



**Office for Standards  
in Education**

# **Increased flexibility programme at Key Stage 4:**

**Evaluation of the first year**

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## Introduction

1. The Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP) was formed as a result of policy described in the White Paper *Schools: Achieving Success*, July 2001. It provides funding to support the formation of partnerships between colleges of further education, schools and work-based learning providers. These partnerships aim to enhance vocational and work-related learning opportunities for local 14–16 year olds, including provision of courses leading to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in vocational subjects.
2. The broad aims of the IFP are to:
  - raise the attainment in national qualifications of participating pupils
  - increase their skills and knowledge
  - improve social learning and development
  - increase retention in education and training after the age of 16.
3. Partnerships aim to achieve the following targets:
  - one third of the young people involved in the project should gain at least one GCSE in a vocational subject at Level 2 (over and above their predicted GCSEs)
  - one third should gain at least one National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at Level 1
  - three quarters of the young people involved should progress into further education or training
  - attendance rates of the young people involved would match that of the average for the Key Stage 4 cohort.
4. Each partnership is expected to form a steering group to decide on the strategy. Such a group should be made up of senior representatives of the participating schools, colleges, training providers and other agents, with Local Learning Partnerships, Connexions Service and Education/Business Links (EBL) consortia invited to join in an advisory capacity. The partnership is required to nominate an individual or individuals to take responsibility for the planning, organisation and day-to-day operation of the pupil placements in colleges which would be part of the programme.
5. Schools continue to have overall responsibility for registered pupils participating in the provision and need to satisfy themselves that the curriculum offered to their pupils meets the statutory requirements.
6. Funding of up to £100,000 per partnership was available from 2002, with its allocation decided locally among the partners. The amount covers the costs of part-time vocational placements with further education/training providers (typically lasting one day or half a day), meeting pupils' travel between schools and colleges or work placements, equipment costs and learning materials, and funding for specialist courses such as those introduced to emphasise work-related learning or a particular subject area.

7. More than 260 IFP partnerships formed in the first year involving around three in four colleges of further education, almost half of all secondary schools and a small proportion of work-based learning providers. Colleges were nearly always the lead partner.

8. Partnerships formed quickly where existing relationships offered a basis for collaboration and communications. Elsewhere, partnership was new. These partnerships needed to work quickly to achieve the basis for a proposal for partnership and were seldom well enough placed to make more than minor organisational adjustments within individual institutions before commencing their activities in September 2002. Some partnerships reached agreements and synchronised parts of their timetables, typically one or two half days each week so that pupils could travel from several schools to college.

9. All IFP partnerships had the effect of broadening the curriculum provided for pupils at Key Stage 4. In nearly all instances there were courses offered wholly at schools, colleges or work-based learning providers, or through many different collaborative teaching arrangements. The level of take-up by pupils suggested that additional resources are being used other than the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) funding. Additional resources may come from Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), Excellence in Cities and local Learning and Skills Council Local Initiative Funds as well as school and college resources.

10. Most schools that are members of an IFP partnership have introduced the new GCSE courses; colleges offer the GCSEs, and a range of NVQ and vocationally related qualifications (VRQs). Work-based learning providers offer NVQs in the main, although some support basic skills courses in addition.

## **The inspection**

11. Ofsted is conducting a two-year survey at the request of the DfES. The survey is evaluating the impact of the IFP on the attainment, progress, learning and social development of those young people at Key Stage 4 who are experiencing a broadened curriculum. They may have begun GCSEs in vocational subjects in schools or colleges or embarked on NVQs or VRQs in colleges or training providers within these partnerships.

12. The survey objectives are to evaluate:

- the gains in attainment and knowledge, understanding and skills of pupils as a result of completion of the IFP. This will include achievement in qualifications compared with earlier forecasts, achievement of key skills and broader achievement
- the effects of increased flexibility on individuals, groups, schools and partners; breadth and balance in the curriculum; statutory requirements and entitlement, including the usefulness to learners of work-related learning and work experience

- the quality of teaching and learning in vocational courses, including the GCSEs in vocational subjects, and in relevant general courses including key skills
- the quality of careers education and guidance and its value; the effectiveness of work-related learning for qualifications and awards and preparation for further learning and training, including work-based directions
- arrangements to support and guide young people at points of transition, most particularly from the end of Key Stage 4 to post-compulsory education and training
- the fitness for purpose and suitability of the current range of vocational courses for the needs and ambitions of young people, and the value of qualifications for later stages in learning
- the management, co-ordination and leadership of local partnerships, communications, monitoring and the sustainability and capacity of the arrangements, including development work with employers and voluntary sector partners
- the value to providers of locally and nationally provided support and development programmes.

13. During the first year of the survey, from summer 2002 to summer 2003, visits were made to a sample of IFP partnerships. Preliminary visits were made to the lead partners of about ten partnerships during the summer term 2002 to monitor readiness to start the IFP in autumn 2002. These were followed by inspection visits to a further 50 partnerships in the autumn, spring and summer terms.

14. Visits were made to more than 60 colleges of further education or sixth form colleges, including two where further education is within a university structure, to around 20 work-based learning providers and to more than 80 secondary schools. Interviews were held with pupils, their teachers and trainers, careers education staff, senior managers of schools, colleges and training providers. Written and practical work was scrutinised and discussions were held with pupils about their progress, assessment, expectations and ambitions for the future. Lessons observed in schools predominantly covered new GCSEs. They were taught wholly by schoolteachers or jointly with colleges. Visits to colleges spanned GCSEs in vocational subjects and a wide range of VRQs and NVQs. Training providers focused on work-related qualifications and some NVQs.

15. For this survey, the GCSEs in vocational subjects were visited in partnership schools even though some such courses appear, in the event, to receive very little tangible support from the IFP. However, the range and scale of support, in funds or in kind, are very diverse. Ofsted's evidence suggests that around six in ten of all secondary schools have begun one or more new GCSE courses.

16. Further evidence was gathered at six-monthly intervals from section 10 inspections of secondary schools. Records spanning one year also provided evaluations

of work experience and work-related learning for pupils at Key Stage 4 and evidence of the introduction of GCSEs in vocational subjects.

17. An evaluation of work experience and work-related learning was carried out during the summer of 2003 with the voluntary support of a panel of employers. This included in-depth interviews with pupils and employers and a postal survey of almost 2,000 pupils. This work investigated the significance of work-related learning to pupils and its value in their work towards a qualification. The survey was supported by interviews with managers and teachers and support staff, such as learning mentors in schools, and with careers and guidance teachers. The results of this survey can be found in a separate publication, *Increased flexibility programme: improving work experience* (HMI 2220).

## Main findings

18. The IFP has shown early evidence of improvements in attitudes, behaviour and attendance in lessons for a significant number of pupils. There has been widespread formation of collaborative partnerships and the number of pupils undertaking the programme has exceeded the initial forecast. Pupils value the new-found diversity of their Key Stage 4 curriculum and engage well with the GCSEs in vocational subjects and NVQs. However, there are a number of weaknesses in the early implementation, often attributable to the short time available in advance of programmes starting. In order to provide good-quality provision, schools and colleges now need to improve the management and organisation of partnerships and the advice and guidance provided to pupils.

### Strengths of the IFP

- ❑ There has been widespread formation of collaborative partnerships involving around three in four colleges of further education and around half of all secondary schools.
- ❑ The IFP has encouraged diversification of the curriculum, providing pupils at Key Stage 4 with access to a broadened provision and range of qualifications. This included the support through collaboration for the introduction of the GCSEs in vocational subjects in many partnership schools.
- ❑ Pupils have responded positively to broadened learning opportunities within the GCSE in vocational subjects and to NVQ and VRQ programmes. The numbers of pupils enrolled on programmes is above the initial forecast.
- ❑ Pupils' attendance on an IFP course at a local college resulted in personal development. This included an awareness of membership of a learning community broader than that of the single school.
- ❑ Where collaborative activity takes place, it has successfully strengthened pupils' learning and enhanced teachers' professional development. In the best practice this brought about effective teamwork in teaching, assessment and grading.
- ❑ Stronger relationships with employers have developed as a result of the IFP. These include: periods of work experience that support progress towards qualifications; particular companies' development of support materials and offers of briefings and seminars about their industry.

### Areas for development

- ❑ The organisation in around one in four partnerships was unsatisfactory. In particular, there were weaknesses in joint decision-making between partners on timetable issues, courses to be provided and progression opportunities available to pupils.

- Only a very few partnerships ensured that the necessary information on pupils' prior attainment was consistently shared between providers. As a result, pupils were placed on courses at an inappropriate level. There were too many instances where expectations were too low for the broad range of abilities of pupils undertaking a vocational course; conversely, better support was required for pupils who found learning difficult.
- Teaching was good or better in only half of lessons seen, although satisfactory or better in almost nine in ten. Collaborative teaching was rarely observed. Where the GCSEs in vocational subjects were introduced by schools with little or no collaboration between partners, the work often lacked clear vocational authenticity despite broadened curriculum choice.
- Levels of attainment were unsatisfactory in lessons observed in a quarter of schools and a third of work-based providers.
- Very few partnerships had developed systems of quality assurance of courses taught in settings outside of school. There was little evidence of schools reviewing the quality of teaching and learning in college settings.
- Assessment was unsatisfactory in almost a third of partnerships visited during the summer term. By the end of the summer, around half of the visits revealed weaknesses likely to hinder pupils' attainment and progress.
- Advice and guidance were among the weakest elements observed in the first year of the IFP. They were unsatisfactory in one in five partnerships. Although the IFP was a general option in some partnerships, in too many, pupils were selected as a result of their behaviour or poor attendance at school.
- Progression opportunities were not always coherent, especially for those pupils who achieved an NVQ in a vocational area at the end of Year 10 or early in Year 11.
- The IFP has made little impression on the choice of courses typically made by girls and boys.

## Recommendations

19. To improve the impact of the IFP, partnerships should:
- establish clear protocols to ensure joint decision-making between the different partners. Schools should be involved in decisions about the types of courses and when and where they will be offered.
  - ensure that information on pupils' prior attainment is shared between providers prior to pupils being placed on IFP courses. Teachers in colleges and training providers should receive training to enable them to understand the data used in schools
  - match teaching in schools, colleges and training providers better to pupils' abilities
  - provide continuing professional development and support to enable the vocational aspects of the GCSEs in vocational subjects taught in schools to be enhanced
  - train teachers in colleges and training providers to set clear targets for pupils about the standard of work that is expected from them and how to provide regular reports on their progress
  - plan their curriculum far enough in advance to ensure information is available to pupils during their option processes in Year 9. IFP courses should be offered as an open option to all pupils. Places should be offered by aptitude, behaviour and attendance
  - allocate funds more equitably. Funding should be spent mostly on course costs or support rather than excessively on the co-ordination of the programme.
20. A broader range of qualifications should be available to ensure pupils have progression opportunities if they complete courses in Year 10 or early in Year 11.

## Curriculum

21. The overall quality of the curriculum and the extent of vocational links to learning in school were good or better on four out of ten visits and at least satisfactory in more than eight in ten. In these cases, pupils' curriculum was broad and balanced, was enriched by additional learning opportunities and had clear progression opportunities. Most partnerships successfully broadened the curriculum and offered greater choice and diversity to learners either alongside a full range of national curriculum GCSE subjects or as part of mixed GCSE, vocational and work-related learning provision. Provision was unsatisfactory in about one in seven instances. The common weakness was the lack of vocational application in GCSEs in vocational subjects.

22. Very good **curriculum planning** across a partnership was rare because most IFP partnerships started their planning too late to influence school timetables. This was particularly true of partnerships where there had been little previous collaboration

between partner organisations. There were few partnerships where schools and colleges worked together to share curriculum opportunities and in most partnerships there was considerable variation in curriculum quality among schools.

23. One **school timetabling** approach which proved quite successful set the IFP across two GCSE options with double lessons at times when some pupils travelled to study. These pupils then missed only one core lesson while out of school, which could be made up on a different day when other pupils were timetabled for that GCSE option. A small number of partnerships aligned timetables across several schools and the college(s). Alignments were for particular sessions, usually one or two half days each week.

24. Examples of good curriculum practice seen demonstrated opportunities for pupils to catch up on any lesson missed as a result of IFP arrangements:

*In one school, extensive timetabling planning minimises any negative impact on the broader curriculum and college courses are offered within the school options grid. In another, all pupils follow the core curriculum but those on NVQ courses miss some lessons in English, mathematics or science when they attend college. 'Catch-up' time is built in to their timetables.*

*This school (and at least two others in the partnership) has very good curricular arrangements that allow all pupils to take core subjects within their school on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. College courses take place on Wednesdays and work experience on Fridays, when those not taking college or work experience have most of their options courses at school. Those taking a college course and work experience also take one option in school, which often supports their vocational education, giving them relevant, complementary skills.*

25. **Curriculum diversification** continued as partnerships planned for the second funding year. Several more partnerships aligned school and college timetables to some extent and many expanded the range of courses they offered.

26. The time allocated to most courses was reasonable, with a full day or two half-days' attendance being typical. Most school-based GCSEs in vocational subjects were allocated four to six hours, but some schools timetabled these double-award qualifications into single-award time allocations. A few schools offered intermediate GNVQ courses in place of two GCSE options.

27. For some pupils, a full day devoted to a single vocational subject course proved too demanding, especially if theory lessons were held late in the day. Some partnerships responded by replacing the whole day with two half-days or by a combination of lessons taught in school and college. Others retained the full days because of transport or because pupils responded positively to a full day on the same course. This was particularly so in practical NVQ courses where practice and consolidation of skills were essential.

28. Effective partnerships found imaginative ways to enrich opportunity, connect learning to work experience and increase learning hours. Pupils gained a better

understanding of the links with industry and of the relevance of their course to working life. Some schools provide other forms of enrichment, as in the following example.

*In one partnership, the GCSE curriculum has been enriched by relevant off-site visits, and guest speakers. A multi-school/college conference for students is planned in conjunction with local employers and the education business partnership. The conference aims to connect learning about work with study for a qualification.*

29. Good progression opportunities for pupils after the age of 16 were available in most partnerships. Some young people had completed their qualifications sooner than had been expected. For example, some pupils progressed from Level 1 to Level 2 NVQ in the second year of the programme. However, the list of approved qualifications imposed limitations, particularly in NVQ courses, where levels of progression are not always accessible to pre-16 learners. Occasionally, a college could not offer an appropriate post-16 progression route.

## Teaching and learning

30. Across all forms of provision, teaching and learning was good or better in just over half of lessons observed. There was some good teaching in schools, colleges and training providers, although very little was excellent. The proportion that was good or very good is markedly lower than for teaching in secondary schools in Key Stage 4. Teaching in colleges was at least good in almost six in ten lessons but only around half of lessons were good in the schools and training providers. The proportion of teaching that was satisfactory or better was broadly similar in each form of provision, approaching nine in ten lessons.

31. There was marked variation by subject, but, in general, teaching was better in schools where practice drew on experience of GNVQ, or recent contact with business and industry, to illuminate the work. Although experience of GNVQ was usually an asset, it could be a hindrance where past work had focused solely on foundation level. In such cases, expectations and demand sometimes needed to be raised adequately to meet the needs of pupils with a broad range of ability and prior attainments who were taking the GCSEs in vocational subjects. Where vocational subjects were taught wholly in schools and without collaboration, lack of specialist resources and expertise too often resulted in teaching which lacked vocational applications.

32. Good teaching was seen in several areas including hospitality and catering, applied business, engineering, childcare, hairdressing, and motor vehicle maintenance. Most teachers had good subject knowledge and were aware of the assessment requirements of the courses. Teaching in colleges frequently drew on the relevant vocational experience of staff and used this to good effect to contextualise learning. This was often helped by good specialist practical facilities and equipment. Although a significant minority of college teachers did not have qualified teacher status, they were typically engaged in further education teacher training. However, too few college

teachers and training providers had received any training in the teaching of 14–16 year olds.

33. In the best practice, teachers shared their **learning objectives** with pupils and provided realistic working environments which established a good **vocational context**, enabling pupils to develop practical, social and key skills. Teachers prepared their lessons thoroughly to create pace and to stimulate and challenge learners. They were confident in demonstrating skills and provided good support and feedback on pupils' progress. Questions were used effectively to engage learners and to reinforce earlier learning. Clear links were established between practical and theory work. Lessons were purposeful, well organised and pupils made good progress.

34. Illustrations of good practice are given below.

*In leisure and tourism, pupils had recently attended a theme park as part of their customer services unit. In preparing the written work for follow up, the teacher used video filmed at the time of the visit to reinforce points made by the manager. Good use was made of the internet for groups to use the park's website for research and discussion and questioning to help pupils write unit answers are used effectively.*

*In one example of good support between partners, the teacher's knowledge of leisure and tourism has been greatly enhanced by support from the IFP and provided by the college. The college has set up well-structured, good-quality visits to Chessington, Thorpe Park and Milestones Museum. Good-quality teaching materials have been developed and teaching of key concepts, such as marketing analysis by college teachers, has supported good progress. College staff and the school teacher worked together to plan assignments.*

*The new GCSE courses are offered to and have recruited from all abilities in the school; able pupils have responded positively. The work has several strengths, including good planning and well-paced teaching leading to effective learning. Assessment criteria are shared with the pupils and there is a positive emphasis on vocational elements of the course and an expectation of independent learning.*

35. Weaknesses in teaching and learning often related to teachers' expectations which were not matched to pupils' abilities. Expectations were sometimes not high enough. For example, some pupils were working at level 2 in school and at level 1 in the college or work-based learning provider. Teaching was not always sufficiently challenging and targeted the capabilities of low- to middle-range pupils in too many lessons. In these sessions, more able pupils worked too slowly and consequently lost interest, while other pupils were moved on before they had fully understood the lesson's concepts. Too few pupils were given the opportunity to solve problems, learn independently or develop their study skills.

36. Overall, theory teaching was less successful than the teaching of practical elements of courses. The integration of theory within the practical work, including attention to key skills, often needed more attention in training organisations. A common problem was the failure to integrate underpinning knowledge and key skills with practical work. Additionally, weak or non-existent links with industry, a failure to develop prior learning and a lack of attention to the skills required for employment were common weaknesses. In some schools, the double-award GCSE in vocational subjects was taught in much less time than recommended. This resulted in a reduction in vocational applications and pressure on pupils to complete assignments in a short period of time.

37. In one school, visits were used well to enhance the vocational elements of the programme.

*Pupils taking GCSE in applied business at school are developing their knowledge and understanding of types of business, their aims and objectives and how they communicate. Pupils set up visits to a large national supermarket and small enterprises to prepare case studies for their assignments. Application of knowledge to specific cases is satisfactory and being developed by the teacher. Pupils use ICT satisfactorily for word-processing and internet research.*

38. Effective teaching gave good support to learners and extended their knowledge, but practice overall was uneven, as in these contrasting examples.

*Teaching in the child-care group was effective, owing to the close support and supervision of pupils by the staff. The small group of ten girls included a number whose behaviour was challenging. High expectations were clearly established and respected along with the setting of personal targets and the reinforcement of acceptable behaviour through commendation.*

*Teachers' expectations of the pupils were not high enough. The teaching methods used were appropriate but more teacher input was required to enable pupils to develop fully. Teachers expected pupils to use independent learning skills but without the development of background knowledge or selective research skills.*

39. In most lessons, pupils' learning benefited from their motivation to acquire new knowledge and to apply skills in a practical context. Pupils were proud of their achievements and were generally confident in articulating what they had learned. They were keen to attend college and welcomed the opportunity to study in an adult environment. Improvements in behaviour and attendance were often attributed to these differences. Where targets were realistic and teaching was stimulating, pupils made good progress, sometimes exceeding expectations.

40. Opportunities to develop and accredit **key skills** in vocational contexts had not been effectively managed by partnerships. Key skills were often pursued weakly or given too little attention. When appropriately integrated, their vocational relevance was

understood by pupils and associated with improving their ability to communicate, select and use appropriate ICT resources. On rare occasions they applied number skills and concepts, as in the following example.

*In one college, pupils taking GCSE in engineering demonstrated good practical skills and used precision instruments effectively. Application of number was developed through the need to measure accurately and calculate. Course design was effective in developing the broader key skills as pupils solved problems and worked with one another, dividing up tasks efficiently as they implemented designs for a land yacht.*

41. The sharing of good practice was present in only a few partnerships visited.

*The very good resources and specialist teaching available at a centre of vocational excellence are made available for limited periods on agreed days planned in advance. This collaboration, in leisure and tourism and in applied art and design, enabled school and college teachers to discuss teaching and assessment methods and provide access to a better range of provision for learners, without over-stretching the capacity of the college resource.*

*The partnership arranged a series of summer conferences. These were collaborative ventures between the IFP and several local employers, each of whom provided seminars on specific topics relevant to the GCSE courses.*

42. The proportion of **unsatisfactory or poor lessons** was high, compared with national figures for Key Stage 4, at around 10% overall. In schools this rose to more than 15% of lessons being unsatisfactory mainly in the new GCSE courses. In leisure and tourism, and health and social care taught in schools there was limited vocational application or collaboration with employers and companies. Weaker lessons in engineering and manufacturing did not exploit new technology, ICT or computer-aided design/computer-aided manufacture (CAD/CAM). The highest proportion of teaching judged to be unsatisfactory across all provision was in manufacturing and construction when it was taught in colleges and work-based learning providers.

43. In the unsatisfactory or poor lessons, planning was weak and pupils were not actively involved in learning. In too many instances, pupils were insufficiently challenged and sometimes poorly behaved. Mundane activities such as copying text without understanding or interest resulted in little gain in knowledge for learners. In a minority of lessons, teachers did not have sufficient knowledge of the course and subject. A few courses had been disrupted by frequent changes in staffing. There were many examples where assignment work was incomplete or not marked.

44. Pupils' learning was satisfactory or better in around nine in ten lessons. There was some variation in this proportion across the different types of provider, with only about eight in ten lessons being satisfactory in training providers. Pupils gained good

understanding and skills when learning objectives were clear and the pace and variety of lessons were maintained, for instance through a succession of different activities. This could be through the day (a whole day each week), or by group activity interspersed with individual work. Learning was more effective when pupils had been taught to use study skills. By taking some responsibility for their work, making notes as teaching progressed or using the internet, they made good progress at a brisk pace.

*Schemes of work are well documented and shared with partner schools. Lessons are well planned and structured, offering a good balance of practical and theory work. For example, in a health and social care class the teacher used questions skilfully to engage learners and encourage participation. The lesson was well planned to include a good mix of teacher-led work, and work in small groups and individually. The teacher used her own industrial experience to enhance the session and to provide real examples of health care practice. All pupils have access to specialist support during workshop and classroom sessions.*

*Work in lessons at the college is well paced, pupils are expected, and if necessary reminded, to take notes during lessons. The college resources centre is currently placing course materials on the website so that pupils can access the content remotely from their school. This enables pupils to reinforce their learning and so allows their understanding to be applied in coursework assignments between sessions at college.*

## Attainment and progress

45. Attainment and progress were judged to be good in over a quarter of visits to providers involved in IFP, but unsatisfactory in nearly a fifth. They were weakest in work-based learning providers where a third of visits showed attainment and achievement to be unsatisfactory. The factors distinguishing effective from unsatisfactory work include the use of prior attainment information, knowledge of the relevant vocational sector, work-related skills and the development of key skills, independent learning skills and underpinning knowledge.

46. Pupils were acquiring knowledge, understanding and skills satisfactorily in around four in five courses inspected. In the majority of courses, pupils were developing better attitudes to learning and improving their attendance, motivation, behaviour and employability. Overall, there was a general expectation that learners would achieve at a higher level by the end of Key Stage 4 than previously expected.

47. The use of specialist workshops and learning centres in colleges and some training providers gave pupils opportunities to use a wider range of equipment and software than is typically available in schools. However, a few pupils made unsatisfactory progress because they were not allocated enough time to practise their new skills in a practical environment. A few partnerships made very efficient use of

facilities that were in very high demand by timetabling carefully judged blocks of time when students could use specialist equipment across the year.

48. Pupils made good progress with practical skills on the majority of courses but key skills development was too variable across programmes. The development of knowledge, skills and understanding improved over the course of the year. Effective planning for key skills development was found in only half of visits, with very few pupils working towards key skills qualifications. Pupils' understanding of industry and enterprise was underdeveloped, especially in school-based GCSEs in vocational subjects.

49. Due attention was paid to **health and safety** by nearly all providers. In the very small number of cases where health and safety requirements were flouted, the problem was caused by one or two irresponsible pupils whose behaviour was not managed adequately.

50. Transfer of information about pupils' prior attainment at the beginning of the courses was frequently unsatisfactory. Data transfer and colleges' understanding of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum test results often improved as a result of inspectors' visits, but they continued to be found wanting in new visits throughout the year. This meant that mismatches between pupils' learning needs and the level of provision were not addressed, especially in colleges and training providers. The lack of information hindered teachers' efforts to match the pace of learning to their pupils' capabilities, so the differentiation of learning activities was frequently inadequate. In some cases, pupils were placed on courses which were at an inappropriate level. Able pupils were too often insufficiently challenged, particularly where they pursued NVQ level 1 courses.

51. The level of **challenge** was sometimes excessive for weaker pupils, leading to frustration and unsatisfactory behaviour in theory lessons. Many lower-ability pupils struggled with GCSEs in vocational subjects because they needed additional support with basic literacy and numeracy. Pupils interviewed often cited the writing demands of portfolios and coursework as the most difficult aspect of their work. ICT was insufficiently used to support them while developing their portfolios or in drafting and revising coursework assignments. The use of writing frameworks and keyword or diagram lists to help pupils structure longer answers was very underdeveloped.

52. Pupils were clearly learning on courses, but processes for setting and monitoring pupils' individual **learning targets** were often inadequate. The quality of assessment and feedback was weaker in new GCSE courses than some other longer-established courses.

## **Attitudes, behaviour, attendance and broader achievements**

53. The improvement of pupils' attitudes, behaviour, attendance and broader achievements was a strength of the programme. They were good or better in nearly three visits in five and satisfactory in more than nine out of ten visits.

54. Pupils spoke positively of their experiences and valued their increased confidence, self-esteem and the vocational orientation of the courses. The vast majority enjoyed their courses and those attending colleges or work-based learning providers valued the adult learning environment of a further education setting. Social

competencies were often encouraged by their new-found membership of a learning community broader than their individual school. Pupils made gains in self-discipline, responsibility and accreditation of skills. They were often positive about their experiences of the IFP.

*One school surveyed pupils' opinions and found they responded to the more adult environment and, in NVQ courses, the emphasis on skills' development and relative lack of written work. They enjoyed hands-on learning and, in hair and beauty, learning through discussion. Construction pupils were taking pride in their work. Pupils benefited from working with others studying at a higher level.*

55. In the best instances, pupils' attitudes were mature; they were well motivated and confident and sustained good attendance. This was particularly so where colleges used appropriately trained teachers or where staff were selected because of their experience of working with school-aged pupils. Pupils' attitudes were best on courses which had clear practical applications and experiences.

56. Pupils were motivated by learning in varied surroundings and groupings. They valued their college places and did not wish to jeopardise them. Social learning was often good. Pupils interacted and co-operated well with peers from their own and other schools.

*In one partnership, pupils taking business visited a business skills centre to evaluate computing applications and take part in computer-simulated activities and problem-solving. There was a strong group spirit. Initially there was some rivalry between schools but this subsided as pupils learned to collaborate with their peers.*

57. Strategies to deal with problems of behaviour were generally effective and learning mentors contributed strongly in several partnerships. Good behaviour in lessons at college often led to improved attitudes to work back in school, as in the following example.

*Another partnership introduced a behaviour contract, half-termly reports and 'compliment' reports. It also faxed records of attendance to schools. Schools commented on the improved behaviour and attendance, with one citing an attendance improvement of around 13% for all pupils undertaking the IFP. Incidents of behavioural difficulty in school had reduced sharply for one pupil who was living in public care.*

58. Pupils' **attendance** overall has been about 85% (as recorded in lessons, without allowance made for authorised absence). There are no national benchmarks for Year 10 attendance but this is below average attendance levels in schools in general. Attendance declined over the course of the year from 87% at the beginning of the year to 83% in the summer term. However, attendance figures should be regarded with some caution as some of the absence was due to commitments back at school.

59. There were appropriate strategies in most partnerships to respond when levels of absence or attitudes were unsatisfactory. Receipt of immediate information allowed college mentors or school staff to manage absence. The more effective partnerships ensured that all staff were appropriately trained and familiar with the IFP protocols.

## Assessment and monitoring of progress

60. The quality of **assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress** was a cause for concern throughout the first year of the IFP. Overall, across all forms of provision, almost a third of assessment practice was unsatisfactory. During the spring term, only a quarter of institutions visited demonstrated good or very good assessment practice and a further quarter were unsatisfactory. By the end of the summer term, around half of visits revealed one or more weaknesses likely to hinder pupils' attainment and progress.

61. Teachers were often uncertain about **grading criteria**. Consequently they lacked confidence in the setting of predictive grades. This was the root of much of the weakness in assessment practice seen. Too many pupils were unclear about the standard of their work in relation to the course and were not given enough information about their overall progress.

62. Pupils generally received appropriate oral feedback on their progress. In examples of good practice, assignment task sheets gave pupils clear guidance on how to achieve good grades and complete their assignments competently. In marked work, teachers had provided helpful, written comments to pupils to show them how to improve.

63. Nearly all schools had well-developed systems for setting targets and tracking pupils' progress. However, there were difficulties in applying these systems to vocational courses, especially NVQs. ICT was not being used effectively by work-based learning providers to enable young people to progress well, particularly in building portfolios and similar records for assessment. **Communication between partners** to inform teachers, pupils and parents about the progress that pupils were making was weak. Many colleges provided half-termly or termly reports to schools. However, the quality of feedback on learners' progress was variable. Comments were too general, with little information on attainment and academic progress, and in many cases lacked clearly defined targets for improvement. In many partnerships these reports were presented at times which did not fit in with the schools' reporting cycle.

64. Communication of assessment information within partnerships needs to improve. Although there was some development, very few colleges had yet made adequate use of prior attainment to inform planning for learning, to set targets, or to track pupils' progress. In many instances, and frequently at training providers, necessary information was unavailable. Often schools had not provided Key Stage 3 results and, even where they had, colleges generally needed guidance on their use.

## Information, advice, recruitment and enrolment procedures

65. The quality of **information, advice, recruitment and enrolment procedures** was satisfactory in eight in ten visits and good or better in nearly three in ten. Considering it was the first year of the programme, procedures for initial advice and

guidance were managed adequately in most partnerships. Nevertheless, this was one of the weakest elements of the IFP because grant confirmations were too late for the usual options process. This contributed to advice to young people which was too late.

66. The most effective partnerships planned far enough in advance to make information available for pupils to make sensible choices. They also arranged 'taster' or college days and induction activities to help them settle into their courses. **Enrolment** on courses was rarely co-ordinated within partnerships, with schools operating a variety of systems. In most cases, careers and progression information was needed far earlier to inform pupils' choice of course.

67. Many partnerships, in expectation of a second year of grant support, introduced improvements in the timing of information for prospective pupils, and their parents, on the basis of experience in the first year. Most partnerships had provided information on the courses available for 2003 to 2005 in time for schools' option processes for Year 9 pupils. Other improvements included college briefing days and opportunities for college staff to attend parents' consultation evenings at partner schools. Some partnerships produced an information booklet common to all schools and IFP providers.

68. Most IFP proposals fulfilled the criteria about the range of pupils to be recruited. However, some will not meet their targets because some courses offered did not prove viable and hence changed the balance of programmes actually implemented across the partnership as a whole. GCSE courses in vocational subjects were usually offered to all pupils, whereas work-related and occupational courses were often restricted to groups or individuals that schools thought would benefit from them. In practice, some pupils had attained Level 1 during Year 10 and progressed to Level 2 in the same field, if a qualification was available. In some disciplines a suitable progression opportunity was not available, which frustrated pupils' ambitions and hampered progress. Many schools offered new GCSE courses independently of the IFP; these were retrospectively included and so enabled partnerships to reach their targets.

69. Some schools restricted IFP access to pupils likely to cause or experience problems, specifically targeting low-attaining pupils and those rejecting schooling. In too many partnerships pupils were selected to 'join IFP'. A few partnerships based their IFP offer on work with disaffected young people. This risked perpetuating a negative image of vocational education among pupils and parents. Only half of schools offered college courses as open choices for all.

70. In many programmes, particularly as the second year approached, demand for places exceeded capacity, leading to selection by aptitude, career ambition, behaviour, punctuality and attendance. Good recruitment practices were supported by tutorial careers advice. Connexions had little influence in most partnerships but, where it did, pupils and staff regarded the service as strongly beneficial. Most pupils valued the diverse opportunities for learning, although some parents were hesitant or cautious, distrusting unfamiliar qualifications.

71. Many programmes provided a fresh opportunity to disadvantaged pupils and those rejecting school. There were examples of pupils successfully re-engaging with education. However, successful inclusion often depended on further support, such as a regular mentoring service. In cases where support for pupils was inconsistent, their behaviour and attitudes declined, causing some placements to lapse. Young people

having **additional learning needs** in areas such as sight or hearing difficulty usually had unhindered access to programmes.

*In an example of good practice, a school options booklet includes information on the four GCSEs in vocational subjects, the National Open College Network (NOCN) taster courses and GNVQ level 1 courses. Information is comprehensive and includes course structure, assessment, mode of study, numbers of days in school and college and possible progression routes. Clear diagrams provide explicit guidance on how options should be chosen.*

*One college-school liaison officer works closely with all local schools, providing pupils with information on college courses and about the application process. All Year 10 pupils are offered the chance to attend a college experience day and Year 11 tutor groups are visited by college staff. All pupils have careers interviews with Connexions personal advisers. After applications are received, interviews are carried out within the curriculum area and offers made. Regular communication then takes place, prior to enrolment in September.*

## Guidance and support

72. There was a wide variation across partnerships in the quality of guidance and support. They were good or better in about one in four visits, and unsatisfactory in more than one visit in five, a higher proportion than would usually be found in long-established provision.

73. In the best practice, the vocational courses were part of the school options grid; pupils were supported in making realistic but challenging choices that were likely to build on their interests and ambition and match their prior attainment. In these instances, pupils were motivated by the course and its relevance to their career ambitions.

74. As partnerships made their preparations for expansion of provision in the second year of the IFP during the summer term of 2003, greater emphasis was placed on guidance-related issues. In the best examples, Year 9 pupils were invited to taster events or college days; college staff attended pupil and parent briefing sessions and, occasionally, individual interviews were conducted by college staff. Guidance for progression opportunities post-16 was generally good. However, there was still much work to be done in preparing young people for the transition at the ages of 14 and 16. The level of support provided by Connexions services was improving but was subject to excessively wide variation across partnerships.

75. The availability and quality of **learning support** were insufficiently well developed overall. It was challenging for partnerships to provide timely and well-focused learning support to those pupils who attended from several schools to study at college and needed additional support in order to progress well.

76. In good practice, there were agreements between schools, colleges and work-based learning providers. Information was shared within these agreements and learning support was either funded through the lead partner or by the school. However, too few colleges were as yet equipped with the relevant information to make a rigorous assessment of individual learning needs, which hindered the implementation of learning support provision. In a few partnerships, many lower-attaining pupils had been encouraged to take GCSEs in vocational subjects and received insufficient additional support with literacy, numeracy and ICT skills to enable them to progress well. Where there was no planned agreement within the partnership, funding constraints or lack of clarity over responsibilities limited or hindered the efficient use of the resources available to address these needs. Learning support assistants and mentors made a significant contribution to pupils' learning in several partnerships.

77. Recruitment on many courses demonstrated conventional choices by girls and boys. This was the case, for example, in fields such as motor vehicle maintenance, engineering, hairdressing and, to a lesser extent, health and social care.

78. In one partnership, provision was made available to all pupils, regardless of learning difficulty or disability.

*The application form included a special needs section and support needs were identified through discussion with school, parent/guardian and pupils. The first stage of the individual learning plan focused on support needs. Support in a college was comparable to that received in school and in some cases better. Learning support assistants worked alongside teaching staff in all classes and other professionals were involved as appropriate. A comprehensive equality and diversity policy was successful in fostering and maintaining an inclusive approach. English as an additional language needs have been met through placements or links with the English as a second language team in college.*

## Work-related learning and work experience<sup>1</sup>

79. The organisation and management of **work experience** by the school, college or work experience agency were good in nearly a third of visits but inadequate in a similar number. The most effective work placements were carefully planned to give pupils opportunities to develop a wide range of new skills.

80. Most schools have a network of contacts for work experience and employers willingly support them by providing work placements. Employers are committed to the

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<sup>1</sup> See *Increased flexibility programme: improving work experience* (Ofsted, 2004) for a detailed report on work experience.

broad aims of work experience but many do not fully understand their role, the purpose of the work placement or its contribution to the pupil's programme of study.

81. Placements are most effective when pupils are well prepared to get the most from the experience and where employers receive information about both the pupil and the aims of the placement. Effective organisers endeavour to provide clear placement descriptors, agreed with all parties, giving clear guidance to pupils and employers about what to expect. However, the advance organisation and management is inadequate in too many cases.

82. Pupils' understanding of the host establishment, its objectives and nature of its core business, organisation and structure is generally satisfactory and often good. Nearly all pupils feel that work experience helps them to understand the world of work and how their employer's business works.

83. The development of work-related skills, knowledge and concepts and key skills is satisfactory overall and often good. The most effective work placements are carefully planned to give pupils opportunities to develop a wide range of new skills and to enhance their social skills. Pupils value the working relationships that develop.

84. Work experience is usually effective in developing pupils' understanding of the workplace, supporting their social learning and developing their ability to communicate with adults and to take advice. Supportive employers and employees enable vulnerable pupils to learn a range of skills, helping their confidence and self-esteem. Extended work placements are often highly successful in improving motivation, self-esteem and attendance among disaffected pupils.

85. Most pupils make a satisfactory record of what they do and learn on work placements but too many fail to reflect on or evaluate their experiences. Not all schools convince pupils of the importance of the course log or diary. Some pupils are not aware of planned follow-up activities and they consequently fail to maintain their diaries.

86. In most cases, there are few discernable links between the work placement and school or college courses. Even where teachers have planned coursework or other activities that directly link with work experience, pupils' recording of evidence for later use in courses or for assessment is often unsatisfactory.

87. Opportunities are frequently missed to link the work placement with course assignments on vocational courses. When the placement has links with a specific course, pupils use their course diaries more effectively, though few diaries draw pupils' attention to specific learning outcomes for such courses. Other links to learning in school are underdeveloped.

88. Although they explore possible career options in school, the majority of pupils on work placement are not well informed about careers within the host organisation or the associated qualifications and training.

## **Resources and accommodation**

89. Resources and accommodation were good or better in two out of five institutions. This was particularly true in Centres of Vocational Excellence and specialist colleges. Good provision for vocational courses in college gave pupils access to equipment not

normally found in schools, such as kitchens, engineering workshops with CAD/CAM equipment and hairdressing salons. Pupils often had access to college libraries, ICT suites and good online material outside their classes.

90. Pupils appreciated the specialist resources, which extended their horizons and improved their motivation. In the best provision, a clear vocational identity was offered, and ICT and learning support services were conveniently and fully accessible. Technical support was appropriate and well used. Text books, materials and appropriate clothing for workshop wear were available.

91. Resources and accommodation were unsatisfactory in one in six institutions. Some providers, more often in schools than colleges or work-based learning providers, failed to establish a distinctive vocational character for their programmes. Technical and associated learning support was not specifically allocated and drab accommodation featured few vocationally relevant displays. Leisure and tourism courses in schools suffered from awkward, unconvincing accommodation and little relevant display, weaknesses which were rarely seen in colleges.

92. Many courses were using appropriate textbooks which staff often supplemented. However, resources tended not to be differentiated for diverse learning needs and some courses suffered from a lack of written, visual and ICT resources.

## **Organisation and management of partnerships**

93. Leadership and management of the partnerships were good in nearly two fifths of partnerships but unsatisfactory in one fifth. Partnership structures were generally found to be fit for purpose. The best partnerships demonstrated a shared strategic vision and a clear commitment to enhancing vocational opportunity. The most successful partnerships had clear protocols which covered all aspects of operational management. During the year, growing numbers of partnerships developed formal agreements and protocols.

94. Most steering groups had appropriate representation including local Learning and Skills Councils, LEAs, Education Business Partnerships and Connexions. In the best partnerships, steering group meetings were well attended, discussing operational and strategic matters. In sharp contrast, in a few partnerships meetings were poorly attended and there was insufficient monitoring of the outcomes of the partnership. In the partnerships where management was unsatisfactory, partner institutions did not have clear expectations of each other. Operational management relied too often on informal contacts rather than clearly defined procedures. In a small minority of partnerships there was distrust of partner organisations at course and departmental levels.

95. Communications between colleges and schools were often well developed at senior level but in need of improvement at an operational level. The day-to-day operations usually ran smoothly, especially when a college operational co-ordinator was in place. This resulted in effective communication on absences, attendance and transport arrangements. However, communication about pupils' achievement was often unsatisfactory. In far too many cases, information on prior attainment and learning support needs was not passed from schools to colleges. Similarly, progress reports on pupils' work in college often lacked detail of their academic progress.

96. Overall, operational **planning at strategic levels** improved throughout the year. At first, some strategic planning took place without sufficient consideration of resource issues or timescales. A significant number of partnerships felt unable to plan effectively until future funding arrangements were confirmed. The more successful, and often larger, partnerships identify IFP funding as one source among several and therefore regarded their plans as being more secure.

97. **Course-level planning** was satisfactory overall. There were instances where course leadership was outstanding, characterised by enthusiastic and able teachers who were well resourced and supported by effective managers. These contrasted sharply with a few examples of poor leadership where poor communications, inadequate monitoring and inadequate developmental resources contributed to dissatisfaction among teaching staff. Strategies to engage employers and develop new industry links were not well developed, although colleges and schools with existing strong links made good use of them.

98. The flow of information between managers and teachers was usually satisfactory, but rarely good. Time allocations for course development varied, being largely satisfactory in colleges but unsatisfactory in schools. The need for further refinement of timetabling to achieve a greater degree of commonality was recognised by many partnerships in planning for the second cohort.

99. **Monitoring of programmes** and of pupils' progress was uneven. A few partnerships monitored programmes well, but at institutional level monitoring was at best satisfactory, and in some cases poor. There was limited use of data on pupils' progress because partnerships did not share information well enough.

100. **Monitoring at course level** was weak overall, and very often not seen as a priority. Teaching in colleges was often subject to standard college quality assurance mechanisms but seldom observed by specialists in pre-16 work. The outcomes of the colleges' self-assessment were rarely shared with schools. The effectiveness of training for staff not accustomed to teaching 14–16 year olds was rarely monitored. The clear need for better development of study skills within many programmes was rarely recognised.

101. Staffing was satisfactory overall. The need for **increased industrial experience for school teachers** was rarely addressed. College teachers had appropriate vocational backgrounds but they rarely had qualified teacher status or experience in teaching 14–16 year olds. However, some subjects were taught by very experienced teachers, both in schools and colleges.

102. **Staff development** was variable and, though improving, often remained unsatisfactory. Teachers and/or support staff frequently accompanied pupils to college and joined in their classes. However, college staff rarely spent time in schools unless they were co-teaching GCSE courses. A few partnerships successfully arranged for school and college teachers to teach collaboratively to share subject expertise, vocational experience and pedagogy and, after an initial period of adjustment, such arrangements could offer strength to the range and relevance of the work. Vocational updating for teaching staff was not a high enough priority and the current levels of activity were unlikely to redress this quickly. Training in 14–16 teaching for college staff was well developed in a few colleges but more usually was limited to a single day of

activity. Planning for collaborative teaching was also uneven. There was little sharing of teaching techniques. Joint course planning and grading moderation were also underdeveloped.

103. Sensible steps to sustain partnerships were being taken in about eight in ten cases. More often in the larger partnerships there was a strong sense of community and a real commitment to the programme. These partnerships were likely to have evolved through various forms of collaboration preceding IFP and some of them benefited from wide community involvement. Most partnerships were seeking to operate within a broad community base and were developing rapidly.

104. In contrast there was a wariness or distrust between some individual organisations within the same partnership, very often in areas where school rolls were declining or non-completion rates were high. In those partnerships which lacked adequate strategic direction and were not innovating, there was similarly little sense of community. Senior and operational managers had different perceptions of their IFP community role and expectations about how pupils should progress at the age of 16. In these instances, opportunities for young people were perceived to depend largely or wholly on a young person's single-institution membership rather than the opportunities for a pupil to access general and specialised courses within an alliance of providers that together could offer greater breadth and diversity than any single institution.

105. There needs to be greater clarity over **costs and fees** and the allocation of costs to particular needs, such as additional learning support, transport or consumable materials. Variations were considerable across localities. For example in some rural areas travel was very costly both financially and in the time taken for pupils to move between institutions. Variations in costs were such that it was difficult to confidently determine value for money. Costs can range from £400 per place per year for a half day each week for a motor vehicle qualification at Level 1 to a business and administration NVQ Level 1 for five hours per week, which cost £1,320 per year in another partnership. Even wider differences are found – for example £1,000 per year for a five-hour per week BTEC First diploma in agriculture and countryside skills compared with a course leading to an apprenticeship in vehicle engineering, taking place on one day per week which cost £5,300.

106. Within schools, there were differences in the extent to which the IFPs supported the introduction of GCSEs in vocational subjects. Some schools which were members of IFP partnerships received no financial support when introducing GCSEs in vocational subjects; some were supported by start-up funds, ranging between £1,000 and £2,500 per course; others still were working within IFP-supported grant structures that allocate introduced resources to support books and materials and augment this with funds for travel to visit employer placements or mount local partnership events.

107. Partnerships generally regard themselves as sustainable in the medium term but plans for achieving this are not well defined. Most concerns stem from capacity issues relating to specialist accommodation in colleges and funding. Lead managers often cited the lack of clarity regarding longer-term funding arrangements as a barrier to effective planning. Most partnerships expressed concerns relating to the financial sustainability of provision in its current form. The longer-established and larger partnerships often benefited from a number of different funding sources and a commitment from LEA and

local Learning and Skills Council, so were less vulnerable to funding changes. Smaller partnerships often regarded their continuation as dependent on funding; in these, many schools that were currently not charged by the college or training provider for places expected to withdraw from the partnership when they did have to pay for places on courses.

108. A small number of schools had either already withdrawn, or intended to withdraw, from partnerships and college provision. Their reasons included transfer of pupils to more competitive providers, unsatisfactory teaching and/or quality, and difficulty with timetabling. In a few particular instances, pupils reported being actively discouraged from going to college by their schools.

109. In a significant number of partnerships, schools are using the opportunities of joint course development and teaching to prepare for the implementation of their own vocational provision, mainly GCSEs. When developed, some of these intended to retain their pupils wholly at school. Overall, there was a general commitment to partnerships being sustained.

## Conclusion

110. The IFP is leading to some useful developments. The number of pupils enrolled is above the initial forecast by more than a third. Pupils value the new-found diversity of their Key Stage 4 curriculum and engage well with the GCSEs in vocational subjects and NVQs. Those having access to a college or a work-based learning provider place mostly attend consistently, are largely well motivated, show clear gains in social competencies and understand applications to work of learning from specialised courses in vocational disciplines. Specialist resources for learning at colleges and some work-based learning providers are often satisfactory or good.

111. However, weaknesses are evident in implementation and there is much to do to consolidate and bring about further improvement. Joint decision-making in partnerships needs to be increased. Costs, on which sustainability strongly depends, need to be clearer given the current wide variations. College and work-based learning staff need better information about pupils' prior attainments and how best to use this knowledge in planning teaching and learning. There needs to be a wider range of qualifications in NVQ and VRQs available to pre-16 pupils; pupils need more effective support in developing and maintaining their portfolios or other coursework for grading and assessment. Careers education and guidance need to be improved to enable pupils' aspirations and future ambitions to be met sooner. Learning from work experience needs to have clearer links to assessment requirements of qualifications.