RESEARCH

Implementing the Increased Flexibility for 14 to 16 Year Olds Programme: The Experience of Partnerships and Students

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National Foundation for Educational Research

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Increased Flexibility for 14-16 year olds Programme (IFP) was introduced in 2002 by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in order to '*create enhanced vocational and work-related learning opportunities for 14-16 year olds who can benefit most*'. Partnerships between a Lead Partner, which was usually a college of Further Education, partner schools and sometimes other providers such as training providers and employers, were formed in 2002 to achieve this aim. A first cohort of Year 10 students embarked on two-year vocational courses including NVQs, other VQs and new GCSEs in vocational subjects in the autumn term of 2002. The IFP was subsequently expanded to a second cohort of Year 10 students in autumn 2003. Across these two cohorts, around 300 partnerships are supporting the learning of 90,000 young people in Years 10 and 11.

The partnerships aimed to raise the attainment of students who participated. They also aimed to increase students' skills and knowledge, develop their social learning and increase retention in education and training after 16. They are working towards a set of targets relating to achievement of qualifications, post-16 progression and attendance. The DfES commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to undertake an evaluation of the first and second cohorts of IFP students. This summary presents the main findings from interviews conducted during follow-up visits to nine partnerships. Further details about the interviews are provided at the end of the summary.

Key findings

- In the nine partnerships visited, most students were said to be on target to complete their qualifications at or above the level predicted for them. Involvement in IFP was said to have contributed to positive developments in students' maturity, self-esteem, self-confidence, independence, attendance, preparedness for the future and career aspirations.
- The majority of students interviewed planned to embark on vocational or academic qualifications at school or college or start an Apprenticeship or job with training.
- Nearly all students interviewed would recommend their course to their peers. Reasons given for this were: because it was different from school, vocationally-relevant, enjoyable and interesting and allowed them to take a post-16 qualification before they left school.
- The interviewed students chose to participate in IFP because they wanted to learn away from school, preferred a practical style of learning and because the vocational area was of interest to them or related to a career aim.

- The students who learned away from school generally appreciated that tutors treated them like adults and provided individual support and they enjoyed the more practical approach to learning. They also liked the alternative environment and facilities and meeting new people.
- Most of these nine partnerships had retained more than three-quarters of their first cohort of IFP students. Where students discontinued early, this was sometimes due to IFP-related issues such as inappropriate selection, lack of commitment to the course by students and inability to adapt to an alternative learning environment. However, it was also due to wider issues such as personal and school-related problems.
- The partnerships visited appeared to have been largely effective in ensuring that students gained positive outcomes from their IFP experience over the two years. The partnerships had retained the involvement of schools and matured over the two years with some initial concerns allayed. Interviewees in colleges, training providers and schools identified good communication, positive working relationships and having agreed aims and objectives as important features of effective partnerships.

Partnership working and organisation

On the whole, the Lead Partners, schools and other providers who had formed IFP partnerships for the first cohort of students in 2002 remained in partnership for the second cohort in 2003. All but one of the partnerships visited had increased the number of schools with whom they worked for the second cohort.

Partnerships were generally managed by a steering group and communication was supplemented by much regular, informal communication. On the whole, the schools visited considered that communication between partners was adequate, although two reported that elements had been unsatisfactory. Approaches to communicating with schools varied within these partnerships: some tutors were in direct contact with school staff while, in other cases, the Lead Partner coordinator was the main point of contact. Increasingly, external providers were producing written reports of students' progress for schools which could be shared with parents.

Interviewees in the nine Lead Partner organisations and their partner schools generally considered that their partnerships had been successful in delivering IFP for the first cohort of students. They identified good communication, positive working relationships and having agreed aims and objectives as important contributory factors to effective partnership working.

Core funding received for IFP was often supplemented by both Lead Partners and schools. In addition to drawing on their own budget, the Lead Partners visited had accessed finance from LSCs and European funding and, in two partnerships, had charged schools to some extent to deliver IFP courses. Schools which had subsidised IFP had used their own budgets to cover the cost of staff escorting students off-site and for additional teaching costs.

Perceptions of whether IFP offered good value for money varied among interviewees and may have been influenced by the number of students participating in a partnership and the delivery approach adopted, which was agreed at a local level by individual partnerships. It is worth noting that partnerships were allocated broadly identical funding and decided the number of students who could participate. As noted above, some used additional funding to support the IFP. Some interviewees took into consideration the outcomes for individual students and consequently considered that it did offer good value for money whereas others noted that it did not offer good value for their organisation.

Programme development

In general, tutors who were interviewed considered that the qualifications which the students were pursuing through IFP were appropriate in terms of their level and content. Some expressed concern that, as they perceived it, the new GCSEs in vocational subjects were not practical enough and not appropriate for students of lower ability. Most of the nine partnerships had altered the qualifications which they offered to the second cohort of students. This included adding new qualifications in response to schools' requests, although these were not always taken up by students, and changing to a more appropriate qualification.

Four of the partnerships had adopted a partnership-wide model of delivery whereby the Lead Partner was the sole provider. In the remaining partnerships, a combination of delivery models was used and no one approach dominated. The approaches within these partnerships included: delivery entirely in college, shared delivery between the Lead Partner and the school, delivery in school with college staff teaching and delivery in school with some support from college staff. In the main, the partnerships had retained the approaches they had used for the first cohort of students for the second. During the first cohort, three partnerships had changed at least one of their courses from some or all delivery in school to teaching the course in college, at least in part.

At an early stage in the first cohort, tutors who were interviewed had recognised the need to adapt their teaching style to suit the needs of younger students. For example, varying their teaching methods and dividing the time into smaller chunks. Although some felt that teaching this age group would be an ongoing development process, they had not changed their approaches notably for the second cohort of students.

Timetabling IFP courses remained an ongoing challenge for some schools in these nine IFP partnerships. Although one Lead Partner had changed from provision on two half days to one whole day, in response to tutors requests and in order to reduce problems with attendance and punctuality, partnerships had not adopted any noticeably different approaches for the second cohort. On the whole, the introduction of a second cohort had not adversely affected timetabling. Indeed, some interviewees had found timetabling the second cohort easier because of their prior experience with the first cohort and the

additional planning time with the second cohort. Overall, the experience which schools had of timetabling did not appear to have been sufficiently problematic to lead them to discontinue their involvement or not to participate in the second cohort.

The involvement of employers in IFP courses in these nine partnerships was not widespread but appeared to have developed over the two years of the first cohort as more partnerships reported that they had developed such links. In some cases, this was facilitated by the use of other organisations such as Education Business Partnerships (EBPs) or by personal contacts which tutors had with employers. Interviewees and participating students generally considered that involving employers would make a valuable contribution to the programme by helping students to see the relevance of their learning and to gain a better understanding of the world of work. Interviewees commented on the challenge of engaging employers such as the limited time available to tutors to develop these links, the lack of appropriate employers and the reluctance of employers to participate. However, tutors sought to ensure that students gained an insight into the working world through the use of real work environments, drawing on personal experience of employment to relate theory to practice and accessing information about employers on-line. Interviewees were seeking to further develop their links with employers in the future including through working with their local EBP. Some were considering minimising the burden on employers by considering the most appropriate way to use their time.

The college tutors who were interviewed had often attended training relating to working with 14 to 16 year olds and specific qualifications. There had been little joint staff development between schools and colleges. Outstanding training needs which were identified included further guidance on working with this age group, guidance and support regarding the new GCSEs in vocational subjects and raising the profile of IFP and of vocational qualifications among staff in schools.

Initially, some college staff interviewed in 2003 had reported reservations about the IFP and the ability, attitudes and behaviour of the students involved. However, there appeared to have been some improvements in their perceptions and tutors acknowledged the benefits to the students and to the college. Some teachers expressed concern that school staff who were not directly involved with the programme were not fully aware of IFP and its potential benefits.

Students' experience

Some of the 45 students who were interviewed chose to participate as part of their options process, while others had been approached by a teacher and invited to participate. The students could choose whether they wished to participate or not and generally chose to do so because they wanted to learn away from school, they preferred a practical style of learning or because the vocational area they were studying was related to a career aim or was of interest to them.

All but four of the interviewed students undertook at least part of their IFP course away from school. A total of 33 students undertook their entire IFP course away from school and eight studied partly at school and partly at college. Nationally, around two-thirds of students studied off site which was a smaller proportion than was the case among the interviewed students. Where the students had studied off site, they generally appreciated that tutors treated them like adults and provided individual support and they enjoyed the practical approach to learning. They also valued the change of environment and the opportunity to meet new people and be more 'grown up' and the access to college facilities. A few students had concerns about learning away from school. These included difficulties they had experienced with travel, learning approaches which they had not liked and the attitude of tutors where they were '*too strict*'.

Support provided by some external providers for students included access to learning resource facilities and the provision of Learning Support Assistants or teachers in the classroom. There were instances where providers had instituted Saturday drop-in sessions and access to on-line resources. Students had generally received an induction to the college or training provider and appreciated the ongoing support provided by their tutors.

Support provided by the schools visited to assist students to complete their qualification did not appear to be extensive and students generally only worked on their IFP qualification during their IFP sessions. However, some schools provided opportunities for students to work on their IFP qualification during timetabled study support sessions and some teachers visited their students off-site. Half of the interviewed students reported that they missed other timetabled lessons as a consequence of attending their IFP course. Many felt that they caught up with the work missed successfully, although a few of these indicated that they did this independently.

While half of the students who were interviewed felt that the amount of time they spent on the course was about right, half did not. Of these, half felt that they would have liked more time so that they were less pressured while the other half would have liked less time because they sometimes lacked interest in the course. Most of the students considered that they had made good progress on their courses and were provided with ongoing feedback by their tutors.

Nearly all of the interviewed students said that they would recommend their course to their peers because they had found it different from school, vocationally relevant, enjoyable and interesting. They believed that they had benefited from taking a qualification which was relevant to their future choices and had enabled them to gain a post-16 qualification before their peers. They believed that it was valuable to have the choice to take vocational qualifications while at school.

Perceptions of the impact of IFP

Interviewees identified a range of positive effects of IFP on their organisations. They had experienced improvements in staff's attitudes towards IFP and their confidence in delivering courses. They also considered that it had enabled them to provide a broader curriculum offer for students at key stage 4. IFP was also said to have enhanced links with external organisations and to have raised the profile of some organisations. IFP had also benefited partnership working, although this was mentioned less often by interviewees. Improved collaboration and reduced competition between education providers and enhanced communication between colleges and schools were noted to have occurred as a result of IFP.

The implementation of IFP with a second cohort of students appeared to have been informed by the experience of the first cohort in certain respects. More specifically, some partnerships had learned how to adopt a more informed approach to identifying students to participate and a more tailored approach to teaching and learning. Some partnerships noted that they had better partnership organisation through advance planning and joint negotiation of issues and a more appropriate approach to discipline and support of students. Some partnerships had also re-assessed the degree to which colleges should be involved in the delivery of IFP courses and were considering a slightly reduced involvement in future.

Half of the interviewees had no concerns regarding the impact of having two cohorts of IFP students on their organisations. However, the remaining interviewees perceived that the increased number of participating students was creating capacity issues in terms of the availability of resources, increased administration requirements, staff workload and timetabling. In contrast, a few interviewees believed that the introduction of a second cohort had consolidated and raised the profile of IFP.

Most of the nine partnerships had been successful in retaining the students who had embarked on their IFP courses in the first cohort. Although all encountered some students discontinuing, in most partnerships, less than a quarter discontinued. In two partnerships, more than half of the students had discontinued. In some cases, the reasons for discontinuing which staff identified were related to IFP. These included inappropriate selection of students, lack of commitment to the course by students, individual students experiencing difficulty adapting to the different learning environment and because students were missing lessons. Students were also said to have discontinued for reasons that were not related to IFP, including having wider school-related problems and students having left, or been excluded from, school. Some students discontinued for personal reasons such as family difficulties.

The majority of staff interviewed who commented on the achievements of the students considered that most were on target to achieve their qualifications at, or above, the levels predicted for them. Involvement in IFP was also said to have contributed to positive developments in some students' maturity, self-

esteem and self-confidence, independence, attendance, preparedness for the future and career aspirations. Many students themselves also felt that they had matured and developed their confidence through their IFP experience.

Staff considered that involvement in IFP had led to positive outcomes for students' progression post-16 in terms of their choices to remain in learning post-16, to undertake a course in the same or different vocational area and being more able to make an informed decision about their post-16 choices. The majority of students who were interviewed planned to embark on vocational or academic qualifications at school or college or to start a Modern Apprenticeship or a job with training. Around half of the students were continuing with plans that they had before Year 10 and half had changed their plans. Most of this latter group appeared to have been influenced positively by their IFP experience in their plans.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The visits to partnerships revealed that, on the whole, students who had participated in the first two years of IFP were on course to achieve their qualifications and had benefited from developing personally and socially and in their preparedness for the future. The partnerships between schools and colleges and training providers which had facilitated this success had been most effective where there was good communication and relationships between the partners, along with commitment from all parties to shared aims and objectives.

The students who had undertaken at least part of their course away from school had valued the alternative learning environment and the approach and teaching style of the tutors. There was evidence that these students had benefited in their personal development and social skills, which suggests that there is value in IFP partnerships continuing to strive to overcome some logistical and practical challenges in order to offer this balance between school-based and college-based provision. Ensuring that students who participate in IFP are well-informed about the content of the course, the nature of the approach, and the associated commitment required by them, emerged as important in terms of minimising the risk of students discontinuing their involvement before the end of the two years of the course.

In some cases, tutors' initial concerns and reservations about the students they would be teaching through IFP were not realised and they were beginning to perceive benefits to the students and the college of their involvement. School staff who were not directly involved were less aware of any benefits and raising the profile of the positive outcomes for students could make a valuable contribution to the place of vocational learning within schools' curricula.

Finally, the experiences of staff and students in these partnerships of the first two years of IFP revealed some implications for policy. These included the need to ensure that schools and colleges have sufficient support to develop their links with employers and the need for ongoing professional development for college staff in teaching a younger age group and the new GCSEs in

vocational subjects. Finally, it emerged that there is a need to ensure that students access good guidance when making their choices to participate, including through ensuring that school staff are fully informed about vocational options. Overall, the research has revealed that there are positive outcomes where schools and colleges and training providers work in partnership to offer greater flexibility to students at key stage 4. However, policy makers need to take into consideration the logistical and operational complexities in merging two types of providers, and the associated costs, when seeking to develop such provision.

Summary of research methods

The findings presented in this summary are mainly based on interviews conducted in nine partnerships in February and March 2004 with:

- IFP coordinators in nine Lead Partners
- a total of 18 tutors across a range of vocational areas in each of the nine Lead Partners, six representatives of other external providers comprising two senior managers and four course tutors
- one student support worker
- 25 school staff in 17 schools
- 45 Year 11 students in 16 schools across the nine partnerships.

Visits were conducted in the same partnerships as in spring 2003 and, where possible, the same individuals were interviewed.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In 2002, the Green Paper: *14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards* set out a proposal to increase curriculum flexibility in order to enable pupils to learn at a pace which is appropriate to them and to pursue individually focused programmes to help them to meet their potential. The Green Paper also announced the introduction of new GCSEs in vocational subjects. These eight new qualifications are intended to provide young people, whose needs have not fully been met by the National Curriculum, with an opportunity to achieve 'vocational' qualifications that have parity of esteem with existing 'academic' qualifications.

In response to the Green Paper, the Increased Flexibility for 14-16 year olds Programme (IFP) was introduced in 2002. This is an £80 million programme which aims to '*create enhanced vocational and work-related learning opportunities for 14-16 year olds of all abilities who can benefit most*' including through undertaking GCSEs in vocational subjects. The IFP is delivered through partnerships which comprise a 'Lead Partner', the majority of which are further education (FE) colleges, partner schools and, in some instances, other training providers and employers. Funding to support these partnerships is channelled through Local Learning and Skills Councils (LLSCs) who also have responsibility for monitoring the process.

Partnerships were established in 2002 and the first cohort of Year 10 students embarked on their two-year courses in September. Subsequently, further funding was made available for a second cohort of students to become involved in the IFP from September 2003. A total of 283 partnerships have been formed to deliver IFP to students in both cohorts and to fulfill the objectives of the IFP which are to:

- raise the attainment in national qualifications of participating pupils
- increase young people's skills and knowledge
- improve social learning and development
- increase retention in education and training after 16.

The partnerships are working towards a set of targets that are as follows:

- one-third of the young people involved in IFP should gain at least one GCSE in a vocational subject at level 2
- one-third of students should gain at least one NVQ at level 1
- three-quarters of IFP participants should progress into further education or training

- attendance rates of the young people involved should match that of the average key stage 4 cohort.

The DfES commissioned the NFER to undertake a national evaluation of the first cohort of IFP to examine the extent to which these aims and objectives were being met. This was subsequently extended to include the second cohort of participants.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The evaluation aims to:

- assess the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of the implementation of the IFP, and identify those delivery models and implementation practices and strategies that appear to be most and least successful
- evaluate the extent to which the IFP has fulfilled its national aims, objectives and targets
- as part of this, assess the impact of vocational qualifications and new work-related learning opportunities on young people's skills, knowledge, attitudes, attendance, attainment and post-16 progression.

The research methods which were used for the evaluation are outlined below.

1.3 Research Methods

In order to achieve the aims of the evaluation, a range of research methods have been adopted. These include:

- baseline data collection exercises, undertaken in autumn 2002 (for the first cohort of provision) and in autumn 2003 (for the second cohort of provision), which identified the schools and students that were involved in IFP. This information was linked to the NFER's Register of Schools and the DfES's National Pupil Database, which contain background information on schools and pupils
- baseline and follow-up surveys of a representative sample of around 12,000 students, 450 schools and 130 providers of vocational courses, including Lead Partners
- collections of attendance and attainment data for the sample of students provided by the schools each term
- a programme of case-studies in nine partnerships in spring 2003 and spring 2004.

This report draws upon interviews that were conducted in the nine case-study partnerships in spring 2004. These partnerships were originally selected and

visited in 2003,[1] and were revisited between April and June 2004, in order to conduct follow-up interviews with college, training provider and school staff, and interviews with Year 11 students involved in the first cohort of IFP provision. As in spring 2003, researchers visited the Lead Partner college in each partnership, as well as any other provider that was involved in delivering the IFP. As last year, across the nine case-study partnerships, two were working with a local training provider, and a further two were working jointly with a local FE college to provide IFP courses. Researchers re-visited both linked FE colleges and one of the training providers.

Researchers also visited schools involved in IFP provision. In the spring 2003, two schools were selected and visited in each partnership (18 schools in total). All but one of these schools were re-visited in spring 2004, 17 in total. The eighteenth school was not revisited, because all students involved in the first cohort had discontinued their IFP courses and the school had decided not to re-introduce IFP with a second cohort of students from September 2003.

In the 2004 case-study visits, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of **60 key staff** including:

- Ten representatives of the Lead Partners (seven who were interviewed last year, and three who had replaced their predecessors).
- 18 Lead Partner college tutors across a range of subjects including GCSEs in engineering, manufacturing and applied science and vocational qualifications in catering and construction (14 of these tutors were interviewed last year, and four had either replaced their predecessors, or represented a new subject area this year).
- Six representatives of the other providers (colleges and training providers), including two senior managers and four course tutors across four different GCSE areas – engineering, ICT, health and social care and applied business.
- 25 school staff, including 14 senior managers (compared to 21 last year). This often reflected delegation of IFP responsibility to a middle manager within the school in this second year of provision.
- One student support worker.

The interviews explored changes in approaches to partnership working and communication since the introduction of IFP as well as partnership funding. They also focused on changes in approaches to staff development, curriculum planning and course delivery. There was a particular emphasis, this year, on the apparent impacts of IFP upon students' achievements, likely progressions and social learning. Interviewees' perceptions of the impact of the first cohort of IFP provision upon approaches to the second cohort were also discussed throughout the interviews.

[1] For details, see GOLDEN, S., NELSON, J., O'DONNELL, L. AND MORRIS, M. (2003). Evaluation of Increased Flexibilities: the Report of Findings from Partnership Visits, June 2003. Unpublished report, p. 3

In addition, detailed one-to-one interviews were conducted with **45 Year 11 IFP students** across 16 schools in nine partnerships. (For a more detailed profile of these students, see Section 4.1). The interviews explored the ways in which students had first heard about and become involved in IFP provision, their views on the experience of studying away from school (where relevant) and their opinions on their IFP programmes (including how these impacted upon their school work, what they liked and disliked about them and the extent to which they had been given experience of working with an employer). The impact of their courses upon their personal development and future plans was also discussed with them.

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 given. 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.

1.4 Structure of the Report

Chapter 2 considers issues surrounding partnership working and organisation, including changes in approaches to partnership management, communication and funding. It also discusses the factors that appeared to contribute to effective practice in partnership working.

Chapter 3 examines the broad development of IFP programmes. It outlines the overall profile of provision across the nine partnership areas, including the extent to which links with employers and the local economy have developed since last year, the progress of staff development and training and staff perceptions of the IFP and vocational learning.

Chapter 4 provides a profile of students involved in the IFP across the nine partnership areas and presents an analysis of students' own experiences of involvement in the IFP. It considers the ways in which they were introduced to their programmes, their experiences of learning away from school and their overall views and perspectives on their IFP programmes.

Chapter 5 draws upon the views of both staff and students in order to examine the apparent impacts of involvement in the IFP upon organisations and partnerships and upon students' achievements, likely progressions and social development. It also considers the impact of the first year's experience of IFP provision upon approaches to the second cohort, and discusses the impact upon organisations of having two cohorts of IFP students for the first time this year.

Chapter 6 concludes the report by drawing out the main issues from the case studies.

2. PARTNERSHIP WORKING AND ORGANISATION

Summary of Findings

- There was evidence that the IFP partnerships had matured over the two years of the programme. The introduction of a second cohort had contributed to this and most of the partnerships had engaged with new schools to provide for a new cohort. There was evidence that, in some cases, school staff's decision to participate in the second cohort was influenced by their perception of the success of the first cohort.
- The partnerships appeared to have retained the management structure which they had established in the first year. This entailed formal steering groups which were supplemented with much ongoing informal contact between Lead Partners and schools.
- The Lead Partners' roles had developed to some extent. The addition of a second cohort had led to an increased amount of time required for coordinating the programme. This was generally addressed through an increase in the existing coordinators time or through the appointment of full-time staff with a broader remit which included IFP.
- Lead Partners appeared to be increasingly establishing more formal arrangements for sharing information between partners, both prior to students embarking on their IFP course and in relation to their progress through it. Such arrangements included background information on students, details of students' attendance at college and progress reports.
- Interviewees in Lead Partner organisations and partner schools generally considered that their partnerships had been effective in delivering IFP for the first cohort of students. They highlighted good communication, positive relationships and having agreed shared aims and objectives as key aspects of ensuring effective partnership working. Some observed that the introduction of the second cohort had consolidated their partnership.
- Lead Partners had supplemented IFP core funding with funds from alternative sources, from the college budget and through schools' contributions. Interviewees' perceptions of whether IFP offered value for money varied. Some felt that, considering the outcomes for certain students, it did offer value for money while others felt that it did not offer value for money for their organisation.

This chapter outlines the structure of the case-study partnerships. It details:

- the membership of the partnerships and the extent to which this has changed
- the role of the Lead Partners and the approaches to communication within the partnership

- the funding received by the partnerships and their perceptions of whether IFP offered value for money
- views on developing effective partnerships.

2.1 Structural Developments

The initial visits in spring 2003 found that seven of the nine partnerships had pre-existing links with some of the schools who were participating in the IFP partnership. As was noted in the report of the visits in 2003, typically, to manage the IFP, the partnerships had established a steering or management group which included the Lead Partner, representatives of participating schools, partner providers and the LLSC. School representatives were generally deputy headteachers, but some schools had appointed coordinators for IFP. For example, among the 17 schools visited, seven had identified coordinators with responsibility for IFP. In some instances, partnerships included representatives of Education Business Partnerships (EBPs), the Connexions Service and local education authorities (LEAs). In 2004, one partnership had expanded to include representatives from Connexions, as Personal Advisers were supporting some of the IFP participants, and the EBP, in order to explore opportunities for increasing the involvement of employers.

The partnerships had continued to hold steering groups to oversee the IFP. The frequency which the steering groups met continued to vary according to local practice and individual circumstances, as also found during the initial visits in 2003.[2] Meetings had sometimes become more frequent when planning for a third cohort of IFP participants was taking place, but in general there had been no notable change in the frequency of meetings, suggesting that partners were content with the existing arrangements. In three partnerships, the IFP steering group was part of a wider forum for 14 to 16 or 14 to 19 learning in the area. IFP was a standing item on the agenda in two of these partnerships, while in the third it was discussed when necessary.

There was some evidence that the partnerships had matured since they were last visited in 2003. To a large extent this was because of the introduction of a second cohort. All but one of the nine partnerships continued to work with the same schools which had initially sent students as part of the first cohort of IFP participants. In the ninth partnership, all of the students in one school who had participated had discontinued their involvement due to the impact on their wider timetable and the implications for their GCSE achievements. Consequently the school was no longer an 'active' partner, but remained involved in the wider partnership. In considering the membership of the partnerships, it is worth noting that, in some instances, the IFP partnership included schools which were not currently actively involved in IFP in so far as none of their students currently participated in IFP-supported courses. For example, one partnership included representatives of two special schools who

2 GOLDEN, S., NELSON, J., O'DONNELL, L., MORRIS, M. (2003b). Evaluation of Increased Flexibilities: the Report of Findings from Partnership Visits. Unpublished report.

had yet to request places for any of their students. Of the 17 schools visited, 15 continued to work only in partnership with the same Lead Partner: one school was not involved in the second cohort of IFP. In a second instance a school had expanded its links to a second Lead Partner for cohort 2 in order to broaden the range of qualifications which they could offer to their students. However, the representative of a different school, which had been approached by a second Lead Partner, had decided not to become involved as it was felt that the coordination across two Lead Partners would be too time consuming for the staff member involved.

The partnerships had generally expanded and engaged additional schools as a consequence of the introduction of funding for a second cohort of students. This reflected the findings of the analysis of the baseline data for the second cohort of IFP[3] which reported that, on average, a partnership incorporated one additional school. Lead Partner representatives commented that schools had become involved because they were aware of the success of the first cohort or, as one Lead Partner expressed it, because the headteachers had '*reassessed whether they wanted to be involved*'. A second Lead Partner observed that, as a consequence of increasing the number of schools, the resource was spread across more schools with fewer students in each school. Furthermore, additional schools would have liked to have been involved but had been unable to take up involvement. In one partnership, the number of participating schools had not increased, for reasons pertaining to the individual schools, although one of the two such schools in the area was considering involvement in the third cohort. In two partnerships, one school was not involved in the second cohort. In one case this was due to a relocation of the college centre which led to transport difficulties for students, while in the second instance students had been taking GCSEs in vocational subjects, and the school was exploring how to deliver this qualification in school.

In addition to school partners, four of the IFP partnerships visited included partner providers. Three of these partnerships had retained the involvement of the original partner providers for the second cohort of participants, while the fourth had done so for only one of their two partner providers as one organisation had withdrawn. This partnership had engaged an additional provider, although in a different vocational area, for the second cohort. However, none of the other eight partnerships had engaged additional partner providers to support the delivery of IFP for a second cohort.

It appears, therefore, that the membership of these partnerships had remained largely the same with some expansion in the numbers of participating schools due to the introduction of the second cohort. However, there were some developments in the role adopted by the Lead Partners and, in some cases, in the role of schools (discussed below).

The Lead Partners continued to perform the various **roles** they outlined in 2003. These included strategic management and coordination, management of

[3] GOLDEN, S., NELSON, J., O'DONNELL, L. and RUDD, P. (2004, forthcoming). Evaluation of Increased Flexibilities for 14-16 year olds: Profile of Partnerships and Students 2002 and 2003.

funds, operational leadership, overseeing and coordinating staff development and the delivery of courses. The main change noted was that the introduction of a second cohort had brought about a need for more time to be spent on coordinating the programme. While in three partnerships this had entailed an increase in the existing coordinator's time, two had appointed a full-time coordinator with a broader 14 to 16 remit which included IFP, and a third was seeking to appoint a coordinator for IFP. One partnership had funded additional administration time to support the existing coordinator.

One Lead Partner representative asserted that the college '*still drives the partnership*' and explained that the schools felt sufficiently involved and did not wish for an enhanced role. In contrast, a second Lead Partner interviewee felt that the role was increasingly acting as a '*devil's advocate*' and to work with the schools to explore the range of possibilities for the future, including enhanced school involvement.

Seven of the schools that were visited considered that they **worked with other schools** in relation to IFP. This included network meetings to share practice, which in two instances were subject-specific, mentioned by three schools, and undertaking joint trips with students, noted by one school. In addition, three schools, two of which were in the same partnership, were working more closely to explore approaches to providing vocational learning for their students, including working in school partnerships to deliver GCSEs in vocational subjects. One respondent explained that, in future, '*we see delivery as being within schools but with the college involved as partners*'. Although these relationships were not always directly related to IFP, they were said to have grown out of the IFP partnership.

Facilitating **communication** between partners was a key element of the role of the Lead Partners. In addition to the formal steering group and network meetings noted above, Lead Partner representatives explained that they engaged in regular, often weekly, informal communication with schools. Such communications were generally to discuss individual student issues and '*troubleshooting*,' and also to engage in some planning and forward thinking. It appeared that Lead Partners and schools were increasingly establishing more formal arrangements for information sharing both prior to students embarking on an IFP course and as they progressed through it. More specifically:

- Four Lead Partners **requested information** such as details of students' attendance at school, key stage assessment grades or predicted GCSE grades, SEN status and eligibility for free school meals.
- Two Lead Partners mentioned that they **provided attendance information** to schools when students were attending the college and requested that schools informed them if a student was absent on a day when they would normally attend college.
- Six Lead Partners provided **progress reports** for schools which could be sent to parents as part of the schools' reporting system. The format of these reports was usually common across the partnership and agreed with the school representatives on the steering group. Staff in four of the

schools which received reports for parents commented that, although these were variable and '*a bit sketchy*' at first, they had improved. Lead Partners provided reports to all schools at the same time and schools forwarded them to parents as part of their normal reporting schedule to parents. Two of the Lead Partners who did not coordinate reports to parents were involved in school-based delivery where reports went through the normal school reporting system.

- Three Lead Partners said that they had arranged **parents evenings** and/or open days, and two mentioned that college tutors had attended schools' parents evenings, in order to provide feedback on students' progress to parents. Undertaking parents evenings had presented some challenges. For example, one Lead Partner had staggered the meetings over time in order to accommodate the number of parents who might wish to attend and around half of parents participated, while a tutor in a second Lead Partner said that only one parent had attended.

Most tutors who were interviewed commented that maintaining contact with schools was usually the role of the Lead Partner coordinator or student support workers, where these were employed. These tutors were usually content with this arrangement and felt that it was appropriate that schools should have a '*single voice*', as one expressed it. Nevertheless, seven tutors in six partnerships had direct contact with schools and, in four of these cases, this was because a member of school staff attended the lessons, either regularly or intermittently, in order to monitor progress or to offer students support. It appeared that, within an individual partnership, some tutors were in direct contact with schools while others were not, and that some staff from some schools accompanied their students while others did not. This suggests that there were no universally agreed arrangements for contact between schools and course tutors within a partnership but rather that these developed in response to the schools', tutors' or students' requirements.

In discussing the communication between schools and the college or training providers, tutors and Lead Partners identified the following **areas for development** to further effective communications.

- More formalised information sharing between schools and colleges or training providers in order to facilitate monitoring (two Lead Partners)
- Formally agreed selection criteria for potential IFP students (one Lead Partner)
- A formal Service Level Agreement between the Lead Partner and schools (two Lead Partners) and contracts between students, parents and the college or training provider (one Lead Partner)
- Information about students' prior attainment and predicted grades to be shared before students commenced their course (one tutor)
- Visits from school teachers to the college or training provider to see the students and the work they were undertaking (two tutors)

- Schools communicating any in-school commitments a student might have which might affect their attendance at the college or training provider (one tutor)
- More communication about individual students' issues, including pastoral concerns, in order that the college tutor could support the student more effectively, '*otherwise you are working on your own and it's meant to be about partnership*' (one tutor).

From the schools' perspective, communication with the Lead Partner occurred at two levels: at a partnership-wide level, usually through steering groups; and at an individual school level, usually through informal contacts. At partnership level, most of the school staff indicated that they were content with the frequency and content of steering group meetings. Indeed, interviewees from two schools in one partnership mentioned that there were now fewer meetings as the partnership was established and running well. Although there appeared to be a tendency for the meetings to be dominated by logistical and operational issues, there were indications that discussions at meetings were broadening and the meetings provided opportunities to share practice and explore future developments. These included opportunities for delivering courses in school which, one school teacher explained, '*brings the schools in – they don't want to miss out*'. One school teacher emphasised the need for discussions regarding joint staff development and timetabling issues and wider issues beyond operational matters.

As noted by Lead Partners, most school staff stated that there were frequent informal contacts between schools and the colleges or training providers. Three teachers in two partnerships attended the college or training provider themselves to provide support and to monitor progress. One explained that this approach is valuable as it '*makes the link between the school and the college alive*'. In a third school, the tutor taught the course in school so communication was frequent. In general, school staff who were interviewed felt that communication between the school and the college or training provider was adequate. Indeed, staff in two schools in one partnership observed that communication between the schools and college was better than communication within the college. Some interviewees noted the value of specific individuals in ensuring that communication was effective. For example, one observed that the college coordinator was '*a skilful negotiator between the schools and the college*'.

Two schools raised specific concerns about poor communication. In one instance, this related to the lack of negotiation with schools before making significant changes to the programme, changes which had implications for schools' timetabling and budgets. In the second case, insufficient timely information about the content of the course, and the progress which students were making, limited the amount of support which the relevant subject teacher in the school could provide when students were behind schedule with their coursework. In this instance, the subject teacher noted the value of involving teaching staff with specialist knowledge in IFP in addition to senior managers who oversaw the coordination.

2.2 Partnership Funding

The cost of delivering new GCSEs within IFP was the focus of a separate in-depth study[4] which found that there was much variability in the costs in different partnerships, '*depending on the number of partners, type/nature of delivery models and/or characteristics that are being employed*'. In addition, the report found that the costs of IFP were higher than the core funding received and additional funding '*can be as much as 57 per cent of the total cost of delivery over two years*'. Surveys undertaken as part of the national evaluation also found that the majority of Lead Partners, and around half of the schools, were subsidising delivery. While not examining the funding models adopted in detail, interviews with Lead Partners and schools in the case-study partnerships did explore IFP funding concerns and considerations in interviewees' perceptions of the extent to which it offered value for money.

In addition to the core funding, five Lead Partners mentioned that they had received additional funds from LSDA, the LSC and '*bits of money from here there and everywhere*', including Connexions and Objective 1 funding. Two of the Lead Partners had charged schools where their students attended the college to undertake their IFP courses. In one case, schools paid £300 per student in the first cohort. This subsidy by schools, together with the IFP core funding, allowed a viable group size to be established. In the second case, the college offered courses to schools at a 50 per cent reduction on the usual cost for courses. Four schools in these two partnerships indicated that they had paid for IFP provision for their students. Two had used their main school budget and one had used their inclusion budget. While two interviewees felt that this was sustainable, the third, who had paid from the main school budget reserves, said that this would not be sustainable and, if the provision did not continue to be part-funded, and the total cost was to the school, they would not be able to continue their involvement. One further Lead Partner was considering charging schools in future as some additional funding received would cease, however, this interviewee observed that it '*remained to be seen*' whether schools would be willing or able to pay for their students to participate. One interviewee in a school identified the size of the cohort as a constraint on the extent to which schools could pay for provision. He explained that, although eight students in the school participated in IFP, the demand for such provision was higher. If the external provider was able to accommodate more places, he would be able to reduce the number of design and technology classes in the school and pass on the saving to the external provider. He concluded that '*the bigger the cohort, the more we can release money to help them* [the Lead Partner]'.

Six of the nine Lead Partners said that their college had subsidised IFP provision. Indeed, one reported that, at a broad level, the IFP had '*cost twice as much*' as the core funding. As noted in the costing study[5], college subsidies related to staff costs for management and coordination of the programme, both

4 YORK CONSULTING (2003). Increased Flexibility for 14-16 Year Olds Costing Study. Confidential Report.

5 York consulting (2003). *op.cit.*

centrally and at department or faculty level, and teaching staff costs. Two Lead Partner respondents commented that their original budgets were based on part-time staff costs, but the courses were taught in practice by full-time staff. In addition, in one partnership, the college subsidised the programme by funding staff to provide learning and pastoral support. The need for such support was unexpected and, therefore, had not initially been factored in. The Lead Partner interviewee observed that these students may have lacked basic skills because, prior to IFP, they had '*never learnt in such a way that makes sense*'. The colleges' commitment to supporting IFP is reflected in the comments of representatives of two Lead Partners who stated that: '*we're doing it because we believe in it*' and '*because we believe it's needed and it feeds into the 16 plus programme*'. Two of the Lead Partners reported that their organisation had not subsidised the IFP. In one case, this may have been partly because the Lead Partner had charged the schools, while in the second, additional funding had been received from the LSC in response to the partnership recruiting more than the target number of students.

Seven of the Lead Partners said that they did not devolve any of the funding to schools, although many re-imbursed travel expenses where these were paid by schools. In the two partnerships where IFP funding was shared with schools, some or all of the delivery of the IFP courses was undertaken in school. One partnership allocated funds to schools for management and supply cover in addition to teaching the course. Respondents in nine of the schools visited said that their school subsidised the IFP provision in some way. Three mentioned the need for time for staff in school to oversee and coordinate the programme. (Note that other school staff may not have perceived this to be a subsidy.) The other main ways in which schools reportedly subsidised IFP included:

- **Additional teaching costs** as a consequence of students participating in IFP having to be taught separately for some of their timetable. This was described as '*very expensive*' by one teacher who indicated that accommodating these students in the timetable accounted for 0.3 of a teacher.
- **Staff escorting students** to their IFP courses and supporting them in the classroom was noted as a cost by interviewees from five of the schools. One interviewee explained that the school had chosen to do this because '*that's part of the investment we've made…they're* [the students] *still our responsibility…we want to ensure that they are good ambassadors for us*'.

As might be expected, given the range of approaches to delivery and the explicit and sometimes hidden subsidisation of the IFP among the partnerships visited, interviewees found estimating a **per capita cost** of delivery challenging. One Lead Partner estimated that the cost was £600 to £700 per student each year, while a second said that they had budgeted on '*a conservative costing*' of £2,000 per student over the two years. In both of these cases, delivery was away from school at the college. Two interviewees in schools also estimated a cost of £2,000 for each student across the two years. Another Lead Partner representative observed that the cost for each

student '*depends on the model…the travel to college model is very high*' due to the transport costs and the '*very high input by college staff*'. The coordinator in a fourth partnership mentioned that the original plan to allocate funds for different courses according to the number of students participating had been '*a mistake*', as it had not taken into account that some courses, such as engineering, which require a higher staff to student ratio, were '*very resource hungry*'. Consequently, funding was now weighted according to the subject area, with engineering and art and design receiving a higher weighting, for example, than leisure and tourism and applied business courses.

In considering interviewees' perceptions of the extent to which IFP offered **value for money**, it is worth noting that partnerships were allocated broadly identical funding and decisions on the number of students to participate in IFP were made at a local level by individual partnerships. As noted above, some partnerships used additional funding to support the IFP. It may be, therefore, that variations in the number of participating students, and in the approach to delivery adopted, influenced perceptions of the extent to which IFP offered value for money.

Interviewees' views on whether IFP offered **value for money** varied. Some interviewees made a connection between outcomes and value for money and, while some felt that it was still too early to say, a Lead Partner observed that '*seeing how the students have responded, yes it offers good value for money*', though conceding that, compared to post-16 provision, it was not good value. Similarly a school teacher stated that '*it has been invaluable for the likes of* [student] – *you can't put a price on what it has done for her*' and a second mentioned that calmer students and the positive progression he anticipated for the participants led him to consider that the programme did offer longer-term value for money.

One respondent, in a school which would have been offering such provision, even if IFP funding had not been available, felt it offered very good value for money. Conversely, a respondent at a school where a high proportion of students had discontinued the programme felt that it did not offer good value. Some interviewees felt that the IFP offered value for money only for certain individuals or organisations. For example, one Lead Partner interviewee felt it was good value for the students, but less so for the college, and a second commented that the school had good value for money from their involvement. Interviewees also considered the broader value for their organisation in assessing the extent to which IFP offered value for money. For example, one Lead Partner felt that it did not offer value for money but, as it helped to meet the broader strategic aims of the organisation, it was valuable.

Overall, interviewees' perceptions of the value for money offered by the IFP appeared to be influenced by the extent to which the outcomes in their experience had been positive. In other words, if some students experienced success, interviewees were more likely to consider that IFP offered good value for money than where they had experienced many students discontinuing their IFP involvement.

2.3 Effective Partnerships

On the whole, Lead Partner interviewees considered that their partnerships had been successful in delivering IFP for 14 to 16 year old students. This overall perception was supported by the comments of school staff, all but two of whom made positive observations about the effectiveness of their partnerships, and of tutors. When they were visited in spring 2003, Lead Partner representatives and school staff indicated that effective partnerships were underpinned by open, understanding relationships between individuals who were committed and had clear roles and responsibilities. Partnerships were said to be effective where there was good communication including formal systems and protocols and joint planning. Reflecting over the previous 18 months of working in partnership, interviewees' observations about the factors that contributed to effective IFP partnerships reflected their comments in the previous year. These included:

- good communication
- good relationships
- strong leadership
- shared aims, objectives and commitment.

Each is discussed further below.

Good communication was regarded as key to ensuring that a partnership operated effectively by six of the Lead Partners, five tutors and three school teachers. They observed that it was important to '*keep talking*', both informally and through '*regular, responsive, business-like meetings*' which were relevant to all attendees. Where students were undertaking their courses away from school, visits from school staff to see the students *in situ* were felt to make a valuable contribution to effective communication. One school teacher noted the cost implications of enabling a member of staff to visit students and indicated that, as he had been unable to carry out such visits himself, he felt he had '*no idea what the pupils are doing down at the college*', and this limited the extent to which he could support the students with coursework. The value of having a member of staff in a school with a specific remit for coordinating IFP was noted by a Lead Partner, tutor and member of school staff.

Establishing, and maintaining, good **relationships** which were based on trust was felt to be central to the success of partnerships, as mentioned by five Lead Partners, a tutor and eight interviewees in schools. In some instances, interviewees cited the existence of established relationships as supporting the development of successful partnerships. For example, one interviewee in a school explained that the success of the partnership was in part because it had initially been the instigation of the schools – '*It was an idea we suggested because we wanted to do it…it offers a curriculum we couldn't offer before*'.

In other cases, it took time to develop these relationships. For example, one Lead Partner observed that involvement in IFP had '*broken down barriers*' between schools and the college, while a second commented that '*we've worked it to a fine art…the schools really trust us*'. In developing these trusting relationships, interviewees in schools and colleges identified that there '*needs to be understanding of each others' needs*' and a '*willingness to take on our concerns and needs*'. Indeed, one school teacher attributed the success of the partnership in part to their partner college '*slowly learning how schools work*'.

Strong leadership in the partnership, and the involvement of schools' senior managers, were also identified as contributing to success. In addition, the contributions of specific individuals were said to facilitate effective partnership working. Teachers in two schools in one partnership mentioned that success was due partly to the continuity of having the same Lead Partner coordinator, and the '*respect and trust*' they had for this individual.

Having **shared aims, objectives and commitment** to the IFP, and agreeing the roles and responsibilities of all those involved, were said to have contributed to the establishment of effective partnerships by five Lead Partners, three tutors and seven school staff. One Lead Partner representative, for example, emphasised the importance of all parties agreeing that '*vocational education is valuable for 14 plus students and does motivate them*'. This was supported by a school teacher who cautioned of the effects on the success of the partnership where schools did not all support an agreed aim such as where '*some schools see it as babysitting – the kids and their parents detect that and vote with their feet*'. Ensuring that all parties sign up to clear agreed protocols and procedures, where issues are '*hammered out around a table*' before the programme commenced, was said to be important. One teacher particularly emphasised the importance of agreeing student selection criteria as part of this. With regard to agreeing the aims and objectives, one tutor expressed the view that it was important to have enough flexibility so that the partnership could recognise that, for some subjects, it might be appropriate for schools to deliver the qualifications themselves.

In addition to these main factors which were perceived to contribute to effective partnerships, one Lead Partner and interviewees in two schools noted that the introduction of a second cohort had '*reinforced*' or '*consolidated*' the partnership. Other observations included:

- that development of the partnership had been assisted by the closeness of the college to the school (two schools)
- that partnerships worked best where coordinators had sufficient time to undertake management and liaison (one Lead Partner)
- that partnerships worked best where good practice was shared (one school).

The views of the school staff interviewed suggests overall satisfaction with their partnerships. In the two instances where school staff expressed concerns,

this was due to poor communication between the Lead Partner and the school. A further insight into the effectiveness of the nine partnerships can be gained through examining the proportions of students who left the programme before the end of Year 11. In three of the nine partnerships, 50 per cent or more of their students had discontinued their involvement, while in one around a quarter had done so. In the remaining five partnerships, few students discontinued. In one of the partnerships which had experienced 50 per cent or more students discontinuing, the school expressed concern about the way the partnership worked, but in the other three partnerships with high proportions of young people leaving, schools were content with the operation of the partnership.

Overall, this chapter has revealed that the partnerships had maintained the engagement of existing partner schools and in some cases had extended their partnerships to incorporate new schools for the second cohort and, occasionally, other organisations such as Connexions and the EBP. A factor encouraging the engagement of additional schools, in some cases, was the apparent success of provision of the first cohort of students. Partnerships had retained their existing formal mechanisms for communicating and had further developed their information sharing in relation to background information on students and providing feedback on progress. However, overall, there appeared to be little change in the nature and structure of the partnerships and, in the main, the Lead Partners continued to take the overall responsibility for the partnership. There was, however, some evidence of schools considering working together to provide vocational opportunities for the third cohort of IFP students.

3. PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

Summary of Findings

- Generally there had been no change in the courses offered for the first cohort of students. However, seven of the case-study partnerships had made changes to the courses they offered to the second cohort of students. These partnerships had either added new courses for the Year 10 students or changed the qualification to one which they perceived to be more appropriate.
- Overall, college tutors were happy with the qualifications offered through IFP, and felt that the level and content were appropriate for the students involved. However, some tutors were concerned that the GCSEs in vocational subjects were too academic and were not appropriate for students of lower ability.
- There had been little change in the delivery models adopted for the first cohort of students, and no change in how courses were delivered for the second cohort of students.
- Four partnerships used the same model for delivering all IFP courses across the partnership, with the Lead Partner being the sole provider. However, five partnerships had adopted a combination of delivery models, with no one approach dominating. In some cases, courses were delivered only in college, while in others, delivery was shared between the Lead Partner college and the school. Some courses were delivered by college staff within schools, while others were delivered only in school, with some support from college staff.
- There had been no major changes to the way tutors delivered courses to either the first cohort or second cohort of students. Most tutors had realised at an early stage in the programme the need to adapt their teaching style to suit the needs of the IFP cohort, including varying their teaching methods and dividing up the course into smaller chunks. Some interviewees recognised that teaching this age group would be an ongoing development process.
- Some interviewees were experiencing ongoing challenges with timetabling the IFP. Some partnerships were also starting to experience capacity issues due to the number of IFP students and this was making timetabling more difficult. However, only one partnership had changed the way they timetabled provision for the first cohort of students.
- The introduction of cohort 2 did not seem to have made much difference to the timetabling approach adopted, and indeed some interviewees reported that they had found timetabling the second cohort of students easier than in the first year because of their prior experience. Only one partnership had used a different approach for timetabling the second cohort of students.

- The involvement of employers was still not widespread, however, more partnerships seemed to have been successful in linking with employers than in the first year of the IFP. School and college staff, and students generally perceived employer involvement to be a valuable aspect of the programme, however, they were still experiencing challenges in making links with employers.
- There had been little joint staff development within the partnerships, however, interviewees had attended training on working with 14-16 year-olds, and on specific courses and programmes. A number of staff development needs were still felt to be outstanding. These included further guidance on working with this age group, guidance and support with the delivery of GCSEs in vocational subjects and raising the profile of the IFP and vocational qualifications among school staff.
- Although college staff initially had some concerns about the IFP and the students involved, there appeared to have been some improvements in their perceptions of the programme, and tutors were starting to realise the benefits to students and to the college. Some schools staff were also starting to notice positive impacts on students, however, there were some concerns in schools that teachers were not fully aware of the IFP and its potential benefits.

This chapter describes how IFP provision has developed over the last year. It details:

- the profile of provision across the nine case-study partnerships, including the courses offered, the models of delivery, timetabling and student support mechanisms, and any changes in these over the last year
- the extent to which employers are involved in IFP provision, and the nature of these employer links
- the progress of staff development and training over the past year
- how the IFP and vocational qualifications are viewed by practitioners and young people.

3.1 Profile of Provision

3.1.1 Changes in courses and qualifications offered

This section explores any changes to the courses and qualifications that partnerships offered through IFP for the two-year period relevant to the first cohort of students. It also examines the extent to which the courses offered for the second cohort of students differed from those for the first cohort.

The case-study visits that were undertaken in the nine case-study partnerships in 2003 revealed that partnerships generally offered both GCSEs in vocational subjects and other vocational qualifications. This was still the case when these partnerships were re-visited in spring 2004, and generally there had been no change in the courses offered for the first cohort of students. Only two

partnerships had discontinued one of their courses, and in one of these this was because all the students had discontinued due to timetabling difficulties within the school.

As reported last year, between two and nine different qualifications were offered to students in the case-study partnerships. Eight of the nine Lead Partner colleges offered at least one new GCSE in a vocational subject and the remaining Lead Partner supported the delivery of new GCSEs in schools. Across the case-study partnerships, all eight of the new GCSEs were being undertaken by the first cohort of students through IFP as follows:

- Engineering (six partnerships)
- Applied ICT (four partnerships)
- Leisure and Tourism (four partnerships)
- Health and Social Care (three partnerships)
- Applied Art and Design (three partnerships)
- Applied Business (three partnerships)
- Manufacturing (two partnerships)
- Applied Science (one partnership).

In 2003, in addition to the new GCSEs, all nine of the partnerships offered other vocational qualifications, including NVQs, to the first cohort of students. However, when visited in 2004, one partnership had discontinued the only other vocational qualification they were offering – Performing Arts City and Guilds certificate – due to students discontinuing. Consequently, eight of the nine case-study partnerships currently offer other vocational qualifications to their first cohort of students. The subject areas of these vocational qualifications included:

- Catering (five partnerships) – usually food preparation and cooking NVQ Level 1
- Construction (four partnerships) – usually the Foundation Construction Award in Building Craft Occupations Level 1
- Engineering and motor vehicle studies (four partnerships) – usually Performing Engineering Operations Level 1
- Hairdressing (three partnerships) – usually NVQ Level 1
- ICT (one partnership) – City and Guilds Level 1
- Horticulture (one partnership) – NVQ Level 1
- Childcare (one partnership) – NVQ Level 1.

The initial visits to the partnerships found that, in general, the Lead Partners, who were the vocational specialists, took the lead in identifying relevant qualifications. In doing so, they took into consideration:

- schools' requests and requirements
- whether qualifications were approved under Section 96
- opportunities for students' progression
- availability of facilities and staff
- complementary qualifications in the same subject area.

In considering the partnerships' approaches to identifying the range of provision, it appeared that a distinction should be made between general subject areas and specific qualifications. The general subject areas were usually identified by schools and colleges together and could be informed by local employment opportunities and skill needs and the availability of facilities at the provider organisation. The specific qualifications were usually identified by the Lead Partner with reference to section 96 and possible future progression.

Seven out of the nine partnerships visited in 2004 reported that they had made some changes to the qualifications and courses they offered to the second cohort of students. In addition to the existing courses they provided for the first cohort of students, five of the partnerships had added new courses for the students in Year 10 in 2003/04, usually in response to schools' requests. However, interviewees from two of these Lead Partners reported that there had been no take-up of some of the new courses (for example, GCSE ICT, GNVQ Performing Arts) because schools felt that they were able to deliver these courses themselves, without the support of the college. Another partnership had decided to discontinue offering GCSE ICT for the second cohort of students for this same reason. Three partnerships had changed the type of qualification that students were following for the second cohort, as they considered that there was a more appropriate qualification available for the IFP students. One partnership, for example, decided to change from offering Engineering GCSE to offering Engineering NVQ Level 1 and Performing Engineering Operations NVQ Level 2 because they felt that the NVQ courses were more practical and craft-oriented and specifically responded to the needs of industry.

3.1.2 Tutors' views on appropriateness of qualifications offered

Overall, college tutors were happy with the qualifications that were offered to students through the IFP, and the majority felt that the level and content of these courses were appropriate for the students involved. These tutors reported that the courses had generally been well received by students and most of them were on target to achieve their qualifications in the spring term of 2004. Tutors were particularly positive about the courses when they felt that they offered good progression opportunities for the students, either into further education or employment. Only three tutors mentioned that they were considering alternative qualifications for future cohorts that might be more appropriate for students aged 14-16 years.

However, some tutors mentioned concerns relating to the new GCSEs in vocational subjects, most commonly Engineering, ICT and Applied Business. Five interviewees felt that these courses were too academic, and '*not as practical as the students would have liked*', and they did not meet the needs of all the students. One ICT tutor added that '*the exam board insists on a written exam*', which he felt would disadvantage students with poor literacy skills. This was echoed by a tutor delivering GCSE Applied Business, who stated that, although this course was appropriate for higher achieving students, other students did not have the organisational or analytical skills necessary for the course and, as a result, some had struggled with the coursework requirements.

Three further tutors commented that although they were satisfied with the content and level of the GCSEs in vocational subjects, they were conscious that these courses were not yet well-established, given their recent introduction, and therefore, they were not running as well as they would have liked. These tutors felt that they had not received sufficient support and resources from the Awarding Bodies to help them deliver the new courses, and as one tutor stated, '*we haven't totally got to grips with it*.' However, the tutors felt that this would improve over time, as they became more familiar with the content of the course.

3.1.3 Changes in delivery models

As reported in 2003, 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. Four partnerships had 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 five had adopted a **combination of delivery models** within their partnership, with no one approach to delivering courses dominating. All but one of these partnerships provided a combination of both in-school provision and off-site provision for IFP students, depending on the course and also the expertise of the schools. In the remaining partnership, students attended either the Lead Partner college or a linked training provider organisation. One of these partnerships with mixed delivery had adopted a rather unique approach, in that they used different delivery models for different subject areas or 'pathways'.

The different delivery models adopted by the case-study partnerships for the first cohort of students, and any issues relating to them, are discussed below.

- **Courses delivered only in college –** as was the case in the first year of the IFP (2003), interviewees in eight partnerships reported that the college delivered the whole of the course, for at least one of the IFP courses. The main reason given for the adoption of this approach was that the college had the specialist facilities and staff expertise to deliver the courses, whereas schools often did not.
- **Delivery shared between the Lead Partner college and the school –** this was reported by interviewees in four partnerships, although the extent of shared delivery differed between courses. In some cases, the delivery was

shared equally between the school and the college; in others, the college was the main provider, with limited involvement from the school; and in others, the schools were responsible for most of the delivery, with some support from the college. 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.

- **Courses delivered within schools by college staff –** Interviewees in four partnerships indicated that college tutors travelled to schools to deliver at least one IFP course, most commonly GCSEs in vocational subjects. As indicated last year, this approach was often adopted in order to overcome capacity and resource issues within the college.
- **Courses delivered only in school,** with support from college staff in some instances – in four of the case-study partnerships, the school was the sole provider of at least one of the IFP courses. However, in some cases, school staff were able to access the expertise of the college to support them with the course delivery.

There was little difference in the delivery models adopted for the first cohort of students in 2004 compared with those used for this cohort in 2003. Interviewees in only four partnerships reported that the delivery approaches had changed. Two partnerships had changed their approach from providing courses within school, with support from college staff, to delivering courses either solely in college or shared with the college. One partnership had changed from the course being taught in the school, by college tutors, to being taught solely at the Lead Partner college, due to the facilities at the school being insufficient to provide a real working environment for students. In the fourth partnership, a private training provider was now sharing the delivery of the courses with the Lead Partner college.

There had not been any new developments in the delivery models adopted by partnerships for the second cohort of students, however, two interviewees mentioned that they were considering changing their approaches for the third cohort of IFP students. One of these interviewees indicated that they were planning to encourage more course delivery within school, while the other, a Lead Partner coordinator, reported that they were considering grouping schools into clusters and sending college tutors out to teach IFP students from across a number of schools as one cohort.

3.1.4 Changes in delivery approaches

As reported in 2003, staff involved in delivering courses to IFP students had faced a number of challenges due to the different needs of students aged 14-16 years compared with those of post-16 students. Most tutors had realised at an early stage in the programme the need to adapt their teaching style and they had made efforts to change their delivery approach to suit the needs of the cohort. The changes mentioned by interviewees in 2003, and re-emphasised by interviewees during the case-study visits in 2004, included the need to:

- **Pitch teaching at the appropriate level** for the IFP students, for example, by simplifying the language used in assignments
- **Vary the teaching methods** used, by combining theory work with practical activities, and keeping lessons lively and activity focused.
- **Divide up the course** into smaller, more manageable 'chunks' and ensure that tasks are not too long, so that they maintain the attention and interest of the students.
- **Continually encourage and reward** students and focus on their achievements, in order to keep them motivated and to raise their self-esteem. One college tutor, for example, stressed that some students '*have never had merit before'*
- **Maintain close supervision** of the students to ensure that they remain on task.

Although many tutors had taken these factors into consideration early on in the programme, some mentioned that teaching this age group was an ongoing learning process for them and that they were still developing new ways of engaging the young people. Tutors had not made any major changes to their teaching approach for either the first or second cohort of students. However, some interviewees reported that they had made slight refinements to their teaching style based on their experience of the first year of the IFP, and their better understanding of the needs of the students. These included using a slower teaching pace and making tasks shorter, and breaking up the theory and practical elements of the course more. It is clear that this will continue to be an ongoing development process for many tutors as they embark on teaching the third cohort of students.

3.1.5 Changes in timing and timetabling

The visits in 2003 revealed that partnerships had either adopted a partnership-wide approach to timetabling or had negotiated individually with each school. In some instances, the college had specified the available times and the schools had fitted their timetables around this. In other cases, the school had provided details of when they could accommodate IFP provision and the third approach could be characterised as being negotiated through discussion.

The amount of time students spent on IFP courses was relatively consistent across the nine case-study areas. As reported last year, students following GCSEs in vocational subjects tended to spend between five and seven hours a week on their course, whereas students undertaking NVQ courses spent approximately three hours per week. The case-study visits undertaken in spring 2004 revealed that there had been very little change in the amount of time the first cohort of students spent on their courses between Year 10 and Year 11. Only one partnership indicated that they had reduced the amount of time that students spent on IFP courses, in order that students did not miss any timetabled lessons at school. In most schools, courses were timetabled for either the whole morning or afternoon, although in two partnerships, students

spent a whole day on IFP. The implications of the timing of IFP courses on the way provision was timetabled are discussed below.

The case-study visits undertaken in 2003 revealed that timetabling was perceived to be one of the main challenges of the IFP. This was mainly due to problems in planning timetables as a result of the late confirmation of funding for cohort 1 of the programme. Interviewees also mentioned a range of other challenges including problems with matching the school and college timetables, the need to organise the key stage 4 timetable around a small number of students and the need to incorporate the time taken for students to travel to their location of study.

Interviewees in seven partnerships indicated that challenges with timetabling were ongoing for the second year of the first cohort of students. Furthermore, interviewees in three of these partnerships reported that they were starting to experience capacity issues, due to the large numbers of students involved in the programme, and that this was making timetabling even more difficult. However, despite these challenges, only one of the partnerships had changed the way they timetabled IFP provision for the first cohort of students, in 2004. This partnership had changed from providing IFP courses on two half-days to providing them on one whole day because they felt that this would be make it easier for tutors to cover the course fully, and would reduce problems with student punctuality and attendance. Although a whole day was quite demanding for the students, the college reported that '*almost all the schools preferred the whole-day approach*'.

In 2003, a few interviewees were concerned that timetabling would be more complex with the introduction of cohort 2. However, from the interviews carried out in 2004, this does not appear to have been the case. Indeed, one Lead Partner representative stated that timetabling had been easier for the second cohort of students because of the lessons they had learned from timetabling provision for the first cohort. Another interviewee reported that, for cohort 2, school and college staff had worked together more closely to timetable the IFP in a way that was mutually acceptable. Interviewees also noted that timetabling was made easier given that they were informed about the introduction of the second cohort earlier in the year and so they had more time to incorporate IFP provision into their timetables. Generally, partnerships had kept the same timetabling approach for cohort 2 as they had used with the first cohort of students. Only one partnership reported that they had altered their approach – they had changed from an afternoon session to a morning session for the Year 10 students, as they felt that the students would be better able to concentrate at the start of the day.

As was the case last year, the timing of the IFP courses meant that some students had to miss lessons in order to participate in the IFP. In 2004, interviewees in eight of the case-study partnerships reported that students were missing lessons as a result of their participation in the IFP. As noted above, only one of the case-study partnerships had made efforts this year to avoid students missing lessons, by adapting the amount of time spent on IFP

courses. In addition, schools did not seem to have developed further ways of supporting students with catching up with work missed. Generally there was no formal provision for students to catch up with work missed, and no monitoring of whether catch-up was successful. As one teacher described, it '*depends on the kids… some are excellent, others are not*'. Students' experience of missing lessons are discussed in Chapter 4.

Overall, it appears that, although timetabling remained a challenge for schools, it was one that they were willing to accommodate in order that their students could access IFP. For example, the majority of the schools had students participating in the second cohort and had retained a similar approach to timetabling as they had adopted with the first cohort. This suggests that, in general, the challenge was not a sufficient barrier to involvement to lead schools to cease their participation.

3.2 Links with Employers and the Local Economy

In five out of the nine case-study partnerships, school and college staff reported that there had been some level of employer involvement in the IFP for the first cohort. This is compared to three partnerships at the time of last year's case-study visits, which suggests that more schools and colleges had been successful in linking with employers for IFP during the second year of the programme. A further two partnerships indicated that employers were involved in the IFP solely for the second cohort of students (those currently in Year 10). It is not possible to conclude from the case-study visits why some partnerships were more successful than others in involving employers. However, five of the partnerships that had involved employers with either the first or the second cohort of students, had linked with organisations which had helped to set up these business links (e.g. Connexions, Open Industry). A few interviewees also mentioned that they had personal contacts with employers, or prior experience of working in industry, which had facilitated making links with employers.

The extent and nature of employer involvement varied across the five partnerships. In one, employers were actively involved in providing block work experience placements for students (for one week, each term). In the other partnerships, provision was less formal and sustained, with students attending one-off visits to local employers (in all five partnerships), or representatives from industry visiting schools to give presentations to IFP students (one partnership).

Interviewees in three of the partnerships also reported that they had tried to encourage IFP students to attend Year 10 work experience placements that were linked to the vocational area that they were studying through the IFP. However, this was not possible for all students, and one interviewee acknowledged that this was not appropriate if students did not want to pursue the vocational area they were studying through the IFP as a career.

Given the nature of the links with employers in the case-study areas, which were usually one-off, individual events, it is perhaps not surprising that there was not much formal preparation for students prior to their employer involvement. However, interviewees in three partnerships indicated that they had spent time on preparing students before they visited employers. For example, by providing them with questions to ask, undertaking mock interviews beforehand, and by briefing them on the appropriate way to dress and behave in a work environment. In four partnerships, tutors also made efforts to link students' experiences with employers to their IFP course. For instance, students were given tasks to complete while at an employer, and these were linked to their course assignments. In other cases, students were expected to write a description of their time with an employer, and use this experience as evidence for their portfolios.

Although current employer involvement in the case-study partnerships was not widespread, many of the interviewees recognised the value of employers being involved in the IFP. It was generally felt that links with employers could give young people '*a first impression of the world of work*' and give them a greater understanding of industry. Interviewees also noted that these industrial experiences could help students to see the relevance of their course, by allowing them to see the theory they were learning put into practice. This '*helps make it* [their course] *real*', and enables students to see how the skills they are developing through their course could be applied in the world of work.

The IFP students interviewed were also asked about their experiences of working with employers. Twenty six out of the 45 students interviewed reported that they had not had any links with employers as part of their IFP course. On the other hand, thirteen students indicated that they had made one-off visits to an employer or company. These tended to involve the students being shown around the organisation and being told by staff about how the business works. A further six students stated that they had been on work placements to an employer at some point in their IFP course, generally for one whole day each week.

Only eight of the 19 students who had experienced employer involvement as part of their IFP course reported that this experience had been explicitly referred to or linked into their course. These students reported that they had been able to apply what they had learnt at the employer to help them with their theory work or that they had used examples from their work experience as part of their coursework assignments.

Nearly all of the students who had been on either a one-off visit or a work placement to an employer reported that they had found this experience enjoyable and useful. Only one of the students interviewed stated of his employer involvement, '*I don't know how that is going to help us'*. Several students indicated that visiting an employer gave them a better understanding of the world of work. One student, for instance, stated '*it's given me an insight into what actual work will be like once I leave school*'. Another

reported that this was more useful than being taught about business in lessons. He indicated that work experience enables students to '*see how it works instead of just being told….you learn better when you can see it….you take it in rather than just sitting in a classroom*'.

It is clear that both the school and college staff and the students interviewed generally perceived employer involvement to be an important and valuable aspect of the programme. However, school and college staff highlighted the challenges they had encountered in trying to make links with employers. These are outlined below.

- **Tutors had limited time to build links with employers** – Interviewees indicated that developing links with employers was often a difficult and time-consuming process. On top of this, tutors emphasised that their focus and priority had been to deliver the IFP course and make sure that the students achieved their qualification. Indeed, this was a more challenging task for tutors who were teaching a new group of students, or delivering a new qualification. Therefore, tutors often found it difficult to have time to set up links with employers and to cope with the logistics of organising visits to employers. Partnerships might benefit, therefore, from having a designated member of staff with responsibility for coordinating employer involvement, in order to reduce the burden on course tutors. Interviewees also added that there was not enough time within the course for work placements, and that including employers in the programme would make the timetabling of the course too difficult.
- **There was a lack of appropriate employers available –** Some interviewees reported that there were limited employer opportunities in their geographical area in the vocational area they needed. Interviewees also reported that involving employers in the IFP was made more challenging by the fact that several schools in an area may be competing for opportunities with the same employers.
- **Employers were reluctant to become involved** – Interviewees gave a number of reasons why some employers were reluctant to be involved in IFP provision. Firstly, interviewees noted that employers had their own pressures and that many, particularly small businesses, had limited staff and resources spare to take time out of their own work for schools. Indeed one interviewee indicated that employers would view working with schools as '*an interruption to their work*'. Another tutor added that businesses might be reluctant to take on young people because employers are vulnerable to the effects on their work and their customers of any inappropriate behaviour by young people. Secondly, five interviewees reported that employers were put off by the health and safety and insurance issues associated with 14-16 year olds attending work placements. Several interviewees suggested that, given employers' concerns, they need much clearer incentives if they are to be encouraged to participate in the programme.

Although the level of employer involvement in the case-study partnerships was not widespread or sustained, there were ways in which tutors were

attempting to incorporate a vocational element into the IFP courses. In five of the partnerships, the college itself had the facilities to provide a real working environment (for example, a restaurant, hairdressing salon or travel agency), and IFP students were able to access these facilities and gain experience of work. In addition, many of the courses were made more relevant to the world of work by the experience of the tutors delivering them. Many of the college tutors interviewed had a background in industry and were able to make the link between the course and the world of work, for example, by relating theory work to real-life practical examples from industry. Other ways in which tutors were trying to ensure there was a sufficient vocational element to the programme was to show students videos of work placements and getting students to explore the websites of different companies to get an insight into how they work.

As mentioned above, 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. Indeed one interviewee stated '*we have not done as much as we would like*', while another indicated that it was their '*next area for attention'*. Interviewees in three partnerships reported that they were planning to work with their local Education Business Partnership (EBP) to try to overcome the difficulties they were facing with setting up industry links. One partnership had also set up network meetings, involving all the schools within the partnership, to coordinate employer links across the partnership. Interviewees in two partnerships also reported that they planned to change their approach to linking with employers in an attempt to encourage more employers to become involved. One partnership, for example, planned to ask employers to give presentations in schools, rather than to provide work placements, as this was easier to arrange and less burdensome on employers. A tutor in the other partnership reported that they planned to provide students with a series of short visits to an employer, rather than blocked placements because, again, he felt that this would be less of a burden on employers.

3.3 Staff Development and Training

This section describes the staff development and training activities that had taken place in the case-study partnerships over the last year, and examines the extent to which interviewees perceived there to be any outstanding development needs.

As was the case in the first year of the IFP, formal staff training development had most commonly been received by staff in colleges rather than those in schools, which reflects the fact that college staff tended to be the main deliverers of the IFP courses. Formal training received so far was described as being related to:

- **Working with 14-16 year-olds –** including behaviour and classroom management techniques and teaching and learning styles appropriate for this age group.

- **Specific courses and programmes –** these tended to be offered by Awarding Bodies, and were most commonly related to the delivery and assessment of GCSEs in vocational subjects.

College and school staffs' perceptions of these two broad forms of training are discussed in further detail below.

College staff in seven out of the nine case-study partnerships had attended training related to **working with 14-16 year-olds**, most commonly focusing on classroom management and teaching and learning strategies. Staff in two Lead Partner organisations had also attended training sessions on the legal aspects of working with this age group, including duty of care and legal responsibilities. Although some college tutors felt that training for working with 14-16 year olds was crucial for them, due to their limited experience of dealing with this age group, others felt that they had sufficient experience of working with young people or with schools. One tutor, with no prior experience of working with 14-16 year olds, described working with the IFP students as a '*culture shock*' because they were '*very different to post-16s*'. Other tutors, on the other hand, stated that they had professional teaching qualifications and had been teaching for many years, therefore, they did not see the need for this type of staff development. In addition, one Lead Partner representative indicated that, although she regarded training on classroom management to be useful for college tutors, '*we don't want to train our tutors to be exactly like a school teacher*', because she felt that what works well in the IFP is that students get a different style of learning when they attend college.

Both school and college staff in seven partnerships had attended training on **specific courses and programmes**, most commonly relating to GCSEs in vocational subjects. As these new GCSE courses were only introduced in September 2003, staff, particularly college tutors, felt that they needed additional support with the content, delivery and assessment of these courses. Interviewees particularly mentioned the problems they had faced due to the lack of past examination papers for these new courses, and they emphasised the ongoing need for exemplar materials.

There was not much in the way of formal joint staff development within the case-study areas, between schools and colleges or training providers. However, in three partnerships, there had been some sharing of expertise between schools and colleges, for example, with college tutors shadowing school teachers and observing the classroom management strategies used. There were also some instances of school teachers and college tutors working together to plan and deliver courses, and subject-specific network meetings involving individuals across the partnership.

Interviewees raised a number of staff development and training needs, which they regarded as still outstanding. As reported last year, these tended to be related to college tutors working with and delivering courses to 14-16 year-olds, although it is worth noting that some interviewees emphasised that these

needs had been addressed somewhat over the last year. Outstanding training needs included:

- **Further guidance on working with 14-16 year olds –** seven college staff and five school teachers felt that college tutors needed ongoing guidance with the teaching methods and behaviour management strategies appropriate for IFP students. One school teacher, for example, stated that tutors '*sometimes forget how young they* [the students] *are*'. Another emphasised that college tutors *'need to understand the clientele better…they need more guidance in how to work with 14-16 year-olds*.'
- **Further guidance on the content and delivery of GCSEs in vocational subjects –** Three school staff and one college tutor considered there to be a need for further support from Awarding Bodies on the content, delivery and assessment of the new GCSE courses. Indeed, one teacher commented that tutors delivering these courses had often felt '*very much on their own'*.
- **Raising the profile of the IFP and vocational qualifications among school staff –** Four school teachers and one college tutor highlighted the need for school staff to be better informed about the IFP and vocational qualifications generally, as this is crucial if vocational learning is to be made an integral aspect of schools' curricula. One teacher also noted that schools' understanding of vocational routes post-16 need to be improved if teachers are to advise students appropriately on the options available to them after Year 11.

3.4 Perceptions of the Increased Flexibility Programme and Vocational Learning

School staff and college tutors were each asked for their views of the IFP and of the vocational route and vocational qualifications more generally, and the extent to which these views had changed over the last year.

3.4.1 Views of the IFP

There appeared to have been some change over the last year in interviewees' perceptions of the IFP, with college staff reporting more positive views about the programme than in 2003. In 2003, for example, many of the college tutors interviewed reported that colleagues not directly involved in the programme, and indeed some who were, had a number of concerns about it. These concerns were mostly related to uncertainty about teaching a younger age group than that to which they were accustomed, and reservations about the type of young people involved. These views were, to some extent, echoed by college tutors interviewed this year. Four interviewees in colleges, for example, indicated that, at the outset of the IFP, there was some reluctance and cynicism about the programme from tutors. Initially, college staff were concerned that schools would use the college as a '*dumping ground*' for difficult students, and they were worried about how they would deal with

difficult behaviour by the young people, as many were not trained to work with pre-16 students.

However, in the second year of the IFP, these concerns seemed to have been less of a problem and indeed three college tutors attributed this change to the types of students involved in the programme, and the benefits observed so far. These interviewees indicated that college tutors had generally been happy with the ability levels and behaviour of the participating students, particularly those in the second cohort of the programme, and their initial fears about poor discipline had not been realised. Some college staff had recognised a change in their colleagues' views of the IFP, and one tutor described how his colleagues were slowly starting to realise that the IFP is '*an opportunity for them to enrich students' lives and to share their experience and knowledge of industry'*.

Another tutor emphasised that there was now a recognition in his college that the IFP students could be future post-16 students for the college and tutors had realised the importance of investing in them earlier: '*They* [college staff] *realise that this is part of their future…it is a privilege to have an insight into the students earlier than normal'*.

Eleven interviewees felt that their colleagues were generally positive about, and supportive of, the IFP, particularly those who were directly involved in the programme. In addition to general views about the IFP being a valuable programme, interviewees mentioned the following specific benefits:

- Inducting students into college life early, and increasing the chances of them progressing to post-16 learning at the college (five interviewees)
- Providing opportunities for students of different abilities, which supports the widening participation policy (two interviewees)
- Improving links with local schools (two interviewees)
- Raising the profile of vocational learning (one interviewee).

Although, as outlined above, there did seem to be some improvements in college tutors' perceptions of the IFP, some, mostly those who were not directly involved in the programme, still had some reservations. These concerns tended to be related to the types of students involved in the programme (eight references), and the increased workload associated with teaching this age group (five references). Interviewees reported that some of the wider college staff, who were not involved in the IFP, still held the view that the IFP students were generally low ability, disaffected young people. As one tutor commented, there is a perception that '*IFP students are disruptive students that schools want to get rid of for a day*'. As a result of this perception, some tutors were reported to be concerned about the potential discipline issues and pastoral care needs associated with these types of students. Other interviewees indicated that many of their colleagues were reluctant to become involved in teaching IFP courses. One tutor stated that staff '*want to avoid it'* because it is hard work teaching a new course and a

younger group of students, and it involves '*high energy input every day'*. Two further college tutors commented that many of their colleagues would prefer to continue teaching post-16 students as opposed to pre-16s. These interviewees noted that FE tutors are used to working with students who have '*actively chosen'* to do their course and are motivated, however, with the IFP, staff '*know that some kids have been forced into it'*.

Two interviewees emphasised that the wider teaching staff in their colleges had a limited understanding of the IFP, and indeed, of schools generally, which added to their negative views of the programme. This suggests that if tutors were better informed about the IFP, the students involved and the potential benefits of the programme, more tutors might be encouraged to become involved in delivering courses.

When interviewed last year, school staff were generally positive about the IFP, however, the views of teachers interviewed through the case-study visits this year were mixed. Nine school teachers reported that the teaching staff and senior managers within their schools were generally supportive of the IFP, and realised the potential benefits of it for the students. These interviewees commented that their colleagues welcomed the IFP as it had enabled the school to broaden the key stage 4 curriculum and make it more flexible, and had given the students an opportunity to engage with different modes of learning. Five interviewees also indicated that teachers had started to notice a positive impact of the IFP on some students, such as the achievement of qualifications that students might not otherwise have gained, and increased maturity.

Whilst school-based interviewees reported that some of their colleagues could see the value of the IFP, others indicated that staff were either unaware of the programme or had concerns about it. Seven school teachers reported that the IFP, and vocational qualifications more generally, were not very well understood within their schools, and that colleagues who were not actively involved in the programme knew very little about it. Two interviewees also commented that teachers did not see the benefits of linking with other external providers, and felt that there was no need to have the college involved in delivering courses because the school could deliver them themselves, '*in-house*'. Three interviewees reported, that although some teachers welcomed the IFP and the involvement of the college, this was because they were '*happy that some of the students were out for a day*'. Other concerns mentioned included students missing timetabled lessons as a result of their IFP course and concerns about the quality of some courses delivered by college staff.

Both college staff and school staff were asked for their perceptions of what the students participating in the IFP thought of it. Generally, interviewees felt that students were enjoying their courses and valued the opportunity to undertake a course they were interested in. Interviewees reported that this was evidenced by the high level of attendance on IFP courses, and the low levels of drop-out from most courses. Some interviewees also reported that they had heard IFP students telling their peers about how much they enjoyed their courses, and in

particular, the opportunity to attend college. Other interviewees had received positive feedback from parents regarding the programme. (Students' own views of their programme are explored in further detail in Chapter 4.)

In summary, although college staff initially had some concerns about the introduction of the IFP, and pre-conceptions about the types of students participating, there appeared to have been some improvements in their perceptions of the programme, and tutors were starting to realise the benefits to students and to the college. Some school staff were also starting to notice positive impacts of the IFP on students, however, there were some concerns in schools that teachers were not fully aware of the IFP, and had some reservations about its potential benefits. It seems that perceptions of the IFP could be improved by ensuring that both school and college staff are better informed about the programme and that it is made an integral part of schools' curriculum.

3.4.2 Views of vocational learning

Both school and college staff were asked to comment on how they thought practitioners and young people viewed, the vocational route and vocational qualifications. Of those who expressed a view, seven interviewees (four school teachers and three college tutors) commented that vocational qualifications traditionally tend to be viewed as for lower ability students. Indeed one school teacher reported that vocational learning tends to be regarded as '*a second rate option for those of lower ability*'.

Some interviewees felt that practitioners' and young people's views towards vocational qualifications were becoming more positive, as described by one teacher: '*they have better vision than they used to have'*. Another school teacher reported that there had been a lot of applications for the IFP among the second cohort of students, and he felt that this was because young people and their parents no longer saw any disparity between vocational and academic qualifications. Two further teachers reported that staff were beginning to realise that all students could benefit from different types of learning and viewed vocational qualifications as providing a good opportunity for students who, for whatever reason, did not adapt well to the standard National Curriculum. One college tutor also stated that employers' perceptions of vocational qualifications were starting to improve and they were viewing them as more mainstream.

Interviewees suggested a number of reasons for these improvements in the perceptions of vocational qualifications. Three interviewees (two school staff and one college tutor) felt that the new vocational GCSEs were helping to improve the status of vocational qualifications, as they were regarded as having higher status than other vocational qualifications such as NVQs and GNVQs. As last year, the main reasons given for this were:

- They had the title 'GCSE', which equated, in the minds of school staff, students and parents, to quality and status

- They carried performance table point scores, which made them a popular choice with schools, and meant that they were viewed as having equal status with traditional GCSEs.

Two school teachers felt that perceptions were starting to improve because the benefits of students undertaking vocational qualifications through the IFP were starting to become apparent. For instance, one deputy headteacher indicated that the improved focus and maturity of the IFP students was helping to improve the reputation of the vocational route in her school. Similarly, another teacher stated that his colleagues' views of vocational learning had been enhanced by the actual achievement of vocational qualifications by some students who might otherwise have dropped out of school.

Although some interviewees felt that there had been some improvements in the way the vocational route was viewed, others felt that there was '*still a long way to go*' before vocational qualifications would have parity of esteem with academic qualifications. Two members of school staff and one college IFP coordinator suggested that many schools were unwilling to engage with vocational qualifications, and to make vocational learning an integral aspect of the schools' ethos. As a result, many teachers do not have sufficient understanding of vocational learning and what students can gain from it.

Two interviewees also suggested that although some schools are happy for their lower ability students to undertake vocational qualifications, high achieving students are actively discouraged from the vocational route. One reason for this that was suggested was that schools were worried about the impact that high attaining students taking vocational qualifications, would have on their performance figures.

These observations reflected the perceptions of some interviewees in 2003 who commented that it would be a major undertaking for any initiative to revise what they saw as historically ingrained negative perceptions of vocational learning and employment. As one stated: '*We are talking about really ingrained attitudes culturally and professionally*.' The IFP was often regarded as a '*step in the right direction*', but was felt to be too small a programme to be expected to have a substantial impact – as one school teacher commented '*goodness knows how you address that in this country*'.

In summary, tutors generally felt that the qualifications which the students were pursuing through IFP were appropriate in terms of their level and content. However, there were some concerns that the new GCSEs in vocational subjects were not practical enough. The qualifications which the first cohort pursued had rarely changed, however, most of the partnerships had altered the qualifications which they offered to the second cohort of students. Four of the partnerships had adopted a single partnership-wide approach to delivery, whereby the Lead Partner was the sole provider. The remaining five partnerships used a combination of methods where no one approach dominated. On the whole, partnerships used the same broad approach for both cohorts of students. At an early stage in the first cohort, tutors had recognised

the need to adapt their teaching style to suit the needs of younger students. Although some felt that teaching this age group would be an ongoing developmental process, they had not changed their approaches notably for the second cohort of students.

Timetabling IFP courses remained an ongoing challenge for schools in IFP partnerships. However, they had not adopted any noticeably different approaches for the second cohort and, on the whole, the introduction of a second cohort had not adversely affected timetabling. Although the involvement of employers in IFP courses in the partnerships visited was not widespread, more partnerships seemed to have been successful in linking with employers than in the first year of the programme. However, interviewees reported that engaging employers was a challenge. Nevertheless they, and participating students, generally considered that involving employers would make a valuable contribution to the programme. There appeared to have been some improvements in college tutors' perceptions of the IFP and of the students involved and tutors acknowledged the benefits to the students and to the college. However, some teachers expressed concern that school staff who were not directly involved with the programme were not fully aware of IFP and its potential benefits.

This chapter has mainly focused on college tutors' and school teachers' perceptions; the next chapter examines students' perceptions of IFP.

4. STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE

Summary of findings

- Students had a free choice to participate in IFP. While for many it had been part of their options process, for many others an individual teacher had approached them. A minority said that they had visited the college or met with college staff prior to participation.
- Students' reasons for choosing to participate included a desire to learn away from school, that the vocational area was related to a career aim or was simply of interest to them and that they preferred a practical style of learning.
- Where students had undertaken their IFP course away from school, they had appreciated that tutors had treated them as adults, provided individual support and used a practical approach to learning.
- Students who took their courses away from school valued the change of environment, the opportunity to meet new people, to be more 'grown-up' and the access to college facilities.
- Concerns which some students expressed included difficulties with transport, learning approaches which did not appeal and the attitude of tutors, such as being too strict.
- Support provided for students in some partnerships included access to colleges' learning resource facilities, and the provision of Learning Support Assistants or teachers in the classroom. Some partnerships had instituted special support such as Saturday drop-in classes and access to on-line resources.
- Support provided by schools to assist students completing their qualifications did not appear to be extensive. Some schools had timetabled lessons and, in others, teachers visited students off-site.
- Students generally reported that they received an induction to the college and valued the ongoing support which tutors gave them during their sessions.
- Half of the students considered that the amount of time they spent on the course was right. Half of those who did not would have liked more time, so that they were less pressured, and half would have liked less as they sometimes found the courses lacked interest.
- Half of the students had missed timetabled lessons, including core subjects. Many felt that they caught up with the work successfully, although a few did so independently.
- Students had appreciated the practical aspects of the course, the environment in which they were learning and the teaching style and approach of tutors. A few students said that they did not like too much paperwork, had found the course repetitive and did not like the teaching style.

- Students believed that they benefited from taking a qualification which was relevant to their future and enabled them to gain post-16 qualifications before their peers. They considered that it was valuable to have the choice to take vocational qualifications.
- Most students felt that they had made good progress on their course and were well-informed through informal feedback from their tutors.
- Nearly all students would recommend the course to their peers because it was different from school, vocationally relevant, enjoyable and interesting.
- Possible improvements to the course, which some students suggested, included having more time, more visits to employers, more practical work, more structured lessons, more variety of courses and improved facilities. They also recommended that timetabling issues needed further attention and that communication between schools and the external provider could be improved.

This chapter provides an insight into the experience of the students who participated in the first cohort of IFP. It explores students':

- reasons for participating in the programme
- experience of learning in a different environment, travelling to a different location and working with other students
- perspectives on the content and duration of their programme, how it was taught, and the extent to which they received sufficient support when working towards a qualification through IFP.

4.1 Profile of Interviewed Students

The 45 students who participated in interviews were not selected to be representative of all IFP participants, but rather to provide an insight into a range of experience and attitudes. Two to three students in each of the schools which had been randomly selected to participate in the case-study visits were identified by teaching staff, or college or training provider tutors. Students from 16 of the 17 schools visited are represented in the group. Staff were requested to identify a range of students in terms of their sex and the qualifications they were studying. In some instances, however, this was constrained by the courses students were taking, as was the case, for example, where all students in a school were engaged in the same type of course. Nevertheless, a range of courses were represented across the 45 interviewed students.

Most of the students (27) were male and 18 were female, which broadly reflected the slightly greater proportion of males in the IFP cohort as a whole. In terms of the **types of qualifications** that students were taking, six students were taking more than one qualification. Five of these were taking Engineering GCSE and Performing Engineering Operations NVQ and the

sixth was taking carpentry and horticulture NVQs. Consequently, the figures provided below do not total 45.

- 22 students were taking new GCSEs in vocational subjects
- 15 students were engaged in NVQs
- Six students were undertaking other VQs
- Two students were taking GNVQs.

Most of the students not involved in new GCSEs were taking Level 1 qualifications, although three were working towards Level 2. The **vocational areas** in which students were engaged were as follows:

- Engineering (18 students)
- Catering (five students)
- Leisure and tourism (five students)
- ICT (five students)
- Construction (four students)
- Land-based (three students)
- Hairdressing (two students)
- Health and social care (two students)
- Applied business (one student)
- Manufacturing (one student).

It is worth bearing in mind that there was an over-representation of students who were studying engineering among those who were interviewed when reviewing the students' experiences.

The majority (32) of the students were participating in their IFP course at a college or training provider. Nine students were engaged in delivery that was shared to some extent between the school and the external provider and four students undertook their qualification at school.

4.2 Students' Introduction to IFP

Interviews with teaching staff in 2003 revealed that, in some cases, the confirmation of funding for IFP provision was announced after schools had commenced their option choices. Nevertheless, staff in five schools said it had been a free option choice for students, and staff in eight schools remarked that it was a combination of selection of students and free choice. Interviewees in five schools said that they had selected the students. Among the 45 students interviewed, 18 said that they had become aware of the possibility of taking vocational courses through IFP when they were choosing their options. Vocational courses had been mentioned in options booklets, at options

evenings and on options '*sheets*' (which may have been added after the main option booklets were completed). Three students said that they had been mentioned at an assembly. A further 18 students said that they had been approached by an individual teacher, usually the coordinator for IFP in the school, but sometimes a form tutor, who explained about the possibility of taking a vocational course. Three students mentioned that tutors from the college had visited the school and talked about the available courses and four students said that they had visited the college. The value of gaining this insight is revealed in the comment of one student who, when deciding whether to take the course, '*just thought it was a bit yuk, grease monkey's work. But …the head of engineering came down, talked to me about it and I found there was a lot more to it and that's how I was really interested in it*'.

Where schools had engaged in some degree of selecting students, the interviews undertaken in 2003 revealed that they took into consideration whether students were interested in the vocational area, and whether students were disenchanted with the curriculum or struggling academically. In addition, some considered the attendance of students and their commitment and motivation.

The majority of students who were interviewed had discussed the option with their parents who had been supportive. One student explained why her parents were pleased that she had the opportunity when she said '*they thought it was quite good actually because I never used to stay in school that much and then they thought I could go to college….so they thought it would be good just to get me out doing something else than stay on school – I'm still in education*'. Only one student commented that her mother had been concerned about missing lessons and had discussed this with the deputy head who had devised a strategy to address this concern. Three students mentioned that they had talked to a Connexions Personal Adviser but, in two cases, this had been after the choice had been made. In the third case, the Personal Adviser had introduced the option of taking the IFP course to the student.

All of the students who expressed a view said that it had been a free choice and they could have chosen not to participate had they wished. However, two engineering students felt that they had not been given enough, or accurate, information and, once they had started the course, had found it different to their expectations as they had believed it would be car mechanics but it was actually engineering.

The main reasons for students choosing to participate in their IFP courses were:

- That they wanted to **learn away from school** in a new environment where some felt they would be treated differently and it would be a different experience (14 students)
- That it was related to a specific **career aim** (14 students)
- That they were just **interested** in the subject matter and '*just wanted to*' participate (11 students), as illustrated in the comment of a student who

had appreciated the opportunity and said '*they just said about an engineering course. I thought straight away about cars, about working on cars and like doing underneath the bonnet and that sort of work. I was quite interested and asked* [teacher] *and she was like "I'm not sure if I really want you to go" because I was a bit of a trouble maker sort of thing when I was younger. They didn't know if I could be trusted sort of thing. But I proved myself*'

- That it suited their preference for **practical** learning (seven students). As one student stated, '*it would be less GCSEs and stuff because I'm not like top of the class…I'm more of a practical person*'
- That it would help develop useful **general skills** for the future such as in ICT and customer care skills (five students). One student commented, for example, that she hoped to '*learn customer service and stuff like that, stuff you might need when you leave school*'
- Where students were taking the new GCSE in vocational subjects, some were motivated by the fact that it was a **double award** (four students)
- Some students chose the particular vocational area because a **relative** already worked in that area (three students)
- Students saw it as a useful **preparation for college** (two students) so that they knew '*what it is going to be like when you do start college*'
- Students preferred the different **content** offered by the vocational course, as explained by one student who, in deciding his options, had compared the new GCSE in manufacturing with the design and technology course and concluded that the latter '*is very much related to how to market research and marketing the product, which is not my great area of interest. I would rather be looking at making it and dealing with it – actually working through the process of developing it, rather than marketing*'.

On the whole, students appeared to regard the opportunity of studying through the IFP as a positive opportunity to meet their needs. However the comments of two student suggested that some may also have perceived that undertaking a vocational qualification was primarily an option for less able students. One observed that '*I was clever enough to do other things, but I hated languages*' and a second commented that '*I only just got in because they said to me I really shouldn't be doing it because I could probably get a GCSE, but mum went to the school and sorted it out*'.

4.3 Students' Experience of Learning Off-site

The majority of the students who were interviewed were undertaking their entire IFP course away from school at a college or training provider. Eight students indicated that they worked towards their IFP course partly at college and partly at school and four reported that they studied only at school. The majority of the students who had attended a college or training provider had found it a positive experience and had valued the experience of learning in a

different environment, with different students and tutors. This section provides an insight into their experience.

4.3.1 Students' views of their tutors

All but four of the students who were interviewed considered that the tutors they worked with in college were 'different' from their teachers at school. The main difference which they identified was the way in which they felt that they were '***treated like adults***' or, as one student expressed it, '*I respect them and they respect me*'. One student considered that '*they're a bit more like you'd expect people to be like when you went to work or say if you had a proper job*'. As the following comments illustrate, students contrasted this with their experience of school teachers:

> [Tutors] *actually listen to you and you can have discussions with them and they listen to your viewpoint instead of you just being a stupid child which knows nothing*
>
> *they treat you more mature and they, like, just talk to you differently and stuff, you get to call them by their names instead of sir or madam sort of thing*
>
> *they give you options instead of telling you what to do…like if you are messing around or something, you can either stay there and concentrate or you move. In school, it's just move, you don't get the other option.*

Many students also felt that their tutors were '*more relaxed*', '*not as formal*' and '*you can have a laugh with them*' and that they '*generally take an interest in your life*'.

In addition to this overall atmosphere, students identified specific ways in which the teaching approach differed from their school experience. The small group size of between four and ten students typically meant that students were able to experience more **individual learning** support. One student identified the difference as '*just the way they talk to you and explain things really, it's different to what teachers do…because all of us have small classes at college – they talk to you in group*'; and a second observed that '*we've only got a small group as well they're more paying attention to you…give you a lot more help and generally talk more to you*'.

Some students appreciated the **practical elements** in their learning and the fact that the tutors '*show you how it's done, rather than telling you how it's done, and get you to write it all down, rather than just tell you and, hopefully, you'll remember it*'. Moreover, some valued the trouble taken by tutors to develop the students' skills. One student said '*if it's almost right. They'll show you how you can improve on it*' and contrasted this with his school teachers who would simply give it a poor mark. There was a sense that some students experienced a teaching style which encouraged them to use their initiative and develop their **independent learning**. One student taking an

engineering qualification explained that '*in some respects, being 14 when you start it, it's a bit of a strange concept because you are used to* [being] *guided here, there and back and forth….they sort of, you know, stand back and, "let him move a little bit forward and find out what he's doing"*'.

While most students had experienced a positive relationship with their tutors at the college or training provider, this had not been a universal experience. In contrast to the students who found tutors to be more relaxed, one student stated that '*the college is far too strict*', and a second at the same location felt that '*they don't give you as much leeway as they do in school*'. In addition, a few students felt unsupported by tutors. For example, one commented that '*they go away too quick when you ask for help*' and a second compared this with teachers at school who '*take time after school if you don't understand. There's no chance to do that here*'. Finally, one group of students who had been taught by three separate tutors in the course of their programme appreciated their current tutor but outlined how '*confusing*' it had been and how '*really upset*' they had felt when they thought it might impact on their achievement.

4.3.2 Benefits of learning off-site

In addition to their experience of being taught by college and training provider tutors, studying off-site had been a positive experience for most of the students for a variety of reasons. Their comments, which are summarised below, reflected the observations of school staff who were interviewed in 2003. At that stage of the IFP, they commented that most students appreciated the less formal atmosphere of the college and welcomed the increased freedom and opportunity to take responsibility for themselves. They were also said to value the structure of the lessons and the learning style.

The students who were interviewed in 2004 made the following observations about their experience of learning off-site.

- Fifteen students had appreciated the **change of environment**. As one explained, '*it's good for children who don't really like school much – it gives them a chance to get out of school and it's something new – a new environment – different ways of learning so it's like nice, makes a nice change after three years at school',* while a second stated that *'it gives you a break from schooling which is what I wanted*'. Two students mentioned that they were less distracted by others and more able to work in a new environment. One said that '*you haven't really got your friends and that to distract you, I can really concentrate more up there* [at the college]' and a second commented that '*at school, there are far more distractions,…but at college, because there is more room and you do not see everyone, it is much easier to work and everyone likes to get on with their work*'.
- Six students who preferred a **practical style of learning** valued having the opportunity to learn in this way and to develop new practical skills. This was illustrated in the comments of two students: '*I hate sitting in classrooms reading books…it doesn't interest me one bit*', and '*I like practical things so I guess it's better'.*

- The change of location led seven students to observe that they felt **more grown-up** and mature at the college and some mentioned that their behaviour had modified as a result.
- Six students had valued the opportunity to **meet new people**, including students from other schools, as the comment of one student illustrates '*meeting new people that I don't know because around school I really know everybody, so it is a big change*'.
- Seven of the students, working in a range of vocational areas including business studies, catering and engineering, noted the access which they had to specialist **facilities**. In the case of business, one student noted that access to ICT equipment was easier. He said that at school '*there is not many computer rooms available…at college there is normally a computer room free*'.
- Being '***a step ahead***' of others, either in terms of knowing the college before leaving school or in terms of their readiness for work, was noted by six students. As one said, '*you get qualifications before you go into your workplace so you have already moved a step up the ladder*'.

Fourteen students identified negative aspects of studying away from school. In all but two of these cases, they had also identified positive elements. Although the majority of students had not experienced any difficulties in travelling to the college or training provider, this had been a concern for eight students. On the whole, students had experienced difficulties where the school or college had arranged taxis or minibuses to transport them which had proved unreliable, impacting on their curriculum time. In the case of one partnership, students' behaviour in transit had reportedly been consistently poor.

Other aspects of learning off-site which students said they had not valued included the '*paperwork*' they had to complete for their course (one student) and the amount they had to copy off the board (one student). Concerns about the teaching of the course were expressed by four students, one of whom had found the course repetitive, while another said '*we don't really do any work*', and a student on the same course explained that '*the teachers here have no control over you – they can do nothing here really – at school you can be expelled*'. The fourth student, who was engaged in a new GCSE felt that he had '*wasted a hell of a lot of time*' and perceived that '*lecturers are feeling their way, though, as much as we are*'.

4.3.3 Working with other students

Most of the students who were taking courses away from their school were mixing with **students from other local schools** on the course. As noted above, many students valued the opportunity to meet with new people and none reported any conflict between students. In addition to working with 14 to 16 year old students from other schools, some students mixed with post-16 students. While there were few instances of 14 to 16 year old students infilling into post-16 courses in the partnerships visited, there were occasions where IFP students shared a workshop with post-16 students. In the main, interviewees had found this unproblematic and had, in a few cases, received

support and guidance from post-16 students. However, in a few other cases, students reported feeling separate from the post-16 learners and one student remarked that '*they call us schoolies*'.

4.3.4 Support received

Students who were taking their courses away from school were working in a new location and might meet their tutors only once, or sometimes twice, a week at their course. The nature of the support provided, and the extent to which students felt supported in this new arrangement are discussed in this section.

Interviewees in Lead Partners and schools identified a range of forms of support which were provided for IFP participants. Staff interviewees in seven partnerships said that IFP students could access the colleges' Learning Resource Centres or libraries. However, a few mentioned that, in practice, students '*can, but don't, access resources*', and one noted that the limited time which students had on site constrained the extent to which they could access other resources. As was found in the initial visits to partnerships in 2003, in five partnerships, students were supported in the college by a Learning Support Assistant or a teacher provided by the school, and in two partnerships the Lead Partner Organisation provided learning support. One Lead Partner interviewee commented that, although all schools did not currently send a member of staff to support students, in future, this would be '*a pre-requisite*' owing to the health and safety concerns in workshops.

Five tutors highlighted the ongoing support which they provided through their lessons where they worked individually with students or provided detailed written supporting materials. One tutor monitored each student's progress through detailed records in order to track progress and identify where support might be required. Three tutors considered that students did not require additional support outside of the time they attended the college and, indeed, ensured that students '*do everything while they are here*' as they were unable to take responsibility for their learning away from the college. This was reflected in the comments of two school respondents, which indicated that the students did not bring any of their college work into school.

In addition, some partnerships had developed extra support mechanisms such as workshops for the second cohort (one partnership), a Saturday morning drop-in session (one partnership), students staying behind after lessons for extra help (one partnership) and a one hour study support session (one partnership). As found during the initial visits to partnerships, two tutors reported that students could use their e-mail address to ask for assistance and a third Lead Partner was seeking to develop this. One tutor had developed on-line resources and links which were available on the college's intranet to support students taking a new GCSE in Applied ICT. However, interviewees in two other partnerships noted an '*inequality of access issue*' whereby students without ICT access, or where ICT facilities at the school were poor, could be disadvantaged.

Reflecting the findings of the 2003 visits to partnerships, pastoral support for students was regarded as the school's role by interviewees in three partnerships and three tutors mentioned the time constraints in supporting students, though one tutor felt that such support would be valuable as students needed '*direction and confidentiality*'. In one partnership where students received support to help motivate them and maintain their engagement, the tutor explained that '*we recognise the problem,…kids who don't see the academic process is for them…they are not going onto A Levels, university, they do feel resentful…you can punish them but their answer is not to come*' consequently he aimed to provide an incentive, by supporting students to find an apprenticeship after school. He explained to the students that, in order to progress, '*it is very much in their interest to get a good reference from college*' and, in one case, a problematic student's '*behaviour turned around overnight*'.

Some schools had also provided specific support for their IFP students. For example, two had timetabled lessons during which students could work on their IFP qualification. Three school respondents mentioned other forms of support provided by teachers. One respondent said that the school offered '*independent supported individual learning*' which entailed providing support with portfolio development as required, and a second coordinator said that '*I make myself available for them*'. Three school interviewees reported that they provided a Learning Support Assistant for specific students and another three said that a teacher visited the students off-site which, as one teacher said, '*shows the students and the college that we're interested*'. Teachers in four schools reported that Connexions Personal Advisers supported the IFP students, although in two of these cases this was co-incidental as some of the IFP students were in the Personal Advisers' caseload. Three schools mentioned that they would like Personal Advisers to become more involved in supporting students in the future.

Other areas for development in supporting students which were mentioned included plans by one school to improve students' knowledge of IFP qualification deadlines to reinforce the college's message. A second school teacher emphasised the need to ensure that support was provided in the early stages when the students might find that the course is '*not what they originally perceived it would be*', in order to ensure their continued attendance. A third school teacher mentioned that they would like to send a school teacher to the college and a fourth would like to send a Learning Mentor to provide support, but felt that this was not viable. Students' perspectives on the support they received are outlined below.

In the initial visits to partnerships in 2003, some interviewees observed that they had taken more time over the induction of students than they would with post-16 students to help them familiarise themselves with the new environment. Most of the students interviewed in 2004 recalled that they had been given an **induction** to the college or training provider. In addition to an introduction to the workshop and facilities for their chosen vocational area, induction typically included an explanation of the Learning Resource Centre

and other student facilities, such as the canteen. The value of taking into consideration how daunting students might find the new location and helping them to become familiar with the college is illustrated in the following student comment:

> *it was a big scary place…you come to school, and you knew where everything was, and you come to college and everything was 'wow'…me and my mum went in and we just walked through the gate and it was just like big glass windows, like wow.*

One Lead Partner, in recognition of the challenge to the students, had instituted a 'buddy' system where 14 to 16 year old students were partnered with a post-16 student at first. As the younger students became more familiar and comfortable in the college or training provider the relationship became more minimal.

Students had a variety of experiences of **ongoing support** for completing their qualification. As noted above, students reported that tutors often provided much individual guidance and support in the classroom and, for many, this prevailing attitude was sufficient. The comments of the following two students reflected a wider experience:

> *they've just helped me throughout – like if I ever need help, they help me…they've just helped me to push on and get what I wanted to get the grade*

> *they help you with anything you want to do, like in class and things, if you get stuck they are easy to talk to. They always support you, if you ever get stuck and you need help on anything, then they will always help.*

Many students appeared to have found their tutors to be approachable and would remark that they could always '*take the tutor aside*' and talk on a one-to-one basis should they need to.

Students often said that they kept their IFP work within college time and did not need support outside of the time they were in the classroom with the tutor available. However, a few students mentioned that their school teachers provided support, including, in two cases, through timetabled lessons. The mechanisms for informing teachers about the work that was required were rarely formal, as in the example of one student who said that the tutors '*tell us what to do really and we bring it back to school and tell the teachers what is going on and the teachers try and help us as much as they can*'. However, there were instances of teachers seeking details from the college, as in the case of one student who explained that '[teacher] *gets told from people who teach us, like, what to do and how to do it. If there is anything we need help with we just go to* [teacher] *and she will do it on the 'phone or whatever. It is good to have a bit of communication from other teachers in the college*'.

In four other cases, a teacher attended the sessions off-site with the students and, in the case where teaching was shared, the teacher was said to '*just listen to what we've done at college, so he knows what we need to do during the school hours*'. In some cases, the students did not appear to consider that teachers would be in a position to support them if they needed assistance with their college work in between sessions and so did not seek their support. This is illustrated in the comments of two students that '*they don't even know what we do down there*' and '*teachers at the school, they are not familiar with the course, so they can't* [help] *really*'.

Students in two of the partnerships mentioned that college staff had instigated additional sessions to provide an opportunity for the students to complete the work required. In one case, students could choose to attend on a Saturday morning, which a few had chosen to do. In the second instance, students expected to extend their attendance at college for two weeks after their study leave had commenced. Other approaches to support noted by students were access to the tutor via e-mail in one course and access to course information on the college's intranet in a second course.

Although most students were content with the level of support they had received, eight students did not consider that they had any support and about half of these were dissatisfied. The value of ensuring that students did feel sufficiently supported is reflected in the comments of two students, one of whom remarked that, unlike at school, '*there's no chance to see anyone here*' when he needed guidance while the second felt that he was unlikely to achieve the qualification and observed that '*the portfolio I'm doing, I don't think I'll ever finish*'.

4.3.5 Extent to which students coped with learning off-site

Reflecting on how well the students had coped with taking a course out of school, 12 tutors in seven of the partnerships said that they thought students had coped well. They cited good attendance (five tutors), good retention (one tutor), positive behaviour (one tutor) and the fact that most students were on course to successfully complete their qualification (one tutor) as evidence of this. As one interviewee explained, '*the ones that have stuck are well committed*…[because] *they have seen something that they can get to grips with and do well at*'. More generally, tutors felt that students had coped well because they had responded positively to: a course which they enjoyed (three tutors), the approach of staff (four tutors) and the alternative learning environment (two tutors).

Three further tutors, in three partnerships, commented that whether students coped '*depends on the cohort or individual…some thrive, others struggle*', as one expressed it. Two tutors, in two partnerships, did not believe that students had coped well and perceived this to be due to difficulties in coping with independent learning and the different teaching approach, particularly the lack of sanctions employed by tutors. A key element in ensuring that students were able to cope with the course, which was emphasised by five tutors in three partnerships, was selecting the most appropriate students and providing them

with sufficient, and accurate, information about the course they would be pursuing. For example, one tutor considered that, where some students in the first cohort had not coped, this was because there had been '*no real thought given to the type of kids selected*' in the partnership. A second tutor, conscious of the challenge of providing detailed information to students who might be considering the course, suggested that a video of 14 to 16 year old students participating in the IFP course, which could be shared with schools, could usefully contribute to helping students to make an informed decision.

School staff who were interviewed were slightly more circumspect in their assessment of how well students had coped. Although overall they believed that students had coped '*pretty well*' they noted that, especially initially, '*some feel really insecure*' and were '*frightened stiff*'. In addition, some had lacked the maturity, discipline and organisational skills to cope with the more adult learning style.

It appears that, while most students had coped well with the experience of learning off-site, the very elements which appealed to many students, such as learning in a different environment and being treated more as an adult, could be a challenge for others. Ensuring that students who participate are either able to cope with these aspects, or are well-prepared before they embark on the course and well-supported in the early stages, could help to ensure that they sustain their involvement.

4.4 Students' Views of their Programme

4.4.1 Course duration and timing

The majority (28) of the students spent the equivalent of one day a week participating in IFP. In most cases, this was on one day, although five undertook their courses on two half days. Other approaches included participating for three afternoons a week, studying for two hours a week in college and two hours a week in school and having five separate 50 minute lessons.

Around half of the students considered that the **amount of time** they participated in the IFP was about right or '*spot on*'. Two students highlighted the benefit to their learning of spending dedicated time on one subject. One commented that '*you've got like two hours of just that subject, so you can get on with things better – you don't have to stop half way through something, you can carry on*' and the second compared it with her normal school experience when she said that:

> *I like the way you do it all day…because…my head's not switching, like over to maths and then have to switch into English, so its really good and keeps you thinking about the same thing like all day, so I've learnt a lot…like more than I have in maths and English – that day is all leisure and tourism.*

Of those who felt the amount of time was not right, half would like more time and half felt they had too much time. Where students felt that they would like more time it was generally because they felt it was required to complete the work and to do so under less pressure. For example, one student remarked that '*I don't reckon its enough because we have got 12 weeks left and we still have a hell of a lot of paperwork we still have got to get done*', while a catering student said that:

> *I don't think it's enough because when we are down there we will get to do something, like one thing, say we cook a lasagne or something like that, that is all we get time to do so you have to be rushing…and you have to do work on your folders as well.*

Students who felt that they had too much time either felt bored or had found the work repetitive. For example, one student said that '*... it starts to drag on a bit and I get a bit bored with it at the end if the day*' and a second commented that '*there was a lot of time in the first year that we spent doing things that we didn't necessarily feel that we needed to go over again*'.

Around half of the students who were interviewed had **missed some of their timetabled lessons** due to participating in IFP. Students reported that they missed a variety of different lessons: the most commonly mentioned were PE (eight students) and RE (six students). Some students missed core subjects of mathematics (five students), science (three students) and English (two students). In addition, some students missed a modern foreign language (two students) and humanities (two students). Many students felt that they caught up with missed lessons adequately and, in some cases had been supported by their teachers and in timetabled lessons. A few said that they had to catch up independently. Some of the students who had missed lessons were unhappy about this. For example, one student commented that due to IFP he was '*missing some vital GCSE lessons at the moment*'. Other students reported that they had discontinued a subject which they had been involved in for the first four years of their secondary education. This was the case with one student who explained that, at the beginning of Year 11:

> *we had been doing* [RE] *for four years and then suddenly they say you cannot do it any more because we are doing this course…they made us choose…so some of us did this, and between that we missed PE as well* [as RE]*...that is why some people left from here, two people left.*

A few students were concerned about missing subjects which were not examination subjects, such as PE which they had enjoyed and which had provided an opportunity for physical exercise.

4.4.2 Course content

The majority of students said that they had enjoyed their IFP course overall. Reflecting back over the five terms during which they had participated, they identified the main elements which they had liked and some areas they had disliked.

As might be expected, given the comments reported in Section 4.3.2, ten students highlighted the fact that the course had been **practical** as being one of the main aspects they had liked. For example, a mechanics student explained, '*I'm a hands on person, I struggle with my writing and spelling and that, so I prefer doing all the work and having four lessons of practical work*'. The comments of two other students illustrate the sense of achievement they had gained from completing a task well:

> *just to know that you've made something – you just look at it and think 'I made that' and it's right and it's pleasing* (catering student)

> *you get to learn different skills, and I suppose like, it's always different…things cannot not be just right, they have to be really good* (engineering student).

Thirteen students across a range of vocational areas identified **specific aspects** of their course content which they had enjoyed such as technical drawing, carpentry, finding out about different people's care needs, and cooking.

Some students had also emphasised the **environment** in which they were learning (six students) and the **teaching style** of tutors (five students). More specifically, students had appreciated learning through role play and using ICT, including the internet, to undertake research. Two students provided an insight into the value of this experience when they contrasted their experience at college with that at school:

> *Well, I like to learn, but have the freedom of learning the bits you don't know. So you go to college, and you are treated more like a grown up, but when you come to school, you sit down in the room and the doors are closed and you are not allowed to talk or anything. That sort of thing gets tiring after a while and you think "oh why do I have to do this?" Then you go to college, and you learn the same things, the same amount of things, but then again you are enjoying it because you have got that freedom and sometimes you actually learn more because you're happy and relaxed, so then you can learn more when you are happy and relaxed, because you are not stressed or anything, and it's so much better I think.*

> *it is different, the way he teaches…the ICT teacher* [at school] *has a big board where he actually shows us what to do, but then our* [college] *tutors come round, they sit by you and then show you what to do, so you do it yourself instead of them doing it for you*

Finally, three students said that they had particularly enjoyed their IFP course because it prepared them for their anticipated **future** career. Two further students valued the fact that, having attended a college, they would have an advantage when they started a course post-16. As one hairdressing students expressed it: '*it's not only a day off school, it's a chance for you to get some qualifications for when you want to become a hairdresser or something else in the future*'.

The majority of students appreciated many aspects of their IFP courses, but it also needs to be noted that some students had disliked a range of other elements. Indeed, a few students regretted undertaking the course. The most commonly mentioned aspect which students had not liked (noted by nine interviewees) was the amount of **theory or '*paperwork*'** they had to complete. Four students identified **specific elements** of their course content, such as answering the telephone on a hairdressing course or having to remain at a computer all day on an ICT course as problematic. Furthermore, three students had found some of their course **repetitive** and three students said that the course was **not as they had expected** it would be. The latter included an engineering student who said that '*none of us expected it to be like it was, because we thought it would be like cars and learning about cars and stuff, but it is about chopping, metal and making little things and stuff*'. Six students, four of whom attended the same course, felt that the **teaching style** had not been appropriate and they had been left with insufficient direction and had too many breaks in the day. Consequently, they did not feel that they had learned enough during the course. In the other two instances, one student felt she did '*too much copying off the board*', but that this had changed after speaking with the tutor, while the second felt he had not received enough help from tutors.

Two students reported that they could not always access the **facilities** they needed and one commented that '*the priority is given to main college students*'. Four students observed that the programme had **lacked organisation**, for example one student had experienced three changes of tutors in the five terms, which had been disruptive.

The students who regretted taking their IFP course did so either because, as noted above in the case of four students, they did not feel that it had been a positive learning experience and doubted that they would achieve the qualification, or, in the case of a fifth student, because it was no longer related to his career aim and was impacting negatively on his GCSEs. He commented

> *I've got the NVQ but I would rather have done the lessons that I said I was going to do when I went to the options evening before I knew about this…if I knew I didn't want to be a chef I wouldn't have pretty much taken this…it's been an OK course, it's not something I enjoy…I really did enjoy coming to college, it's like I couldn't wait to get out of school to come, and I still probably enjoy it when I'm in the kitchen, it's just that I don't want to be out of school so much now.*

Although this experience was rare among the students who were interviewed, it illustrates the need to ensure that students consider carefully their choice of course and see that, although it is vocationally-related, it can also be of value in their education as a whole.

As has been outlined earlier in this chapter, the students who participated in the interviews had generally appreciated the opportunity which they had to work towards a more 'vocational' course and not simply their 'academic'

GCSEs. In commenting on the difference between the types of qualifications they were working towards, students often identified the opportunity to learn in a practical way and to develop new skills, the alternative teaching styles and the environment and the relevance of the course for their future, as noted above. Their comments did not suggest a perception of a hierarchy in qualification types, for example that GCSEs were superior to NVQs. Indeed, as in the case of the student who remarked '*it's an NVQ isn't it – it's equivalent to a GCSE*', some students connected the value of their course with the qualification outcome. As one said, '*you still walk away with grades at the end of it*'. This was particularly notable among some students who observed that they would get two GCSEs as a result of taking the one course. These findings suggests that, for these students, if the qualifications had currency which was equivalent to GCSEs, the distinction between academic and vocational was irrelevant. Indeed, they appeared to consider that they had benefited from learning in a way which suited them with a potential outcome which they perceived as not only equivalent to their peers, but which also put them at an advantage, as illustrated in the comments below.

Two students noted the value in learning skills, while at school, which they perceived to be **relevant** to work and their future:

> *it's just a change – it teaches you new skills, it teaches you how to compare things to the real world rather than just the general sort of stuff we get taught here at school – you also get a link to the real world and how we can sort of put it into practice* (business studies student)

> *if I had the choice of dropping school altogether and only going to school until I was 12 years old and then after 12 years old having to go to college to do like a course and stay on at college for several years to do this course and get a degree or whatever…because school…everyone says you need all this but to be honest, I am never going to need how to analyse a poem or analyse a story…whereas if I was at college I'd be learning something I want to learn which I would want to do for the rest of my life* (horticulture student).

Indeed, a third student in engineering considered that, through IFP, it was possible to **gain qualifications** which you would otherwise have to take post-16, when he commented that it presented a '*good opportunity to get your qualifications when you are younger and so when you leave school you don't have to do it all over again. I think it is a good opportunity and they should bring in more subjects. Bring in more different things to do*'. Two other students noted the value of the increased **choice** that was available to students who were taking IFP courses. They said:

> *it gives people a better chance in life and to understand what is available and to see whether that is something they would like to do when they grow older* (catering student)

> *I feel that schools offer far too general courses. I appreciate that everyone needs to do English, maths and science. For the rest of*

> *courses, I feel they offer far too general courses…they are far too strict on what they make you do…for example French, arts…you really would be better off going off doing something that you want to look at as a vocation….everyone should have the opportunity and try and learn a modern language up to Year 9, possibly, but as a GCSE course, they should not be forced into something like that, there should be more choice* (engineering student).

4.4.3 Progress on the course

In addition to having enjoyed the courses they were taking through their involvement in IFP, the majority (35) of the students considered that their **progress** towards achieving their qualification was adequate. Indeed, some commented that they were progressing '*extremely well*' or, as one said, '*I've just taken to it*'. Many of the students explained that they knew they were making sufficient progress because their tutors gave them regular, informal feedback and some had also discussed their progress with teaching staff in their school. Other, more formal mechanisms for feedback which students mentioned included written reports, parents evenings, receiving marked work and taking mock examinations. Three students identified further feedback which they would have valued. One would have liked help with homework, a second would have appreciated receiving marked work back and a third said '*I would really like it if, at the end of every month or so, you got a sheet saying you are doing well in this and you need to pick up on this and stuff like that, you could see a bit of guidance on where you were going really*'.

Seven of the students who were interviewed were less positive about their progress. One, who was working towards a new GCSE felt that he was '*a bit behind*' and a second, also taking a new GCSE, thought he '*could be doing better*'. The remaining students, who were taking NVQs, thought that they were unlikely to achieve the qualifications, either because they felt that the teaching of the course had been inadequate (in four cases) or because the course had not been as expected and so the student had missed many sessions.

4.4.4 Students' recommendations

Nearly all (37) of the students said that they would recommend their IFP course to other students. Three were not sure and four, who were all on the same course, said that they would not recommend it. Students who would recommend the course to others explained that they would do so because:

- it was different to school – as one commented '*you get out of school, which is most probably what they are coming for*' (seven students)
- it was an opportunity to take a course that was vocationally relevant and helped prepare you for the future (seven students)
- in their experience it was '*fun*', enjoyable or interesting (four students)
- the lessons were '*more relaxed*' (two students)
- you could gain two GCSEs (one student)
- you would meet new people (one student).

The comment of one student who said '*it is fun and it is quite good for what you are going to need later on in life. It is a bit more laid back than the other courses and you are getting the extra qualification as well*' sums up these views.

A few students observed that their IFP course might not be appropriate for all students and they would not necessarily universally recommend it. For example, one student said that '*you learn lots if you concentrate – if you are not a person concentrating, you might as well just go to school*'. In contrast, another student felt that IFP had provided him with an opportunity and thought others could similarly benefit. He said:

> *I would aim it at people more like myself, with like special needs, and people who are mostly in trouble all the time, and some of the students who like working well and are very good in their lessons. I would aim it at certain people because, where they are always getting into trouble, when you come out of school, like, you feel far older and more mature. You can make your own choices.*

Finally, a student on an NVQ course mentioned that he would recommend it if the student '*can do the coursework. If not, I wouldn't suggest it as it is a bit stressful*'.

Clearly, the majority of the students who were interviewed had a largely positive experience of their IFP participation. Nevertheless, more than half of them were able to identify ways in which the **course could be improved**. These can be summarised as follows.

- Different **timing** of the course (four students) – for example, more time in general, more time at the college where there was shared delivery between school and college, and more frequent, but shorter, lessons
- More **visits** to workplaces or visiting speakers (four students) with the aim, as one student expressed it, of obtaining '*more information about how companies actually do work*'
- More **practical** work (four students) and ensuring that tutors '*cut the paperwork to a minimum*' as one student commented
- More **structured** lessons (two students) instead of '*just thinking of something for us to do on the spot*'
- Resolving **timetabling** issues so that students did not miss lessons in their other GCSEs (two students)
- Improving **communication** between teachers, where there was shared teaching (one student), and between parents and the college, for example where a student faced particular challenges (one student)
- Improving overall **organisation** such as ensuring classrooms remained the same each week (three students)
- Introducing more **variety** of courses or in course content (two students)
- Improving **facilities** in catering and ICT (two students).

This chapter has shown that students became involved in IFP through a range of means but that all students could choose whether they did or did not wish to participate. The desire to learn away from school and to pursue an area of interest, which may be related to a career aim or because a relative worked in the area, emerged as influential on students' decision to participate in IFP. Students also wished to learn in a practical way and to develop general skills or prepare for their transition to a college after Year 11.

In the main, these expectations appeared to be realised for students. Those who learned off-site valued the experience. They appreciated the tutors who treated students in an adult manner and provided individual attention and support and helped to develop their independent learning. In addition, students appreciated the change of environment where they felt more grown up, had the opportunity to meet new people and access specialist facilities and learn in a more practical way. Where they did have concerns, these related to the transport difficulties, and there were some concerns with the teaching, such as finding it repetitive or experiencing too much paper-based work.

Much of the support provided to students was through ongoing support, guidance and encouragement from tutors within the lessons, where group sizes were often relatively small. Providing learning and pastoral support was constrained to some extent by the limits on the time available in the college or training provider outside of lesson time. However, in some cases students could access Learning Resource Centres and resources on-line and there were instances of special provision such as Saturday classes.

Overall, most of the students felt sufficiently supported and, although half of the students had missed timetabled lessons, most of these were not overly concerned. Where students had not coped well with the course, it emerged that ensuring that students received adequate support with both choosing to undertake the course and with the transition in the early stages was an important consideration. Nevertheless, most students were said to have coped well and the experience of those interviewed was largely positive. The majority of students considered that they had made good progress on their course and nearly all would recommend it to another student.

This chapter has used the perspectives of both tutors and students to provide an overview of students' experiences of IFP courses. The next chapter looks at broader successes and challenges of the IFP programme.

5. PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF THE INCREASED FLEXIBILITY PROGRAMME

Summary of Findings

- In this second year of IFP provision, partnership-wide monitoring and evaluation of programme outcomes was still fairly limited.
- A range of positive effects upon organisations were identified, including improved staff attitudes towards, and confidence in delivering, IFP courses, enhanced external links, a broadened curriculum offer for key stage 4 students and a raised organisational profile for some institutions.
- Positive impacts upon partnerships were also mentioned, although less frequently. They included improved collaboration and reduced competition with different types of educational providers and improved communication processes between schools and colleges. A small number of interviewees, however, identified specific concerns about the workings of their partnerships.
- Involvement in the first year of IFP provision had proven to be a valuable learning experience for partnerships in terms of their planning for the second cohort of students (2003/04). Impacts included: a more informed approach to student recruitment; a more tailored approach to teaching and learning; better partnership organisation through advance planning and joint negotiation of issues; a more appropriate approach to the discipline and support of IFP students and a re-assessment of the degree to which colleges needed to be involved in delivery in some cases.
- Interviewees were more mixed in their views about whether the presence of two IFP student cohorts since September 2003 had a particular impact upon their organisations. Around half reported no concerns, but a similar number felt that the increase in student involvement was creating capacity issues in terms of resource availability, increased administration, staff workload and more complicated timetabling issues. In contrast, six interviewees felt that the presence of two IFP cohorts had served to consolidate, and raise the profile of, IFP.
- All partnerships encountered some students discontinuing their courses. While in most partnerships, less than a quarter of students were said to have discontinued, in two partnerships half or more had done so.
- In some cases, students had discontinued for reasons that could be related to IFP. These included inappropriate selection of students, lack of commitment to the course by students, difficulties for students in adapting to the adult environment and because students were missing lessons.
- Students discontinued for reasons that were not related to IFP. For example, some had wider problems at school or were excluded from, or had left, school. Students also discontinued for personal reasons.
- In four of the partnerships, some students had completed their NVQ or other VQ before the end of Year 11. These students generally embarked upon additional units or units of the next level of qualification.

- The second cohort of IFP students were said to differ from the first by interviewees in eight partnerships. Differences included that there was a wider range of ability and that students in the second cohort were more motivated and committed. Differences were generally said to be a consequence of partners being more aware of which students might be appropriate and to some developments in selection processes.
- Of those staff who commented on students' achievements, the majority felt that most were on target to achieve their qualifications at, or above, the levels predicted for them. In addition, there were numerous references to softer IFP impacts including increased maturity, enhanced self-esteem and confidence, good or improved attendance and enhanced career aspirations.
- Similarly, most staff who were able to comment pointed to a range of likely positive post-16 student progressions. These included students planning to continue in learning in order to progress in the same, or a different, vocational area to that in which they had been involved through IFP, students planning a general, as yet unspecified progression into education, training or employment and students having developed the capability to make informed decisions about appropriate future progressions.
- There was widespread agreement between staff and students that IFP had generally had a positive effect upon social learning and development (for example in terms of increased maturity, confidence, independence, preparedness for future employment and awareness of wider societal issues). This was attributed to the opportunities students had been given to learn off site in a new, more relaxed and adult, environment.
- Many students felt that they had matured, or developed in confidence through their IFP experience.
- Most students were also fairly clear in terms of what they planned to do at the end of Year 11. The large majority were planning to undertake vocational or academic qualifications at school or college, or to undertake a Modern Apprenticeship or job with training. A small number (four) were planning to go into the military at the age of 16. Students were fairly evenly split between those who had been aiming towards these progressions since the beginning of Year 10 and those who had changed their plans since then. Most of those in the latter group appeared to have been positively influenced by their experiences of IFP provision.

Although Year 11 students have not completed their IFP programmes, and hence it is not yet possible to report their actual achievements, this chapter provides some insights, from the perspectives and staff and students, on the impact of IFP. It covers the following areas:

- IFP partnerships' monitoring and evaluation strategies, and their ability to assess the relative impact of their programmes.
- Impact of the IFP on organisations and partnerships.
- Impact of the first cohort of provision upon approaches to the second cohort, and the impact of having two IFP cohorts for the first time this year.

- Staff views of the impact of IFP upon students' achievement, progression and social development.
- Students' views of the impact of IFP upon them and their future progressions.

5.1 Monitoring and Evaluation Strategies

Most partnerships had some system for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing their programmes, albeit not particularly detailed or systematic. Although two of the nine partnerships reported that they had no monitoring or evaluation policies in place, the remaining seven undertook some activities. Within these partnerships, it was most often the case that monitoring or evaluation activity had been undertaken by Lead Partner organisations, with a handful of schools having undertaken their own monitoring exercises. The outcomes of monitoring and evaluation activities undertaken by Lead Partner organisations were sometimes filtered through to partner schools, but more often served the purpose of fulfilling the colleges' own course evaluation and review requirements. Thus, it appeared that, at this stage, there was limited sharing and use of monitoring and review data to inform the development of partnerships as a whole.

Partnerships had generally adopted a range of formative, rather than summative, approaches to monitoring and evaluation, although three colleges and one school had plans for a formal end of year evaluation of course effectiveness and student progress. Most formative processes were restricted to the collection and recording of data on attendance and behaviour, with some progress monitoring. However, there were a small number of examples of a more concerted effort to assess issues such as students' experiences, students' progress and performance, and the overall design of programmes. These included:

- Focus group discussions with IFP students, held by college staff or Connexions Service personnel (three partnerships).
- The administration of a questionnaire survey with school and college staff and IFP students (one partnership).
- Use of a detailed monitoring sheet, recording all aspects of the programme that students should have achieved or completed (one partnership).

It was rare for partnerships to have no monitoring or evaluation data at all, and most had some basis upon which to base their observations on the overall impact of the IFP. However, it is worth bearing in mind, in the following sections, that interviewees' comments are not usually based upon systematic evaluation or review of their provision.

5.2 Impact on Organisations and Partnerships

In the early stages of IFP in 2003, interviewees in colleges and training providers identified benefits to their organisations which they had gained through their involvement in the programme. Interviewees had experienced improved links between their institutions including greater understanding of each others' expertise and formalising existing links. In addition, the benefit of promoting the college to schools and students was noted. Interviewees also highlighted the benefits for the professional development of staff in colleges and training providers gained through enhancing the skills required for working with a younger age group, and for some staff in schools who were developing their understanding and skills in relation to delivering vocational qualifications.

In describing the impact of IFP in the second year of the programme, interviewees most commonly identified a range of outcomes for students – which they saw as the main purpose of the provision – rather than focusing on the effects of IFP upon their organisations or wider partnerships. However, further discussion revealed that most interviewees were able to indicate some such outcomes.

5.2.1 Impact on organisations

The large majority of interviewees highlighted positive impacts upon their organisations. The only references to negative effects of involvement came from an individual member of staff in one Lead Partner organisation and in two schools, respectively, across three partnership areas. These included two comments about the complicated logistics and expense of transporting students a long way to their off-site provision and about negative effects upon the overall school timetable of trying to incorporate IFP provision. They also included one comment, from a member of school staff, that, in his view, the quality of teaching by college staff had not been of a high enough standard, and consequently that the students' and school's performance was likely to suffer. In addition, individual members of staff in each of one Lead Partner organisation and six schools, across five partnership areas noted no demonstrable impact upon their organisations.

The remaining interviewees identified a range of positive impacts upon their organisations, which can be summarised as follows:

- **Staff development** – interviewees in eight organisations (five Lead Partners and three schools) mentioned positive effects upon staff development. These included several references to college staff becoming more confident in working with a younger age group, and to school staff becoming more proficient at teaching vocational subject areas, with comments such as *'it has been a steep learning curve, but a positive one'* and *'it stops the staleness setting in – the job is more enjoyable again'* being common. Additionally, some members of college staff had changed their initial view of pre-16 students as a nuisance or a distraction to their

main business, as a result of having been involved in, or having observed, IFP provision.

- **Widening external links** – interviewees in six organisations (five Lead Partners and one school) felt that one of the main benefits of IFP had been in increasing the number of external organisations and the range of staff with which they now worked, or in raising awareness of the possibilities of such links in the future. As one IFP coordinator in a Lead Partner organisation stated: *'It's got us talking to other organisations. There are now stronger bonds between schools and colleges – there is trust.'*
- **Broadened curriculum offer** – interviewees across four schools were pleased that IFP had created opportunities for their schools to expand the range of subjects and qualifications on offer to students, and to provide alternative options to a largely 'academic' curriculum. This was reported to have had knock-on effects in raising the status of vocational learning within some of the schools, and in ensuring that it became an integrated aspect of the curriculum rather than a *'bolt on'*.
- **Raised organisational profile** – two Lead Partner organisations felt that involvement in IFP had raised the profile of the work undertaken by their organisations generally, and the contribution that they could make to lifelong learning specifically.

Finally, staff in two schools reported that students attending their local college to study, and thoroughly enjoying and engaging with their new environment, had the *'unexpected side-effect'* of leading to improvements in their overall attendance, behaviour and confidence in school, even though this had not been an explicit goal of the programme.

5.2.2 Impact on partnerships

Interviewees were also largely positive in their comments about the impact of IFP upon the development and operation of partnerships. However, more identified that IFP had no demonstrable effect in this respect (three Lead Partners and eight schools across eight partnerships) than had said the same regarding the impact of IFP on organisations. This would seem to reflect two factors:

- That the schools and colleges concerned had longstanding or effective partnerships prior to the introduction of IFP, and saw involvement in this new provision as a continuation of their existing relationships rather than as anything new or developing.
- That working in partnership was not a major aspiration for some organisations. For example, one school undertook all teaching of GCSE Leisure and Tourism itself and only contacted the Lead Partner in order to draw down funding.

Additionally, slightly more concerns were raised by interviewees about unsatisfactory impacts upon partnerships than had been identified in relation to organisations. These were mainly relatively minor concerns, such as a feeling that the Lead Partner organisation had become involved in IFP largely to boost

recruitment to the college (one school), reports of poor partnership communication across some subject areas between school and college staff (a second school) and concerns that a partnership approach to provision was creating an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy in some instances (one Lead Partner). In this latter case, one of the schools undertook almost all teaching of the GCSE in Applied ICT itself, with a few of sessions each year provided by the Lead Partner. In the view of college staff, a preferable approach would be for the school to receive direct funding in order to undertake the teaching itself, and to buy in specialist support as and when required rather than the college taking the lead.

One final comment from a school senior manager concerned what he saw as a deteriorating relationship between his school and Lead Partner organisation. In his experience, the Lead Partner did not liaise or negotiate with schools sufficiently regarding significant changes to the delivery of IFP such as timetabling, term dates and the possibility of charging schools for places. Consequently, the school was struggling to see how it could accommodate these changes at short notice. As the school senior manager stated: *'This is not partnership working…You can't just change your plans and let schools know at the last minute.'* Such concerns were, however, rare and the remaining interviewees identified a number of positive impacts of IFP upon their partnerships, including the following:

- **Improved collaboration and/or reduced competition** – interviewees in ten organisations (six Lead Partners and four schools) were pleased that new relationships had been developed, or that old ones had been enhanced, as a result of involvement in IFP. One Lead Partner explained that a number of former assumptions or prejudices on the part of both college and school staff had been *'wiped away'* through partnership working and an increasingly shared understanding of the issues faced by different types of provider. Another added: *'It has helped to build bridges with schools.'*
- **Improved communication processes** – interviewees in two schools felt that, during the course of their involvement in IFP, they and their Lead Partner organisation had found increasingly effective methods of communicating and sharing information.

Finally, one IFP coordinator within a Lead Partner organisation said that a positive impact upon his partnership had been in identifying, and beginning to act upon, a series of joint staff development needs and expectations.

5.3 Impact of Cohort 1 on the Approach to Cohort 2

School and college staff generally felt that their involvement in the first year of IFP provision (2002/03) had proved to be a valuable learning experience, which had shaped their approaches to the development of the programme in the academic year 2003/04. As one IFP coordinator in a Lead Partner organisation stated: *'No staff training could fulfil how much our staff have learned from cohort 1.'* Only seven organisations (six of them schools)

reported that no particular lessons had been learned through involvement in cohort 1 provision, and that there had been no demonstrable change in their approaches to cohort 2 as they appeared to be content with the approach they had developed over the first year.

Other organisations identified a range of areas which had been approached differently in cohort 2 as a result of an accumulated experience of IFP provision. These related to:

- Recruitment
- Teaching and learning
- Organisation
- Discipline and support
- College input.

Each is discussed further below.

Nine organisations (five Lead Partners and four schools) said that the **recruitment** of students to IFP programmes had been approached somewhat differently for cohort 2. Essentially, these colleges had impressed upon school staff the importance of adopting an informed approach in their identification of students, based around ensuring that IFP programmes were presented as an integral aspect of the options process, and not as a remedial measure to deal with their more disaffected or problematic students. Respective members of school staff agreed that 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 rather than as a remedial measure or, indeed, a programme for *'hand picked'* high achieving students who would be good ambassadors for the school, as had been the case in one school previously.

Some of these organisations stressed that this mutual understanding had created an environment for a better sharing of information on individual students and the appropriateness of IFP courses to their needs than previously and, in some cases, for higher levels of college involvement in student recruitment procedures. Some colleges, for example, had held open days or interviewed students and their parents prior to offering them places on courses. The schools concerned also felt that they and the colleges had produced better quality information for Year 9 students than previously, to help them make an informed choice about the appropriateness of IFP provision.

A number of organisations (five Lead Partners and four schools) also felt that they had learned much about ways in which to approach **teaching and learning** with the second cohort of IFP students. As noted in Chapter 3, tutors had developed their teaching style over the two years of the first cohort. In considering their approach to cohort 2, interviewees across these organisations (mainly college tutors who tended to be the main deliverers of IFP courses) re-iterated that pre-16 students appeared to learn differently to older students,

and hence needed to be motivated in different ways. Lessons learned from the experience of cohort 1 included:

- A need to break information down into small units, so that students could both understand and retain it
- The importance of simplifying technical terminology
- Not attempting to cover too much theory or underpinning knowledge at any one time, but ideally building *'bite sized chunks'* of theory into each practical activity
- Adopting a largely active approach, involving outdoor work, role play or workshop work where appropriate and avoiding too much class-based written work.
- Providing closer supervision of students than would be the case at post 16 and, where potentially dangerous activities are involved, having high staff to student ratios.

One member of school staff also commented that she planned for the current cohort 2 students to have completed the examined unit of their GCSE Leisure and Tourism by the end of Year 10, in order to give them sufficient time in Year 11 to complete their coursework, which accounted for two thirds of their marks. This decision stemmed from the fact that cohort 1 students, who had taken their examination at the beginning of Year 11, were reportedly finding it a challenge to complete their coursework on time.

Six institutions (five Lead Partners and one school) said that they had approached the **organisation** of cohort 2 differently, as a result of their experience of involvement in cohort 1. Most of their comments related to the importance of early planning and having sufficient lead-in time, so that:

- schools knew far enough in advance the range of courses that they could offer students in time for inclusion in their Year 9 options processes
- college tutors and school staff were able to plan their programmes effectively
- schools and colleges were able to timetable IFP provision in order, where possible, to avoid subject clashes or staffing problems.

Other comments stressed the importance of schools and colleges working together closely, listening to each other's needs and working jointly to resolve issues, rather than either party dictating terms (one Lead Partner and one school) and the importance of consolidating teaching within small, dedicated teaching teams, in order to build confidence and continuity (one Lead Partner).

Two Lead Partners and one school mentioned issues related to the **discipline and support** of IFP students. The two Lead Partner interviewees (both tutors) confessed that they had been somewhat nervous of the cohort 1 students in September 2002, and had possibly been too willing to placate them in the early stages. One tutor confided: *'I was a bit of a softy when I first started'* and

another commented: *'We let them rule the roost – we were too soft.'* Both stressed that they had been much quicker to *'take control'* of the cohort 2 students. One commented: *'You need to set the same boundaries as you would do normally.'* This was felt to have greatly improved discipline and a sense of purpose within lessons. Additionally, one school stressed the importance that they now attached to sending a member of school staff to college with the IFP students each week (a policy adopted by a number of other schools with their cohort 1 students) in order to offer support to the college tutor and the students, to monitor students' behaviour and progress and to act as a general quality control.

Finally, three organisations (two Lead Partners and one school) raised issues related to **college input** on IFP programmes. Respondents at two of these organisations (one Lead Partner and one school, from different partnerships) reported that college input into provision had been reduced in cohort 2, in order to spread IFP resources further. Both felt that many of the new GCSE qualifications could be taught largely in schools, by school staff, with occasional college support, rather than relying on colleges to teach all, or most, programme content. The advantage of this approach was summed up by the school's IFP coordinator, who stated: *'This way IFP money can be spread a bit more widely and more students can benefit.'* It is important, however, to recognise that neither organisation was advocating an approach where there was no college involvement. Indeed, a point made quite strongly by an IFP coordinator in a different Lead Partner organisation, was the importance of actively encouraging a reasonable college input across all IFP programmes, in order to ensure that students gained sufficient opportunities to gain social and vocational learning opportunities.

Clearly, in terms of the ways in which they took forward their ideas and plans for cohort 2 provision, IFP partnerships, had learned a great deal from their involvement in cohort 1. Most interviewees had found their first year of involvement to be a positive learning experience and were enjoying being able to consolidate and refine their provision with cohort 2 students. The extent to which having two, as opposed to only one, cohorts of IFP students for the first time this year had impacted upon them, their organisations and their students is discussed in the following section.

5.4 Impact on Organisations of having two IFP Cohorts

A large number of interviewees, representing around half of those organisations visited and, between them, eight of the partnership areas[6], did not feel that the presence of two cohorts of IFP students had had any particular impact on their organisations or students. Those that gave reasons said that they had either had the capacity to cope confidently with the increase in numbers this year, or that, in the case of college respondents, their long-

6 This indicates a difference of perspective between the schools and colleges within many of the partnerships.

standing links with schools, and historic provision of a range of programmes for Year 10 and 11 students, meant that accommodating a second cohort of IFP students had not created any concerns. Some commented, however, that should the scale of IFP expand greatly in the future, their organisations might begin to face capacity issues.

This view was far from universal however. An equivalent number of interviewees, some of them representing the same organisations as those mentioned above, indicated a range of problems or concerns that they faced in offering IFP provision to two cohorts of students. Their concerns included:

- **Resources** – Three Lead Partner organisations had found it quite difficult to allocate sufficient staff, rooms and equipment to meet the demand for places: *'it's pushed our resources and staffing to the limit'*, whilst one school had found transporting many students to college difficult due to a shortage of buses and drivers.
- **Administration** – IFP coordinators in four schools, who had been given no extra time allowance to account for the growth in provision, reported that they were struggling to manage the administration, organisation and coordination demands of the IFP and to keep track of the progress of students during their off-site provision.
- **Timetabling** – Three schools reported that an increase in the number of students undertaking IFP options, and the fact that Year 10 and 11 students often had to undertake their off-site provision at different times on different days, meant that it had been impossible to arrange the school timetable in such a way as to avoid some subject clashes (although this had been possible during the first year of cohort 1 provision when the numbers involved were smaller).

Finally, one school had found the cost of sending a member of school staff to college to support students during their classes there (as had been possible with cohort 1 students) to be prohibitive now that the number of classes had more than doubled. Interviewees at the school reported a deterioration in student performance, behaviour and attendance as a result, and were looking for ways to rectify this concern in the academic year 2004/05.

On a more positive note, staff across six organisations (four schools and two Lead Partners), identified benefits associated with the existence of two cohorts of IFP students this year. Most of their comments related to the fact that IFP was now increasingly regarded as a complete key stage 4 option – the *'norm'* rather than something exceptional. There was reported to be a growing sense of confidence on the part of staff, which was connected to an enhanced profile of IFP and vocational learning within schools, and a consolidation of provision. A further member of school staff said that an additional advantage had been that there were now greater numbers of students within the school benefiting from a broad curriculum offer: *There are a lot more students in the school doing courses that they want to do.'* Finally, an IFP coordinator within a Lead Partner organisation commented that the introduction of cohort 2 had enabled him to put forward a case for additional staffing, which had been met.

The final sections of this chapter consider the apparent impact of the IFP upon students, who were the group that should be benefiting most from the provision in the view of most of those interviewed.

5.5 Staff Views of Impact on Students

In 2003 interviewees had observed some early benefits to students. In the first year of the programme, students were said to have gained from accessing a broader curriculum, developing personally and socially and improving their motivation and attendance. Furthermore, students were said to have gained from accessing an alternative learning environment and approach and preparing for their progression post-16. These early indications of the benefits of IFP were reflected in the findings from the interviews in the second year of IFP, as outlined in this section.

Interviewees' comments in 2004 regarding the achievements, likely progressions and social development of students who had been involved in the first cohort of IFP provision were overwhelmingly positive. School and college staff identified a range of beneficial student outcomes, at least for those who had remained with their programmes. It is worth noting also, however, that some interviewees mentioned disappointing levels of discontinuation or exclusion.

5.5.1 Changes in cohort 1 participation

In all of the partnerships visited, interviewees said that they had encountered some students discontinuing their IFP courses during the five terms of provision at the time of the interviews. Although partnerships were not always able to provide detailed figures regarding the numbers of students who had discontinued, their responses suggested that:

- Six partnerships had experienced low or minimal drop-out (less than a fifth of students)
- One partnership had experienced medium drop-out (around a quarter of students)
- Two partnerships had experienced high drop-out (half or more students).

The reasons why students had discontinued their involvement sometimes related to IFP, but also often reflected wider personal and educational issues, as outlined below.

Reasons related to IFP

- Four interviewees in two partnerships commented that, in some instances, students were **inappropriately selected** and had not really wanted to be involved from the start and had consequently left the programme. For example, one interviewee perceived that '*schools were getting rid of their trouble makers*' and a second stated that '*some without doubt were press-ganged – we asked*'.

- Similarly, interviewees in two Lead Partners organisations noted that students who had discontinued lacked **commitment or motivation**.
- Two school teachers said that some students had left the programme because they could not cope with the new **adult environment.**
- One tutor and one Lead Partner interviewee commented that students had discontinued because they were **missing lessons** in their other subjects due to timetabling clashes.

Reasons not related to IFP

- Interviewees in two Lead Partners, and six schools said that some students had discontinued their involvement because they had **wider problems with school**, refused to attend or were truants or non-attenders.
- Interviewees in two schools and two Lead Partners mentioned that students' involvement in IFP had discontinued when they had been **excluded** from school.
- Five school representatives and two Lead Partners said that some students had **left the school** and so their involvement had discontinued.
- Three school teachers mentioned that students had other **personal reasons and issues** which had led to them discontinuing their involvement.
- Staff in two schools were **uncertain why** students had discontinued and one commented that '*it would be good to know what the reasons are*'.

Reflecting on the students who discontinued involvement, one deputy head remarked that reintegrating students back into school classes who wished to discontinue their IFP involvement was a challenge. Indeed, a second school had explained to an external provider that it was not possible for students to be re-integrated and that they could not, therefore, be excluded from external provision if their behaviour was poor.

In addition to participation changes brought about by discontinuation, staff in four of the Lead Partners indicated that some students had completed their IFP qualification before the end of the Year 11 academic year. In all of these instances, students were taking NVQs and other VQs. Where they provided details, in three cases, students had undertaken additional NVQ units either at the same level or at the next level. For example, one tutor explained that a student was working towards the 'working with other people' unit at Level 2 as she considered it could be applicable to a wide range of vocational areas. In one case, students' return to school had been negotiated and the qualification in its current form discontinued.

5.5.2 Characteristics of cohort 2 participation

An indication of the lessons learned by Lead Partners regarding the characteristics of students participating in IFP, and the extent to which these had been shared with partner schools, is reflected in the findings that interviewees in eight of the Lead Partner organisations considered that students in the second cohort differed from those in the first cohort and, in

most cases, this was a positive difference. It is worth considering that students who participate in IFP are not a homogenous group and, in addition to individual differences, characteristics of students differed between courses and between schools. Moreover, although partnerships had adopted a variety of approaches to selecting students, which will be outlined later in this section, '*chance has a lot to do with it*', as one tutor explained.

Overall, interviewees in three Lead Partners observed that students in the second cohort reflected a wider range of abilities than was the case with the first cohort. In addition, staff in six schools also made this observation. Staff in three Lead Partner organisations and in six schools in five partnerships said that students in the second cohort were of higher ability than their peers in the first cohort. This experience is reflected to some extent in the quantitative data of the profile of around 36,000 students in the second cohort of IFP.[7] For example, a greater proportion of students in the second cohort than the first had attained level 5 and above in each of the three subjects in their key stage 3 assessments. This higher attainment reflected a general increase in the attainment of students in Year 10 nationally in 2003 to 2004, and this national pattern may have resulted in tutors' perceptions of second cohort students having higher ability. However, the data for the second cohort did not indicate that students who were involved in this later cohort had a wider range of ability than those in the first, indeed, the overall profile of achievement for students in both cohorts was similar.

Three interviewees (two teachers and one Lead Partner representative) specifically mentioned that students taking new GCSEs in vocational subjects were of a higher ability than in the first cohort. Interviewees in four Lead Partners and in two schools commented that the students in the second cohort were more motivated and focused than was the case with the first cohort. For example an ICT tutor commented that, for the second cohort of students '*ICT is their life*' and a catering tutor said that the students were '*hungry to learn*'. Finally, interviewees in two Lead Partners observed that students in the second cohort had better behaviour than those in the first.

By contrast, three tutors in three partnerships felt that the second cohort were more challenging than the first. One tutor, who had experienced a high level of drop-out in the first term attributed this to the lack of interest in the vocational area among a group of students for whom it had been their second choice. Two other tutors commented that the students were disruptive and challenging and a school teacher in a third partnership also felt that the students displayed more challenging behaviour than the previous Year 10 students, but noted that this was true of the whole year group and was not isolated to IFP participants.

7 GOLDEN, S., NELSON, J., O'DONNELL, L. and RUDD, P. (2004). *Evaluation of Increased Flexibilities for 14-16 Year Olds: Profile of Partnerships and Students 2002 and 2003.* (DfES Research Report 558) London: DfES.

It appears that, in the main, interviewees perceived that students in the second cohort of IFP differed from their peers in the first cohort. Interviewees in five Lead partner organisations felt that this was due to schools having learned which students were appropriate for the course. As one tutor commented '*schools appear to have picked up that there is no point sending students not destined to make it*'. To some extent, the comments of school staff reflect this. Some mentioned that they had sought to select the students more carefully and had take into consideration various factors including students' attitudes, enthusiasm, career aims and history of absenteeism. In addition, they mentioned that IFP was not appropriate for disaffected students or those of low ability and it was not, as one teachers had originally hoped, a '*panacea*'.

In terms of the new processes and activities which partnerships had undertaken with the second cohort, interviewees identified the following:

- development of the application form, such as asking students to outline why they were interested in the course (two Lead Partners)
- assessing students' mathematics and English ability (one tutor)
- Interviewing students (one Lead Partner and two tutors in two partnerships)
- Having a taster session (one Lead Partner) or a college tour (one tutor)
- '*Looking more carefully*' at additional information about students, such as academic achievement, but remaining '*aware that they might be struggling for other reasons*'
- pre-application visit (one school).

5.5.3 Impact on students' achievement

With respect to the first cohort of students (Year 11), whilst there were a number of references to students' actual, or likely, attainment of qualifications, there were many more comments relating to a range of softer outcomes. Many interviewees commented that the IFP had proved to be an all-round positive experience for the students involved, and saw that there had been a number of effects of their involvement on their achievement. These are discussed below.

Of those who commented on the impact of IFP upon students' **attainment** (seven Lead Partner and ten school respondents), the majority reported that most of their IFP students were on target to achieve their various qualifications by the end of Year 11, as predicted. These included a group of 17 students, mostly with special educational needs (SEN), of whom 14 were expected to achieve their level 1 qualification by the end of the year and two partnerships in which some Level 1 students had successfully achieved their qualifications already and had progressed to Level 2. An additional student had reached the regional final of a 'skills build' (brickwork) competition, alongside post-16 students, which was said to be a huge achievement for him. Interviewees across four partnership areas added that some of their students were making progress at levels far higher than expected of them. These included:

- Around half (approximately 13) of a cohort of engineering students who had achieved a Level 1 qualification with distinction or double distinction by the end of Year 10, and who looked likely to achieve their Level 2 by the end of Year 11. The Lead Partner coordinator described this as: *'nothing short of outstanding.'*
- Two groups of new GCSE students (Health and Social Care and Applied Business) who had all achieved at, or above, their predicated grades in their external assessments. In the case of the Health and Social Care students, 17 of a group of around 22 had achieved above their target grade.

Staff in two additional partnerships also commented that their Health and Social Care, Applied Business and Manufacturing students were on target to achieve better grades in their GCSEs in vocational subjects than in all their other subject areas. Explanations for such 'value-added' effects included that the students had been given the opportunity to study an option of real choice, that they had benefited from the more adult, independent learning style allowed in college and that they had been able to focus on a more practical, or applied, learning style than was possible in their 'non-vocational' GCSEs.

In contrast to these positive reports, staff in one school and one college across two different partnership areas indicated that students on two specific courses, leading to GCSEs in Engineering and Applied Business, respectively, looked likely to achieve at a level below that predicted for them. This trend was explained by reference to the characteristics of the students themselves. The first group were described by college staff as very low achieving, with behavioural, attendance and motivational problems, and were felt to be totally unsuited to the demands of a double award GCSE. The second group, in contrast, were said by school staff to be some of the school's highest achieving students (A* candidates) who, in their view, had been let down by being 'guinea pigs' to a new qualification, which was said to lack sound specifications, and by college staff who, despite their best efforts, were struggling to teach the GCSE at a challenging enough level.

Only in two partnerships did certain members of staff[8] find it difficult to comment on the impact of IFP upon the students involved. This was because, whilst some students were said to have matured and to be achieving well, others had consistently displayed poor levels of behaviour or attendance, and so what emerged was a very mixed picture. Staff across the other partnerships, in contrast, reported a range of positive outcomes associated with involvement in IFP provision. On balance, however, most IFP students appeared to be on target to achieve at, or above, the levels expected of them. In addition, interviewees identified a range of softer outcomes from their involvement in IFP programmes. The majority of comments about positive outcomes were made by interviewees in Lead Partner organisations rather than those in schools, where the impacts of IFP on students' achievement did not appear to have been so readily identified.

8 It is important to note that this only applied on specific courses within these partnerships, and was not reported as an issue by all subject staff.

Interviewees identified some benefits to students which underpinned their achievements. These included personal developments, such as improvements in their maturity, responsibility and independence (noted by interviewees in eight Lead Partners and five schools) and enhanced self-esteem and/or confidence (mentioned by interviewees in five Lead Partners and three schools). These outcomes for young people will be discussed further in Section 5.5.5.

Other achievements for students which were identified included improvements in attendance and enhanced expectations and aspirations.

Three Lead Partner interviewees and one school interviewee reported that the **attendance** of students undertaking IFP courses through their institutions had been either consistently good or improving. One Lead Partner organisation commented that attendance figures had improved by approximately 60 per cent since the start of the programme, whilst another stated that students' attendance on their college catering course had been consistently good, in contrast to their attendance at school generally, which was often quite poor.

Finally, two Lead Partner organisations and two schools believed that students' general life **expectations and aspirations** had been enhanced by involvement in their IFP programmes. This was felt to be attributable to having had the opportunity to find out about various vocational areas, and to work towards a relevant national qualification. Some students were thought to have clarified their longer-term career plans as a result of this experience. The matter of progression and career planning is dealt with in more detail in the following section.

5.5.4 Impact on students' likely progressions

It was clear that tutors and teachers had not always discussed IFP students' planned post-16 progression. Most of the interviewees who were able to comment were college tutors, who generally had closer contact with the students than school staff as a result of having taught most of the provision. Whilst it is true that staff across a number of organisations were unable to comment on students' likely progressions it was, nevertheless, noticeable that those that did have an opinion tended to make positive, rather than negative, comments. Only across four organisations (one college and three schools) did some staff raise concerns around the issue of progress.

In this college and two of the schools, staff commented that few of the IFP students had shown any interest in progressing in vocational, or other, learning as a result of their involvement in IFP. The college tutor was not surprised by this, having already outlined what he saw as a very poor approach to selection by the school. In his view, the school had used his course as an opportunity to send the more difficult and disengaged students, who were the least likely to be committed to, or motivated by, a demanding double-award GCSE. The two school interviewees (from different partnership areas) felt that poor behaviour and commitment amongst the students involved in IFP was having a similarly detrimental impact upon the likelihood of them progressing in learning at post

16. Staff in the final school raised a different concern. In their view, there was felt to be no easily identifiable vocational post-16 progression route for exceptionally gifted (potential A*) students, who were currently working towards the double-award GCSE in engineering. In consequence, these students were said to be likely to progress to AS/A2 Levels in the natural sciences or mathematics, even though some had expressed an interest, ultimately, in undertaking degrees in engineering.

The remaining interviewees who were able to comment on progression, however, pointed to a range of likely positive transitions for IFP students. These included plans to:

- **return to the same college to progress in the same vocational area** (mentioned by certain course staff across five Lead Partners and five schools). Specific examples included all five motor vehicle students attending one college having already been offered Modern Apprenticeships in the same area and around 70 per cent of a Level 1 construction cohort in another college looking likely to have places to progress to Level 2 there. In one partnership, where around half of an engineering cohort had achieved their Level 1 qualification by the end of Year 10, many were said to be planning to progress to Level 2 or 3 engineering qualifications within the same college, or to take up Modern Apprenticeships.
- **return to the same college to progress in a different vocational area** (mentioned by certain course staff across three Lead Partners). Such staff commented that the students' IFP course had given them experience of college life, and an interest in vocational learning generally, rather than a desire to progress within their IFP area specifically. Examples included an NVQ Food Preparation student who had been offered a place on an electronics course at the same college and two engineering students who were planning to embark upon courses in plumbing. Such references were usually to fairly small numbers of students. It seemed more common for students who were planning to embark upon a vocational course at college to be thinking of doing so in the same area as that in which they had been involved through IFP.
- **progress, but at school or a different college, rather than at the Lead Partner organisation** (mentioned by certain course staff across three Lead Partners). Students who had made this choice had done so, either because they were high achievers who were planning to undertake AS/A2 Levels in their respective school sixth forms, or because they had found relevant courses of interest at a college closer to their homes.
- **make a general, as yet unspecified, progression** (mentioned by certain course staff across three Lead Partners and two schools). One member of college staff commented that his IFP students had been unsuited to school and were now tiring of college after two years studying there, but were still keen to progress. He thought that: *'a job with training is likely to be the best option for them – they need the challenge and variety.'* A school senior manager commented that most of her IFP cohort would previously have left school at 16 and tried to get a job immediately or *'drifted'*. Now,

in contrast, many were said to be researching college and Modern Apprenticeship options.

Finally, staff in four Lead Partner organisations and two schools made general comments about students' apparent readiness for positive progressions. As the IFP coordinator at one Lead Partner organisation said, IFP students in her partnership had, over the course of their programmes, acquired the knowledge from which to progress within their chosen occupation: *'they are still going in the direction they originally planned, but now it is from a knowledge base whereas before it was a little bit theoretical'*. She commented that, as a result, they were less likely to end up in low-skilled jobs than they might otherwise have been. Other comments included that students were beginning to think about where they wanted to be in the medium to short term and to research their future options accordingly, and that students who had previously been nervous of the wider world post-16 were now no longer '*worried'* about the prospect of studying at college, for example. This implies that there had been social and personal, as well as learning, development for some students through their involvement in IFP. This outcome is discussed in more detail in the following section.

5.5.5 Impact on students' social development

There was widespread agreement amongst interviewees that involvement in IFP had proved to have had a positive impact upon students' social learning and social and personal development. All Lead Partners and all but one of their linked providers[9] felt that this had been a positive outcome of students' involvement in off-site learning. Only across individual courses in one Lead Partner organisation and five schools respectively, was social learning reported to have been a negligible impact of the IFP. In three instances this was because schools undertook all teaching themselves, and hence opportunities for students to develop through experiencing a new learning environment were said to be minimal. Interviewees in the remaining three schools were more circumspect in their comments about the social impacts of students attending college, even though college staff within the same partnerships tended to feel that the students concerned had made substantial personal gains as a result of their involvement in off-site learning. Staff in two further schools were unable to comment on social learning effects, as they reported having limited contact with the IFP students who attended college each week to undertake their provision there.

The remaining staff interviewees made the following positive comments about the social and personal benefits to students that had arisen through their involvement in IFP programmes:

- **Improved maturity, responsibility and social skills** (eight lead partners and eight schools). This was by far the most commonly mentioned impact

[9] One tutor at this college reported that students had seemingly become more immature and badly behaved since attending college. He attributed this to their low achievement and poor behaviour records prior to joining the course, coupled with a less controlled environment than school, which they had tended to abuse.

of IFP upon students' social development. Many interviewees reported having witnessed students becoming more mature and *'respectful'* of others over the course of their programmes, with improved social skills and enhanced levels of responsibility. For some of the students concerned, this was said to have been an enormous development. One senior manager in a Lead Partner organisation stated: *'They have been through all sorts of maturity since they have been here…Some are turning out to be ideal vocational students.'* Many of the interviewees went on to comment that these improvements in maturity and levels of independence were having positive effects upon the students' general employability and social skills and upon their awareness of *'real world'* issues. One IFP coordinator in a Lead Partner organisation commented that the students attending her organisation had learned how to speak with others without being *'sulky or teenagery'*. She added: *'It has been like a finishing school for them…they have learned poise!'* Another coordinator said that students attending his college had learned the skills of effective communication, punctuality and willingness to learn, which would serve them well in the future.

- **Enhanced confidence and self-esteem**. Three lead partners and three schools reported that many of the students involved in IFP had developed in self-confidence and self esteem. Those that commented attributed this to a realisation, on the part of the young people, that they had the capability to achieve something worthwhile and that, in some cases, they already possessed skills that they had not previously realised. A student support worker commented: *'Students have gained confidence by being able to do things they wouldn't expect. They see tradesmen in normal life performing wonderful things, and they find that they can do this after a few weeks.'* The fact that many students were on track to achieve a qualification at Level 1 or above, when some of them were not expecting to achieve many other formal qualifications by the end of Year 11, served to boost their confidence still further.
- **Better self-direction and independence** (three lead partners and two schools). Interviewees in these organisations felt that their students had learned to be more self-directed as a result of being given opportunities through IFP to be more independent in their learning. Two school interviewees added that students had been trusted to make independent travel arrangements to and from college, and that most had responded well to this. One school coordinator commented: *'They have learned to stand on their own two feet a bit.'*
- **Better preparedness for future employment**. Three lead partners commented that IFP students had become more punctual, better at interacting with others and were learning to pay attention to their appearance since being involved in IFP. These were all believed to be skills and attributes which would serve the students well when it came to securing and retaining employment in the future.
- **Enhanced awareness of a range of societal issues**. Two lead partners and one school reported that their students had developed a wider outlook since embarking on their IFP programmes. Examples included a cohort of inner-city students working towards a GCSE in Applied Science, who had

'had their eyes opened to a range of rural issues', and a group of students working towards a GCSE in Health and Social Care, who had learned to deal more maturely with issues surrounding homosexuality, mental health and homelessness since embarking on their course. One college tutor commented: *'They come here and they go away with a very different outlook on things.'*

Explanations for these developments were plentiful, but essentially focused on the fact that most students were being given the opportunity to learn in a completely new and different environment to school by attending a local college or training provider. Interviewees identified a number of features of this environment that seemed to lead to positive social learning. For example, some mentioned a positive enthusiasm amongst college staff, which was felt to rub off on students. As one tutor commented: *'We as tutors are hugely enthusiastic about our subject, so students love the course.'* Others pointed to a more relaxed, informal learning style in colleges, where tutors were normally on first name terms, and students very often did not have to wear uniform. It was argued that by treating the students as young adults and with respect, then they, in turn, were likely to reciprocate. The students also reportedly responded well to studying something in which they were genuinely interested, which usually had a practical focus or application, in being given responsibility and in working with students from different schools and mixing with older students. This latter aspect was said to make them re-assess their status as *'very small fish rather than the king pins'*. Finally, some interviewees commented that IFP students generally regarded the fact that they had the opportunity to learn off site as a *'privilege'* and tended not to abuse this opportunity.

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that a small number of interviewees reported that some students in their organisations had failed to cope with the features of off-site learning described above. Whilst most rose to the challenge of a more independent and relaxed learning style others, who lacked social skills, motivation or confidence, reportedly often failed to progress well with their IFP provision. One interviewee summed this up by saying: *'The ones that don't drop out love it',* whilst another commented: *They have the opportunity to do things they wouldn't do in school, but this requires a mind that can open up to opportunity.'*

5.6 Students' Views of Impact and Future Progressions

The students who were interviewed during the course of the partnership visits presented a rich source of data on the impact of IFP from their perspective.

5.6.1 Students' views on the impact of IFP

Students' responses to a question about the extent to which they felt they had changed since embarking upon their IFP courses revealed a very similar picture to the social learning benefits described by partnership staff above. For example, 12 students believed that they had **matured** or *'grown up'*

considerably and seven said that they had become more **confident** or relaxed during their time on IFP.

Amongst those identifying increased maturity was a male engineering student who made the following comment: *'Well I've grown up a bit from what I was…I used to mess around a lot, but I haven't messed around this year*. In explaining this change, the student stated: *'When you're at school you get treated like a baby so you act like one, but when you're at college you get treated like an adult so you work properly and don't mess around so much.'* Similarly, a female catering student confided: *'I think it makes me more mature, because when you are down at college and working with people who are older than you, you have to be really mature and not giggle and mess about.'* A male engineering student, who said that he nearly had not been able to take part in IFP because he had not previously been considered trustworthy enough was proud to say: *'I have proved them wrong, and I have proved to myself that I can knuckle down and do it.'* On the matter of enhanced confidence, one female engineering student, the only girl in her group, who had initially felt slightly intimidated by embarking upon the course, made a particularly interesting comment: '*I feel more comfortable doing things that, I don't really know how to put it, like engineering that girls shouldn't in theory be doing…I have got higher qualifications in engineering than most of the boys*.'

Smaller numbers commented that they had learned more about the reality of work (three), had become more proficient at carrying out specific practical tasks (three), had realised the importance of school work (two) and had become more independent in their approach to learning (two). One of these interviewees, a male engineering student stated: *'Before, I would always ask the teacher for help, but now I just try figuring it out for myself – if I can't then I will ask. I have changed the way I learn, if that makes any sense.'* Four further students said that they had become aware of the different options available to them at post-16 (two) and had improved their overall attendance at school and college (two).

It is also worth noting, however, that a sizeable minority of students (13) did not feel that they had changed at all since their involvement in IFP. Two of these said that this was because they were already well focused and motivated, but the remaining eleven offered no further elaboration. In addition, two students commented that involvement in IFP had taken away their interest in the vocational areas they were studying, because their course experiences had been negative. One engineering student elaborated: *'I've been regretting it every day. Everyone tried to quit at once – we all went to the office and said 'we want to quit now''*. Fortunately, such negative experiences were rare, and most students appeared to have benefited from their involvement in IFP, demonstrating a number of positive impacts which broadly mirrored those identified by partnership staff.

5.6.2 Students' views on their future progressions

In the course of their programmes, a few of the students (eight) said that they had discussed their future plans with the tutors on their IFP courses. More had talked with their family and friends (19 students), an advisor from the careers or Connexions Service (18 students) and their teachers at school (12 students). On the whole, students had found the sources of advice helpful.

Reflecting on the extent to which school had prepared them for their future careers, 18 felt that it had been helpful and 15 thought it had not. Where school had been helpful, students generally cited general careers support provided by schools. This included the value of careers-related lessons during which they had completed CVs, application forms and participated in mock interviews, and the benefit of having undertaken work experience. In addition, a few noted the influence of the discipline, punctuality and knowledge that they had gained through school. Some of the students who did not consider that school had helped commented that the school environment was different to the world of work. Seven students felt that more opportunities to undertake work experience, or more people from the world of work visiting schools, would help prepare them for their future careers.

Six of the students who were interviewed specified their IFP course as having contributed to their preparation for work. One student felt that experience at college had developed his teamworking skills and a second considered that he had learned '*more about the skills you need in the workplace*' in college than he had at school. A third student explained how, as a result of his IFP course, '*now I know not only what I have to do to get recruited but what businesses do to recruit people – I know both sides of the story now*'.

Finally, students identified a range of skills which they considered **employers looked for** when recruiting a young person. Fifteen of the students said that employers sought good communication and interpersonal skills, such as being polite and able to get on with people. Other skills which they believed employers valued included a wide range of personal attributes such as punctuality, confidence, interest and enthusiasm, responsibility, reliability and independence. Patience, determination, trustworthiness and self-discipline were also mentioned by students, in addition to good body language and being interested, enthusiastic and committed.

Sixteen students said that employers would look for qualifications, most frequently GCSEs, or particular subjects such as mathematics, English or science. IT skills were also mentioned by three students. In general, the students who were interviewed felt that they had some or all of the skills and attributes which they had identified. On the whole, they did not attribute having these skills to their experiences on their IFP courses specifically, although eight made some connection between the two. For example, three students felt that they had developed their confidence in talking with adults through opportunities to work with new teachers. Another student hoped that his achievement through IFP would help him to demonstrate to an employer his commitment when he said '*my grades aren't going to be the best but I'm*

just hoping this [IFP course] *will help reflect that more – which is that you can stick with something*'.

Most of the students interviewed were fairly clear in terms of what they planned to do at the end of Year 11 and, encouragingly, none of them said that they had no plans, or did not wish to continue in some form of learning or employment. The students identified the following likely post-16 progressions:

- **AS/A2 Levels, AVCEs or intermediate-level GNVQs**. Sixteen students said that they hoped to progress to undertake such qualifications (most of them mentioning AS/A2 Levels) either in college (nine), or their current school sixth forms (seven).
- **NVQs, or BTec National Diploma qualifications** at college. Eleven students identified that this was their likely progression route. One commented, by way of explanation: *'I don't really want to stay on and do A Levels at school. I feel I want to do something more vocational.'*
- **Modern Apprenticeships or jobs with training**. Seven students were interested in the work-based route post-16, recognising a value in beginning work and starting to earn some money, whilst simultaneously gaining further training and qualifications.
- **College or work in general**. Six students were unable to say specifically what qualifications they hoped to work towards, or where they planned to undertake these, but remained keen to progress to some kind of college course or employment option nonetheless.
- **A career in the military**. Four students had specific plans to join the military (normally the army) once they turned 16. Four additional students had longer-term plans to join the military at officer level once they had undertaken one of the post-16 options outlined above.

Students were split fairly evenly between those who said they had been aiming towards these progressions since before the beginning of Year 10 and had not changed their minds (19), and those whose planned progressions had changed over the course of key stage 4 (25).

Most of those who had **not changed their plans** said that they had long had a very clear view of what they wanted to do at post-16, although one commented that her IFP experience had strengthened her plans: *'I've always known that I want to go into engineering, yes, but it's a bit stronger now.'* Most of these students had undertaken an IFP course in an area closely related to their post-16 occupation or qualification of interest (13), whilst six had embarked on an IFP course at the beginning of Year 10 knowing that it was not related to their longer-term plans. As one commented: *'It's like an interest rather than a career path*.' Most of these latter students were planning careers in the military. Interestingly, two of the six said that their positive experiences and enjoyment of their IFP courses had almost made them re-think their longstanding plans. One commented: *'I really enjoyed* [my horticulture course] *but there again I know I enjoyed the Army Cadets…so I had to think*

really hard. I've got the horticulture and I've got the Army and I like them both equal.' The other said: *'I wouldn't say it has made me change my mind about what I want to do in sixth form* (A Levels in the sciences and mathematics)*, but I really considered going for a Modern Apprenticeship or college course to do engineering.'*

Of those who had **changed their plans** about post-16 progression since the beginning of Year 10 (25), a majority seemed to have been influenced by their IFP experiences. Twelve, who had changed their minds about the courses and/or occupations that they were originally interested in working towards post-16, appeared to have been motivated by a more applied style of learning, and were now planning on undertaking vocational courses at post-16, albeit in different areas to those they had undertaken as part of their IFP provision. An additional seven students commented that the vocational content and approach of their IFP courses had specifically made them decide to pursue these vocational areas further at post-16. One female ICT student commented: *'Before, I didn't want to do ICT. I thought it was kind of boring…but when I came here* [to college] *and started doing the coursework I decided it's the way I like to do it.'* The remaining students who had changed their initial plans (six) appeared to have been less influenced by their IFP experiences specifically. They included three who had decided to embark upon AS/A2 Levels with a view to going on to university in order to keep their options open, two who had decided to join the army and one who was now planning to remain in learning, having previously planned to leave education at the age of 16.

That the students had, broadly speaking, been attracted to vocational learning or work in the longer-term is reflected in the fact that most (25) hoped, in the medium term, to undertake careers where they could learn through work-based provision. For example, construction, hair and beauty, plumbing, catering, travel and tourism and car mechanics. Eight students were planning to go into the military. Seven outlined careers that might require professional training or a higher level academic qualification, such as a university degree, for example, careers in ICT, accountancy and journalism. This suggests that IFP provision had, in general, been appropriately targeted at students with an interest in applied styles of learning and longer-term vocational occupations. The students certainly seemed well motivated to progress at the end of Year 11, and it is hoped that subsequent analysis of their actual destinations post-16 will show the extent to which they have been able to make positive, and relevant, transitions.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Conclusions

Overall, the research has revealed that these IFP partnerships had successfully maintained and expanded their relationships with schools for the first and second cohorts of IFP. The majority of the partnerships had continued with their management, organisational and delivery structures which suggests a degree of stability in IFP delivery. The views of the students were largely positive and students were on course to achieve the qualifications they had taken through IFP. Moreover, some tutors in colleges were more positive in the second year of provision and in some cases had been impressed by the enthusiasm and ability of participating students.

Effective approaches to **partnership working** included the need for good communication, good relationships with the individuals involved, and partners who agreed, and were committed to, shared aims and objectives. On the whole, the partnership staff appeared to have positively embraced partnership working in order to deliver vocational learning opportunities to 14 to 16 year olds. In two of the partnerships, however, there was evidence of half or more of the students discontinuing their qualifications and of at least one school, and some students, having been dissatisfied with the provision. While there may be a range of reasons for this, it appeared that these partnerships lacked some of the key elements of partnership working identified above. The evidence suggests that schools and tutors in the two partnerships may not have always been fully committed to the overall aim of providing vocational options for 14 to 16 year olds and that an agreed, partnership-wide, approach may not always have been established. One challenge of partnership working may be reconciling the views, priorities and concerns of a number of schools or of departments within a college in order to achieve this. A second, related, concern within these partnerships was the need for the identification of students who were appropriate for the programme, a need to enable students to make an informed decision to participate in the particular course. Where students were not in this position, it appeared that they either discontinued their involvement or, where this was not possible, became disruptive. Finally, there were indications that, in partnerships which had been less successful, communication between the most relevant individuals was not effective.

The evidence from the case-study visits suggests that there are benefits to students of **learning off-site**. Students had valued and responded to the experience of learning in a different environment at this stage in their school career, and of working with tutors who adopted a more adult and relaxed approach with them. In addition to the positive achievements of students who had participated, those who had learned off-site had frequently benefited in

terms of their personal and social development. This suggests that there is value in including off-site provision in a learning experience if one of the aims of the experience is to assist students' personal development. However, the partnership working required to offer this type of provision is not without challenges including logistical complexities and in relation to staffing and staff development. There were indications that partnerships were exploring approaches such as increased delivery by schools in order to overcome such challenges. In exploring such approaches, partnerships may wish to take into consideration the most appropriate balance between delivery in schools and off-site in order to ensure that students continue to benefit in the way that most of the students interviewed had done.

There were some instances in the case-study partnerships of **teachers or Learning Support Assistants accompanying or visiting students** while they were undertaking their courses off-site. In these cases, interviewees felt that this approach had a number of benefits. It was a useful way of enhancing the relationship between partners and ensuring effective communication between school and college staff. It was also seen as a good opportunity for monitoring the attendance, behaviour and progress of the students on their courses, and for making college tutors and students feel supported. Interviewees felt that visiting the students at their place of study confirmed that the school extended their responsibility for students to an off-site situation and showed the students that school staff value and take an interest in their courses. Although it is acknowledged that it can be challenging for schools to find the necessary staff to make these visits, partnerships could benefit from further exploring the value and potential benefits of such visits.

In the first year of the IFP, college staff had some initial concerns about the programme and pre-conceptions about the types of students involved. However, there appeared to have been some improvements over the last year in their perceptions of the programme, and tutors were starting to realise that there were benefits to students and to the college. Some school staff were also starting to notice positive impacts on the students. However, there were some concerns that teachers, particularly those who were not directly involved in the programme, were not fully aware of the IFP, and had some reservations about its potential benefits. Interviewees also highlighted the need for the profile of vocational qualifications to be raised among school staff. This suggests that there would be value in ensuring that school and college staff are **better informed about the IFP**, and for partnerships to find ways of effectively communicating the benefits and outcomes of the programme more widely. Such information could support schools' understanding of the IFP and vocational learning generally and, where appropriate, make a contribution to helping vocational learning to become an integral part of schools' curricula and ethos.

Students who participated in IFP, and remained engaged, valued and appreciated the adult treatment they received, the different learning environment and, to some extent, the independent learning they had experienced. However, the evidence from staff suggest that, where students

discontinued or found it hard to cope with IFP provision off-site, this was sometimes because they found it too challenging to respond to this alternative experience. Moreover, students who discontinued reportedly found that the course was not as they expected, had not fully chosen to participate or had wider issues with school or in their personal lives. This highlights the need for careful **identification of the most appropriate students**, who could respond to the alternative learning environment, who are then provided with sufficient, and accurate information, in order to make an informed choice and benefit fully from the experience.

6.2 Policy Implications

The IFP is now into its second cohort of young people, and many successes have been reported by the students and their teachers and tutors, as well as by staff in Lead Partner organisations. However, it is inevitable that increased flexibility and greater choice for 14-16 year-olds, usually involving learning at two sites and in different forms, will be accompanied by certain practical and logistical issues. The concerns that remain are relatively minor, but they do have a number of policy implications and, in the spirit of continuous improvement, the DfES and the various individuals and institutions involved in IFP might wish to consider the following remaining 'challenges':

- All parties appear to agree that, although it is by no means easy to involve employers, such involvement is beneficial for the IFP. It may be that more could be done by the DfES, IFP partnerships, LSCs, EBPs and other employers' organisations, to involve more employers. In addition, it might be worth giving the schools or colleges the resources to have dedicated time or to appoint a dedicated member (or part-member) of staff to liaise with employers.
- It emerged from the visits that some college tutors, in particular, would benefit from further relevant professional development opportunities. Whilst it is acknowledged that many demands are made on tutors' professional development time, there does appear to be a case for the provision of more training on guidance in respect of college tutors working with this age group, and on good practice in teaching the new GCSEs in vocational subjects.
- Another important finding was that some school staff were not aware of the IFP and its potential benefits. Time and resources permitting, national and regional organisations, as well as school managers, should look at ways in which they do more to raise the profile of the IFP in a school context. In some cases, it might be helpful for the school management team to signal their commitment to the IFP by holding a staff meeting or a whole-school training session focused on this provision.
- Student retention on the IFP has generally been good. In addition, where there has been discontinuation, this has often been due to the general factors that affect the 14-16 age group, rather than to anything specific to IFP provision. This does not, however, preclude the need to address some

of the reasons for discontinuation: schools should ensure that students receive good guidance when they are presented with course and option choices, and both schools and colleges should continue to strive to improve the student selection process.

- In order that the levels of student satisfaction and independence can be maintained, it is clearly important that students should continue to receive good levels of academic, pastoral and practical support. It would be worth school (and especially college) staff giving careful consideration to the question of what other extra practical, logistical and social support they could give to students.

Overall, the research ahs revealed that there are positive outcomes where schools and colleges and training providers work in partnership to offer greater curriculum flexibility to students at key stage 4. However, policy makers need to take into consideration the logistical and operational complexities in merging two types of providers, and the associated costs, when seeking to develop such provision.

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