

NATIONAL EVALUATION OF THE INCREASED FLEXIBILITY FOR 14-16 YEAR OLDS PROGRAMME

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Introduction

The Increased Flexibility for 14-16 Year Olds Programme (IFP) was introduced by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). This £120 million programme aims to '*create enhanced vocational and work-related learning opportunities for 14-16 year olds of all abilities who can benefit most.*' In order to achieve this aim, a total of 269 partnerships have been established each of which has a Lead Partner, usually a further education (FE) college. The partnerships involve links with schools and, in some instances, other training providers and employers. Funding to support these partnerships is channelled through the Local Learning and Skills Councils who also have responsibility for monitoring the IFP.

The partnerships aim to raise the attainment, to increase the skills and knowledge and to improve the social learning of the participating students as well as to increase their retention in education and training after 16. In meeting these aims, the partnerships are working towards a set of targets which relate to attendance, attainment at 16 and progression post-16.

This summary is based in the analysis of the baseline data provided by schools and Lead Partners. More than two-thirds (69 per cent or 1208 schools) of all schools which are participating in IFP provided details of the students who were involved in IFP.

Key findings

- ♦ 269 Lead Partners, which are usually Colleges of Further Education but include sixth form colleges, training providers, a university and an LEA, have formed partnerships with 1663 secondary schools, 76 special schools and 18 Pupil Referral Units to deliver IFP.
- ♦ Based on returns from 69 per cent of schools, at least 28,885 year 10 students were accessing vocational courses through this route and the majority were doing so away from their school site. If the average number of students participating is the same in the schools which did not respond, it could be estimated that there are approximately 42,000 young people involved in the programme.
- ♦ More than half (58 per cent) of the students were pursuing new GCSEs in vocational subjects and around a fifth (17 per cent) were taking NVQs at levels 1 to 3. A similar proportion (19 per cent) were undertaking other vocational qualifications.
- ♦ Students were working towards qualifications across a wide range of vocational areas. In the ICT, science and administration and business areas there was a proportional representation of students of both sexes.
- ♦ The majority of students were pursuing only one vocational qualification and nine per cent were pursuing more than one.
- ♦ Among the young people who were participating in the programme, it appears that the majority (75 per cent) of those who had attained level 5 and above in their key stage 3 tests were undertaking new GCSEs in vocational subjects. Amongst those who attained level 4 and below, just under half were pursuing GCSEs in vocational subjects and just over half were taking vocational qualifications including NVQs, which were most often at level 1.

Aims of the evaluation

The DfES commissioned NFER to undertake a national evaluation of IFP. 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 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.

Profile of IFP Partnerships

A total of 269 IFP partnerships in the 47 LLSC areas in England have formed partnerships with 1663 secondary schools, 76 special schools and 18 Pupil Referral Units. On average, a Lead Partner was in partnership with seven schools and supported the vocational learning of around 115 Year 10 students. In each school, an average of 24 students were accessing vocational options at key stage 4 through their participation in IFP.

Profile of IFP schools

The majority of schools identified by Lead Partners in the Autumn Term of 2002 who were taking part in IFP were comprehensive. By comparison with all schools in England, a greater proportion of IFP schools were Community schools. In addition, a greater proportion of schools involved in IFP were among those with lower attainment at key stage 3 and GCSE. Schools which were involved in IFP were slightly less likely to be among those who had a low percentage of their students who were in receipt of free schools meals.

Characteristics of IFP students

Details of the students who were participating in IFP were provided by just over two-thirds of the schools who were involved. The data from these 1208 schools were matched to the records for individual students on the NPD.¹ A total of 28,885 were identified by schools as participating in IFP. Around one per cent of these students (288 individuals) attended special schools and 61 attended PRUs. Analysis of the characteristics of the students revealed that:

- ♦ Just over half were male (55 per cent) and less than half were female (45 per cent)
- ♦ The majority were white (92 per cent), while four per cent were Asian or Asian British and two per cent black or black British
- ♦ For the majority (95 per cent) English was their mother tongue and the remaining five per cent had another language as their mother tongue
- ♦ Nearly a quarter (23 per cent) were in receipt of free school meals compared with 17 per cent of students nationally.
- ♦ Just over two-thirds (67 per cent) had no special provision for special educational needs compared to 81 per cent nationally. Six per cent either had a statement or had a statutory assessment and more than a quarter (27 per cent) were recognised for 'school action' or 'school action plus' compared with 15 per cent nationally.
- ♦ Around half of the students had achieved level 5 or above in their key stage 3 assessments in each of the subjects. More specifically, 49 per cent achieved level 5 or above in English, 50 per cent achieved this in mathematics and 51 per cent achieved level 5 or above in science.

¹ Overall, seven per cent of students did not match to NPD. For some characteristics data was missing for a greater proportion of students. Data on the characteristics of students includes students attending special schools but not those attending PRUs.

These students who were engaged in IFP appeared to differ from their peers in year 10 in schools which were participating in IFP, and in all schools in England, in most of these characteristics. More specifically, it appeared that IFP students were more likely to be male, to be white and to be in receipt of free school meals than their peers in year 10. Furthermore, a greater proportion of students involved in IFP were recognised at some stage on the SEN Code of Practice, including having a statement (33 per cent of IFP students compared with 20 per cent of all students in year 10 in IFP schools). Finally a smaller proportion of students who participated in IFP achieved level 5 or above in their key stage 3 assessments, compared with their peers in year 10 in IFP schools (between 49 and 51 per cent of IFP students achieved level 5 and above compared with between 67 and 68 per cent of all year 10 students in IFP schools).

Qualifications Undertaken²

The majority of students who were participating in IFP were undertaking a new GCSE in vocational subjects (58 per cent). Around a fifth (17 per cent) were taking an NVQ and a similar proportion (19 per cent) were taking other vocational qualifications. Seven per cent were pursuing GNVQs. Qualifications other than new GCSEs were most often at level 1 (29 per cent of students) although six per cent were pursuing level 2 qualifications and four per cent were undertaking entry level qualifications.

The most commonly studied new GCSEs in vocational subjects were Applied ICT (18 per cent of students), Health and Social Care (11 per cent), Leisure and Tourism (nine per cent), Applied Business (nine per cent) and Engineering (eight per cent). Among those pursuing NVQs, most of which were at level 1 as noted above, five per cent were working towards Hairdressing, three per cent were undertaking Food Preparation and three per cent were

undertaking Performing Engineering Operations. Of the 'other' qualifications studied, three per cent of students were taking the Foundation Construction Award, the same proportion were pursuing the Certificate in Motor Vehicle Studies and two per cent were undertaking Skills for Working Life.

Students were pursuing qualifications across a range of vocational areas. Nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of students were undertaking qualifications in ICT and 16 per cent were following courses which would lead to engineering and motor vehicle maintenance qualifications. Thirteen per cent of students were taking qualifications in the care and childcare vocational areas while ten per cent were pursuing administration and business-related qualifications and the same proportion were working towards qualifications in sports, leisure and tourism.

While some sectors, such as construction and hair and beauty, were dominated by either boys or girls, there were no notable differences in the sex of students studying qualifications in ICT, administration and business or science. The vocational areas of construction and catering appeared to have a disproportionate representation of young people with lower levels of attainment in all three assessments at key stage 3 while ICT, administration and business and science had higher representation of students with higher attainment levels.

Nine per cent of the students were taking more than one vocational qualification through their involvement with IFP. Half of the students were taking new GCSEs in vocational subjects only and just under a quarter were taking at least one new GCSE in combination with another qualification. In the main, students who were taking more than one qualification were pursuing different vocational areas (such as ICT and science or ICT and sports, leisure and tourism). However, a small number of students were said to be taking more than one qualification in the same subject area such as catering.

² It should be noted that a student could be pursuing more than one qualification and therefore percentages should not be totalled.

Overall, within the IFP cohort, there appears to be two distinct groups. One group are those who have higher levels of attainment, compared to all IFP students, who tend to be more likely to be pursuing new GCSEs in vocational subjects (75 per cent of this group of students were taking these GCSEs) and the broad vocational areas of ICT, administration and business and science. The second group are students who achieved level 4 or below at key stage 3. Just under half of this group were taking new GCSEs in vocational subjects and just over half were working towards NVQs or other vocational qualifications, most often at level 1 and in the subject areas of construction, catering and hair and beauty.

Location of Study

Although the majority of the students attended the Lead Partner organisation to pursue their vocational course, just over a third (34 per cent) attended another partnership organisation. Most often (for 30 per cent of all students), the students undertook their course at school, while three per cent of students attended further education colleges which were not Lead Partners and two per cent attended training providers or employers. It appeared that schools were more likely to be delivering new GCSEs in vocational subjects or GNVQs while training providers, employers and colleges including Lead Partners were more likely to be delivering NVQs and other vocational qualifications.

Research methods

In order to achieve the aims of the evaluation, a range of research methods have been adopted. The first stage of the research, on which the findings presented in this summary are based, involved a **baseline data collection exercise**. This was undertaken in the Autumn of 2002 and 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. It will also be linked to the GCSE outcomes for these students in 2005.

Between spring 2003 and spring 2005, further research will be carried out that will include:

- ♦ **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 schools each term.
- ♦ A programme of **case studies** in nine partnerships in spring 2003 and spring 2004.
- ♦ **Telephone interviews** with parents of students who are involved in the programme and with employers and staff in Higher Education Institutions.

Copies of this Research Brief (RBX11-03) are available free of charge from the above address (tel: 0845 60 222 60). Research Briefs can also be accessed at

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/>

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