk](http://www.shellstep.org.uk)

Business Bridge – [www.business-bridge.org.uk](http://www.business-bridge.org.uk)

Foundation Degree Forward – [www.fdf.ac.uk](http://www.fdf.ac.uk)

Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance – [www.gmsa.ac.uk](http://www.gmsa.ac.uk)

Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire Lifelong Learning Network – [www.merseyandwestlancslln.ac.uk](http://www.merseyandwestlancslln.ac.uk)

Cumbria Higher Learning – [www.cumbriahigherlearning.ac.uk/](http://www.cumbriahigherlearning.ac.uk/)

Cheshire and Warrington Lifelong Learning Network – [www.lifelongcw.org](http://www.lifelongcw.org)

Aimhigher – [www.aimhigher.ac.uk](http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk)



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17 Bloom Street  
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HIGHER EDUCATION

*hefce*  
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