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**Abstract**

Recent widening participation policies have been subject to a number of criticisms; they focus on aspirations rather than differences in performance; they place less value on the aspirations of the ?disadvantaged? comparing them to a middle class norm; they subordinate what was a radical agenda to the demands of the economy and so constrain the available options to young people. Using data from young people who have taken part in Aimhigher initiatives in the South West of England and from teachers who have organised Aimhigher events, this paper will examine to what extent these features of policy are evidenced in the attitudes and aspirations of these pupils. It will argue that the data shows little evidence of pupils positioning themselves as inferior, that young people display instrumental attitudes to education, but that these attitudes relate to policy discourse and practice in complex ways. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)