

Evaluation of Increased Flexibility for 14-16 Year Olds Programme: Delivery for Cohorts 3 and 4 and the Future

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Peter Rudd and Matthew Walker**

National Foundation for Educational Research

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Executive summary

Background

The Increased Flexibility for 14 to 16 year olds Programme (IFP) was introduced in 2002 to provide vocational learning opportunities to young people *‘who would benefit most’*. The first cohort of Year 10 students embarked on their courses in 2002 and this was followed by three subsequent cohorts in the following years. Through the programme, students could pursue NVQs, other vocational qualifications, GNVQs and GCSEs in vocational subjects for two years, completing in Year 11. In order to deliver the programme, around 300 partnerships were formed between a Lead Partner organisation, which was often a college of Further Education (FE), schools and other colleges or training providers.

Since the IFP was launched, there have been a number of developments at key stage 4 and the notion of delivery across a 14-19 age range has become increasingly established. These developments culminated in the 14-19 Implementation Plan which set out a programme and timetable for change in learning for this age group. In order to explore the developments in the IFP partnerships as the programme matured, and their plans for future developments in light of these changes, DfES commissioned NFER to undertake a programme of case study visits to nine IFP partnerships.

Key findings

- The IFP partnerships appeared to have remained stable in terms of membership and had matured in relation to mechanisms for communicating and emerging working relationships between schools.
- Approaches to selecting students to participate had become increasingly developed and appeared to be more effective where clear criteria were shared between colleges and schools and consideration was given to students’ motivation, attendance and interest in the vocational area.
- While no one model of delivery emerged as the preferred, or more effective, approach, partnerships had reflected on, and amended, the qualifications that they offered and, in some cases, the timing and duration of the courses.
- The majority of young people were satisfied with their courses and many felt that they were more confident and mature. Similarly, staff considered that participants were progressing well in their qualifications, and gained in confidence and employability skills.
- The prevailing view among interviewees was that participation in IFP had helped institutions to prepare for developments in 14-19 provision through acting as a useful ‘pilot’ to develop experience in logistics and

practicalities and through contributing to building partnerships that could be further developed in future.

Aims and objectives

The research aimed to explore the extent to which IFP had become embedded in partnership provision and the wider 14-19 agenda and the factors that appeared to facilitate and inhibit this. The objectives were to:

- identify the current partnership arrangements and the extent to which these had changed in relation to the nature of the cohorts and models of delivery
- explore the development of IFP including the extent to which it had become embedded in institutions' provision
- examine staff's perceptions of the contribution of IFP, and their partnerships' experience, to the transition into the new 14-19 arrangements
- investigate the perceived outcomes for young people, staff and institutions from participating in IFP
- explore young people's experience of participating in IFP including their reasons for participating, experience of the programme and the main outcomes including their intended future progression.

To achieve these aims and objectives, visits were made to nine partnerships and interviews conducted with Lead Partner representatives, tutors, school staff and students in Years 10 and 11.

Developments in working in partnership

The partnerships that were established to deliver the IFP had remained largely stable in terms of the schools involved, or slightly decreased. In two of the partnerships visited, the number of schools had increased. Thus the partnerships appeared to have consolidated and there were indications that they were more mature. For example, in some partnerships, schools were working towards common timetables and were exploring sharing students between schools. Moreover, protocols and procedures for sharing information between institutions relating to students' attendance and progress on the course were increasingly become established and routine. However, provision of information about students before they embarked on the course, sharing of key dates between institutions and informing external partners about students' permanent or fixed-term exclusions, was more varied.

School staff and external provider staff increasingly visited their partner institutions. While in some partnerships this entailed shared teaching, this was not widespread. Nevertheless, tutors from colleges and training providers visited schools and '*shadowed*' teaching staff as part of their professional development. In addition, where school staff were able to visit their students at

the external provider, this was perceived to be a valuable contributory factor in ensuring effective partnership working.

Developments in delivery

In all of the nine partnerships visited, there had been some changes in the nature of the IFP ‘offer’. In terms of the qualifications offered, partnerships were offering new vocational areas or had changed the specific types of qualifications that they offered. These changes were ongoing as seven of the nine were considering making changes to the qualifications offered in future.

Partnerships had also made changes to the mode and timing of delivery. In four partnerships, delivery, particularly of GCSEs in vocational subjects, had been moved to the schools. The main reasons for this included the need to address resource and staffing issues within the college, avoiding the travel time and logistics involved in young people travelling to learn, and capitalising on the strength and expertise of each partner. However, in a fifth partnership the tendency was for courses to be delivered in college as ‘*many schools have recognised the benefits of pupils coming to college*’.

There was no consensus across partnerships of the duration and timing of the IFP courses, which varied from half a day a week to one day a week. However, most staff felt that the amount of time was sufficient as did most students other than those who wanted more time because they enjoyed the course. Whether the time on the programme was consolidated in one day or on separate days varied as did staff’s views on the most effective approach. In considering which approach, some staff believed that a full day allowed for sustained delivery while others felt that maintaining concentration was too challenging for the participants. Furthermore, views differed on the relative difficulty of timetabling half-day sessions or full-day sessions. While no one model emerged as being preferred, it appeared the partnerships reviewed their approaches and, in three cases, were altering the pattern including adopting varied approaches across the terms.

Although there was widespread recognition of the value of employer involvement in IFP, participation of employers was not widespread and did not appear to have increased as the partnerships had matured. Nevertheless, there was a generally perceived intention to further develop links in the future.

Tutors reported that they had not made major changes to the way that they delivered the courses to the third and fourth cohorts of participants, compared to the first and second cohorts. The main lessons that they had learned during the course of teaching IFP participants were to vary teaching methods, divide up the course into manageable elements, motivate and encourage the students, treat the students like adults while maintaining close supervision. The students who were interviewed appreciated the approach of the tutors, the practical aspects and more relaxed adult environment. Around one third of interviewees

said that they worked harder on their IFP course than their other school subjects because they enjoyed it.

Developments in student selection and support

The approaches to selecting students to participate in IFP had developed as the partnerships had matured. There was evidence of more rigorous selection in six partnerships with more emphasis on students' motivation, attendance, interest in the vocational area and desire to undertake the course. Where this was the case, the staff and students felt that the right people were taking the right course. The remaining three partnerships were working towards improved selection.

There was increased awareness of the support needs of young people participating in the third and fourth cohorts, compared with the first two cohorts. Four partnerships had specific support regimes in place. All the schools were involved in reviewing the progress of their students to some degree and three reported that they monitored progress more stringently now than in the earlier cohorts. Some students had discontinued across the partnerships but many appeared to be reflecting on the causes and considering how to prevent it. There was evidence that, in the partnerships where selection procedures had not progressed since earlier cohorts, discontinuation was more of a concern.

While in four partnerships students had been offered support in relation to their post-16 choices which appeared to be over and above that offered generally to their peers, this was not the case in all partnerships.

Outcomes

The majority of the young people interviewed were satisfied with their IFP course and tutors observed that most were making sufficient progress to achieve their qualifications. Many young people were also felt to have become more confident and engaged in learning and this perception of staff was reflected in the comments of many young people interviewed who said that they were more confident and mature as a result of their participation in IFP and their response to the way in which they were treated. Some young people also commented that they felt more prepared for working life both through developing sector-specific skills and through the development of generic employability skills.

There was evidence of the majority of young people who had participated in the programme planning to remain in learning, often in the same vocational area as they had engaged in through IFP. Young people were considering both course-based, and work-based, routes. In many cases, participation in IFP had either confirmed an existing interest in a vocational area or had led young people to consider it for the future. Staff in schools identified the extension of

young people's understanding of post-16 choices as a positive outcome for their institutions. Other institutional outcomes identified included professional development for staff, stimulation of working with younger students and positive developments in working in partnership.

Future developments

Most Lead Partners were optimistic about the future development of vocational provision in their area. The prevailing view was that IFP had helped colleges to prepare for developments in 14-19 learning and had laid some solid foundations for the future. More specifically, IFP was felt by Lead Partners' representatives to have been helpful in developing experience of the practicalities and logistics of a programme for 14 to 16 year olds and for promoting the development of partnerships between colleges and schools and for marketing and recruitment of young people to vocational courses. School staff felt that participation in IFP had helped them to strengthen the vocational opportunities for their students. This could continue to involve colleges but schools were also keen to develop on-site provision.

Two predominant themes emerged from interviewees' views on how IFP would fit with the 14-19 Implementation Plan. Firstly that IFP had acted as a useful 'pilot' for the Plan and secondly that IFP had contributed to partnership working which could be built on in future. Future funding was a key concern among interviewees although there were examples of planning for sustainability including building of new facilities. A further challenge related to continuing competition between schools and colleges which was felt to affect 14-19 delivery and lead to changes in 14-19 provision. Other challenges identified related to capacity issues, transport, timetabling demands, training and staffing requirements and difficulties engaging employers.

Conclusion

To what extent have partnerships changed?

The overall success of the partnerships may be reflected in the findings that staff and students interviewed were largely positive about working in partnership and that the membership of the partnerships had remained stable or had consolidated over the four years of the programme. While mechanisms for communicating key information between institutions had become largely routine as the partnerships had matured, there were indications of scope for improvement in ensuring that information was communicated at all levels, including to staff involved in the direct delivery of courses. Approaches to selecting students had been a focus of improvement in partnerships and, where this had become more considered, it appeared to have been beneficial in terms of satisfaction of staff and students and reduced discontinuation.

What appears to contribute to effective practice?

In the partnerships that appeared to have been more effective in terms of their outcomes, there were clear criteria for selection set out by the college shared with school staff. In addition, there was effective support for students and communication between individuals at an operational level, in addition to partnership level, was effective. Where partnerships appeared to have been less effective, there were indications that the external provider was less involved in identifying students and, in one area, there was a perception of '*dumping*' of students by schools. In addition, the selection of tutors to teach students was less likely to have been through a request for volunteers and there was a perceived lack of commitment from senior school staff.

What are the implications for the 14-19 Implementation Plan?

Three key themes emerged with regard to the implications of experience of IFP for the 14-19 Implementation Plan. Firstly, that IFP had been a 'pilot' for the plan in terms of allowing partnerships to test out the logistical and organisational arrangements for a cross-institutional programme for 14 to 16 year olds, to prepare the 14-19 prospectus and to prepare for the Specialised Diploma. Secondly, IFP was felt to have helped to refine and promote institutional partnerships which could be built on in future. Thirdly, the IFP was felt to have established some of the processes required to broaden the vocational offer for young people.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Increased Flexibility for 14 to 16 year olds Programme (IFP) was introduced in 2002 to provide vocational learning opportunities to *‘those who would benefit most’*. To enable a range of courses to be offered, partnerships were formed between a Lead Partner organisation, which was often a Further Education (FE) college, schools and other colleges or training providers. The IFP entailed students in Year 10 embarking on a two-year programme working towards approved NVQs, GNVQs, other vocational qualifications or GCSEs in vocational subjects which were also launched in 2002. Funding to support these partnerships was channelled through Local Learning and Skills Councils (LLSCs) who also had responsibility for monitoring the process. The first cohort of Year 10 students embarked on their courses in September 2002 and they were followed by three further cohorts in subsequent years.

Since the IFP commenced, there have been a range of developments at key stage 4 and the notion of delivery across a 14-19 age range has become increasingly established. The Tomlinson report (14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform: Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform), published in October 2004, recommended a ‘strengthening of the vocational offer’ and called for ‘better vocational programmes’ and ‘rationalised vocational pathways’.¹ The 2005 White Paper: 14-19 Education and Skills, and subsequent 14-19 Implementation Plan states that:

*We must support every area to develop a system in which schools and colleges can offer more to young people through working together than they could on their own.*²

Through the partnerships that had been developed, the IFP partnerships had already made some progress towards inter-institutional delivery. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to undertake a qualitative study of a sample of partnerships to explore the extent to which the partnerships had developed over time and their plans for the future in relation to the 14-19 Implementation Plan.

¹ Working Group on 14-19 Reform (2004). *14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform: Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform*. London: DfES. Chapter 8 and p. 8.

² Department for Education and Skills (2005). *14-19 Education and Skills Implementation Plan*. London: The Stationery Office. p.6.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The research aimed to explore the extent to which IFP had become embedded in partnership provision and the wider 14-19 agenda, in the four years since it was introduced, and the factors that had facilitated and inhibited this. The objectives were to:

- identify the current partnership arrangements and the extent to which these had changed in relation to the nature of the cohorts and models of delivery
- explore the development of IFP including the extent to which it had become embedded in institutions' provision
- examine staff's perceptions of the contribution of IFP, and their partnerships' experience, to the transition into the new 14-19 arrangements
- investigate the perceived outcomes for young people, staff and institutions from participating in IFP
- explore young people's experience of participating in IFP including their reasons for participating, experience of the programme and the main outcomes including their intended future progression.

1.3 Research methods

In order to achieve the aims and objectives outlined above, visits were conducted to nine partnerships that had participated in IFP since 2002 when the first cohort of students embarked on the programme. Six of the nine partnerships were visited by the research team twice before in 2003 and 2004 for the evaluation of the first two cohorts of IFP.³ The remaining three partnerships had not been visited previously for the research. The partnerships reflected a range of practice and offered NVQs, other vocational qualifications and GCSEs in vocational subjects to young people in the third and fourth cohorts. However, the sample of partnerships were not selected to be representative of practice in IFP delivery and the findings presented in this report reflect the experiences, practice and lessons learned by these nine partnerships.

Each case-study visit entailed interviews with the Lead Partner coordinator and up to three tutors who taught the IFP participants. In addition, two schools in each partnership were visited and interviews were conducted with the main coordinator of the programme and with up to four students in Year 10 (cohort 4) and four students in Year 11 (cohort 3) in each partnership.

³ Golden, S., Nelson, J., O'Donnell, L. and Rudd, P. (2004). *Implementing the Increased Flexibility for 14 to 16 Year Olds Programme: the Experience of Partnerships and Students* (DfES Research Report 562). London: DfES.

Across the nine partnerships, interviews were conducted with:

- Lead Partner coordinators in nine partnerships
- IFP coordinators in 17 schools
- 29 tutors in 11 colleges
- 74 students in Year 10 (cohort 4) and Year 11 (cohort 3).

The interviews focused on the developments in the partnerships over the four cohorts of participants and explored the interviewees' views on the future. More specifically, the interviews investigated:

- the nature of partnership arrangements and the extent to which these have changed
- the nature of the approaches adopted to deliver IFP and the extent to which these have changed
- the support provided for students
- the extent to which employers are used to support IFP delivery
- the transition to the new 14-19 Implementation Plan
- the outcomes of IFP for students and institutions to date.

Although the young people who were interviewed could not be said to be representative of the cohorts as a whole, they were working towards NVQs, GCSEs in vocational subjects and other vocational subjects in around 13 vocational areas including construction, engineering, sports leisure and tourism, hairdressing, motor vehicle, land-based sector and business.

Throughout this report, figures indicating the number of interviewees who mentioned the aspect of IFP under discussion, or the number of institutions to which it applied, are sometimes provided. It should be noted that these figures are provided for guidance only as, during the interviews, respondents were not all asked identical questions with a range of responses as they would be on a questionnaire. Rather, their comments reflect their own issues, concerns and priorities.

2. Developments in working in partnership

Key findings

- No common pattern of change in partnership participation. The partnerships had either remained stable, or slightly decreased in number while two had increased. The reasons tended to relate to local circumstances, changes in staff and consolidation at a '*critical mass*' of schools.
- Among the nine partnerships, some of the IFP steering groups had become part of a wider 14-19 management structure locally, or there were plans for this to happen in the future.
- Where school staff were able to visit their students who were studying off site, this was perceived to be a valuable contributory factor in working in partnership effectively between institutions.
- Schools within a partnership appeared to be increasingly exploring adopting a common timetable, even at a simple level, although this was only in a minority of partnerships. In addition, there were indications of schools collaborating in sharing their students either between schools or in order to create a viable course at an external provider.
- Protocols and procedures for sharing information between institutions about students' attendance and progress on their IFP course appeared to have been established satisfactorily in the partnerships visited.
- Provision of information about students prior to embarking on the course was more varied and some tutors at external providers indicated that they would value this information. This appeared to work more effectively where partnerships had an application form for each student, or where there was shared teaching.
- Effective sharing of key dates and of details of fixed-term and permanent exclusions was an area for development in some partnerships.
- The need for professional development for external provider tutors in teaching 14 to 16 year olds appeared to have reduced as the partnerships matured. Nevertheless, it remained a need for new tutors. There were indications that tutors were increasingly visiting schools and shadowing school staff as part of their professional development.

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the experience among the nine IFP partnerships, of working together to deliver the IFP to four cohorts of young people. It explores partnership working from the perspectives of both the Lead Partner organisations and the schools.

It examines:

- the structure of the partnerships and the nature of any change over the development of the programme
- the approaches to managing the partnership including the protocols and procedures in place and the extent to which these have changed over time
- the nature of any staff development and the extent to which this has changed as the partnerships have matured.

2.2 Structure of the partnership

Among the nine partnerships visited, there was a varied experience of changes in the structure of the partnership for the third and fourth cohorts of IFP. Two had increased the number of schools that they worked with since the first two cohorts, while four had remained stable and three were now working with fewer schools than they had been initially.

The reasons for the expansion in the two partnerships that had **increased** the number of schools that they were working with, varied in each partnership. While in one partnership this expansion was a result of involving schools other than mainstream secondary schools, in the second the expansion was among secondary schools. The first partnership had already involved all but one of the local schools for the first two cohorts and had subsequently included a paying independent school and was developing links with a special school. In the second partnership, some schools in the area had felt that the time available to prepare for the first cohort of participants was insufficient but, as the IFP had continued, schools had been more able to plan and fit IFP provision into their timetables and, consequently, had become involved in the partnership. In addition, the Lead Partner observed that some schools had become involved because of the contribution that points achieved by students taking vocational qualifications could make to their '*league tables*'.

In four of the partnerships, the number of participating schools had remained **stable**, albeit in one partnership a school had ceased involvement and another had become involved. There was a sense, in two of the partnerships, that the partnerships had grown in the first two years of the programme but had now reached '*critical mass – a plateau if you like*' of participants, as one Lead Partner put it. Indeed in the second partnership, the Lead Partner anticipated that the numbers would contract next year as provision was perceived by some schools as expensive and they planned to teach vocational courses within the schools instead. The future development of the partnerships are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

In the remaining three partnerships, the numbers of participating schools had **decreased**. In one partnership, this had been the result of a strategy to

consolidate the partnership by reducing the geographical area and the number of schools involved. Consequently, two schools had remained nominally part of the partnership but their students attended an alternative IFP partnership which was nearer the schools. In two partnerships the change in the numbers participating was related to changes in staff. In one, a new headteacher at one partner school had withdrawn the school, preferring to provide vocational learning opportunities through alternative means. In the second, the partnership coordinator explained that the partnership had ‘*consolidated*’ with fewer schools, because of staff changes, and that this was a particular risk where delivery was shared. He commented that ‘*we have lost some of the expertise and enthusiasm in schools. If they lose staff in a shared delivery model we lose schools*’. However, the remaining partnership schools were felt to be most committed and, in the view of the Lead Partner coordinator, this enhanced the quality of the partnership, as reflected in the comment that ‘*the schools that have settled with us are there for the right reasons. The schools’ SMT [senior management team] are fully behind it and it’s a solid and stable partnership*’.

Overall, although there had been some change among the nine partnerships, no common pattern of expansion, stability or contraction emerged. Rather, developments in partnership structures were largely associated with the local context, the individuals involved and the initial timeframe for establishing the partnerships, as was found through the earlier visits to partnerships. Indeed, as the partnerships had developed, there continued to be some turnover in school participation as schools considered the costs involved and as staff changes occurred.

2.3 Managing the partnership

The responses from the Lead Partner coordinators across the nine partnerships reported that five of the steering groups for managing IFP had changed and evolved since cohort 1 and 2. In one instance, an alternative structure had been established whereby college and school coordinators met together termly. This change was made because the previous arrangement of senior manager meetings and tutor meetings had been poorly attended in both cases. The other four partnerships whose steering groups had changed had either become part of a 14-19 group (two partnerships) or were part of a wider strategic group for lifelong or vocational learning (two partnerships). In the four partnerships which had not changed, the steering groups were said to have remained largely the same, although in two partnerships they were evolving into wider 14-19 groups in the medium term. On the whole, partnership meetings were felt to be productive, as illustrated by the description by one coordinator of the meetings as the ‘*engineering room*’ of the partnership. In addition, the IFP had facilitated relationships, as reflected in the comment of one coordinator that ‘*the programme has got us talking*’, while a second indicated the value of the

maturity of the partnership over the four years in facilitating productive working relationships because *'we know each other so well and trust each other'*.

2.3.1 College and school partnerships

In addition to the formal steering groups and meetings, staff in five partnerships mentioned that partnership working was facilitated by school staff visiting the college, or other providers, to see their students. In many cases, it appeared that this role focused on supporting college staff with behaviour management and attendance. One tutor said that this support was *'really good, because it helps in terms of behaviour'*, while a tutor in a second partnership concurred when he said that: *'as long as they [school staff] call in on a regular basis, I can pass on any challenges'*. However, even within a partnership where some school staff visited students at the external provider, this was not the case for all schools. This prompted a tutor to observe that *'where it doesn't happen, provision is not as good...it's about working in partnership'*.

2.3.2 Schools in partnership

The school staff who were interviewed outlined a number of ways in which they were working in partnership with one another in developing IFP in their partnership. School staff in four partnerships said that they either had introduced a common timetable or were planning to do so in the near future. Where a common timetable had been introduced, this tended to entail an agreement of one day or two days in the school week when the IFP would be offered which schools could choose to access as appropriate. This simple approach was felt to be the most appropriate at this stage because, as one school teacher said, *'[it is] reasonably easy and simplistic at the moment because, these things aren't easy [to implement]'*. Indeed, a teacher in a school in a second partnership had agreed with the majority view in the partnership of when to provide the programme but pointed out that this had not been the preferred model for the school. Implementing a common timetable remained an issue in one partnership where one teacher said that, due to the differences between individual schools and their cohorts of students *'it would be impossible to share selection criteria or timetables'*.

School staff in two partnerships said that they intended to share students between schools. In one of these partnerships, the schools formed clusters which planned to share students, while one school in the second partnership was *'looking at bringing in other schools to use our new on-site facilities'*. An alternative to sharing students, which was adopted by schools in two partnerships (one of which also planned to share students), was ensuring that an IFP course was *'viable'* by supplementing the cohort from one school with students from another.

There was evidence from the school staff in two partnerships that participation in IFP had led them to network with other schools and to share practice. In one partnership, when a new school joined it was ‘*buddied*’ with an existing school to provide support. In another, the school teacher commented ‘*we talk to each other and certainly there is a willingness to share ideas*’. However, this teacher cautioned that there were limits on the extent to which practice in one school could easily be transferred to another and went on to observe ‘*but ultimately it is up to individual schools as to how they want to implement the programme*’. Overall, it appeared that, in addition to the partnerships between colleges and schools, partnerships between schools were beginning to emerge as a result of participation in IFP, and there were indications that, as one teacher commented ‘*collaboration has gone beyond IFP because of IFP*’. This developing collaboration will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

2.3.3 Information sharing and protocols

One of the keys to effective partnerships, identified in the previous visits to IFP partnerships, was ensuring that communication was effective. This was endorsed by the Lead Partner coordinator in one partnership who emphasised that: ‘*there needs to be greater understanding of the fact that learning is delivered in more than one place and communications structures need to reflect this*’. While this observation suggests that there was still scope for further development in communicating effectively, the responses of Lead Partner coordinators, tutors and school staff indicated that some progress had been made as the IFP had matured. An interviewee in one Lead Partner said that ‘*lines of communication are significantly better now than they have ever been*’, while in a second partnership the interviewee observed that ‘*there has always been an attitude of sharing but schools are now more open about sharing ... there’s not as much suspicion as at the beginning*’.

In general, across the nine partnerships, information about students’ attendance and their progress on their IFP course was regularly, and formally, shared between the college or other provider, and the schools. While the timing of the provision of attendance information varied and could be on the day of the IFP course, weekly or termly, school staff were generally satisfied with the approach taken in their partnership. In addition to informal discussions of students’ progress, formal reports reflecting individuals’ progress were often provided by college staff for schools who could then include them in their usual reporting strategies to parents. While, on the whole, school staff were again satisfied with these reports, one teacher commented that the timing could coincide better with school systems, and a second felt that the content was ‘*old fashioned*’ but was in discussion with the college about this.

The information flow also entailed schools providing details to colleges. Most commonly, schools provided background details about students before they embarked on the course. The reflections of college staff revealed a more

varied experience in the extent to which this information was provided, compared to sharing information about attendance and progress. Interviewees in three partnerships felt that background information could be provided by schools, or provided at a more appropriate time. However, the Lead Partner coordinator in one of these partnerships felt that it was improving and that it would take more time when he said that *'it was bound to take time to get this right and to get the information flow about KS3 SATs, medical issues – it is more of a focus in cohorts 3 and 4'*. In two partnerships where staff did not express a concern about the provision of background information, the partnerships had established an 'application form' procedure through which schools provided some details about individual students. Even in these partnerships the form had developed over time as staff became aware of the nature of the information needed. Even within a partnership, there could be variation and, as the Lead Partner coordinator in one such partnership observed, this was closely associated with the relationships between the schools and the college. Where there was *'good collaboration'*, or shared teaching, this information was shared more effectively than where this was not the case.

In addition to some concerns about the provision of information about students prior to the course starting, staff in two partnerships highlighted the need in future to share key dates such as term dates and examination dates between institutions. A third partnership had moved towards standardising information flows about key dates over the last 18 months. While in a fourth partnership the solution was to *'swap'* college and school calendars, but this did not appear to have occurred in the two partnerships where concern was expressed. The comment of a tutor in one of the partnerships where key dates were not shared highlights the potential constraint of not providing this information for tutors: *'it would be helpful, for example, if schools could let us know term dates and exam dates in advance so our tutors can plan accordingly'*.

Another area for development for sharing information between schools and colleges was in relation to fixed-term and permanent exclusions. Staff in two partnerships had experience of students' non-attendance being explained by their exclusion from school but had not been informed about exclusions. As one explained, after a student had not attended for five weeks *'I've just found out that she's been suspended from school...even if she has been suspended from school, I am sure she could have still been coming to us, and now she has missed out all that work'*.

2.4 Staff development

The interviews with staff in colleges and schools suggested that, to some extent, staff development needs were developing and changing as the IFP was maturing. The training provided, commonly related to behaviour management,

working with a younger age group, health and safety, child protection and understanding of specific qualifications. Much of this training was provided internally by colleges although training in relation to specific qualifications was sometimes provided by the relevant awarding body.

Interviewees in six of the partnerships commented that staff were becoming more experienced at working with 14 to 16 year olds and adopting appropriate teaching and learning and managing behaviour strategies with this age group. Indeed, one Lead Partner coordinator felt that, as tutors were becoming more confident, they were using more adventurous approaches. Consequently, the staff development needs for working with younger students were perceived to have reduced somewhat by some interviewees. Nevertheless, as the comments of two tutors illustrate, there may still be an ongoing need for such staff development. This could be because not all tutors will have had the opportunity to develop these skills, for example in the case of one who stated *'I didn't have half the skills in dealing with this age group as school staff'*. Alternatively, tutors may wish to be reassured that their strategies are appropriate, such as the tutor who had undertaken a professional diploma, who said that *'I had a fear that I was not getting the best out of them'*.

In addition to the slight change in emphasis in staff development which emerged from interviews in the nine partnerships, there were indications of school staff and college staff working together to learn from one another. Staff in three partnerships provided examples of college staff visiting schools and shadowing teachers or observing lessons. There were also instances of school staff visiting the college. As the provision of vocational learning in schools had continued to develop, two partnerships were beginning to train school staff to gain accreditation as assessors of vocational qualifications. Indeed, in one instance, the school saw this as a way of managing the longer-term provision of vocational learning by increasingly providing vocational courses in school rather than at an external provider such as the college. The senior staff member set out the financial imperative for considering this approach when he explained that *'I don't want to bring the children back into school...but we can provide it cheaper...we would need to move towards a general accreditation of vocational skills rather than a specific NVQ'*. This will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

As the IFP has matured, it appeared that formal qualifications accrediting work with 14 to 16 year olds in a post-16 setting were increasingly available. Staff in four of the partnerships mentioned that they, or colleagues, had undertaken a formal qualification and a number of different qualifications were cited. These included a BTEC professional diploma at level 4, which was offered in three of the partnerships visited, while a fourth was working with QCA to develop a qualification.

Although all of the nine Lead Partner coordinators who were interviewed explained that training was available for their staff, not all of the tutors who were interviewed said that they had undergone some training. Although in one partnership, the coordinator stated that initial training was compulsory, in others this was not said to be the case and it appeared that tutors could choose training as appropriate. Some tutors were not concerned that they had not participated in any training in relation to delivering IFP courses as they felt that they had sufficient skills to teach 14 to 16 year olds students and, indeed, a few felt that the younger students did not differ noticeably from those aged 16 and over. These tutors often indicated that they were aware that training could be provided, should they wish to access it. In one partnership, the Lead Partner coordinator explained that the responsibility for ensuring staff were trained as required was devolved to the heads of faculty as part of their overall responsibility for their staff. Nevertheless, there were some staff in colleges who indicated that they would like more training than had been offered or accessed. In some instances, they had been unable to access it due to lack of time and other commitments. In other cases, they requested training in relation to behaviour management and working with students with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

2.5 Summary

Overall, the nine partnerships appeared to have remained stable and had consolidated their inter-institutional relationships over the four years of IFP. While there had been some turnover of participating schools this had not been great and the prevailing view among the staff interviewed in the partnerships was satisfaction with relationships. While procedures for attendance and progress appeared to have become more established and routine as the partnerships had developed, there remained scope for development in the sharing of information about students prior to embarking on the course, on key dates such as term and examination dates, and on fixed term and permanent exclusions. There were indications in the nine partnerships of movement of staff between institutions as school staff attended or visited external providers to support staff and their students, and college staff shadowing school staff for professional development and this appeared to have developed over the four years. In addition, some partnerships were training school staff as assessors for vocational qualifications with a view to sustaining vocational learning in the longer term.

3. Developments in delivery models

Key findings

- All nine partnerships reported that they had made some changes, since the first cohort of the programme, to the qualifications and courses they offered to IFP students. These changes involved either adding new courses to the existing courses they provided, or changing the specific qualifications that students were following. Seven partnerships were considering further changes in the future.
- There was no consensus across partnerships on the amount of time students spent on their course, and it ranged from half a day per week, to one day per week. However, generally school and college staff felt that the amount of time that students were spending on their IFP course was sufficient time in which to deliver the course and the young people were happy with the amount of time they were spending on their course.
- In eight of the nine partnerships visited there had been some change to the delivery of IFP courses, either in terms of the delivery model adopted or the duration and timing of courses, for the third and fourth cohorts. These included moving the delivery of GCSEs in vocational subjects to schools and consolidating the time on one day.
- There had been no major changes to the way tutors delivered courses to the third and fourth cohorts of students; however, tutors had learnt lessons about how to adapt their teaching style to suit the needs of the IFP cohort.
- Nearly all the young people reported that they enjoyed their IFP course, and they particularly enjoyed the practical aspects and the more adult and relaxed environment of the college.
- Around a third of the young people interviewed reported that they were working harder on their IFP course than on their other school subjects, most commonly because they enjoyed it more. Just under a quarter of students indicated that they viewed their IFP course in the same way as their other subjects, and worked equally hard on all their subjects. A small number of students reported that they work harder on their other school subjects than on their IFP course.
- Although there was widespread recognition of the value of employer involvement in the IFP, actual involvement was limited and there was still a generally perceived intention to further develop links 'in the future'.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the delivery of IFP courses in cohorts 3 and 4, and explores the experience of delivery from the perspectives of the Lead Partner organisations and schools, as well as of participating students. It focuses on:

- the courses and qualifications offered through the programme, and the nature of any change in these over time
- the models of delivery and the timing and duration of courses, and the extent to which these have changed for cohorts 3 and 4, as well as lessons learned by college tutors about delivering IFP courses
- students' experiences of the delivery of IFP courses, including the aspects that they enjoyed the most/least, and their views on how their IFP course differs from their other school subjects
- the extent to which employers are involved in IFP provision, the perceived value of employer involvement, and any change in this involvement over time.

3.2 Nature of qualifications

3.2.1 Courses and qualifications offered

The case-study partnerships visited were offering a wide range of different qualifications and courses to students involved in the third and fourth cohorts of the IFP. All nine partnerships were offering GCSEs in vocational subjects, as well as other vocational qualifications, including NVQs, GNVQs and BTEC courses. Each of the partnerships was offering courses in a wide range of vocational areas, and in most cases, the range of areas had expanded since the start of the programme. Further detail about any changes to the courses offered through the IFP is provided in the following section.

The specific qualifications that were offered through the programme were generally identified by the Lead Partner organisation, although in a small number of cases, schools requested a particular qualification. However, the vocational areas that the qualifications related to were generally identified by schools and colleges together. As one Lead Partner coordinator indicated: *'Schools are subject-led...they just want to choose the subject area, rather than being concerned about the qualification.'* Decisions about vocational areas tended to be informed by demand from students for a particular vocational area, local employment and skills needs and the expertise of each organisation.

3.2.2 Changes in courses and qualifications offered

All of the nine partnerships visited reported that they had made some changes to the qualifications and courses they offered to IFP students since the first

cohort of the programme. These changes involved either adding new courses to the existing courses they provided, or changing the specific qualifications that students were following. Only two partnerships reported that they had discontinued specific courses, and in both cases this was due to lack of demand from schools.

Six partnerships indicated that they had **expanded the range of courses** on offer through the programme, in terms of subjects and levels. This was mainly in response to schools' requests for a wider range of vocational areas and qualifications, in order to make the programme accessible to a wider range of students. A school teacher in one partnership, for example, reported that the range of courses and levels of study available had increased each year, and she praised the efforts of the Lead Partner in trying to find courses suitable for all students. A Lead Partner coordinator in another partnership reported: *'We've tried to offer a good range...so we've put programmes together at entry, foundation and intermediate levels...we've widened the offer really.'*

In most cases, partnerships had expanded the range of vocational areas on offer, or the level of qualification available, rather than introducing new types of qualification. One partnership, for example, that had delivered a large number of entry level qualifications in the first cohort of the programme, had introduced more Level 1 qualifications. Another partnership had expanded the number of GCSEs in vocational subjects they provided, so that all eight vocational GCSEs were on offer to IFP students in the third and fourth cohorts. Four partnerships reported that they had introduced a new type of qualification, and in all four partnerships, they had introduced BTEC qualifications for the third and fourth cohorts of students, as they had become available for use pre-16 since the start of the IFP.

Staff in five of the nine partnerships reported that they had **changed the specific qualification** that students in the third and fourth cohorts were following, as they considered, based on their experience of teaching IFP students, that there was a more appropriate qualification available for these young people. In some cases, this involved a change to a different type of qualification, for example, from a GCSE to an NVQ, while in others, it involved a change to the awarding body of the qualification. In one partnership, for example, the engineering tutor decided to change from offering Engineering GCSE to offering Applied Engineering Principles for the third and fourth cohorts, as he considered this to be a more practical and more appropriate qualification for the IFP students. In this same partnership, the hospitality and catering tutor had changed the awarding body for the NVQ from City and Guilds to the Hospitality Awarding Body, as she felt that the nature of the assessment for the latter was more suitable for the students.

3.2.3 Future changes to courses and qualifications

School and college staff were generally happy with the qualifications currently on offer through the IFP in their partnership, and most tutors felt that the level and content of these courses were appropriate for the students involved. However, staff in seven of the nine case-study partnerships visited were considering changing the qualifications they offered, either for the fifth cohort of students, or at some time in the future. In four of these partnerships, interviewees wished to widen their offer to IFP students, by further expanding the courses and qualifications available through the programme. One partnership, for example, that was offering mainly NVQ Level 1 courses to students in cohorts 3 and 4, planned to introduce more GCSEs in vocational subjects, in order to give young people the opportunity to undertake Level 2 qualifications. Another partnership was considering offering more entry level qualifications for students who were unable to cope with Level 1 qualifications, in order to ensure they are catering to the needs of all students.

The remaining three partnerships that planned to change the qualifications they delivered through the IFP reported that they were considering changing from one qualification to another. In all three partnerships, tutors wished to change from GCSEs in vocational subjects to BTEC courses, as they felt that they were more appropriate for IFP students than GCSEs. Both college and school staff were concerned that the GCSEs in vocational subjects were *'too academic'*, and too difficult for IFP students, and one assistant headteacher in a school offering these courses stated that, *'they still don't enable students to fulfil their potential.'* In contrast, BTEC qualifications were seen to be *'more realistic for young people that age'*.

In summary, the range of courses and qualifications on offer in partnerships had expanded since the first cohort, and there had also been some changes to specific qualifications, as tutors attempted to offer qualifications that were more appropriate for the needs of the IFP cohort. It appears that partnerships were continually reviewing the qualifications they offered, partly in response to demand, and partly as a result of their experience and knowledge of teaching on the IFP, and they planned further changes to qualifications in the future. The delivery models adopted by partnerships and the extent of any change to these models is discussed in the following section.

3.3 Delivery of IFP courses

3.3.1 Nature of delivery model

As was the case when partnerships were visited in 2004,⁴ the approaches to delivering the IFP often differed within partnerships, and even between courses within partnerships and schools. Therefore, a partnership, and indeed a school, could have more than one approach. Two of the nine partnerships visited as part of the current evaluation of the third and fourth cohorts used the same model for delivering all IFP courses across the partnership, with the Lead Partner college being the sole provider of courses. However, the remaining seven had adopted a combination of delivery models within the partnership, with different approaches for different courses, and in some cases, for different schools. The four different delivery models adopted by the case-study partnerships for the third and fourth cohorts are discussed below.

- **Courses delivered in college, by college staff only** – interviewees in seven partnerships reported that the college delivered the whole of the course, for at least one of the IFP courses. Although school staff were not involved in delivery, in some partnerships they accompanied the students to the college, and observed lessons, and/or supported students.
- **Delivery shared between the college and the school** – this was reported by interviewees in five partnerships; however, the extent and nature of this shared delivery differed between courses. In some partnerships, this division of labour was based on the strengths and expertise of each partner. Where this occurred, the schools tended to deliver the theory elements of the courses, whereas the colleges, which often had more specialist facilities, were responsible for the practical work. In a small number of partnerships, there was ‘team teaching’ of courses, with both college and school staff involved in teaching lessons. Interviewees reported that this was due to the large numbers of IFP students in a class, or resource issues, or for the development of school staff’s skills. One Lead Partner coordinator, for example, stated: *‘there is some team teaching going on because there has to be if we’re to make these courses sustainable.’*
- **Courses delivered within school, by college staff only** – interviewees in five of the nine partnerships visited indicated that college tutors travelled to schools to deliver at least one IFP course. As described in the following section, this approach was often adopted to overcome resource and transport issues. However, a tutor in one partnership reported that a school had requested that she deliver the course in school because they were reluctant to send their students to the college, as they were concerned about the legal issues associated with pre-16s being out of school.
- **Courses delivered in school, by school staff only** – in three of the partnerships, at least one IFP course was delivered solely in school, by school staff. However, in one of these partnerships, interviewees reported

⁴ Golden, S., Nelson, J., O’Donnell, L. and Rudd, P. (2004). *Implementing the Increased Flexibility for 14 to 16 Year Olds Programme: the Experience of Partnerships and Students* (DfES Research Report 562). London: DfES.

that school staff were able to access the expertise of college tutors to support them with the course delivery.

The extent to which delivery models had changed for the third and fourth cohorts is discussed in Section 3.3.3.

3.3.2 Duration and timing of IFP courses

As was the case in the first cohort of the programme, the visits to partnerships revealed that, for the third and fourth cohorts, partnerships had either adopted a partnership-wide approach to timetabling, or had negotiated individually with each school.

Four partnerships indicated that they had a partnership-wide approach to timetabling provision. In three of these partnerships, students spent one whole day per week on their IFP course, and this day was fixed across all schools in the partnership. In the remaining partnership, young people spent approximately three to four hours per week on their course. Five of the nine case-study partnerships reported that the timing of IFP provision varied between courses, and in most cases, the amount of time that students spent on their IFP course had been negotiated with individual schools. The amount of time ranged from half a day per week, to the equivalent of one day per week.

Generally, the school and college staff interviewed felt that the amount of time that students were spending on their IFP course was sufficient time in which to deliver the course. However, interviewees had differing views on what they perceived to be the most appropriate timing of IFP courses. Six interviewees, for instance, reported that it was best for IFP courses to be delivered on one whole day each week, as this allows for more sustained delivery time, and gives students experience of a full day at college. Some school staff also felt that this approach was easiest to manage, as it reduced issues with timetabling and transport. In contrast, four interviewees indicated that it was better for courses to be delivered on two half days, because *'it is difficult for the young people to concentrate for a whole day.'* One deputy headteacher also felt that this approach was easier to timetable, and indicated that students were more likely to miss school lessons when IFP provision was timetabled on a whole day.

The **young people** interviewed also commented on the duration and timing of their IFP courses. Around half of the young people (35 individuals) reported that they spent the equivalent of one day a week participating in IFP. In nearly all cases, this was on one day, although three students undertook their courses on two half days. A total of 23 students indicated that they spent half a day each week on their IFP courses, and in cases where there was shared delivery, this time was divided between the school and the college or training provider.

A total of 40 students reported that they were happy with the amount of time they were spending on their course, as they had sufficient time to complete the work. Seventeen students indicated that they would like more time on their course, and the majority of these young people explained that this was because they enjoyed their course so much. However, four students said that they needed more time to complete their work, as described by one student: *'I would like to go more, twice a week or something. It would be better. We wouldn't have to try and do three days' work in one day.'* Only one student felt that they spent too much time on their IFP course, and he indicated that this was because the course had become repetitive.

Eight students also commented on the timing of their IFP course, and when was the most appropriate time for it. Five of the students felt that it was better for their course to be timetabled on one whole day each week, as it enabled them to focus on their vocational area of interest for a whole day, and was a more time-efficient approach. This was illustrated by one student who made the following comment about timetabling courses on two half days per week: *'It is a bit sketchy because you would be going through one thing in the morning and then forget it ... but if you have the whole day you can remember what you did. It is more fresh in your mind that way instead of stringing all little bits together.'* One student who spent two half days on his ICT course also commented on the time that was wasted through this timetabling approach: *'By the time we settle down and we look at what we've done, we have a break, and then we come back and then we've had about 20 minutes, and then we have another break, and then we leave at 2.30.'*

Two students, who were attending college on half days, commented that it was difficult when the course was timetabled in the afternoon, as it was more challenging to arrange transport to and from the college. One student, who was studying at college, also commented that they should not have to study outside of school hours. Although a few students did highlight the longer hours involved for their course, they appreciated that this was required, and in fact, one student commented that this was good experience for the future: *'It is teaching us in the future that if you want to be a bricklayer you have to get up early and might go home late.'*

3.3.3 Changes in delivery

In eight of the nine partnerships visited there had been some change to the delivery of IFP courses, either in terms of the delivery model adopted or the duration and timing of courses.

Staff in four partnerships reported that they had moved the delivery of some courses, most commonly GCSEs in vocational subjects, from the college to schools. The reasons for this included the need to address resource and staffing issues within the college, avoiding the travel time involved in young people travelling to learn, and capitalising on the strengths and expertise of

each partner. One Lead Partner coordinator, for instance, reported that they had moved some delivery to schools *'purely because of issues to do with our own resources ... travelling time was also an issue'*. Another coordinator stated: *'After doing it for two years, we really felt we had learnt our lessons that we were not the experts at GCSEs ... schools are the experts for GCSEs, we're the experts in industry.'* A school in one partnership had decided to deliver a manufacturing course themselves in the fourth cohort, as they were disappointed with the results that IFP students in cohort 2 had achieved at the college, and they felt that they could deliver it more successfully in school.

In contrast, staff in one partnership indicated that delivery of IFP courses had started to move from schools to the college, as *'many schools have recognised the benefits to pupils of coming into the college'*. One school in this partnership, for example, that had been delivering the leisure and tourism GCSE in the first and second cohorts of the IFP had decided to have shared delivery at the college, so that the students could benefit from work experience at the travel agency at the college.

In two partnerships, there had been shared teaching of at least one course in the first two cohorts of the programme; however, this had not continued for the third and fourth cohorts. In one partnership, this was due to a change in the school teacher involved in delivering the course. Staff in the other partnership could not explain the reason for the shared teaching not continuing, and stated that it *'just died a death'*. In contrast, in two different partnerships, shared teaching or team teaching had been introduced in cohorts 3 and 4, due to the increased numbers of students undertaking the courses.

Staff in three partnerships reported that they had made changes to the timing of IFP courses. One partnership, for example, had changed the timing of IFP courses from two half days to one whole day, to make it easier to manage, and to reduce issues with transport and timetabling. Another partnership had changed the pattern of the timing of one of their courses for the third cohort. Previously students had attended the college for two hours per week for one term; however, this had changed to two full days in the college per term, to cover all the practical work. The tutor explained, *'This was done for practical reasons because there are transport issues ... Also we were finding some students were missing quite a lot of practical sessions. We were spending a lot of time recapping what we did the week before. On balance, blocked time is better.'*

In summary, the partnerships visited generally continued to offer a variety of delivery models within the partnership for different courses and only two used the model where the Lead Partner delivered all courses. The timing of courses varied and there was no prevailing view of the most effective approach to the duration and timing of courses, which could be delivered on one whole day or two half days or by other models. The partnerships had reflected on their

practice and the changes that they had made for the more recent cohorts included moving the delivery of GCSEs in vocational subjects into schools in some cases. While shared teaching between schools and colleges continued to be used it had been discontinued in two partnerships and commenced in another two.

3.4 Teaching and learning on IFP courses

3.4.1 Lessons learned about delivery approaches

Most of the tutors interviewed had realised at an early stage in the programme the need to adapt their teaching style to suit the needs of students aged 14 to 16, and they had made changes to their delivery approach. A few tutors, for example, reported that they had overestimated the abilities of the IFP students in the first cohort of the programme, and had subsequently started to teach them at a slower pace. Other tutors reported that they had learnt the need to balance the amount of theory and practical work, as illustrated by the following comment from an engineering and manufacturing tutor:

The way we teach has changed ... in the early days we tried to do a bit of practical and a bit of theory, but it was blatantly clear from early on that the young people did not want to come to college to do classroom work ... so we now do as much practical as possible, and as little theory.

Some tutors, however, mentioned that teaching IFP students was an ongoing learning process for them and they were still developing new ways of engaging the young people in cohorts 3 and 4 of the programme. One applied business tutor, for example, reported that the way he teaches is ‘*always changing year on year, depending on the needs of the students*’.

The majority of the tutors reported that they taught students in both the third and fourth cohorts of the IFP, and some had been teaching on the programme since the first cohort. Tutors were, therefore, able to draw on this experience and comment on the lessons that they had learned about the delivery of IFP courses. The main lessons learned included the need to do the following.

- **Vary the teaching methods** used, ‘*to keep their interest*’. One way in which tutors achieved this was to combine theory work with practical activities. One tutor, for example, stressed the need to ‘*have both elements on the same day ... with the practical given as a reward after they’ve done the written work*’.
- **Divide up the course** into smaller, more manageable elements, or, as one tutor described, use a ‘*step-by-step approach*’. Tutors felt that this helped to maintain the attention of young people and keep them actively engaged in the lesson.

- **Motivate and encourage** the students, and ‘*show an interest in what they are doing*’, in order to keep them engaged in the course, and to raise their self-esteem. One engineering tutor also highlighted his efforts to ‘*inspire*’ students’ interest in the area, by talking to them about possible careers available in engineering.
- **Treat the students like adults**, by using a more informal approach and giving them more independence, as tutors felt that students ‘*respond to the more mature approach*’.
- **Maintain close supervision** of the students to ensure they remain on task, and be ‘*firm but fair with them*’. One tutor, for example, emphasised the need to ‘*set clear boundaries at the start of the course*’. Another tutor, who taught ICT, commented, ‘*Although they are on our premises, they still are school children. You haven’t got that ability to reason with them that you have with more mature students. Some of them, more than others, are childish, so classroom management is essential really.*’

3.4.2 Students’ experience of the delivery of IFP courses

The majority of the students interviewed were undertaking their IFP course away from school, at a college or training provider. Seventeen students indicated that there was shared delivery of their course, and that they studied partly at a college or training provider, and partly at school. In most cases, the time that students spent on their course each week was divided between the school and the college or training provider. However, in one partnership, students rotated their location of study every half term, so that they spent one half term at their school, and the following half term at the college. Five students, who were taking GCSEs in vocational subjects, reported that they studied solely at school. The majority of those students who had attended a college or training provider had found it a positive experience and valued the experience of learning in a different environment, with different tutors and students.

Nearly all of the students interviewed reported that they were enjoying their IFP course overall, and they identified the elements of their course that they had enjoyed the most. The most common response, mentioned by around half the students interviewed (30 individuals) was that they liked the **practical work** the most.

Many of the students commented that they preferred the more applied approach of their IFP course, as it suited their learning style, and this was not limited to more ‘practical subjects’, like engineering and construction. Interviewees highlighted the difference between their IFP course and their other courses at school, as illustrated by the following comments:

I mainly like the active side of it ... actually doing the work, working on the lathes and things like that. I prefer hands-on learning. I don’t like

to be sat down reading, I prefer actually doing it, and learning from your mistakes. (engineering student)

It's more fun, it's not all about writing ... in school you are just doing things out of a book. (construction student)

It is not like a normal lesson where you are sitting there getting on with work. We get to interact. (applied business student)

Nine students indicated that they had particularly enjoyed the more **adult and relaxed environment** of the college, including the more informal teaching style and 'lenient' approach of tutors. Again they contrasted this with their experiences at school. Students, on the whole, felt that they were 'treated as adults' by college tutors and with more respect than their school teachers, as the following comments illustrate:

Here they treat you like adults, but at school they think you are still little children.

They are more laid back with you ... At school, they are on you 24/7 to get things in; whereas at college they give you a deadline and if you don't do it then you don't get the grades, which I think matures you.

Five students reported that they had particularly appreciated the **opportunity to work with new adults and students** through their course. Eight students across a range of vocational areas identified **specific aspects** of their course content that they had enjoyed most, such as metalwork in engineering and learning about spreadsheets in ICT. Other aspects that a small number of students mentioned that they enjoyed included working in a smaller class, and learning something new and developing new skills.

Although 16 students stated that there were no aspects of their IFP course that they disliked, some students did mention a range of elements that they had not liked about their course. The most commonly mentioned aspect which students had not liked (noted by nine individuals) was the **theory or written element** of the course. This was summed up by one student who explained, 'theory is boring because I hate writing'. Three students identified **specific elements** of their course content that they had not enjoyed such as working on lathes in engineering, and dealing with money in a hairdressing salon. Other aspects that students had not enjoyed included the teaching style of specific tutors (three interviewees mentioned this), and difficulties with transport (two interviewees).

3.4.3 Views on how IFP courses differ from other school subjects

Most of the tutors interviewed had not actively tried to make the IFP course different from students' other courses; however, some did comment on how

the learning experience for young people taking vocational qualifications differed from their academic qualifications. Some tutors pointed out that vocational qualifications involve more practical work, and group work, than academic qualifications, as expressed by one tutor, who indicated that on his public services course, there is *'a lot more learning through practice ... less chalk and talk'*. However, it is worth noting that a few tutors commented that GCSEs in vocational subjects were *'not as vocational as [they] should be'*, and were not very different to academic GCSEs. Consequently (as discussed in Section 3.2.3), some tutors were considering changing from GCSEs in vocational subjects to BTEC qualifications, as they considered these qualifications to be more vocational.

A few of the tutors interviewed also highlighted differences between the learning experience of IFP students studying at college, and their experience at school. A small number of tutors noted that colleges are more likely than schools to be able to offer specialist equipment and staff with experience of industry. Some tutors also indicated that the college environment is more informal, and less structured, than school, and highlighted that tutors are able to be more flexible in their teaching approach than school teachers. One tutor, for example, highlighted that, unlike in schools, where breaks have to be taken at specified times, he was able to take breaks in lessons at the most appropriate time. It is worth noting, however, that where tutors were delivering IFP courses in schools, some also tried to create a similar informal environment, by bringing the FE culture into school. One health and social care tutor, for instance, reported that she has flexible break times in lessons, not necessarily at the normal school times, and she allows the students to have drinks and biscuits in their lessons.

Many of the young people interviewed also highlighted differences between their IFP course and their school subjects. Their comments were similar to those of the tutors, in that they noted differences in the amount of practical work involved in their IFP course and also differences in the way the tutors treated them, compared with their school teachers.

Some students commented on their experience of being able to study a vocational course as well as more academic qualifications like GCSEs. Where students felt able to comment, they generally appreciated this opportunity, and welcomed the variation in their studies. Some students indicated that they appreciated the opportunity to study a new type of course, particularly one that was more practical, and to learn new skills, as expressed by one interviewee, *'I feel it is a lot better because I learn a lot better actually doing something. I can't sit there and look at a book. So, if I am doing it, I will learn as I am doing it, so doing vocational courses are great for me.'* Other students reported that they enjoyed being able to gain experience of the college environment and to get a *'taster'* of what career they might like in future, and a small number felt that this would give them an advantage in the future: *'It*

has helped a lot and it is giving me a better chance of getting into college because I am not the brightest lad. A few young people also stated that vocational courses were particularly good for those who do not achieve well in academic GCSE subjects.

Students were also asked to comment on whether they worked as hard on their IFP course as on their other school subjects. Around a third of the young people interviewed (24 students) reported that they were working harder on their IFP course than on their other school subjects, and in most cases, these young people explained that this was because they *'enjoy it more'*. Students' reasons for being more motivated on their IFP course included the following.

- **It was something new**, and so was seen as more interesting than their other courses. This was illustrated by the following comment from a bricklaying student: *'I think I probably work harder here [at the college] because we try and impress all the tutors. This is the first year here, but I have been doing maths for 10 years, so it gets a bit boring.'*
- **It was a course they had chosen to do**, and were particularly interested in. A hairdressing student, for example, stated: *'This is what I really want to do ... I am really working for it because I really want to do it.'*
- **They saw the relevance of it** because it was related to a career they were interested in. A plumbing student, for example, explained: *'I push myself a lot more ... I think this is better than school because later in life there is a job involved. At school there is just GCSEs which do help you get a job and that, but not really. They don't really matter when you actually do them.'* Another student, who was studying ICT through the IFP made the following comment about his course: *'It is worth more to me because when I leave here the main thing that I need is ICT. So as soon as I get to college I screw my head on ... make sure that I pass. I think it is the one course that I really do work on compared to everything else.'*

Eighteen students indicated that they viewed their IFP course in the same way as their other subjects, and work equally hard on all their subjects. A small number of students reported that they work harder on their other school subjects than on their IFP course. A few students explained that this was because their IFP course was easier than their other subjects, and so they did not need to work as hard. One motor vehicle student, for example, explained that, *'it is not really hard, so you don't have to concentrate too hard, so you can concentrate more on your school work.'* Other students stated that, as a result of taking their IFP course, they had realised the importance of achieving in their other subjects, and were now working harder in their core subjects. This was summed up by one student, who commented on their maths and English GCSEs: *'It has made me think I need to knuckle down and get them.'*

In summary, the tutors delivering IFP continued to build on the lessons learned in working with 14 to 16 year olds in external providers' settings as the programme matured. They suggested that varying teaching methods,

dividing up the course into manageable ‘chunks’, motivating and encouraging students and treating them like adults were all effective approaches. In turn, the students learning away from school valued the adult and relaxed environment, the opportunity to work with adults, in addition to the practical and applied approach. Those who reported that they worked harder on their IFP qualifications than other subjects said that this was because it was something new, that it had been an active choice and because they saw its relevance to their future.

3.5 Extent of employer involvement

Previous visits to partnerships had shown a slight increase in employer involvement. Also ‘interviewees generally perceived employer involvement to be a valuable aspect of the IFP, and many emphasised their plans to develop their links further next year’. However challenges were highlighted as:

- tutors had limited time to build links with employers
- there was a lack of appropriate employers available
- employers were reluctant to become involved.

3.5.1 Extent of change

Although there was widespread recognition of the value of employer involvement in the IFP, actual **employer involvement was limited** and there was still a generally perceived intention to further develop links in the future. However, in at least one school there had been no change since cohort 1 as the school had never involved employers.

Employers were being used, but not to a great extent, indeed staff in four colleges reported having no involvement with employers (one of which had involvement in cohort 2 but not in cohorts 3 and 4 because of the amount of time it took to arrange). Schools reported having less involvement, with the thrust of their relationship with employers focusing on work experience, with the onus on the colleges to organise IFP engagement. Even though it was generally recognised that employers add value to the students’ experience there were still many barriers in place (see below).

Some methods of facilitating employer involvement were identified (see below), and, although a minority of young people had engaged with employers on their IFP courses, those that had were positive about the experience.

3.5.2 Barriers and facilitators

The main barriers to further employer involvement in the IFP were perceived to be:

- **Constraints** in the form of, for example, health and safety considerations, especially in areas such as construction, motor vehicle maintenance and health and social care. One IFP coordinator reported that last year the college temporarily put a stop to IFP students going on work placements due to health and safety considerations and new legal requirements, one tutor said *'the thought of risk assessments doesn't appeal'*.
- **Lack of time** to organise in terms of not only the risk assessments, but also the logistics with employers and young people. In addition tutors in one college, in particular, felt they had limited time, *'my main priority is to cover the curriculum ... there is not enough time to fit employer engagement in'*.

Additional factors were also mentioned.

- **Limited funding.** One college pointed out how expensive it was to either get employers into college or transport young people to employers (especially with the staff: pupil ratio needed).
- **Confusion over whose responsibility it was to drive forward employer involvement.** Tutors and the coordinator in one college did not agree as to whom should be organising employers, whether it should be the school, the college IFP coordinator or the individual departments within the college.
- **Difficulty in gaining employer support.** For employers, involvement can be time consuming and sometimes, lack of understanding between employer and college could also be an impediment. One hairdressing tutor, who found working with employers particularly challenging, said *'colleges and employers don't work well...employers don't like colleges...they don't realise what is involved in teaching them'*.

It appeared to be recognised that some subjects were easier to involve employers in than others, either because the work was suitable, for example agriculture, or because the college could be used as an employer, for example, hairdressing and catering.

Apart from the nature of the employer sector, other facilitators were as follows.

- **Identifying clearly who was responsible for involving employers,** for example, one college had a new '14 to 16 teaching and learning champion' within each faculty and part of the job was to look into employer engagement.
- **Raising the profile and importance of employer involvement.** Apart from appointing dedicated staff (as described above) one IFP coordinator

reported holding regular internal staff meetings to discuss potential employers and *'to try and encourage as much involvement as possible'*. In cohort 4 they have worked (alongside the Education Business Partnership (EBP)) towards work experience being related to the IFP courses. Some schools also reported building up employer involvement as part of the enterprise culture.

- **Using lecturers' contacts.** In some sectors tutors reported lecturers still having contacts in the industry in which they used to work. This should be recognised and more time given to nurturing these contacts. Some employers, for example the army, appreciated being involved and were happy to work with the college.

3.5.3 Value added by employers

The main way in which staff at colleges and schools believed employer engagement benefited students was by **bringing the workplace to life**, as one IFP coordinator postulated *'there is nothing quite like seeing the ethos of work'*. One school teacher pointed out that it brought the workplace into the classroom and put the emphasis back onto work and *'adds a lot to their understanding'*. Visiting the workplace also contributed to **coursework assignments** as IFP students could ask questions, take photographs and accumulate materials. A hairdressing tutor in one college commented on how working in the salon at college helped her students with their **communication skills** *'they have to be disciplined and professional in front of clients'*.

One IFP coordinator valued employer engagement highly and gave two examples of how it can be mutually beneficial to both student and employer. One construction company, for instance, offered an apprenticeship to a student who had won a bricklaying award. The coordinator also described a model of an employer and college relationship he had seen, and wanted to emulate, where *'employers do some teaching ... and instead of getting paid they are given free places at college for their workforce, so receiving free training themselves'*.

3.5.4 Students' experience of employers

The majority of students could not recall involvement with employers as part of their IFP courses. However, fifteen young people recalled visiting employers or employers visiting the college. They all found the experience rewarding, as one enthused *'it just gives a real-life feel to the subject, we are not just being taught by words, we are actually going out and seeing for ourselves what everything is about and how it runs'*. Another student appreciated seeing how products are made: *'They actually make the cars by hand. We actually got to see them make these things.'*

At another college the army visited the college and worked with the young people, *'they came in for a day and we did lots of activities with them'*. One

young person enthused about this *'they gave us basis materials and told us to build a car and gave us the tools. A racing car and we raced them at the end'*.

3.6 Summary

Overall, it appears that these partnerships were continually reviewing the qualifications they offered, partly in response to demand from schools, and partly as a result of their knowledge and experience of delivering vocational qualifications. Partnerships' flexibility in responding to their local priorities and contexts is further reflected in the finding that no one common pattern of changes in qualifications emerged consistently across the nine partnerships. For example, while some were extending the levels offered upwards to Level 2, others were extending downwards to entry level. There was also some indication of a decline in the delivery of GCSEs in vocational subjects at external providers and a move in some partnerships towards delivery of these types of qualifications in schools.

In all but one of the partnerships, there had been some change to the delivery of IFP courses, either in terms of the delivery model adopted or the duration and timing of courses, for the third and fourth cohorts. Some partnerships, for example, had decided to move the delivery of some courses from college to schools, in order to overcome resource issues within the college, as well as timetabling and transport issues. There had been no major changes to the way tutors delivered courses for the third and fourth cohorts of students; however, they had learnt lessons about the need to adapt their teaching to suit the needs of the IFP cohort.

Students appeared to be responding well to their IFP course, and nearly all reported that they were enjoying it. Many young people contrasted their learning experience on their IFP course with their experience at school, and welcomed the practical aspects of their course, and the more adult and informal way in which they were taught by college tutors. Just under a quarter of students indicated that they worked equally hard on their IFP course and their other school subjects; however, around a third of young people reported that they were working harder on their IFP course because they enjoyed it more.

4. Student selection and support

Key findings

- Awareness of the importance of selection had developed but it had not always filtered down to schools.
- There was evidence of more rigorous selection in six partnerships, with more emphasis on students' motivation, attendance, interest in the vocational area and generally whether the student wanted to undertake the course. The remaining three were working towards improved selection.
- Where the interaction and collaboration between colleges and schools was strongest, the selection procedure appeared to be more successful in terms of staff and students believing the right young people were on the appropriate course.
- In cohorts 3 and 4 student support remained '*ad hoc*', with many similar features as reported in cohort 1, for example, tutorial sessions and in-class support for students. However, there was increased knowledge and awareness of the support needs of these young people and there was some evidence that colleges had progressed in their support provision, for example, four partnerships had specific support regimes in place.
- All the schools, to some degree, were involved in reviewing students' progress. Three reported that progress was monitored more stringently now than in the first year of IFP, but others also indicated that they were introducing a slightly tighter regime for supervising progress. In some cases this was formalised by the introduction of a new member of staff, whilst in others strong links appear to have been formed with college staff.
- Discontinuation of students was still apparent, although two-thirds of colleges reported low levels, and many appeared to be reflecting on the causes and considering how to prevent it. In the three partnerships where selection appeared not to have progressed so far, there was evidence that discontinuation was more of a problem.
- Four colleges appeared to be more advanced in their support offered to IFP students with regard to post-16 choices. Evidence emerged from these partnerships that IFP young people were offered advice beyond that offered to all Year 11 students. Other colleges attended Year 11 options evenings at schools, but appeared to offer little proactive action.
- In cohorts 3 and 4 the young people reported themselves to be, on the whole, positive about their college experience. Most felt well supported and appeared to have experienced few problems. Those that had, tended to come from partnerships where there appeared to be least development in terms of selection and support.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the characteristics of students and approaches to selection from the perspective of the college, the school and the student. It also investigates the nature of the support for students. It examines:

- the extent of change with regard to the characteristics of students and approaches to selection
- the responsibility for selection and perceptions of the key student characteristics necessary for IFP selection
- the support structures in place and the nature of any change over the last four years
- discontinuation and subsequent support action, transition support and the students' experiences of support.

4.2 Characteristics of students and approaches to selection

Initial research findings from cohort 1⁵ revealed that three approaches to identify students for participation in IFP had been adopted by schools. These were:

- free student choice
- a combination of free choice and selection
- selection by staff.

In 2004 some change had been reported in the approach to student recruitment between cohorts 1 and 2. Some colleges and schools agreed: *'they had 'opened up' IFP within the options process, so that it was now coming to be regarded as a programme for students of all abilities'*. This section reports on further change in cohorts 3 and 4 with regard to the characteristics and selection of young people for IFP.

4.2.1 Extent of change

Overall evidence emerged that in cohorts 3 and 4 students' characteristics have become increasingly important in the selection for participation in the IFP. Staff in schools and colleges in six partnerships commented on the fact that more emphasis has been placed on students' attributes, for example **their motivation, their interest in the area and their ability to attend regularly.**

It appeared that, in the most developed and successful partnerships, **screening programmes or selection guidelines emerged as contributing factors to**

⁵ Golden, S., Nelson, J., O'Donnell, L. and Morris, M. (2003). Evaluation of Increased Flexibilities: The Report of Findings from Partnership Visits. Unpublished report.

good practice. Although students might be at liberty to choose a course, they were then checked for suitability. In one partnership, for example, both schools selected students quite stringently according to criteria other than exclusively ability. One assistant headteacher, with responsibility for the IFP, said: *'This year we have achieved our best screening programme, it is based on Fischer Family Trust data, key stage 3 results, attendance (anyone with less than 80% is not considered) and exclusions data.'* This was refined by their Curriculum Coordinator (with responsibility for diversity), who added: *'The key criteria are their choice and how well they will achieve – which I establish by interview.'* The assistant principal at the college concurred with this, he believed that selection in cohorts 3 and 4 was more rigorous and that generally schools were more aware as to what was suitable for different young people.

In another partnership, schools had developed sophisticated selection processes. One school incorporated the IFP into the normal Year 9 options process. The key criteria for selection were an interest in the vocational area, Level 5 at key stage 3 (although exceptions were made if the student was enthusiastic about the area), cognitive ability test (CAT) scores and students' attitudinal scores (based on a system developed by the school which identified a good hard-working attitude). Another school in the same partnership assessed students' suitability in terms of their behaviour and attendance as well as their academic ability. The school perceived suitable students for the IFP to be those who preferred a practical approach to learning, were self-confident and had thought carefully about what they wanted to do in the future. In this partnership the college had set out clear guidelines for selection criteria:

- predicted to achieve 5 GCSEs (A*–C)
- Level 5 at key stage 3 essential
- Level 6 at key stage 3 desirable
- good attendance (95% minimum)
- enthusiasm, interest and commitment.

The IFP coordinator at this college had noticed a change in students since cohort 1, when the students tended to be lower achieving; whereas in cohorts 3 and 4 schools selected the students according to the guidelines with the result that students appeared to be more appropriate for the IFP: *'we want the right students for the right course...they need to have a chance of achieving'*.

Overall, staff in six partnerships (where there was some evidence of embedded good practice with regard to selection, for example the introduction of selection guidance (see above)) said that the way in which young people were selected for IFP in cohorts 3 and 4 had altered in the light of experience. There was increased awareness overall that **IFP was not suitable for all students**,

especially at either end of the ability spectrum. One school IFP coordinator believed that: *'it is not appropriate for A/A* students to go off to college and do entry qualifications'*. Another coordinator maintained *'in the early years of the programme we were getting bottom set students'* whereas in cohorts 3 and 4 they were reported to be more able. It appears that with cohorts 3 and 4, while perceived ability was still a contributory factor, the key criteria considered were student characteristics and an interest in a vocational area.

However, in three partnerships there appeared to have been little indication that criteria for selection had developed significantly in cohorts 3 and 4. In two of these partnerships there was evidence of increased awareness of the importance of selection but there was a feeling that this had not necessarily filtered down to the schools, that awareness had not been translated into action and that not all tutors concurred. *'I don't think all schools have caught up yet. They are still directing kids to the programme that they don't know what to do with.'* The last partnership was planning to introduce a new selection procedure for cohort 5.

Discussion relating to the selection process was not straightforward in two partnerships where funding streams had been pooled and, consequently, partnerships could not readily identify selection procedures specifically for 'IFP-funded' students. In another partnership, where schools contributed directly to the costs, the schools were focused on ensuring that they selected students who would sustain a two-year course as they now had to pay for a student even where they discontinued. In this partnership, the college had also planned to develop cohort 4 further as they bid for European Social Fund (ESF) Objective 2 money from the county to provide more shorter courses.

4.2.2 Responsibility for selection of students

The responsibility for selection in cohorts 3 and 4 appeared to rest predominantly with the schools, as one college coordinator expressed *'I believe the key people in the selection process are the schools'*.

In cohort 1 *'in general, [college] tutors were not aware of how or why students had come to participate in IFP'*.⁶ On the whole, with the notable exception of the two colleges outlined in the previous section who had introduced selection guidelines for schools, this was true in cohorts 3 and 4 as well. One tutor, for example, said *'the first contact with learners is usually on day one of the course'*. Another college coordinator stated that despite efforts to encourage schools to think carefully about the selection programme, the process remained a mystery other than *'many heads still use the programme as a dumping ground'*. However, **there were signs of increased responsibility**

⁶ Golden, S., Nelson, J., O'Donnell, L. and Morris, M. (2003). Evaluation of Increased Flexibilities: The Report of Findings from Partnership Visits. Unpublished report.

from colleges in the form of increased input into the process (some of which could be construed as promotion for the college). These were:

- staff from four colleges attended Year 9 **options evenings** and, for example, presented ‘vocational pathways’ to the parents and young people at the schools
- two colleges were already **interviewing** young people, as it was perceived to be important for the young people to have an interview with a college tutor
- one college issued **guidelines** for selection (see above)
- one college implemented a written **screening** programme (see above)
- one college was introducing interviewing in cohort 5 *‘selection and recruitment are vital...as young people have to prove they want to do the course’*.

Only two colleges had taken on proactive responsibility for breaking down stereotypical job roles. One college was running specific taster courses in construction and engineering focused on encouraging girls’ participation. However, the college IFP coordinator felt that opposition to non-stereotypical subject choice came from schools, as they tended to be quite conservative and appeared to be worried that they would be blamed by students if they were subsequently unhappy with their choice. At another college an engineering tutor had made candlesticks and displayed these on the schools’ option evenings in the hope that they would appeal more to girls. He had also recruited a part-time female engineering tutor. These measures had yielded little so far but he remained hopeful that they would help to break down gender stereotyping.

Other colleges had a less proactive approach in their measures to change stereotyping, one college coordinator commented *‘nobody would be discouraged if they were making a non-stereotypical choice’* and another said *‘we always make clear to students that all young people can do our courses’*.

4.2.3 Students’ experience of selection for participation in the IFP

Most young people (69) recalled first hearing about the IFP courses at the Year 9 options presentations mainly from the Head of Year or teachers. There were few mentions of careers teachers or Connexions. Some (16) remembered reading about them in options booklets and pamphlets. Seventeen students heard about it from siblings or friends, for example one said: *‘I heard about it from friends at school first, and then it was on the option sheet so I wrote in because I was so keen’*.

Just under one-third (22) of the students perceived themselves to have, in some way, been *‘chosen’*, *‘selected’* or *‘picked’*. The implications of this

perception appeared to alter depending on whether the selection was portrayed as being for positive reasons as in the case of the following student:

Me and my mum had to take our recent school reports...and say why we wanted to do the course...and then they chose us on why we wanted to do the course...because it was quite a big group and he had to select.

Alternatively some students appeared to believe they were being ‘selected’ for other reasons, ‘my teacher said there is a construction course and was I interested and I said “yeah” because I don’t like school.’

There was evidence that in those schools within these nine case-study partnerships **where more successful selection criteria were embedded, students appeared to be happier about the advice**; whereas in those schools where selection criteria were not as well understood, some young people indicated that they would have liked more information. One student wanted ‘the Year 9s who were thinking of coming [to college] to talk to the Year 10s to get their opinion’. Another student pointed out she had not been given much information at all about the course, and when asked about what further information she would have liked said ‘that we were going to college once a week!’

Regardless of how they had been informed, or whether they wanted more information, most young people expressed positive comments about the prospect of the IFP courses. They looked forward to the courses, because they were interested in the subject, they felt it was a good opportunity, they wanted to do something practical ‘I like getting my hands dirty’, they wanted to go to college ‘it makes you feel a bit older’ or because it was an opportunity to get away from school. The parents, who were reported to be supportive by the students, generally thought it was a good opportunity, as one student commented: ‘my dad actually said it would be good because later on I may be able to get into BA systems like my dad and work on the aircraft’.

These spontaneous reactions, when they first heard about the IFP courses, were generally reflected in the students’ reasons for ultimately deciding to take part in the courses. Many (29) were motivated by the vocational area and the practical nature of the work, ‘I like cars, I have liked them since I was about eight ... there is more practical work here ... and you have to wear overalls and boots.’

Some (5) took part because they liked the qualification, ‘it’s different, it’s more likely to get me a job’, some (6) felt it better prepared them for a job, whilst others (12) just believed the course would be better than school.

4.2.4 Staff and students' perceptions of key student characteristics necessary for IFP selection

As outlined in section 4.2.1 above, student characteristics seen to be necessary by staff for success in the IFP were:

- 'appropriate' academic ability (dependent on the partnership and the qualification (see section 3.2))
- motivation
- genuine interest in the vocational area
- good attendance.

Students' views on why one student was chosen over another varied. It appeared to be largely dependent on the way in which the school approached the selection procedure and this in turn appeared to reflect the school's attitude to the IFP.

In the schools with partnerships that had developed some features of good practice with regard to the IFP, students perceived the courses to be for 'good' students. As one girl said:

We had a wide range and variety of options and we could choose media as a subject at school, but the school suggested to us that if we wanted to they would take a group of good students to go over to some of the colleges to learn for a First diploma in media.

One more student in another partnership also believed that the IFP courses were for those students who behaved: *'The school wanted somebody who worked hard out of the [school] building without causing trouble....and [the school wanted] to make sure it would benefit them as well.'*

Some students, in the partnerships with evidence of good practice with regard to selection for IFP courses, indicated that **they needed to apply for or earn their places**: *'The teacher spoke to us about what we would have to do on the course and she gave us a paper on the course that we had chosen and we had to write a piece about why we wanted to do it.'* And yet others, in these partnerships, gave the impression **they were taking ownership of the decision**, even if they were, to some degree, being directed, as one boy said: *'I applied for motor vehicle, but Mr X recommended me for engineering because he thought I was a bit too bright for motor vehicle.'* Another stated:

Mr X didn't really want me to [go to college] because he said that I could do engineering here, but ... I went to see the college because it is more hands-on and you're actually there and you're actually doing stuff. Here you are just doing written work basically.

Conversely, **in partnerships with less well-developed selection procedures, there was some evidence that young people were more passive in their consideration of the IFP**, they were just informed that they had been selected, one boy said: *'I think the school had our names down and they picked the ones who they thought would do alright.'* Another disclosed: *'I didn't really want to choose that course ... I got settled in so there was no point in moving ... they just took me and told me what it was about.'*

In one case a girl spoke about encountering negative external perceptions of student characteristics associated with 14 to 16 year olds attending college:

I work at Superdrug and I tell the girls that I go to college one day a week and they [say] 'that is for naughty people', I don't know where they get that idea from. I said, 'No not at all, because it is for the people that they feel are going to attend ... it is not for naughty people.' I don't know where they get that impression.

4.3 Nature of support for students

In 2003 six out of the nine partnerships in cohort 1 reported⁷ they were providing specific support to the IFP students, namely:

- one-to-one or small-group tutorial sessions
- in-class support for students
- college tutors giving students their contact details
- colleges taking more time than usual with their induction sessions.

In addition two partnerships had introduced Learning Mentors or had used Connexions Service Personal Advisors to support their IFP students. Nevertheless, support was described overall as *'fairly ad hoc'*.

This section explores the extent of change since cohort 1, how students' progress was reviewed, the extent of drop-out and subsequent support, support with transition and post-16 choices and lastly outlines students' experience of support.

4.3.1 Extent of change

In cohorts 3 and 4 support remained *'ad hoc'*, with many similar features as reported in cohort 1, for example, tutorial sessions and in-class support for students. However, there was increased knowledge and awareness of the support needs of these young people. Whilst there was not consensus on all issues (see section 4.3.2 below) there was some evidence that colleges had

⁷ Golden, S., Nelson, J., O'Donnell, L. and Morris, M. (2003). Evaluation of Increased Flexibilities: The Report of Findings from Partnership Visits. Unpublished report.

progressed in their support provision. For example, four partnerships had specific support regimes in place and many more schools appeared to be sending a member of staff with the young people to college to support students and college colleagues and maintain contact with progress.

There was still some evidence of young people dropping out of IFP courses in cohorts 3 and 4, although, on the whole, schools and colleges were reflecting on the causes of this. In partnerships with more developed IFP practice, for example, more rigorous selection and subsequent support, drop-out was less of an issue. Conversely, there was some evidence in a couple of partnerships that drop-out was perceived to be an accepted part of IFP because of the nature of the students.

In cohorts 3 and 4 the young people reported themselves to be, on the whole, positive about their college experience. Most felt well supported and appeared to have experienced few problems. Those that had encountered problems came from partnerships where there appeared to be least development in terms of selection and support.

4.3.2 Support with learning

In five of the colleges staff reported that there was **support available within the lesson structure if required**, *'support is in-built into lesson time'*. One tutor commented that *'this is how we deal with post-16 students'*, indicating that there was no special provision for the younger people. However, a few colleges recognised that IFP students needed slightly more pastoral attention within the present structure because of their age.

In a few other colleges tutors indicated that there was further **tutorial support**, for example, for social skills and confidence, available if needed. One tutor supported his students *'on a one-to-one basis to help them with the theory'*. In another college, with highly developed selection procedures embedded, two college tutors described how they laid on extra voluntary tutorial sessions for young people to catch up with work, in one case after-school sessions were held in the school.

This same college was one of four partnerships that had **specific support structures** in place. The IFP coordinator in this college explained that the IFP was run like a *'mini school within the college'*. There was a Schools Link Team (catering for all 14 to 16 students) through which IFP students could access:

- a student handbook, which contained information such as the differences between school and college, code of conduct at college, health and safety issues, enrolment, attendance, transport, academic calendar
- the School Link Mentoring Programme, which provided two dedicated mentors available for school students

- the School Links Summer Club, where students were able to access the college at any time and the college runs specific activities during summer holidays for school link students.

In addition, the college had implemented 'praise postcards', whereby tutors sent postcards to students' homes in order to highlight students' achievements, and 'attendance postcards' where, if tutors were concerned about attendance, they would send a card saying *'we have not seen you in college, we take an interest in you and your progress. If there is a problem, please contact us'*. The college also hosted a 'rewards day' at the end of each year for all schools-links students. The press attended this and gave IFP students recognition in front of others.

Another example of specific support structures was in a college who had employed a new 'school link liaison officer'. This officer was responsible not only for administration, for example, attendance, but also for pastoral support. The IFP coordinator said *'I don't know how we coped without her'*.

There was a lack of consensus between tutors and college coordinators about the extent to which IFP students shared similar needs with their post-16 peers, and they questioned whether IFP students needed different support from the older students. Five tutors in four colleges believed that the **support needs of the IFP young people were no different to the post-16 students**, *'they are not that far apart'*. One tutor suggested this similarity between IFP and 16 to 18 year olds' support needs emanated from the fact that the types of students who attend college post-16 were often those who had not done well at school. However, two tutors in different colleges believed that the IFP students needed higher levels of support, one felt they experienced different problems, for example *'having to juggle more subjects'*, whilst the other pointed out *'that their main problems revolve around transport'*.

Three colleges still maintained that the **primary support responsibility lay with the schools**: *'we don't give pastoral support – they're only here for two hours'*. Another tutor pointed out that if the young person needed support *'then a teaching assistant will come from school'*.

4.3.3 Methods used to review students' progress

All the schools, to some degree, were involved in reviewing students' progress. At least three schools reported that progress was monitored more stringently now than in the first year of IFP. Other schools also indicated that they were introducing a slightly tighter regime for supervising progress. In some cases this was formalised by the introduction of a new member of staff *'in cohort 1 there were no reports, now reports go to parents and school and they're much more detailed and better written ... this is all managed by a new member of staff, the Head of Vocational education'*. Whilst in others strong

links appeared to have been formed with college staff regarding students' progress, attendance and behavioural issues.

Several schools also sent members of school staff to the college with the young people, consequently they felt well informed with regard to the young people's progress. Only one school recognised that feedback from the college was still *'patchy'* and needed to be improved. This was being addressed by the new curriculum coordinator.

4.3.4 Extent of discontinuation and subsequent support action

Two-thirds of colleges reported a low level of discontinuation, with reasons mainly centring on personal issues, such as families leaving the area or students preferring to do another course, indeed one stated that there had been *'no serious incidents and certainly no exclusions in four years'*. One schoolteacher pointed out that poor attendance and behavioural problems were more common when students had to take a course that was not their first choice. A few college staff reported good relationships with schools and some pointed out that it was the school's responsibility to re-engage students if they did discontinue. Schools, in their turn, did report encouraging young people to *'catch up'* if they swapped course. There was one incidence, however, where a school did withdraw from a course run at the college. This appeared to be because the school was not happy with the qualification and the exam board. They were now running a different, but related, course with a new exam board entirely in school.

One college had adopted a pre-emptive policy, to minimise drop-out, of getting young people to fill in questionnaires to establish potential problems or issues which might contribute to future drop-out, *'it highlights early warning signals of drop-out'*. They worked well with schools, who had a highly developed selection procedure (based on guidance from the college). One school reported that discontinuation was not an issue as the students were normally better engaged than other students.

However, they also reported having a group of students in the school who followed a key skills and enrichment type programme, so if students did drop out of the IFP, they were able to join this group, *'it is a safety net for them to come back to'*. In another partnership, a school reported a similar scenario where reintegrated students spent their 'college' day in the special needs centre, on, for example, coursework supervised by teaching assistants. A school in another partnership, with some good embedded IFP practice (especially with regard to collaboration between schools and the college) was considering an Asdan course for next year (which would not be funded by IFP) and the possibility of a one-year course (as two years was often felt to be too long for many IFP students). One more school endorsed this view that two years was too long, *'it's very tough for a 14 year old to commit to a two-year programme that they might know little about. We need to ensure that the*

young person sees the relevance in what they've chosen and we're getting better at this'.

Conversely, **two colleges did report high levels of discontinuation**. In one, (which had not revealed much progress with regard to selection) the IFP coordinator believed this was school-led *'mainly for poor attendance or lack of interest and motivation'*, suggesting that the young people were not on the right courses in the first place. Nevertheless, a tutor at this college had tried to address discontinuation, *'I talk to them [the students] but if they don't want to be here then they shouldn't – they are meant to enjoy it'*.

The other college, where schools appeared to be moving delivery of IFP into school in cohort 4, reported that two-thirds had discontinued in cohort 1, 60 per cent in cohort 2 and for cohort 3 *'they [the college] hoped to have some improvement'*. Although some students left for very good reasons, one tutor stated *'the truth is that many of them [the students] are not fully committed. I already know that only half of my cohort 4 will finish.'* The deputy headteachers at both the schools in this partnership largely concurred with this sentiment, one described the students as *'often very disaffected who would not attend school anyway'*, whilst at the other school IFP students were reported to have learning and behavioural problems. This suggests that in the partnerships where selection had not progressed, discontinuation is still an issue.

4.3.5 Support with transition and post-16 choices

Four colleges appeared to be more advanced in their support offered to IFP students with regard to post-16 choices. Evidence emerged from these partnerships that IFP young people were offered advice beyond that offered to all Year 11 students. This could be in the form of discussions and *'ongoing'* advice in weekly tutorials, or one-to-one interviews, or in the case of two colleges more advanced support.

In one of these partnerships (which displayed many good features with regard to the selection and support of IFP students), the college held a careers day, with local employers, for IFP students in Year 11. Interestingly, one of the schools in this partnership did not think the IFP students received the same level of support with post-16 choices as the other students at that school, although they were on the Connexions target list because they missed their careers lesson to participate. In another partnership, the college had introduced (with funding from ESF), in cohorts 3 and 4, employability workshops which offered advice on possible progression routes, apprenticeships and employment skills.

Staff from other colleges attended Year 11 options evenings at schools, but appeared to offer little proactive advice. Although one college coordinator pointed out that if the students' experience on the Level 1 course was successful, then they would want to stay on post-16, but this was more of a

passive approach to transition. This was confirmed by a few schools who believed that, in cases where the student was on a vocational course at college, young people were more likely to consider their post-16 options, *'for all our students the programme has been beneficial because it makes them think out post-16 destinations'*.

4.3.6 Students' experience of support

The majority of young people were positive about the support they had received whilst taking their course out of school. Sixty-three of the comments regarding support indicated that IFP students felt well supported at college. Some liked being treated *'more like adults'*, some felt the college lecturers were more helpful (possibly reflecting smaller class sizes) whilst others appeared to feel the lecturers were more available *'college lecturers are very, very supportive ... they're there 24/7 if we ask'*.

However a few students (six) would have liked more support, for example *'with spelling'* or *'just to have a chat'*. And a couple had turned to their friends and parents for support.

Eight students reported experiencing problems at college, for example conflict amongst the young people or with the tutor, getting used to new tutors and, in one case, too high a turnover of tutors. But, in the main, students appeared not to have encountered problems.

In addition most reported that they felt they were progressing *'pretty well'*, with a few commenting, for example, *'it's lots of fun'*, *'I'm very clear about how I'm progressing'* and *'it's helpful to know what to improve'*. However, four students admitted that they had not attended college *'for a while'*, either because it was *'boring'* or more specifically, *'the people running it changed and I didn't like the new lot'* and *'my friends have dropped out because they're afraid to miss school'*. These last comments revealed that some students, in some circumstances, need more support to cope with college courses.

The students who had experienced problems at college, and who admitted that they had not recently attended college, although small in numbers, significantly all came from partnerships with less rigorous selection, and lower levels of overall support.

Overall, this chapter has revealed that, on the whole, selection has become more rigorous with less emphasis on ability and more emphasis on students' motivation, attendance and interest in the vocational area. Where the interaction and collaboration between colleges and schools were strongest the selection procedure appeared to be more successful, in terms of fewer students discontinuing, more young people reporting themselves to be positive about their college experience and staff and students believing the right young

people were on the appropriate course. Student support was still developing and, whilst four partnerships had specific support regimes in place, others were aware of the support needs of these young people and were working towards it. Where selection and support had progressed the furthest there was the lowest reported incidence of student discontinuation and problems experienced by young people.

5. Outcomes of IFP

Key findings

- School and college staff reported that the programme had increased participating students' opportunity to succeed.
- Interviewees reported that many young people had increased their skills and knowledge across a range of vocational areas.
- There was some evidence of the continuing consolidation of working relationships and of the rising profile of vocational learning opportunities as viable routes into FE.
- Almost half of all young people interviewed (30) reported that the programme had either reaffirmed their interest in their chosen career or conversely had made them rethink.
- The planned career paths of many students were positively associated with their experiences of IFP.
- Many tutors attributed disappointing outcomes, where they occurred, to limited selection procedures, although selection procedures in six of the partnerships had become more rigorous since the first cohort, and there was discussion taking place about how to make improvements in the other case-study partnerships.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the views of all interviewees on the outcomes of the Increased Flexibility Programme, for the schools, for the colleges, and for the staff and the young people themselves. Where relevant, comparisons have been drawn with the findings from the quantitative analysis of outcomes for the first cohort of students.⁸

The timing of the visits meant that data was not yet available regarding the attainment or post-16 destinations of young people participating in cohorts 3 and 4 of the programme. Thus the purpose of this chapter is not to provide a statistical assessment of student learning outcomes to date, but rather to provide a qualitative evaluation of the outcomes experienced by staff and students, and, where relevant, to explore changes over time.

⁸ Golden, S., O'Donnell, L., Benton, T. and Rudd, P. (2005). *Evaluation of Increased Flexibility for 14 to 16 Year Olds Programme: Outcomes for the First Cohort* (DfES Research Report 668). London: DfES.

5.2 Outcomes for young people

5.2.1 Students' views and attitudes to their IFP courses

Students themselves were generally very happy with their IFP courses, with the majority of those students who expressed a view reporting that their courses could not be improved upon. However, six students suggested that their courses would benefit from more practical work and/or from a more varied range of practical activities. For example, one engineering student said:

The course would benefit from having a bit more variety in the things we do. For example in the first year it was mainly lathe work and not much in the way of welding and other metalwork, which would have made it a bit more interesting.

Other suggested improvements included:

- longer or more frequent breaks during the college day (four students)
- having more time to complete college work, particularly practical work (three students)
- better catering arrangements at the college/training provider (two students).

One student, whose construction course was jointly delivered by both the college and the school, also commented on how he thought the shared-delivery model was not working.

I think there needs to be a greater understanding between the school and the college because I think that is a major weak point. They don't always know what each other is doing and when I last went to the college he [the tutor] said we were meant to be taught this at school and we said 'yeah, but school said we were meant to be taught it here'. They are not always reading off the same page.

It should be pointed out, however, that the majority of students said they were very happy with their courses. Furthermore, the majority of students said they would be happy to recommend their respective courses to other students considering getting involved. One student said: *'I would tell anyone thinking of doing the course to go for it. It is a very good course to do, it is very informative and it will help you in later life.'* Other students said they simply enjoyed the change of environment and thought it broke up the school week, as explained by another student:

I think it is good because it breaks up the week and stuff and it gives you a good outlook once you have been to college.

Only two students said they would not recommend the course to other students, with one saying that the course was *'boring and a bit repetitive'* and the other saying he found it quite difficult because he thought that his teachers were disorganised and that this had led to more work for the students.

5.2.2 Achievement

The evidence from the evaluation of the first cohort of IFP (see Golden *et al.*, 2005) indicated that the majority of young people who took GCSEs in vocational subjects and GNVQs attained their qualifications, and that the majority of the sample of young people who had undertaken NVQs and other vocational qualifications through the programme had achieved the qualification at the end of Year 11.⁹ Interviews with the partnership coordinators revealed that the majority of young people from cohorts 3 and 4 were thought to be on track to do the same. There was a consensus amongst college staff that *'achievement outcomes have generally accurately reflected the abilities of the students'*. Furthermore, early outcome indicators from schools were reported to suggest that cohort 3 and 4 students were progressing at least as well in their IFP qualifications as they were in their school subjects, and in some cases better on their IFP courses. However, all nine partnerships had some experience of underachievement, particularly in terms of retention or attendance, as one teacher explained:

In terms of how successful the courses have been I know that poor attendance, and in some cases outcomes, will look unfavourable, but many of these students have really benefited from being involved. You have to take account of the kind of students we're working with.

There were some concerns regarding students' performance, often tied to particular courses and/or cohorts. For example, staff from three colleges reported disappointing achievement rates for students in cohort 1, with one college saying this was specifically in art and design, while staff from another college said they were getting disappointing results where they were helping schools to deliver Applied GCSEs. Where disappointing results had been noted, the majority of college staff agreed that this was usually down to inadequate selection procedures. Indeed, the inappropriate selection of students was reported in the evaluation of the first cohort of the programme (Golden *et al.*, 2005) as a primary reason for students discontinuing their involvement in courses (p24). In the visit in 2006, staff from three partnerships said that too many schools were still using the programme as a dumping ground for *'difficult children'*. One tutor explained: *'Despite the college's efforts to encourage schools to think carefully about the students they select for the programme, many heads still use the programme as a dumping ground.'* Other reasons given for where results were not as good as could be

⁹ Golden, S., O'Donnell, L., Benton, T. and Rudd, P. (2005). *Evaluation of Increased Flexibility for 14 to 16 Year Olds Programme: Outcomes for the First Cohort* (DfES Research Report 668). London: DfES.

expected included students not mixing well with peers from other schools and the high numbers of students with Special Educational Needs participating in IFP courses.

Improvements had been made however. Six of the nine partnerships visited expressed the view that selection procedures had become more rigorous since the first cohort (see Chapter 3), and that schools had further developed their approaches to selection, as one partnership coordinator explained:

We discussed [the issues regarding selection] with the schools and they took it on board. The students selected in cohorts 3 and 4 have been much more appropriate [for placement on IFP funded courses], and we hope this will be reflected in their achievements.

There was, however, discussion taking place about how to make improvements in the other case-study partnerships.

5.2.3 Social and personal development

The majority of school staff agreed that the IFP had helped many students to become more confident and to engage (and in some cases re-engage) into learning, as one teacher explained: *‘The IFP has raised the aspirations of students who might not have otherwise considered progression to FE. It has also improved their attendance and their self-esteem.’*

These views were mirrored by comments made by the students themselves. In response to an open question, students identified ways in which participation in the IFP had helped them develop both socially and personally. The two most widely reported factors were:

- improved confidence (28 students)
- greater maturity (eight students).

The majority of views expressed related to students becoming more **confident** and the knock-on effects this had had on their college work. One Year 10 student explained: *‘I have become much more confident with people and consequently much better at working in teams.’* A Year 11 student said: *‘I have changed; I’m more likely to give things a go now: I’ve got more confidence.’* Fourteen students said the experience had not changed them at all. However, the majority of students were able to identify ways in which participation in the IFP had helped them develop. Of those students that did say the course had changed them, many were appreciative of the opportunities the IFP afforded them. One Year 11 student, for example, explained that his course had *‘increased my knowledge of engineering in general. I have done things that I probably wouldn’t have done if I had a normal technology subject.’*

While staff from one partnership area expressed the opinion that the IFP had ‘*increased young people’s interest in education*’, through widening their opportunities and increasing their self-esteem, this was not entirely borne out by interviews with the young people themselves. There were some indications that, for a few students, the experience of the IFP had not affected their attitudes towards school because, as one young man explained, ‘*I am doing stuff that I enjoy [at college] but at school it’s maths and English and all that*’. Seven students who said that they had gained in confidence because of their respective courses said that their experiences on the college course had made no change to their attitudes towards school, which remained largely negative. Five students said that they thought their college experience which had led to increased confidence had had a direct impact on their work in school. For example, a Year 11 student said ‘*I now feel more willing to sit and listen and learn. So when I’m back in school I think “it’s only an hour”; I now know how much more I can learn in a lesson.*’

A small number of young people spoke of having **matured** since starting their vocational courses. For example, one Year 11 student said:

I think being in a college environment I have matured a lot more [...] Everyone on the course is really grown up now compared to before. When we first went on the course it was all about messing around. Now we will go out and get something to eat and come back and we will get on with our work.

Some of the young people themselves identified disciplinary and social arrangements at the college providers as being instrumental in changing their own behaviour. One girl, talking about her experience of the college environment, said: ‘*the teachers treated us like adults and there was so much more respect ... I have realised that that there is no point in messing around when you might as well get on with it. You can talk when you’ve done all your work.*’ Similarly, enjoyment of the vocational course and the desire to continue with it was reported to act as an incentive by two young people. This is illustrated by the following comments from one Year 10 student who was doing a bricklaying course:

In Years 7, 8 and 9 I was naughty at school, but since Year 10 I’ve actually been trying. Because if you are naughty at school then we get kicked off our college course. So I am really trying at school now – [the course] is helping me a lot.

5.2.4 Employability skills

Partnership coordinators generally agreed that providing students with the opportunity to mix and interact with adults, combined with the hands-on experience of working with specialised tools and equipment, made the students potentially more employable. School staff agreed that the majority of

young people responded positively to the programme, and that the development of ‘soft’ skills would make them better prepared for the world of work, as one teacher explained: *‘It has added to their employability by keeping them in school and by producing more rounded individuals. They respond well to the fact that people are actually doing something for them.’*

These findings remain consistent with those published previously in the evaluation¹⁰ which indicated that there was evidence that IFP participants had developed their social skills and confidence in their employability skills, including interpersonal, communication and problem-solving skills.

A small number of construction and engineering tutors also felt strongly that students in these sectors would especially benefit from IFP, as one construction lecturer explained: *‘Employers in construction like 16 year olds. Employers are suspicious of young people who first express an interest at age 18 or 19 because they want to know what they have been doing in the intervening years.’* The IFP was also seen as an effective way of getting young people interested in pursuing a career, particularly in the manufacturing industries. One engineering tutor explained: *‘There’s a need to get kids hooked early on vocational routes. At post-16 it can be too late.’*

Many students agreed that experience on IFP had made them more prepared for working life. In addition to learning trade skills, young people pointed to the ‘soft skills’ such as confidence and self-esteem that they had developed while participating on the programme, as well as the experience of working under ‘real world’ conditions. A notable number of students said they had acquired sector-specific knowledge and experience (12 students) as a direct consequence of their IFP college/provider placement.

5.2.5 Post-16 destinations

The majority of young people who participated in the first cohort of IFP were reported to have continued in education or training post-16 (Golden *et al.*, 2005), and there was general agreement amongst the Lead Partners that for many young people in cohorts 3 and 4, the experience of working in a college environment was continuing to help stimulate their interest in post-16 learning. One teacher explained: *‘A lot of Year 11s wouldn’t have finished school if they hadn’t gone on the IFP ... a lot of them are now considering college or work. Without the IFP a lot of them wouldn’t be qualified or going on to FE.’*

There were early indications that cohort 3 students on construction and engineering courses in particular, were most likely to progress to post-16 learning with the same IFP provider. Staff from all nine partnerships also

¹⁰ Golden, S., O’Donnell, L. and Rudd, P. (2005). *Evaluation of Increased Flexibility for 14 to 16 Year Olds Programme: the Second Year* (DfES Research Report 609). London: DfES.

agreed that whether a young person chose to continue into post-16 learning or not, experience of working in a college environment provided a valuable introduction to college life and for students to find out if it was the right option for them. As one partnership coordinator explained: *‘Students that come to us might decide that they want to come back post-16 or indeed never come back! But either way the college environment forms a valuable experience for them.’*

The evidence from the evaluation of the first cohort of IFP (Golden *et al.*, 2005) indicated that more than half of those young people (51 per cent) progressing to post-16 learning were reported to be taking a course at an FE college (p39). However, staff from three of the nine partnerships visited expressed concerns that more young people from cohort 3, than from the previous cohorts, were planning to stay on at school or go onto a sixth form college than continue with partnership providers. One partnership coordinator explained, *‘many of the students, particularly the higher ability ones choose to go onto sixth form college rather than stay at college’*. This could, however, also be seen as an indication that students in cohorts 3 and 4 represented a more diverse range of abilities, including higher ability students, than those from previous cohorts.

One college reported that the numbers of young people being recruited to post-16 courses across the college had improved since the introduction of IFP. The interviewees acknowledged the likely contribution of IFP to this, although they could not attribute the increase solely to the IFP.

Students were asked what they thought they would do when they finished Year 11. Many of the students (30) said they planned to continue onto further education, and 18 said they planned to continue to study their IFP subjects but at a higher level. All 18 said they planned to stay on or were considering staying on in learning with the same IFP provider.

Ten students said they planned to get a job on leaving Year 11, and six of these students thought they would go into jobs in their IFP subject areas. Eleven students expressed an interest in going into an apprenticeship, again in sectors associated with their IFP subject areas.

At the time of interview 17 students said they did not know what they would go on to do or were undecided.

5.2.6 Effect of IFP on future plans

Many students (34) said that their career plans had not changed since the beginning of Year 10 as a result of their experience on the IFP. However, a notable proportion (30) reported their intentions had changed as a result of the programme. Those students that said their plans had changed reported that the programme had either reaffirmed their interest in their chosen career or conversely had made them rethink. For example, one student studying for a

foundation course in motor vehicle said: *'I always thought I would have an office job but now I am thinking of getting a bit more hands on'.*

When asked about their future career aspirations, many students said they were interested in pursuing careers in the longer term, in sectors related to their IFP courses. The most popular professions related to those studied in IFP case-study partnerships and included those related to engineering such as plumber and electrician (18 students); mechanic (14 students); and hairdresser (eight students). Other, less popular professions were associated with subjects not taught in the IFP case-study partnerships and included: professional sportsman; actor; chef; journalist; childcare worker; and accountant. Overall the evidence suggests that for many young people their IFP courses confirmed their interest in or provided the inspiration for their choice of occupational area.

Approximately half of the young people interviewed said they had spoken to someone about their future plans, and the majority of them said it had been helpful. Those people spoken to included friends, college tutors and careers teachers, although most young people said they found the advice from Connexions advisors and parents to be the most helpful because they were viewed as informed people and/or people whose opinion mattered. There was also some evidence that some partnerships appeared to be building in careers awareness programmes into their courses, as one student explained:

We talked about what we might be doing in the future at the college. We were all asked to write down bits about where we are now and where we'd like to be in the next couple of years and where we'd like to be in ten years' time.

Young people in previous reports wanted more information about post-16 choices, and this development could be seen as good practice in responding to the needs of young people, although it is too early to see if it translates into destinations.

In summary, the early indications were that the majority of young people in cohorts 3 and 4 were on track to achieve at least as well in their IFP qualification as they would have in school. While there remained some concerns regarding students' performance, all nine partnerships said that selection procedures had improved or were in the process of improving since the first cohort. Furthermore, students themselves were generally very happy with their courses, and the majority of students said they would be happy to recommend their respective courses to other students considering getting involved. Partnership coordinators said that the programme was continuing to stimulate students' interest in post-16 learning and that many of the courses were helping to make the students more employable. Finally, both staff and students were in agreement that IFP had helped students to develop both

personally and socially, and students' enjoyment of their courses was reflected in the fact that many students said they were interested in pursuing careers in sectors related to their IFP courses.

5.3 Outcomes for staff and institutions

School staff and college tutors were asked for their views on the outcomes of the programme. On balance it appeared that both school staff and their colleagues in colleges were equally positive about the programme in terms of benefits for both themselves and their peers and for the institutions they worked in.

Senior staff from five partnerships singled out the **professional development opportunities**, particularly for college staff, that teaching on the programme provided. One coordinator explained: *'I think it has been good, educationally for our tutors ... You've got better understanding of differentiation issues in the classroom; for some of our areas it has made them innovate significantly.'* One tutor said it had helped him *'consider different ways of learning and of presenting information to students'*, while another said he thought staff found the programme rewarding because students were given a genuine opportunity to flourish and to succeed on the programme.

As discussed in Chapter 2, colleges benefited from increasingly working in partnership with schools in relation to staff development. For example, at least one partnership reported having a joint training programme where college staff were being encouraged to go into schools to observe teaching styles appropriate to younger learners. In return, school staff were being given the opportunity to train to become assessors and to develop their practical skills.

While the majority of tutors interviewed said they enjoyed the **stimulation of working with younger students**, senior college staff were also aware that not all tutors enjoyed teaching the 14 to 16 age group. However, for most partnerships, timetabling restrictions meant that many staff had little or no say in whether they taught on the programme or not, and this remained a challenge to further improving outcomes for staff.

Staff from two schools agreed that IFP had broadened students' knowledge base of **post-16 progression routes** and that it had contributed to progression to further education, both at college and at school. Findings from the evaluation of the first cohort showed that around two-fifths of those taking a qualification post-16 were taking a course that was in the same subject area as their IFP course (Golden *et al.*, 2004, p37). Evidence from the recent round of visits suggests that this development is set to continue, with college staff from four partnerships reporting that more students were attending their respective colleges in the same subject areas because of their experience on the IFP.

Several Lead Partners said IFP had been the catalyst for greater **partnership working** with schools, and indeed senior managers from four partnerships said that greater collaborative work had been one of their partnerships' main achievements. A partnership coordinator explained: *'One of our main achievements has been bringing together a diverse range of partners to offer, through collaboration, a range of vocational learning opportunities to young people.'* Some of the other main achievements identified at the partnership level included:

- the development of a more **diverse curriculum** for young people (three partnerships)
- developing an **environment** in which young people would have the best opportunity to succeed (three partnerships)
- more **joined-up planning** between providers (two partnerships).

Interviewees in seven schools reported that the distinctive contribution of the programme was that it enabled them to **broaden their offer at age 14 to 16** and to give students a greater choice. For example, one deputy head said: *'These students are entering onto these courses knowing that they are getting something different ... Young people appreciate the benefits associated with a vocational learning experience'*, while the vocational education coordinator at another school said: *'It's just another string to our bow ... we couldn't have [made the offer] without IF funding.'*

In summary, one outcome that had developed (or was in the process of developing) for the third and fourth cohorts was closer partnership working between college/training provider and school staff. Similarly, there was some evidence of the continuing consolidation of working relationships and the rising profile of vocational learning opportunities as viable routes into further education.

6. Future developments

Key findings

- Most Lead Partner interviewees took an optimistic view regarding the future development of vocational provision in their partnership areas. There was a feeling that the IFP had helped colleges to prepare for the 14-19 agenda and had laid some solid foundations that could be built upon in the future.
- The IFP, in the view of Lead Partner staff, had been particularly helpful in terms of experiencing the practicalities and logistics of a 14 to 16 programme, for promoting the development of school-college partnerships and for the marketing and recruitment of students to vocational courses.
- The strongest point made by school respondents about future provision related to their desire to strengthen the 'vocational offer' in their schools. This could continue to involve colleges, but the schools themselves were also keen to develop on-site courses. The issue of the school-college mix across the vocational offer is one that is likely to be the subject of further discussion.
- When Lead Partner and school respondents were asked about how the IFP would fit with the 14-19 Implementation Plan, two predominant themes emerged in their replies. The first of these was a view that the IFP had acted as a useful 'pilot' for the 14-19 plan, and the second related to the value of partnership working and how this could usefully be built upon in future years.
- Some issues remain about the status and awareness of the IFP within schools. In a minority of schools such provision still had a low status, but in most, staff perceptions were either improving or positive.
- Future funding of the IFP remains a concern for both school and college staff, though there were some good examples of planning for sustainability, including the building of new facilities for use by IFP partners.
- The main challenge identified by Lead Partner staff related to continuing competition between schools, and schools and colleges. This was affecting 14-19 delivery and, in some areas, leading to changes in local 14-19 provision.
- Both school and Lead Partner staff saw capacity issues, transport and location, timetabling demands, training and staffing requirements, and difficulties in engaging employers, as challenges for the future.

6.1 Introduction

As noted in Chapter 1, it is important that the Increased Flexibility Programme should be viewed in the broader context of the 14-19 Implementation Plan and other developments in vocational education and training for this age group. This chapter therefore examines Lead Partners' and school respondents' views about:

- how vocational provision will develop in the future
- how IFP fits with the 14-19 Implementation Plan
- views about future funding
- perceived challenges arising from new 14-19 arrangements.

6.2 Embedding IFP

6.2.1 The future development of vocational provision (Lead Partners)

Both Lead Partner and school staff interviewees were asked how they saw the IFP and similar types of vocational provision at key stage 4 developing in the short and medium term. In their answers to this question, most Lead Partner respondents (college managers and tutors) took an optimistic view. There was a feeling both that the IFP had helped colleges to prepare for the 14-19 agenda and that the programme would be built upon in the future, though there were also some concerns about funding (see below).

There were three ways, in particular, in which it was thought that IFP had helped with preparing the ground for the future development of vocational provision for 14 to 16 year olds. These were in terms of:

- practicalities and logistics
- the development of school–college partnerships
- marketing and recruitment of students to vocational courses.

One deputy principal, exemplifying a common view, expressed the importance of logistics: *'It seems like the IFP has forged the way for the whole 14-19 agenda in terms of how things can work, logistics, infrastructure, those kinds of things.'*

Another college respondent, a tutor, expressed a view that implementing the IFP had strengthened school–college relationships and that *'this could be a way of looking into developing the diploma'*.

There was also a recognition that, in terms of marketing and recruitment for vocational courses, the target population of learners was changing. One head of 14-19 recruitment said, for example, that *'It will change ... our marketing and our prospectus. But because we're already working as a team on the 14-19 age group, I think we're well placed to do all that and link it in, I can see that happening already.'*

6.2.2 The future development of vocational provision (schools)

When school respondents were asked how they saw IFP and similar types of vocational provision at key stage 4 developing in the short to medium term, they also mostly provided optimistic viewpoints. The three most frequently mentioned points about future development in this provision were as follows:

- the 'vocational offer' should be maintained and, if possible, expanded
- school-college partnerships should be further developed
- schools' roles will depend partly upon the size and location of the school.

The strongest point made by school respondents about future provision related to their desire to maintain or strengthen the 'vocational offer' in their schools. In one of the partnership areas there were plans for a common offer for students right across the local authority area, so that students could access courses in other schools: colleges would still be involved in this vocational provision, as they would still have the expertise and the specialist facilities required for some courses, but it was also felt that there were some vocational areas (such as art), that the schools could expand and deliver themselves. The issue of the school-college mix across the vocational offer is one that is likely to grow in importance in the next few years.

In one of the schools the deputy head responsible for IFP explained that a 'vocational offer' for the entire Year 9 year group was included in the options process: every Year 9 student had to select a vocational course (or science) from one option column. This interviewee wished to see vocational provision developed in the way it had been in his school, with every Year 9 student being offered a choice of vocational pathways. Echoing this view, in another school, a school IFP coordinator wanted to see more vocational courses added to the Year 9 offer in her school, but there was *'no sign of this happening'* within the school due to what was perceived as a lack of value placed on such courses by the senior management team. A further respondent also took this view, expressing a desire for the IFP *'to expand and encompass more qualifications'*. He would also like the IFP (or a similar course) to be open to a wider range of students.

The point that the IFP had helped with the establishment and development of school-college partnerships was made by several school respondents: *'these relationships have got better over the years'* (head of faculty). There was also

a prevailing view that such partnerships should be developed further in the future. This did not necessarily mean, however, that the number of these partnerships should increase in number; rather their importance should be maintained and developed in a strategic/quality sense. Two respondents said that they would go into partnership with a smaller number of schools, one indicating that this was in order to *'keep it manageable and to agree timetabling issues'*.

The point was also made by a number of respondents that the school role within IFP or similar provision would very much depend upon factors such as the size of the school, the facilities available, and the location of the school. It was emphasised that it might be easier to integrate such provision in bigger schools, where there is more flexibility in timetabling. This could work, for example, with the new Specialised Diplomas, because students can build up a package of credits. In addition, travel and transport difficulties could be kept to a minimum by choosing more local providers. As one school manager put it: *'Transport is an issue and the closer the provision the better.'*

6.2.3 How IFP fits with the 14-19 Implementation Plan (Lead Partners)

When college respondents were asked about how the IFP would fit with the 14-19 Implementation Plan, two predominant themes emerged in their replies. The first of these was a view that the IFP had acted as a kind of 'pilot' for the 14-19 plan, and the second related to the value of partnership working and how this could usefully be built upon in future years.

One senior manager in a college said of the IFP: *'... personally feel it was the pilot ... [we learned that the IFP is] not a bolt on, but an integral part'*. An assistant principal in another college took the view that:

IFP has been a powerful change agent for us because we have had so many students going through. Without IFP experience we wouldn't be where we are now, ready as we are for the 14-19 implementation – this has helped us get a lot of issues such as delivery sorted out – it has been invaluable.

Several college respondents made the point that involvement with IFP had given them a head start in terms of preparing the 14-19 prospectus and also in terms of thinking about the delivery of Specialised Diplomas.

The point about the benefits of partnership working was made by at least one respondent in each of the nine Lead Partner institutions. Examples of the comments made include the following.

- *'Schools and colleges work together now – it didn't used to happen and now it does – lessons learnt are that you have to be open and honest with*

each other and we have to share information – you have got to give impartial advice and guidance’ (head of marketing).

- The IFP has: *‘oiled the wheels of collaboration ... there won’t be so much of a chasm, as in some areas, where there has not been any cross-phase working’* (IFP coordinator).
- *‘It has been a catalyst for getting different relationships with feeder schools in the city and beyond ... and it will be a catalyst for integration between schools and the college’* (IFP coordinator).
- *‘The way of thinking is changing. Recently I was at a meeting where one deputy said “we can’t run health and social care next year because we’ve only got nine opting for the course this year”, and another deputy said “well now I know that, I can bus some of our young people over as we also have too few to run the course”’* (assistant principal).

6.2.4 How IFP fits with the 14-19 Implementation Plan (Schools)

When school respondents were asked about how the IFP would fit with the 14-19 Implementation Plan, very similar themes to those discussed above, regarding college staff responses, emerged as being important. For example, the idea of IFP as a pilot was mentioned: *‘We are piloting 14-19’*, and the importance of partnership working was again emphasised: *‘IFP has brought closer links between school and post-16 providers’* (IFP coordinator); *‘It is playing a big role in developing partnerships’* (vocational education coordinator, different area).

With regard to partnership working, one school respondent explained how the local authority was looking at how a collegiate approach could be developed, especially for the delivery of Specialised Diplomas. In this partnership area, the local authority wished to increase the number of students on vocational provision, and schools have been asked to look at developing shared timetables, so that students could in the future be shared between schools. The idea of a shared or common timetable was mentioned in three other partnerships. For example, in one area, a school IFP coordinator described how work had already begun on the compilation of a 14-19 prospectus for the area, and schools were planning to have a *‘common offer, taught by different schools’*. Most of the secondary schools in this area had Specialist status, and therefore, were able to offer different areas of expertise and different qualifications.

The point about maintaining and even broadening the vocational offer to 14 to 16 year olds was emphasised again in responses to this question. One deputy headteacher with responsibility for IFP said that he wanted the 14-19 partnership in his area to be *‘wide and broad’*. Another deputy head, in a different partnership, made a similar point: *‘Fundamentally recognising that there are different groups of young people has to be right – we have to go down the personalisation route – one size doesn’t fit all.’*

6.2.5 How IFP fits into school

School interviewees were asked to provide their views on how the IFP was perceived in their school. They were asked how the IFP was included in key strategic decision-making processes in the school and whether the IFP was included in the school development plan.

In terms of within-school perceptions of the IFP a full range of responses, from mostly negative to very positive, were given. In two cases it seemed that the IFP had a low status within the school and very few staff or parents were aware of the programme. There was a feeling that vocational learning routes were not given the attention or the importance they deserved: *'The school actively seeks to steer kids away from vocational routes.'* In these cases, the IFP coordinators usually expressed frustration in terms of how the programme was viewed by other staff (these interviewees were in two different schools in the same partnership area):

There is a belief in the school that IFP is for students that are of lower academic ability. It's actually a programme for students who want to learn in different ways. The way they are taught is different and some students can actually relate to this more so than they can at GCSE (IFP coordinator).

Most teachers have awareness that some students are undertaking a vocational GCSE, and view this positively; however, most are not aware of the IFP itself. Only those teachers who are responsible for the management of the programme tend to be aware of it (assistant headteacher).

In other schools, it was felt that the IFP and vocational routes more generally still did not have a high status, but there had been some improvements in staff perceptions over the four years in which the programme had been operating. One IFP coordinator emphasised that the way IFP is perceived in the school depends very much on the teacher: *'some are very positive; some see it as a waste of time, or see it for low ability students'*. She reported that although the SMT view the IFP as part of the core delivery of the school and *'a positive step for the school'*, most other teachers see it as a separate initiative. She also added that lots of parents and some teachers still perceive GCSEs to have more value than vocational qualifications: *'the stigma is still there.'* Another respondent noted an improvement in levels of staff awareness:

Now the school has been running the programme for a number of years awareness is quite high of what the programme is about, especially amongst staff. However, because of the small number of places it remains a small, if important, part of the key stage 4 offer (IFP coordinator/deputy head).

In several schools, however, the IFP was universally (or almost universally) recognised as a very positive aspect of student provision. Three examples are as follows.

- In one school, the IFP coordinator said that he felt that the IFP was viewed positively by all staff, and that *'a marked change'* in teachers' attitudes had come about in 2003, with the introduction of cohort 2, when the school opened the IFP to all students. Teachers also *'saw a marked improvement in engagement across the curriculum'* and an improvement in the achievement and attendance of students. This coordinator thought that the IFP was seen as part of the core delivery of the school, and that teachers did not make any distinction between the IFP and other college link programmes in the school.
- In a second school, the deputy head with responsibility for the 14 to 16 curriculum described how IFP was recognised early on as being *'a valuable asset'* in shaping young people's curriculum offer. For this reason, it was built into the Year 9 offer and the programme has been oversubscribed every year. Although the IFP only represents less than 10 per cent of students' curriculum time, it is recognised by staff that the rewards the programme offered to young people are considerable.
- In another school, when the deputy head was asked how IFP was perceived in the school, he went so far as to say that the question was *'irrelevant'*. What he meant by this was that the school had always had a strong vocational dimension, with consistently good support from staff, so staff perceptions were already positive and would not have changed: *'We've always had this type of background. Our staff are better than average at delivering vocational courses.'*

Most school-based IFP respondents, with the exception of the two for whom IFP had a low status within the school (see above), felt that they were appropriately consulted within decision-making processes. Around half of the school respondents said that the IFP was explicitly featured in the school development plan (SDP): the other half either did not know whether the IFP was featured, or indicated that it was covered by the vocational or work-related element of the SDP.

6.2.6 Future funding for IFP (Lead Partners)

The predominant view from Lead Partner respondents was that, with regard to the future, *'funding remains an issue'*. In the first years of the IFP it was evident that some colleges have subsidised the cost of the IFP, and even in the most recent interviews one coordinator said that: *'What we are charging schools at the moment is barely cost recovery.'*

Around half of the college respondents emphasised that 16-plus remained their main funding stream and that this was their main priority. Some indicated that they would not risk expanding the 14 to 16 programme in favour of traditional post-16 courses which were already heavily oversubscribed.

Opinion was divided on whether this type of 14 to 16 provision could continue: more than half felt that provision could not continue without dedicated funding. On the other hand, there were two college managers who felt that such provision was sustainable. One of these expressed a view that some schools were already willing (and able) to pay for bespoke vocational programmes, which suggests to the college that there is life in this sort of provision post IFP (IFP coordinator). Similarly, a second said: *'The crunch comes when you're talking about economic viability. The schools started off paying us £7.50 per student; they're now paying us £15 – so there is a willingness to pay for these things.'*

There was some further evidence that college staff were thinking about how to sustain programmes for 14 to 16 year olds. One college, for example, had developed an off-site centre which allowed them to offer more local delivery of courses to schools, and the IFP coordinator felt that this would provide *'a step towards sustainable provision for the 14 to 16 age group when the IFP funding dried up'*. One respondent also suggested that sending (more) tutors to schools was a step in the right direction to achieving future sustainability.

6.2.7 Future funding for IFP (schools)

Uncertainty about funding for future cohorts was also a cause of frustration for some school IFP coordinators:

Where is this money going to come from? Is it new money or is it going to come out of something else? Exit routes for us [post-IFP] are currently unclear. The new 14-19 arrangements present something of a frustration to us. We like what we have developed here, what we are able to offer the young people, and we want to continue to develop it. And yet someone is saying we are going to take your money away.

Again, a majority of respondents felt that it would not be possible to continue with 14 to 16 provision if dedicated funding was not made available for this kind of vocational activity. Respondents in some schools said that they would try to continue to send students to colleges, but the numbers would have to be reduced: *'I think it would still continue, but that it would not be open to all ... we would pick those that were best suited to it'* (IFP coordinator). Only one school respondent was certain that this type of provision would continue even if dedicated IFP funding was not available.

Again, however, there were also examples of school staff thinking hard about how they might be able to sustain this type of provision. This often involved moving towards in-school delivery of IFP courses. In one instance, the school used IFP money to build a workshop on site to help move towards a sustainable model of delivery: crucially, this school has teachers with the necessary skills to continue to deliver vocational courses post-16, and new partnerships with schools would make their continuing work financially viable.

6.3 Perceived challenges in new 14-19 arrangements

6.3.1 Lead Partners

Lead Partner respondents outlined a range of perceived challenges that needed to be considered with regard to the new 14-19 arrangements. The main challenges identified were as follows (these were all at least mentioned in three or four Lead Partners):

- institutional competition
- capacity issues
- location / transport issues
- timetabling demands
- training / staffing / skill requirements
- potential difficulties in engaging employers.

In Section 6.2 (above) there is a good deal of evidence to indicate that the IFP had assisted significantly in the development of partnerships between schools and colleges. Many respondents anticipated that these partnerships would be strengthened and developed in future years. However, the point was made by many respondents that keeping partnerships going and establishing new partnerships would be a major challenge in the future. The barriers that would prevent the formation of partnerships in the future included competition between schools, the continuing low status of vocational pathways in some schools and disagreements on the preferred types of students to be selected for participation in the programme.

In some geographical areas there was still competition between schools (and colleges) and, in addition, it was felt that some schools would wish to maintain their 'academic' status and therefore would not be likely to seek involvement in 14-19 vocationally-based partnerships. One interviewee, a subject coordinator, expressed a view that schools would always tend to keep their most able students on site because these students contribute significantly to the school's 'league table' results:

If there is competition between schools and colleges then it won't work because schools will want to keep hold of better students. I personally believe that you have to get rid of league tables. If you take away the league tables then you can have collaboration, otherwise competition will exist.

Other respondents made a similar point: 'Personally I don't see how school performance tables can carry on – whose student will that be?' One respondent, a subject coordinator, went so far as to say that: 'The Government must legislate to say that all young people must have experience of vocational

education – communication between schools and colleges would then also improve.'

In some cases there was a good deal of uncertainty about what schools would do in the local area. Local changes in 14-19 provision could happen very quickly. Would more schools be sending their key stage 4 students to colleges, or would they be establishing IFP-type provision within their own sites? One Lead Partner IFP coordinator put it this way: *'We don't control what schools do – if we're to get integration it will be interesting to see how these partnerships [with schools] develop. We're here and ready if people want to come and get involved but it depends on what the schools want to do.'*

There were also some feelings of a lack of clarity in national developments. One IFP coordinator said that there was a lack of guidance about the Specialised Diplomas and the 14 lines of vocational study. Linked to this, one interviewee raised the issue of media and public perceptions of vocational pathways: *'There is a need to communicate through the local press about changes, there need to be interesting stories about vocational education and choice.'* A levels and GCSEs, this respondent argued, received too much media attention, at the expense of vocational qualifications: *'Until we persuade teachers, parents and employers that there are these other qualifications it's going to be difficult to convey this message.'*

Respondents in four colleges said that they faced a challenge in expanding the number of places for IFP students because they had reached full capacity in terms of their physical and/or staffing resources.

- *Capacity could be a problem. The partnership does not have the capacity to offer many more 14 to 16 places.*
- *We are stretched to limit now, but we are supposed to be moving campus in a year or two because of the need for space and specialist facilities.*
- *'Struggling' schools in the area were being signposted to the college by inspectors as a possible way to boost attainment, but we couldn't take many more.*
- *We are at capacity now ... we don't want college to become a school ... we need to keep our own identity, that's what attracts students.*

There did seem to be a view that colleges had to be careful not to take on too many students of this type, in case this stretched resources or was detrimental to their major post-16 identity and provision: *'We don't want to dilute what we do.'*; *'Each institution has still got to maintain knowledge and expertise of what it is good at.'*

Transport difficulties or physical location also posed challenges for some colleges, particularly those located in rural areas. One IFP coordinator said that one-third of the local IFP budget was spent on transport. Another stressed that: *'Rurality is a real issue in the region. Young people are bussed in from*

miles around. These problems could also be evident in more urban locations: a further coordinator mentioned the *'poor infrastructure and transport system within the city, which may limit the extent to which students will travel to different institutions to study'*.

Although common timetables to be applied across colleges and schools were being developed in some areas, some timetabling issues remained: *'timetabling across all institutions will be an issue'* (IFP coordinator); *'One massive problem is going to be common timetabling – how are we going to persuade all schools?'* (IFP coordinator). Likewise, an engineering tutor said that he did not think that the college would be able to expand their provision, *'unless schools are more flexible in their timing of the programme'*.

Four respondents raised issues to do with whether college staff had sufficient training or the appropriate skills to deal with 14 to 16 year olds. For example, one tutor said that the main challenge for the future would be: *'Training – more focus on getting the right staff – not just who is available.'* Another stressed that it is *'vitally important to have staff who want to teach that age group'*.

A final challenge identified by college respondents related to the need to engage employers in the new 14-19 arrangements. A number of tutors made the point that some Specialised Diplomas, such as health and social care and engineering (due to be introduced in 2008), will present problems in this respect. One IFP coordinator summarised this issue as follows:

We have been very unsuccessful in recruiting employers to the programme and this is a problem because I can envisage the need for greater work in this area with the move to new 14-19 arrangements ... I have to say that I have some sympathy with their position. What employers want from a college such as ours are job-ready individuals; of course they don't get this with IFP students.

A construction tutor made a similar point: *'We want to offer construction at level 2, but this requires employer involvement, and more time, along with more experienced school staff.'*

6.3.2 Perceived challenges in new 14-19 arrangements (schools)

For school respondents, perceptions of future challenges were much the same as for the Lead Partner respondents, though interestingly there was less concern about issues of competition between schools and future partnership working. There were, however, shared concerns about the practicalities of implementing a new, larger-scale 14-19 agenda. One school respondent, a deputy headteacher, expressed his concerns about this as follows:

I just can't get my head around it. Where's it going to take place? Who's going to provide it? Whose league table is it going to sit on? The framework is definitely there because of IFP, but scaling up the programme to the size envisaged poses a lot more questions. At the moment I just can't see it happening – and certainly not within the timescale proposed.

Two school staff supported the point, made by a college respondent (above), that parental and public perceptions would present a challenge for the new arrangements. One of these interviewees explained that the school was in a predominantly Asian community and many parents would prefer for their children to pursue an academic route into professional jobs: *'Parental perception is also very important ... This could be an obstacle in the future.'* The second emphasised that the main challenge would be: *'changing the perceptions of parents, universities, employers'*, persuading them *'that these qualifications are just as valid as traditional qualifications'*.

Location and transport issues were just as much of a concern for schools as they were for colleges, especially where the schools were in partnerships operating in rural areas:

The other issue as a rural school is a transport issue ... Land based is in 15 locations around [the county] – I have to sit parents down and say I can't ask you to pay but unless you arrange the transport then I can't afford to provide the placement.

This view was supported by a deputy head interviewee: *'Transport is the main challenge. Also accessing types of courses we need ... Kids have to be highly motivated to travel across county to do the course.'*

There was also some concern about the levels of management and administration that would be required in the future. One respondent indicated that he felt that the main challenge related to *'logistics and management issues for the college – they already work with 800 students on school link programmes'*. Another, whilst very much supportive of the IFP in general, expressed a similar view about the logistical pressures on his school: *'I worry about the logistics and the time involved in organising IFP, the time spent on it can be disproportionate.'*

Organising and synchronising timetables was one of the logistical pressures that needed to be anticipated.

Down the line timetabling is going to be a real concern. If the Government is serious about Specialised Diplomas then the schools and the college will have to work hard to try and agree timetables and that will be a massive shift in working practices.

Having the appropriate staff was also a concern: *‘One of the biggest issues for the future will be staffing because a lot of the subjects they are talking about are in shortage areas. We need the staff to offer the courses’* (IFP coordinator). And the potential difficulties in engaging employers were also recognised by school respondents: *‘getting employers involved and engaging them in meaningful work experience’*, would also be a major challenge, and: *‘There are three high schools in the area, and there are not enough employers to support them all.’*

In the opinion of the interviewees, then, these were the main challenges that needed to be addressed in the future development of the IFP or similar programmes. However, these need to be set in the mainly positive context of most respondents expressing optimistic viewpoints about the impact of the IFP as useful preparation for the developing 14-19 Implementation Plan and future vocational pathways for this age group.

7. Conclusions

7.1 To what extent have partnerships changed?

The interviews with staff and students in the nine partnerships indicated that they were largely positive about their experience of participating in an IFP partnership. The case-study partnerships had remained **largely stable**, or had consolidated with fewer member schools over the first four cohorts of the programme. As the partnerships had matured, staff indicated that they had become more used to working together and, on the whole, mechanisms for routine communication in relation to students' progress and attendance, seemed to have become established. Further evidence of the maturation of the partnerships was indicated by the finding that, in some partnerships, schools were beginning to work together either to agree a shared timetable, to share students to create a viable course, or to provide courses on one school site attended by students from other schools. In addition, staff from external providers were visiting schools, and teaching students or shadowing teachers more in recent years than had been the case in the first two years of the programme. This did not occur in all partnerships, however, and may be an area for future development.

Although institutional partnerships appeared to have become more established at partnership area level, there was still scope for development in ensuring that information was **communicated effectively**, including to those working at a more operational level, teaching the young people at the external providers. In particular, there would be value in ensuring that teaching staff are provided with information about the students before they embark on the course, and that key information relating to term dates and examination dates and fixed term and permanent exclusions are communicated to teaching staff.

Overall, partnerships appeared to have refined and developed their approaches to **selecting students** to participate in the programme. Indeed, partnerships where college staff felt that the participating students were appropriate, tended to be those where selection was more carefully considered. The factor, that seemed to contribute most to successful selection was through schools having a thorough understanding of which particular students might benefit most from the IFP. Where, for example, Lead Partners provided guidance to schools, to which the school staff then responded, the students and staff seemed to be more content. Despite this, the issues over identification of appropriate students, which had been reported in relation to the first two cohorts, continued to occur in a few partnerships, or in some schools within partnerships.

7.2 What appears to contribute to effective practice?

Although ensuring that the partnership operated effectively, and that appropriate students were selected to participate, were important factors in effective practice, **no one model of delivery emerged** as being noticeably more effective than another. Indeed, the partnerships visited had retained largely the same broad model that they had adopted originally and there was no consensus across the partnerships of the optimum amount of curriculum time for students to participate in IFP: suggestions on this ranged from half a day to one day per week.

There was evidence of **shared delivery** between schools and external providers among the partnerships, for example whereby schools delivered the theoretical elements and the external provider delivered the practical elements. The findings revealed that such delivery worked most effectively where there was good communication between the staff in the school and the external provider. Having a lead person in either institution, who took responsibility for driving this shared delivery, helped to facilitate this communication. The observations of staff and students indicated that, in order for a shared delivery model to work well, the provision should be joined up and should appear to students as a coherent programme and not as a series of unrelated elements.

Ensuring that students were adequately supported was a further feature of effective practice. While overall the students who were interviewed felt that they were adequately supported, this may reflect in part the support provided by individual tutors rather than a more strategic institutional level of support. Indeed, in some partnerships, there were indications that external provider staff regarded support for students as being the responsibility of schools, and understanding of the relative roles and responsibilities of school and external provider staff may not have filtered down to teaching staff in all cases.

Across the nine partnerships, there was evidence that some appeared to be more effective in terms of outcomes than others. Further exploration revealed that, in the four partnerships that appeared to be most effective, there were clear criteria for selection set out by the college, that were shared with school staff. In addition, there was effective support for students and effective communication between individuals at an operational level, in addition to a partnership level. Conversely, in the two partnerships which appeared to have been less effective, there were indications that the external provider was less involved in identifying students and there was a perception of '*dumping*' by schools in one of these partnerships. In addition, the selection of tutors to teach the IFP participants was less likely to be through staff volunteering to teach this age group. Perceived lack of commitment by senior managers in schools, which may be related to the small number of students participating, was a further feature of partnerships which appeared to have been less effective.

7.3 How embedded had IFP become?

Although IFP had continued in these nine partnerships across four cohorts of students, the extent to which it had become embedded was closely associated with the nature of the funding. Interviewees' observations showed that much had been learned in relation to the systems, structures and logistics required for delivering vocational learning for students across institutions, and involvement in IFP was often felt to have provided a basis from which to progress the delivery of vocational learning at key stage 4. Moreover, attitudes towards vocational learning were beginning to change and there was a recognition that the development of vocational pathways at key stage 4 would continue. However, uncertainty over the future arrangements for funding such provision were leading staff in about two-thirds of these nine partnerships to consider whether it could be sustained or whether it would continue with smaller numbers. As part of the planning for sustainability, it appeared that some schools were exploring mechanisms for delivering vocational learning on site through sharing students between schools, building specialist workshops, and training school staff as vocational assessors.

7.4 What are the implications for the 14-19 Implementation Plan?

Three key themes emerged with regard to the implications of the experience of the IFP for the 14-19 Implementation Plan.

- The first of these was a view that the IFP had acted as a kind of **pilot** for the 14-19 plan, allowing Lead Partners and partner providers to test out the logistics and organisational arrangements required for the delivery of a cross-institutional 14 to 16 programme. Involvement with IFP had given many staff a head start in terms of preparing the 14-19 prospectus and also in terms of preparing for the delivery of Specialised Diplomas.
- The second theme was an emphasis on **the value of partnership working** and how this could usefully be built upon in future years. There were still some issues remaining regarding partnership working: what should the college-school delivery mix be and what would happen where new 14 to 16 and post-16 provision was being set up by schools separate from IFP? However, there can be no doubt that the experience of the IFP had helped to refine and promote institutional partnerships, laying the potential foundations for new 14-19 partnership arrangements.
- The third predominant theme was a strong desire to continue to strengthen and broaden **the vocational offer** to 14 to 16 year olds. There was widespread recognition that there needed to be continuing development of appropriately delivered and accredited vocational pathways for these young people: and the IFP had established some of the processes required for promoting and developing these pathways.

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