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**Monograph:**

Golden, Sarah, O'Donnell, Lisa, Benton, Tom et al. (2006) Evaluation of Increased Flexibility for 14 to 16 Year Olds Programme: Outcomes for the Second Cohort - Research Brief. Research Report. DfES Research Briefs . Department for Education and Skills , Nottingham.

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## EVALUATION OF INCREASED FLEXIBILITY FOR 14 TO 16 YEAR OLDS PROGRAMME: OUTCOMES FOR THE SECOND COHORT

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### Introduction

The Increased Flexibility Programme for 14 to 16 year olds (IFP) was introduced in 2002. The aim of the programme was to 'create enhanced vocational and work-related learning opportunities for 14 to 16 year olds of all abilities who can benefit most' - this included supporting provision of the GCSEs in vocational subjects. The first cohort of Year 10 students embarked on their programme in 2002 and this was followed by a second cohort in 2003 and subsequent cohorts in the following years.

The IFP was the first national programme which formalised partnership working between post-16 and pre-16 education providers to deliver a broader curriculum for young people at key stage 4. Since its inception, the programme has expanded in the context of a continuing focus on improving the curriculum and qualification routes for 14 to 16 year olds and integrating these into a 14-19 framework. Through the IFP, partnerships between colleges and training providers and around 2000 schools have been established along the lines set out in the 14-19 Implementation Plan, and these have continued to develop and mature since the second cohort embarked on their programme.

The DfES commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to undertake a national evaluation of the first and second cohorts of IFP students, in order to examine the extent to which the aims and objectives of the IFP were being met.

This summary focuses on the outcomes for participants who participated in the programme between 2003 and 2005 (cohort 2) during a time of change in 14 to 19 policy. It should be stressed that this summary reflects the outcomes for only the second cohort of young people to participate in this new and developing approach to delivering a more flexible and vocational curriculum through institutions working in partnership. The evaluation of the second cohort of IFP participants aimed to:

- evaluate the extent to which the IFP has fulfilled its national aims, objectives and targets
- assess the impact of vocational qualifications and new work-related learning opportunities on young people's attainment and post-16 progression.

## Key Findings

The IFP exceeded its target in so far as the majority of young people made a positive **transition**. The majority (87 per cent) of young people who participated in the second cohort of IFP progressed into further education or training. This was consistent with the percentage of the first cohort who progressed.

The IFP was also positively associated with the **attainment** of participants, but this was not consistent across all types of qualifications studied. Young people who took NVQs and GNVQs did better than might be expected, given their prior attainment, while those taking other vocational qualifications<sup>1</sup> did less well. Young people taking GCSEs in vocational subjects achieved at levels broadly commensurate with expectations.

IFP appeared to be particularly advantageous for particular **types of students**. Female students gained more points in their IFP qualification than similar students who were male. However, male students who took NVQs gained more points than female students taking NVQs, once prior attainment and other factors were taken into account. Students with lower attainment at key stage 3 gained higher total point scores at key stage 4, relative to their prior attainment, than similar students with higher key stage 3 attainment.

### Outcomes for IFP cohort 2: Achievement of qualifications

Using multi-level model analysis, the research examined the extent to which the IFP met its objectives in relation to the attainment of young people who participated in the programme. This analysis explored their attainment, compared with similar students who had not participated, in terms of:

their achievement of the IFP qualifications they had undertaken

their total points score at key stage 4 and their eight highest grades achieved

their achievement of five A\*-C GCSE grades or equivalent.

Early analysis<sup>2</sup> revealed that students who participated in the second cohort of IFP differed significantly from their peers in some key respects. They were significantly more likely to be male, white, in receipt of free school meals and recognised for school action or school action plus on the register of SEN than their peers in the same schools. Moreover, the attainment at key stage 3 was lower overall among the whole IFP cohort than for all students in their year group not participating in the programme. These differences were taken into account in the statistical models.

### Did the IFP participants achieve their IFP qualification and what influenced this?

The **majority of participants** in the second cohort of IFP had **achieved the qualifications** that they had undertaken through the programme. Overall, without taking into account prior attainment, 93 per cent of the GCSEs in vocational subjects undertaken were achieved at grades A\* to G and 39 per cent at A\* to C grades. Of the GNVQs undertaken 81 per cent were achieved. Around two-thirds (64 per cent) of NVQs, and 58 per cent of other vocational qualifications undertaken by a sample of young people, were achieved.

Students' achievement of the qualification that they were undertaking through IFP was associated with their **prior attainment**. Higher attainment at key stage 3 was associated with higher attainment in students' IFP qualifications. However, the relationship between key stage 3 attainment and achievement of other vocational qualifications was less strong than was the case with the other types of qualifications studied which may suggest that they are assessing different skills and knowledge.

Once prior attainment and other characteristics were taken into account, **female** students achieved higher points in their IFP qualifications than similar students who were male. However, **male** students who were taking NVQs gained more points than female students taking NVQs.

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<sup>1</sup> 'other vocational qualifications' in this report comprise all qualifications taken by IFP participants that were not identified as GCSEs in vocational subjects, GNVQs or NVQs. This 'other vocational qualification' group includes all the entry-level qualifications, while the other three qualification types include level 1 and 2 qualifications.

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<sup>2</sup> Golden, S., Nelson, J., O'Donnell, L. and Rudd, P. (2004). *Evaluation of Increased Flexibilities for 14 to 16 Year Olds Programme: Profile of Partnerships and Students 2002 and 2003* (DfES Research Report 558). London: DfES.

The **location** where a young person pursued their IFP qualification did not emerge as being significantly associated with their achievement of that qualification.

### **Did the IFP participants do as well as might be expected at key stage 4 and what affected this?**

Overall, participation in IFP was positively associated with the attainment of participants, but this was not consistent across all types of qualifications studied. Young people who took NVQs and GNVQs did better than might be expected, given their prior attainment, while those taking other vocational qualifications did less well. Young people taking GCSEs in vocational subjects achieved at levels broadly commensurate with expectations.

More specifically:

Taking the students' prior attainment and other background characteristics into account, young people who participated in IFP, and took **NVQs and GNVQs**, achieved more points in total at key stage 4 than similar students who did not participate in the programme and *did not take these qualifications*.

It appeared that the young people who had **lower attainment** at key stage 3 (level 4 and below), and took NVQs gained even more in terms of the points achieved than their peers with higher attainment who took these qualifications.

Young people who had taken **other vocational qualifications** through IFP gained fewer points at key stage 4 than similar students who had not taken any vocational qualifications once prior attainment and other background characteristics had been taken into account.

However, this **varied in relation to prior attainment**. Young people who had lower attainment at key stage 3 (below level 4), and took other vocational qualifications, gained more points than might be expected while those with higher attainment gained fewer points than would be expected given their prior attainment and other background characteristics.

The analysis of the achievement of young people who took **GCSEs in vocational subjects**

through IFP revealed a more mixed picture. It was possible to compare these young people firstly with similar students who had not taken any vocational qualifications and secondly with similar students who had taken these qualifications but had not participated in IFP.

It appeared that students who took GCSEs in vocational subjects through IFP achieved slightly but significantly **more points** in total at key stage 4, compared with students who had not taken any vocational qualifications and had not participated in IFP.

However, this achievement was associated with the type of qualification studied. Students who took GCSEs in vocational subjects, but did not participate in IFP, also achieved more points in total at key stage 4 than similar students who did not take these qualifications. Moreover, they achieved more points still than similar students who *had* taken these qualifications *and* had participated in IFP.

The achievement of young people taking GCSEs in vocational subjects appeared to differ in relation to some characteristics. **Female** students, and those of **Black heritage**, who undertook GCSEs in vocational subjects through IFP gained significantly more points than similar students who were male, or were White, once prior attainment and other characteristics were taken into account.

### **What was the overall achievement for students who discontinued their involvement in IFP?**

Around 15 per cent of the IFP cohort who had embarked on GNVQs and GCSEs in vocational subjects appeared to have **discontinued** their involvement prior to the end of Year 11. The analysis suggests that discontinuing involvement in IFP was associated with significantly lower attainment at key stage 4 than might have been the case had the student either sustained their involvement, or not embarked on IFP.

Those who had discontinued appeared to be more likely to be eligible for free school meals, recognised for action on the register of SEN and have lower prior attainment, than might be expected given the profile of IFP participants in cohort 2 as a whole.

## Did IFP participants achieve five A\* to C grade GCSEs or equivalent?

In terms of achieving the level 2 threshold of five GCSE passes at grades A\* to C, or equivalent, students who had participated in IFP had a **lower probability** of achieving this compared to similar students who had not participated in the programme, once prior attainment and other background characteristics had been taken into account. It is worth noting, however, that 32 per cent of young people were undertaking qualifications through IFP at level 1, and six per cent were taking entry level qualifications, which would not contribute to the level 2 threshold.

Young people who participated in the second cohort of IFP had a **lower probability** of achieving the level 2 threshold **including mathematics and English**, compared to students who were similar in terms of prior attainment and other background characteristics but did not participate in the programme. Moreover, IFP participants achieved lower grades in English and in mathematics compared with similar students who had not participated in the programme and this difference was more marked among those taking NVQs and other vocational qualifications. However, further analysis suggested that IFP participants who undertook GCSEs in vocational subjects, NVQs and other vocational qualifications made significantly less progress between key stages 2 and 3, *before they embarked on the programme*, than might be expected given their prior attainment and other characteristics.

## Did IFP participants progress into further learning post-16?

The **majority** (87 per cent) of young people who participated in the second cohort of the IFP were reported by schools to have **continued into further education or training** after finishing Year 11, which exceeds the target for IFP partnerships of 75 per cent.

A range of variables emerged as being influential on young people's post-16 destination, including their IFP experience pre-16. Students who had taken an **other vocational qualification** through the programme had a **lower probability** of continuing into further

learning post-16 compared to students in the IFP cohort who were similar in terms of prior attainment and other background characteristics but had taken NVQs, GNVQs and GCSEs in vocational subjects.

While the reasons for this are not clear, the evaluation of the first cohort of IFP participants suggested that continuity in qualification type may support continued participation post-16 and that a smaller proportion of young people who took other vocational qualifications pre-16 continued into similar qualifications post-16 compared with those who took NVQs.

Where IFP participants had progressed into further learning, those who had undertaken an **NVQ or other vocational qualification** had a greater probability of progressing into FE (compared with sixth forms) than students who had taken GNVQs or GCSEs in vocational subjects through the IFP.

## Summary

Overall, the majority of participants in the second cohort of IFP had **achieved their qualifications** and had achieved in line with expectations given their prior attainment and other background and school-level characteristics. Indeed, those taking NVQs and GNVQs had achieved more points in total than students who were similar in terms of their prior attainment and background characteristics but had not participated in IFP but who may have been undertaking vocational qualifications. The attainment outcomes for the second cohort of participants were similar to those of the first cohort in many respects. However, for cohort 2, those taking GCSEs in vocational subjects achieved less well compared with similar students taking the same qualifications: this was not the case with the first cohort.

The majority (87 per cent) of the representative sample of young people had **progressed onto further education or training** after completing their involvement in IFP. This proportion exceeded the target for the programme of 75 per cent of participants remaining in learning post-16.

## Implications for policy and practice

The experiences of the first and second cohort of IFP participants may be helpful for informing the 14-19 Implementation Plan and similar programmes. The

findings relating to the second cohort point to a number of possible implications for policy:

**Sustaining progression** The finding that 87 per cent of cohort 2 IFP participants progressed to further education, training or employment, is very similar to the destinations finding for cohort 1. This suggests, again, that students' experience of IFP usefully contributes to engaging them in learning post-16. It is worth noting, however, that it is not possible to know what these young people might have chosen to engage with post-16, had they not participated in IFP in Years 10 and 11. An interesting area of investigation would be to explore the extent to which these transitions can be sustained, so that the young people remain in learning until the completion of their post-16 course or programme of study, or indeed, continue into further learning in the longer term.

**Provision of appropriate qualification types** It appears that studying 'other' vocational qualifications through IFP may lead to different outcomes for young people than studying NVQs, GNVQs and GCSEs in vocational subjects. Young people who had undertaken other vocational qualifications had a lower probability of continuing into further learning post-16 compared with their peers who participated in IFP but undertook other types of qualifications. Consequently, those involved with examination entry policies and curriculum provision for the 14 to 16 age group may wish to further scrutinise the types of qualifications that students are undertaking in order to ensure that they are appropriate for their needs.

**English and mathematics provision within IFP programmes** The analysis indicated that young people who participated in the second cohort of IFP had a lower probability of achieving the level 2 threshold of the five GCSE passes at grades A\* to C, or equivalent than similar students who had not participated in the programme. This was also the case when their achievement of level 2 including English and mathematics was examined. Moreover, on average, they achieved lower grades than similar students who had not participated in the programme in their English and mathematics GCSEs. Partnerships may wish to explore locally the reasons that could explain the

apparent relationship between IFP participation and achievement in mathematics and English. This could entail investigating the extent to which they offer support to IFP participants in relation to their core subjects, where lessons in these subjects are missed as a consequence of participation, and whether, and in what ways support could be enhanced. Moreover, there may be value in examining approaches to timetabling and identifying good practice which enables young people to participate in such provision without missing core subjects.

**Addressing discontinuation** A notable minority of young people (around 15 per cent) appeared to have discontinued their involvement in IFP before the end of Year 11. Such discontinuation was associated with students achieving significantly fewer points at key stage 4 than similar students who had either not embarked upon IFP, or had sustained their involvement. It appears that young people who had lower attainment, were eligible for free school meals or were recognised for action on the register of SEN were over-represented among those who discontinued. Those responsible for the programme at a national level may wish to consider how the needs of this minority might best be addressed in the delivery of the programme. In addition, partnership staff may wish to identify young people with these characteristics early in the programme and consider the need to target additional support at them with the aim of minimising the risk of them discontinuing their involvement.

**Location of study** The location where students pursued their IFP qualification, such as school, college or a training provider, did not emerge as being significantly associated with differences in the achievement of qualifications. This is in contrast to the analysis of the first cohort of IFP participants, which drew on questionnaire data relating to delivery that was not available for the analysis of the second cohort, and found that students achieved more points where delivery was shared or they studied principally at school. The finding that the location of study does not appear to be associated with outcomes for young people in the second cohort, may suggest that staff responsible for delivery in college have built on their experience of the first cohort and may also have drawn more fully on school staff's knowledge and expertise. If this is the case, then these developments should be continued and consolidated.

## Summary of research methods

In the autumn term of 2003, a baseline data collection exercise which identified the schools and individual students who were participating in the second cohort of IFP was undertaken. IFP partnerships identified all of the schools that were involved in their partnership and the majority of these schools (63 per cent) identified the Year 10 students who were participating in the IFP. This data was matched to NFER's Register of Schools and the DfES's National Pupil Database (NPD) which contain background information on schools and pupils.

A representative sample of around 14,500 students in 496 schools in 100 IFP partnerships was identified, and schools were asked to provide details of the students' achievements and destinations at the end of Year 11. Consequently, details of students' achievements in this report are drawn from two sources of data:

The DfES's National Pupil Database (NPD) - this contains details of all students' attainment in their key stage 3 assessments and the achievement of GCSEs, including GCSEs in vocational subjects, and GNVQs at key stage 4.

Data provided by schools on the achievement of NVQs and other vocational qualifications for a sample of IFP participants.

In addition to indicating the achievements of students, school staff were asked to identify the destinations of students post-16, using a list of pre-coded options. A total of 233 schools responded, representing 5,006 IFP participants. However, school staff were not always able to provide details of students' destinations, and consequently the destinations analysis is based on details for 3,789 individuals. The sample of students for whom details of their achievements and destinations were provided, was broadly representative of the cohort as a whole.

Multi-level modelling techniques were used to examine the factors associated with students' attainment and destinations. This statistical technique enables variables at school-level, area-level and student-level (such as individuals' prior attainment) to be controlled for statistically. Consequently, the findings take into account these influential factors. However, the possible effect

of, for example, students' motivation, learning preferences and personal circumstances cannot be taken into account, or explored, through this quantitative analysis as such data was not available.

The attainment analysis allows a comparison between students who participated in IFP and students who were similar in terms of their prior attainment and other background characteristics, who attended similar schools, but were not known to have participated in IFP. The analysis of students' destinations and their achievement of their IFP qualification compares students within the IFP cohort who were similar in terms of their prior attainment and other background characteristics.

## Additional Information

*Copies of the full report (RR786) - priced £4.95 - are available by writing to DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.*

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