



the *impact* of 14–16 year olds
on further education colleges

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Executive summary

Background

Over recent years there has been an increasing emphasis on making provision within Further Education (FE) colleges for pupils in key stage 4 of secondary schools. Although there has been research exploring young people's responses to vocational and work-related opportunities, it has generally concentrated on their experience of attending college courses, the progress they have made and the ways in which schools and colleges have interacted. Little has been done, as yet, to examine the ways in which colleges have integrated this 14–16 year-old group of learners into the more traditional profile of FE. This research has focused on this area, as with the advent of Diplomas and the national roll-out of 14–19 prospectuses, FE colleges are likely to be increasingly involved in provision for this age group.

The central aim of this research was to examine the strategies that FE colleges and their staff used to integrate 14–16 year olds successfully into their institutions and to explore the impact that 14–16 year olds have on FE colleges, their staff and older learners. The research methodology was based on case-study visits to five FE colleges, where young people aged 14–16, 16–19, older learners, lecturers with and without experience of teaching 14–16 year olds, heads of faculty and curriculum managers were interviewed. Colleges were selected to represent a range of geographical areas in England and because they had substantial experience of providing courses for 14–16 year olds. The research visits took place during May and June 2007.

Key findings

- Interviewees outlined some significant successes over recent years with regard to the progress of strategies for the inclusion of 14–16 year olds in colleges. Whilst the evidence points to the need for further refinement and development in the future, worthwhile steps in the learning journey have been achieved.

- The presence of 14–16 year olds in colleges was recognised and, on the whole, accepted by older learners and lecturers. In general, older learners and lecturers felt the impact on them was minimal.
- College managers felt they had developed some worthwhile strategies (see below) to enhance the experience for the young people and those college staff involved in the provision of the courses. They also observed that challenging issues (see below) remained with regard to implementing the successful strategies for the future provision for the 14–16 age group.

Impact

The evidence suggests that the degree and extent of impact of the presence of 14–16 year olds on college staff and older learners and the approaches adopted are dependent on the situation within which a college is located.

- On the whole the majority of interviewees believed that students aged over 16 years old were **largely unaffected** by the presence of 14–16 year olds in college because it was perceived that many older learners were **unaware of the presence** of the 14–16-year-old students and older learners, who were aware of the 14–16 year olds, either **did not mind or were positive** about their presence.
- A minority were not enthusiastic about the inclusion of 14–16 year olds in college largely because the younger students were perceived to be noisier and sometimes misbehaved in the corridors and canteens, and occasionally in lessons.
- **It appeared that teaching 14–16 year olds in colleges was becoming increasingly embedded and an expected element of the lecturers’ role.** Staff observed that attitudes amongst lecturers towards teaching 14–16 year olds had become more understanding in recent years largely because of a greater awareness of the benefits to 14–16-year-old students, the challenges involved, the skills needed and the importance of a more refined selection of students.
- Senior managers were reported to be very aware and supportive of the 14–19 agenda and were keen to provide career and professional development (CPD) for lecturers teaching 14–16 year olds in areas such as behaviour management, health and safety and child protection.

- Staff in all five colleges commented on the positive impact of young people attending college between 14 and 16 years old on progression post-16. Additional benefits included young people making a more informed choice with regard to their choice of pre-16 courses, better preparation for post-16 courses and greater awareness of future career paths.
- The majority of staff and students commented on [the positive repercussions that having 14–16 year olds in college was having on the local community](#), partly because communication and collaboration with schools improved as a result of closer liaison, but also because there was a widely held view that attending college had improved the behaviour of many young people who were not progressing well at school. Some staff also felt that including 14–16 year olds in college had benefited the local community as it encouraged young people to develop self-worth, and this impacted more widely on society.

Successful strategies for 14–16 year-old provision

The main strategies to the inclusion of 14–16 year olds in college, that were considered to be successful, included:

- [An appropriate and transparent selection process of young people on to courses](#). Effective selection was considered to include ensuring that the young people were thoroughly informed about the skills required and the course content, and that college staff were involved in the selection process.
- [Close liaison with schools](#). Effective communication with schools was necessary not only during the selection process, but also subsequently throughout the young person’s college course so that both institutions could work together in the best interests of the young person.
- [Ensuring that 14–16 year olds were taught by lecturers who were committed to and enjoyed teaching them](#). It was observed that this often involved lecturers who volunteered to teach the younger age group.
- [Ensuring that the context of the college, in terms of facilities and the characteristics of the local community, was taken into consideration in determining the type of provision](#).

- **The provision of support for the young people.** Strategies had been developed to provide pastoral support for the 14–16-year-old students, on subjects such as transport as well as course-related issues. For example, colleges used tutorial systems and anti-bullying policies. It was also seen to be desirable to provide extra support in the classroom either for specific pupils or more general assistance for lecturers.
- **A college-wide and holistic approach to the inclusion of this new age group.** It was suggested that the 14–16 year olds should have a comprehensive induction to the whole college so that they felt part of the community. It was also pointed out that although a college-wide inclusive ethos to 14–16-year-old inclusion should be promoted, a balance of age groups was felt to be important to maintain the FE community ethos.
- **Training for lecturers in teaching and managing the younger age group.** This could also be supplemented with, for example, seminars or the cascading of good practice to all lecturers of 14–16 year olds.

Issues for consideration

Workforce capacity

Evidence suggests that lecturers feel more comfortable teaching 14–16 year olds subsequent to their first year as they gain experience in, for example, behaviour management and teaching and learning strategies for this age group. Additionally this research further emphasises the importance of having staff who are enthusiastic about teaching this age group and who are fully involved in the process of selection of the students. It is suggested that it is worth considering how to systematically support lecturers with regard to sharing their learning and growing expertise by, for example, methodically cascading learning down to all or through seminars open to all lecturers of 14–16 year olds.

Physical capacity

The inclusion of 14–16 year olds into FE colleges brings with it the need to consider the capacity and adequacy of the physical resources of the college. As colleges expand to include another target audience, it may be necessary

to consider how best to cater for them. This research indicated that the college context was important in this consideration, for example, one college had already built a specialist 14–16 unit while another was considering building a specialist unit for their higher education students (another area of expansion) since they felt it was more appropriate, in their circumstances, to include the 14–16 year olds in with their 16–19-year-old students. Colleges may also wish to consider the provision of social facilities for this age group, for example, space to play football or a common room with a pool table.

FE ethos

14–16-year-old pupils value the different relationship they have with FE lecturers, as opposed to school teachers. Whilst there is some suggestion from this research that there is a need for more parity with schools with regard to behaviour management and discipline, college managers might wish to consider how to endorse this while at the same time maintaining the FE ethos (for example, students calling lecturers by their first names and the more informal atmosphere) which is important to 14–16 year olds. Furthermore with increasing numbers of 14–16 year olds in college, it is suggested that consideration should be given as to how best to maintain a balance of age groups so that the traditional FE ethos is preserved.

Partnership issues

College interviewees acknowledged that collaborative working with partners was beneficial to young people and this research further emphasises the work involved in partnership working. Although it is apparent that there are variations according to geographical area depending on whether an area is predominantly urban or rural or whether schools have sixth forms, sixth form colleges or FE colleges, nevertheless certain issues remain constant. Further collaboration might be considered by, for example, shared in-service education and training (INSET) days which could be used to further reflect on mutual issues such as discipline and practical considerations such as conformity of approach with regard to students' absence and expectations of students as to how and to whom they should report. Other issues of concern to both schools and colleges, and similarly worthy of further consideration,

might include parity of funding with regard to 14–16-year-old students and pay between school and college lecturers teaching the same age group.

Health and safety

Although the colleges involved in this research clearly had comprehensive health and safety procedures in place, the inclusion of 14–16 year olds into colleges, which have traditionally served students over 16 years old, raised issues of concern. For example, although all staff are checked by the Criminal Records Bureau, older students are not and supervision of all 14–16 year olds in breaktimes proved to be challenging. It is hard for colleges to mitigate all risks and issues such as this must remain an ongoing consideration.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Over recent years there has been an increasing emphasis on making provision within Further Education (FE) colleges for pupils in key stage 4 of secondary schools. The Increased Flexibility Programme, which began in 2002, the DfES Pathfinders (2003) and the requirement for work-related learning for all pupils (2004), have all strengthened the view that some 14–16 year olds should have the opportunity to attend courses at FE colleges, thus moving the FE sector away from its traditional role as a post-16 education provider. This broadening of the FE sector role has been advanced by the outcomes of the DfES 14–19 Education and Skills White Paper (2005), the review of the future role of FE colleges by Foster (2005) and the recent White Paper: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances (2006).

Although there has been research exploring young people's responses to vocational and work-related opportunities, it has generally concentrated on their experience of attending college courses, the progress they have made and the ways in which schools and colleges have interacted. Little has been done, as yet, to examine the ways in which colleges have integrated this 14–16 year-old group of learners into the more traditional profile of FE, characterised by 16–19 year olds and adult learners in continuing education. This research has focused on this area, as with the advent of Diplomas and the national roll-out of 14-19 prospectuses, FE colleges are likely to be increasingly involved in provision for this age group.

1.2 Aims

The overall aim of this research was to examine the strategies that FE colleges, their staff and learners are using to integrate 14–16 year olds successfully into their institutions. In particular, it was designed to:

- contribute to an understanding of how the presence of 14–16 year olds is shaping FE colleges, in terms of issues such as learning and teaching styles, health and safety considerations, social interaction and the professional development of college staff

- capture the voice of students, lecturers and those in management roles and gain their perceptions of the changing age profile of FE colleges and the implications for learners and staff.

1.3 Methodology

The research was based on case-study visits to five FE colleges. They were chosen to represent a range of geographical areas in England, and because they had substantial experience of providing courses for 14–16 year olds. The research visits took place during May and June 2007. Where possible, case-study visits included:

- individual or paired interviews with four 14–16 year olds
- interviews with four 16–19 year olds and adult learners
- interviews with two lecturers (one with and one without experience of teaching pre-16 students in the FE context)
- an interview with one head of faculty (different types of faculties were involved across the colleges to gain a broad view across subject areas)
- an interview with the curriculum and quality manager (or equivalent) who could provide a broad overview of the impact of 14–16 year olds on the quality of provision.

The interview schedules made use of projective techniques, which were designed to elicit interviewees' attitudes allowing interviewees to project their feelings onto other people, through the use of sentence completion, or imagining themselves in the place of others. Table 1 gives details of the 63 interviewees.

Table 1 Numbers of interviewees per group

Group	Number	Percentage of total*
14–16-year-old learners	20	32
16–19-year-old learners	15	24
Adult learners	6	10
Heads of faculty	5	8
Quality and curriculum managers	7	11
Lecturers	10	16

* Does not sum to 100 due to rounding

The next chapter explains the context in which the five colleges were operating and the broad similarities and differences between them.

2 Context of colleges and approaches adopted to provision for 14–16-year-old learners

2.1 Context

As all the case-study colleges had adopted strategies according to their particular contexts, this section provides background details of the five colleges.

The colleges represented the main geographical areas of the south-east, south-west, midlands, north-east and north-west of England. Four were in large cities, all with areas of deprivation and changing industrial patterns and one was in a smaller town and took students from a predominantly prosperous area. All had considerable experience of providing courses for 14–16 year olds, particularly as a result of the Increased Flexibility Programme (which began in 2002), with most having accepted 14–16-year-old students on a less formal basis for much longer.

College A was on several sites in a fairly large town, which had good levels of employment, and had around 3000 16–19 year olds on full-time courses and around 5000 part-time students, including adults. During the academic year 2006-7, the college had provided part-time courses for 500 14–16 students, who came from a number of schools in the surrounding area.

College B was spread across several sites in a large city and had more than 1000 14–16 year olds, although this was still less than two per cent of the college population. The great majority of pre-16 students were taking part-time courses, but over 100 were full time and had work placements as well as attending college. An ‘early college unit’ had been set up three years ago to provide extra support to the 14–16 students.

College C was in a metropolitan city, in an area of economic deprivation and put strong emphasis on its role in the community. Five years ago the college set up a 14–16 ‘collegiate’, which takes over 1000 students from local schools, mainly on part-time courses, which are intended to encourage post-16 participation in education and training.

College D was also urban-based, in an area where the traditional form of employment had declined considerably. There were over 1000 14–16 year olds, but this was a small percentage of the 36,000 student total. The college had a ‘School Links’ department, which dealt with the overall strategy for pre-16 students and liaison with schools.

College E was another large city-based institution, with a long tradition of providing an alternative curriculum for school-aged students. The number of 14–16 students had fluctuated in recent years. A senior manager had the responsibility for liaison with schools and for the overall supervision of 14–16 students.

Senior management interviewees in all the colleges shared the perception that providing courses for 14–16 year olds was beneficial, both for their own institutions and for the young people themselves. However, provision had to a large extent developed as a response to school requests and to changing policy, such as the introduction of the Increased Flexibility Programme, and often initially without any clearly defined strategies on issues such as application processes and liaison with schools.

As the demand for provision for 14–16 year olds increased and colleges assessed the impact it was having, they began to develop more defined systems for working with a cohort that was outside the traditional FE cohort. These systems were based on what were seen as the colleges’ interests and the needs of its post-16 students, as well as ensuring that the 14–16 year olds gained a positive experience by attending a FE institution. The five case-study colleges had all adopted and adapted strategies according to their individual contexts and this chapter examines their current approaches to the pre-16 cohort and why they had been developed.

For all the colleges too, there was the recognition that this is a time of uncertainty as they were awaiting the implementation of the first round of the new Diploma qualifications and responding to the changing scene of 14-19 education and training. This may mean further adaptation and change to their current strategies, but all the management interviewees felt that they were more aware of what was likely to work for them and their students as a result of reflecting on what they had achieved so far.

2.2 Approaches

The strategies adopted by the case-study colleges to 14–16 provision depended on their individual circumstances. A college’s capacity for taking school-age students, the nature of the courses provided, the type of community in which the college was located and its management structures, all affected the approaches they had adopted and helped to explain the reasoning behind them. The rest of this chapter considers the main practical approaches to working with the 14–16 year olds taken by the case-study colleges and why these had been adopted.

2.2.1 ‘Selection’

The issue of how, or indeed if, pre-16 students were selected by the colleges was generally seen by most staff interviewees as crucial to the success of their 14–16 programme. It was also seen by some as a sensitive issue and was certainly open to interpretation. In all the case-study colleges, the strategies for admitting 14–16 year-old students had developed since the programmes began, with three of the colleges adopting a much more structured approach than they had operated originally.

More structured approach to selection

Three case-study colleges had originally taken significant numbers of 14–16 year olds – almost everyone sent by the schools. This had caused problems related to behaviour management and teaching and learning challenges which resulted in the adoption of a much more careful process of what some interviewees referred to as ‘selection’, but which two of the curriculum managers preferred to describe as ‘putting the right learner on the right course’, with one adding, ‘we don’t like the term “select”’. One head of faculty explained that a new approach had been necessary, because the college appeared to have become ‘a dumping ground for the disaffected’. The behaviour of the 14–16 year olds and lack of both motivation and aptitude caused serious concern. In addition, it was reported that many of the young people appeared to derive no benefit from attending college as, in some faculties, the drop-out and exclusion rate reached 60 per cent. In response to this situation, the college implemented a [formal application](#)

system, so that year 9 pupils had to complete an application form and letter, explaining why they wanted to do their chosen course. All were interviewed to ensure that they understood what would be involved and to determine whether the young person had a genuine interest in the subject. The curriculum manager from the college explained that: ‘It’s college policy not to turn students away. We work with them to get them on the right courses’. This involved using the interview process and key stage 3 assessment results to determine the level of course for which the students were entered. As a result of introducing this application process, the drop-out rate had fallen dramatically (to ten per cent in the faculty where the head was interviewed) and the number of exclusions was minimal.

This faculty also put a limit on the total numbers that could be accommodated each year. This was necessary because of limited workshop space, but also because it was important to have the 14–16 students on the same site as their post-16 and adult learners, to enable them to experience a FE college environment, but the numbers of younger students had to be limited to avoid ‘changing the balance’ of the learning environment. In the view of the faculty representative, the limit on numbers, and the application process, had completely transformed the situation. The 14–16 students saw themselves as having been given an opportunity, which others did not have, to learn skills and help their career development and they responded positively. The four 14–16 students interviewed at this college reinforced that view, as all were very enthusiastic about their time in college and the advantages it gave them, with one commenting: ‘I think we are privileged to be able to come here’.

It was the view of the curriculum manager at this college that the schools had now become much better at directing the appropriate pupils on to the vocational courses offered by the college, which meant that ‘the college works with schools which now have a good understanding of qualifications and rewarding students with the right attitude’. How far this more selective attitude on the part of the schools would have developed anyway, and how much it was a reaction to the college’s application process, it is impossible to judge from this research, as no school staff were interviewed, but as far as college staff were concerned, they now had a system which worked in everyone’s best interests. This was an example of the importance of developing a strategy of partnership working between colleges and schools, which all the case-study colleges felt they had developed over time.

This partnership strategy was also beneficial as the basis for an application process which relied firstly on the schools putting forward students who were most likely to benefit from attending college. Young people were then interviewed by college staff, and as one curriculum manager explained: ‘The effort is getting them on the right course and that comes from experience.’ The head of faculty interviewed in the same college described the significance of this approach: ‘The college was originally baby-sitting for schools, but we’re now past that stage and we select them through interview’. However, she also emphasised that the groundwork was accomplished by [providing plenty of information for school staff, parents and pupils](#), for example, by sending staff to year 9 options evenings and arranging taster days for school students. She explained that college staff had the experience to ‘advise on the best courses for individual aptitudes’, and that the admittance procedure had yielded positive results: ‘Initially we had a lot who dropped out, but it’s less of a problem now.’

There was further evidence of the value of combining a more stringent application process with good partnership working with schools. At a third college the curriculum manager explained that the majority of pupils originally sent to them by the schools had been ‘entry-level and sent by the schools because they could not provide for them’. The college approach was rethought with the emphasis on partnerships with schools, which were encouraged to send pupils capable of level 1 and 2 courses. College staff attended school options evenings and put on taster sessions, and pupils completed application forms accompanied by a report from their school and came to the college with their parents for a meeting. They were allocated to a course based on entry criteria and a learning agreement was signed by the student and their parents/guardians. If the student was not suitable for the course applied for, ‘they get advice on other courses or curriculum areas and we talk to the schools about it’. This college too provided evidence that such an approach had a positive effect on the schools’ policies on sending pupils: ‘the schools are now better at selecting too and don’t expect us to be a clearing ground for them’.

The curriculum manager said that the new application process had resulted in a sharp fall in numbers of 14–16 year olds entering the college, because ‘some schools just stopped sending pupils’. However, in his view, most schools were now putting forward pupils who were committed and had

aptitude for their chosen courses and so were more likely to gain satisfaction and qualifications and to progress on to post-16 education and training. It could also be seen as short-term pain for longer-term gain, as schools were now more aware of the benefits of partnership with the college and requests for places were increasing again.

There was a common perception in all three colleges that well-defined strategies on accepting school students had an all-round advantage by encouraging the schools to send pupils who would benefit, so helping the college to provide worthwhile courses in which students could succeed, thus raising their self-esteem. Staff at all these colleges thought that sending pupils who had no aptitude, or even interest in courses was not conducive to success and only resulted in a high drop-out rate and demoralisation for the young people.

Less-structured approach

The other two case studies had not developed their entry policies in the same way. One took over 1000 14–16 students on a part-time basis and it was left to the schools to select these, although results in key stage 3 assessments were used as a means of deciding if any should be on level 2 courses. There were however some elements of the same strategies, as one of the lecturers interviewed here said that her department interviewed school applicants to make sure ‘they were on the right course’, and gave them ‘a short piece of written work to see what standard they were’, but this was the limit of their selection process. Another lecturer from a different department said that he used to interview the school students, although ‘none were ever rejected’, but it was now the responsibility of a specialist pre-16 unit to decide on student entry. At this college too, the curriculum manager was of the opinion that the schools had become better at putting forward the right candidates, explaining that: ‘schools are more rigorous now, particularly with regard to whether the young person wants to do the course’.

In the fifth case study, there was almost total reliance on the twin strategies of building good relationships with the schools and trying to ensure young people made an informed choice. This was accomplished by providing leaflets on college courses, which were incorporated into the schools’ options booklets; college staff attended options evenings and the college had

an open day in early January, which year 9 pupils from local schools were encouraged to attend. One of the lecturers interviewed here said that her department was very involved in liaison with schools and so was able to emphasise the need for genuine interest in a course. The curriculum manager made the observation that there was always some element of selection, because even if schools claimed that pupils had a free choice in deciding to take a college course, ‘the school always ultimately decides – there’s the element of “benevolent shepherding”’. However, as far as this college was concerned, the interviewee was firmly committed to the principle that as the college was a community facility, it was up to the schools to send the appropriate candidates. Like all the other senior management interviewees, he also thought that schools had moved on from the days of ‘dumping’ pupils that they did not want and that:

In most cases the schools respond properly because they know this is about raising interest and motivation. If they send an inappropriately placed student, the placement will not be successful, so it’s up to the school.

In practice, the real dividing line in college/school strategies on selection was whether they had confidence in schools to send appropriate students, with the right aptitude for, and interest in, courses or whether they preferred to make this judgement for themselves. A largely ‘open-door’ policy on admissions ran the risk of the college being seen as ‘a dumping ground for low-achievers – for naughty boys’, a comment made by a head of faculty who had concerns about what he perceived as his department’s lack of control over school student admissions. Yet other staff from the same college thought that working closely with the schools did provide a reasonable basis for taking students and the college senior management were firmly committed to the ethos of a community facility that provided access to all within that community. To some extent, decisions on whether to adopt particular strategies on selection depended not only on college context, but also on building capacity, budget, flexibility in overall numbers and which teaching and learning strategies had been adopted. It is the latter that is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

2.2.2 Teaching and learning

The two main methods by which courses could be provided for pre-16 students were discrete teaching groups, where they were with others of their own age, or in-fill groups, where they were taught alongside older students. As a number of staff interviewees pointed out, there were advantages and disadvantages to both models and in some colleges, individual faculties or departments decided the most appropriate approach for their students rather than adopting a college-wide strategy.

In considering their approach, staff in all the case studies took into account the need to provide 14–16 year olds with the experience of a FE ethos, through which post-16 year-old students have a more informal relationship with their lecturers. On the other hand, they also considered the colleges' main student body, which was post-16, who should not be disadvantaged by the presence of younger students, with different needs.

Two of the colleges had decided that **discrete classes, but sharing the same buildings as older students**, provided the best compromise for the following reasons.

- Separate teaching groups were ‘in the best interests of the learners’, and were also practical, because the pre-16 students were usually on courses at a different level and there were too many of them to be successfully integrated with older learners. However, as they were using the same workshops and facilities as older students, 14–16 year olds were gaining the ‘FE college experience, rather than replicating school’.
- For courses that were particularly popular with school students, the numbers involved made infill classes impractical, but the model of a completely separate ‘14–16 academy’ was not a good idea, because ‘the pre-16s then don’t experience the FE ethos’.
- For young and possibly vulnerable students, such provision was best, as one lecturer pointed out: ‘the main college can be very overpowering for some 14 year olds’. She added that ‘the 14–16 block is a secure environment’, which was an important consideration in the welfare of pre-16 students (see section 2.2.3 ‘health and safety’), but as they could also go to other parts of the campus for the canteen or other facilities, they were not isolated within their own age group.

- It protected older students from possible disruption and annoyance caused by ‘immature behaviour’.

Three case studies had a **mixture of discrete and infill classes** and individual faculties decided how they wanted to organise their pre-16 intake. As might be expected from colleges with dual systems, interviewees could see advantages and disadvantages to both. Two of these colleges had 14–16 units, which were used as a base by the pre-16 students and were the focus of communication with their schools. Both had some discrete teaching groups, often because of the substantial numbers of students involved, but lecturers who had experience of teaching pre-16s in infill groups, thought that this worked well, as long as ‘the numbers are limited’, and if it was a subject with plenty of practical content. In particular, interviewees considered that there was a real benefit for pre-16s in working alongside older students, because it ‘raised their maturity levels’ and could help to increase motivation. Much depended on the numbers involved, a point made consistently by interviewees and emphasised strongly by one curriculum manager, who felt the number of pre-16s in a group was crucial.

With infill there’s a feeling that young people step up their behaviour and work standard, but it’s important not to have too many as they can then influence the group. If there’s a few they will behave more like adults, but having too many can tip the balance.

Box 1 illustrates the advantages and disadvantages of a mixture of discrete and infill provision.

Box 1 Combining discrete and infill provision

College D had a department with staff who liaised with schools and managed the welfare and overall strategies for the 14–16 learners, but there was no separate unit for teaching. College departments decided how they wanted to arrange their teaching groups and hairdressing, for example, was taught discretely, in small groups of between 12 and 15. This provided a good staff to student ratio and allowed plenty of attention to be given to the students, as it was important to make them ‘feel they have made a fresh start’. Although they were taught in

separate groups, they mixed with the older students in the practice salon and often built up a good relationship with the adult learners, who could pass on some of their knowledge and experience.

The 14–16 learners interviewed here were all in discrete delivery classes and were very satisfied with this system, because they felt more comfortable with their own age group. However, when asked about the alternative of a mixed class with older learners, they acknowledged that there could be value in learning from the experience of older learners. The students taking engineering courses said that they mixed with older students in the workshops and some also mixed socially, playing football at break times.

The curriculum manager thought that the type of provision depended very much on the number of younger students involved, but that infill classes had particular advantages in providing young people with role models, demonstrating the value of taking work seriously and making immature behaviour look out of place. However, where quite large numbers were involved, infill classes were not practical and the best compromise was to teach the 14–16 year olds in discrete groups, but within a mixed environment where they had the option of communicating with older learners.

The issue of whether to have all discrete or all infill provision, or whether to mix the two is a complex one and colleges had made their decisions based on the numbers of younger students, staff preference and their own internal organisation. The other teaching and learning issues that arose during case-study visits were more straightforward

The **amount of time** generally available for 14–16 students on part-time courses was one day – delivered either as one whole day or two half days. Factors that influenced the amount of time available was whether students were transported to the college by their schools and then returned to school at the end of the day, or whether the students were responsible for their own transport to and from college. In one college, the need for students to be transported back to outlying schools meant that although in theory they had a full day, they were only in college for four and a half hours and this made delivering the course ‘pressured’.

Organising the timetable in colleges where students came from many different schools could also present problems. A curriculum manager explained that one way of dealing with this was for the schools to have a common timetable, so for example, all core subjects were taught from Monday to Wednesday and students in college at the end of the week did not miss any of these lessons. Such a system was very helpful for students who did not then have to catch up on core subjects, but depended on the level of local cooperation between schools and colleges.

Lecturers who taught 14–16 students in discrete classes all made the point that it was necessary to **adapt their teaching style to a younger age group**. The strategies that they had developed included the following.

Clarity and repetition

You have to speak more slowly, be more active in the classroom, have more patience and consciously spell things out. The youngsters have goldfish memories – you have to repeat things three times for them.

Engaging and innovative approaches

The level of the course and the nature of the subject obviously made a difference to the teaching strategies employed, but an interviewee commented that for these younger students generally, it paid to be innovative, as well as giving more direction and changing activities frequently:

Get them to present to the rest of the group and use computer games and response pads. You have to constantly work at engaging their attention.

Avoiding potential problems

One lecturer reported that she had avoided the problem of students turning up late on the morning they had a theory lesson, apparently intentionally, by rotating the theory and practical sessions, ‘so they don’t know what they are doing until they come in’. Some interviewees also cautioned that in discrete classes, it was important to be aware of group dynamics, particularly if the class was dominated by students from one school.

Teaching and learning strategies

It was the general opinion of interviewees who taught 14–16 year olds that the task required staff volunteers who had enthusiasm for teaching this age group, a view summed up by this comment:

The main thing is you have to have lecturers who want to teach them. Young people are very astute and they can see if staff don't want to be there.

2.2.3 Health and safety

All the staff interviewees at the case-study colleges agreed that having 14–16 year olds on site raised issues about health and safety and that dealing with these issues sometimes presented a dilemma. FE colleges were designed for post-16 learners and it was neither possible, nor desirable, to ‘fence students in’. On the other hand, staff knew that they were responsible for the pre-16 students, and it was therefore necessary to find some practical solutions to some of the difficulties. In some cases the strategies served a dual purpose of protecting younger students and controlling their behaviour when they were not in classes. Examples of the solutions adopted included:

- Three colleges had a **short (30 minute) lunch break** for pre-16 students, which did not allow them enough time to go off-site and made contact with older students less likely.
- In two colleges, some faculties had decided to run **half-day rather than full-day sessions**, so the school students would not be on college premises at lunch-time.
- Lecturers who taught 14–16 students in discrete groups generally had a policy of **sending the pre-16s for breaks at different times from older students** and for a shorter period.
- In one college, the curriculum manager observed that supervising the pre-16s was a concern because ‘we are legally responsible for their safety’, and consequently, ‘we are rigorous in not allowing them off-site’. A short lunch break helped with this, but there was also a policy of not allowing a pre-16 student to go home if they were ill, unless a parent came to collect them.

- Other colleges were also very aware of the need to keep pre-16 students under **constant supervision during class time** – one lecturer emphasised that: *We never send them away if there's a problem, they either go back to school, or the college deals with it.*

However, staff in all the case studies agreed there were challenges in dealing with these issues, because of the differences between a secure school site and an open college site. In some colleges, it was their policy to make it clear to 14–16 year-old students that they should not leave the college grounds at break times, but it was impossible to ‘police’ the site and check where students were going. A staff interviewee made the point that:

We don't escort them at lunch-time and we assume that they stay on the premises, but it's an open campus.

Similarly, in another college, the curriculum manager explained that it was made clear to parents that it was an open site. Consequently, parents were made aware that their children attended college on this basis. Providing a separate building as a centre for the pre-16 students, as one college did, coupled with a short lunch break, was one way of dealing with this problem, but this was not the route that all colleges wished to adopt, and could still not guarantee complete security for the younger students. In one college, lecturers pointed out that 14 -16 year olds could access all college facilities and go off-site when they wanted.

Another issue that was raised by staff in all the colleges was that although staff had Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks, older students did not. If pre-16 students were taught in discrete classes and had breaks at a different time from older students, contact with post-16 learners could be restricted. However, one of the perceived benefits of attending college for 14–16 year olds was for them to experience an environment that was different from school and to have the opportunity to mix with different age groups. So this presented another dilemma for college staff and as one curriculum manager explained:

This is a continuing concern – it's impossible to protect all the children all the time unless they are taught in specialist areas with their own canteen and toilet facilities.

The point was taken up by a lecturer in a different college who said that if constant supervision meant ‘keeping children in a room for five hours’, this was also against their interests and unacceptable.

As far as [health and safety regulations](#) were concerned, all staff interviewees were very clear that ‘safety was never compromised’. Workshops, salons and kitchens were all strictly regulated, as were all classrooms, and pre-16 students were under constant supervision during classes. Students were supplied with safety boots and overalls if they were in workshops and all colleges carried out regular risk assessments. In one college, separate risk assessments were carried out for each school and college staff liaised with the health and safety representatives from the schools.

As with many other aspects of taking pre-16 students into institutions that were designed for post-16 learners, staff continued to address the challenge of achieving a balance between the need to protect the younger students, while giving them a different learning experience.

2.2.4 Behaviour

In the three colleges that had a clear internal procedure for selecting 14–16 students, staff interviewees thought that behaviour was no longer an issue. School students knew what was expected of them in terms of attendance and behaviour and what the consequences would be if the rules were not adhered to. At the two colleges which relied more on the schools selecting the students that they sent, there was a perception from lecturers that some school-age students could be ‘difficult to deal with’, but if the right staff were teaching them and there was a strong emphasis on ‘establishing discipline at the outset’, then potential problems could be contained. As already referred to in section 2.2.2, on teaching and learning strategies, it was also accepted by college staff that [teaching styles had to be adapted](#) for younger students, to take account of their level of maturity and ability to concentrate. All the colleges had [well-defined procedures for monitoring the attendance](#) of pre-16 students, either by contacting the student’s home if they did not arrive, or by faxing the schools with register updates.

Although none of the college interviewees raised major concerns about behaviour in class time, there were comments about out-of-class behaviour

from some staff and from some older students. The complaints were generally about noise levels, pushing in corridors, or inappropriate language. In one college, a head of faculty said that over-boisterous behaviour sometimes led to comments about the college being ‘overrun with school kids’, and a lecturer elsewhere felt that ‘in a college environment they should learn to adapt their behaviour’. Post-16 students were generally tolerant of the younger ones, making comments such as: ‘sometimes they rush around a bit, but they’re not a problem’, and one astutely pointed out: ‘everyone messes around a little bit, and they’re better behaved than they would be in school’. Adult students tended to be more irritated by what they regarded as immature behaviour, but admitted that they would not necessarily know the difference between 14–16 year olds and the 16–18 year olds, who were full-time students. A group of mature students in one college said that out-of-class behaviour that threatened to become more serious sometimes had to be dealt with by security guards, but agreed that rowdy and inconsiderate behaviour was as likely to be committed by 16–18 year olds as pre-16s. As already explained in section 2.2.3, on health and safety, it was partly to deal with the potential for immature behaviour that a short lunch-time policy had been widely adopted, because, as one curriculum manager pointed out: ‘if they get bored, they can get into trouble’.

It was also pointed out by staff interviewees in several colleges that no special provision existed for pre-16 students when they were not in class and that sometimes even the safety valve of kicking a ball around outside was denied to them because of shortage of space.

The comment made by one curriculum manager, that pre-16 attitudes and behaviour could be greatly assisted by ‘[celebrating the positive](#)’, was reinforced by the 14–16 year-old students who were interviewed in the case-study colleges, who, without exception, were appreciative of the opportunity to attend a FE college. Many of them were quite open about the fact that they behaved far more positively at college than they had done (or still did) in school, and that this was largely because of a [good relationship with those who taught them, small teaching groups and the practical nature of their courses](#). The knowledge that ‘if we mess about, we get sent back to school’ was enough for some to be careful about their behaviour, while others who were in integrated groups with older students, said that poor behaviour was not an option and that they valued an environment where working properly

was accepted behaviour. As one of the interviewees put it from a staff perspective: ‘If you have students who want to be here, you don’t have problems’.

2.2.5 Entitlements

The two main entitlements affecting the 14–16 age group were free school meals and Special Educational Needs (SEN) support, and there was a varied picture with both of these. In three colleges a voucher system was used for pupils entitled to free school meals and they could use these in the canteen. The other two did not have such provision, but one was hoping to introduce a similar system.

Support for statemented pupils with special needs also varied. Staff in three colleges said that there was no support from the schools for students with SEN and in two of these, staff interviewees pointed out that these students were disadvantaged by not getting this entitlement, as: ‘schools do not hand over the extra cash for statemented children, so they [the students] are missing out’. At one college schools sent staff to support students with SEN, while in another, the curriculum manager said that some schools did so and others did not. This was clearly an area where there was no common practice and where college staff had concerns about the lack of any coherent policy. This was also raised at one college in connection with bus passes, where a lecturer felt it was unfair that some students seemed to have them, while others did not.

2.2.6 Capacity

A preoccupation of managers generally was **future demand**. There was a general perception amongst staff that demand for places was growing and would continue to do so with the introduction of Diplomas. If there was a limit on physical capacity in a college (which most considered there was), then solutions would need to be found. A head of faculty at one college expressed the view that there had to be some overall limit on numbers, unless the college ‘went down the route of discrete provision on a separate site for 14–16 year olds’, which neither he nor his colleagues favoured. In three of the colleges, consideration was being given to their

staff going into the schools to help deliver Diploma teaching and they hoped that this was possibly at least a partial solution to the problem of matching demand to capacity.

In the colleges where 14–16-year-old students were taught in integrated classes, there were also concerns about the dangers of [upsetting the balance between school-age and older students](#) if too many of the former were included. The 16–19-year-old students who were interviewed in one college where there were in-fill classes thought that the current numbers of 14–16 year olds were ‘about right’, but that if there were more it could present problems. In another college, the older students were divided, with some expressing the view that a greater number of younger students could be absorbed, while others thought there should not be any increase. Mature students generally felt that there should not be an increase in the number of 14–16 year olds. Interviewees from the younger age group also made the point that one of the [benefits of being at college was that they were in smaller teaching groups than at school](#) and therefore any substantial increase in their numbers would negate that advantage. The challenge presented by increased demand was summed up by one curriculum manager who said that the issue needed ‘careful management’, because taking too many 14–16 year olds would ‘change the college environment’.

2.3 Summary

The common thread that ran through the colleges’ approach to taking 14–16 year olds was that they had adopted policies designed to accommodate the varied needs of a younger intake, without putting their main body of students at a disadvantage. Staff in all the case-study colleges welcomed the younger students and felt that they were providing a valuable and important service to these young people, but that in order for the process to work well, it had to be carefully managed and well thought through. Strategies on selection and teaching and learning were crucial to this process, but varied according to each college’s particular context. None of the college staff felt that they could be complacent about their provision, because the situation was constantly changing, for example, with regard to capacity and demand; and there were issues which still gave cause for concern, such as health and safety. However, all thought that they had learnt much from the years of

experience they now had in this area and that even if the inevitable difficulties of introducing pre-16 students into a FE environment had not all been solved, they had good foundations on which to build in the future.

The following chapter deals in detail with the impact that providing courses for significant numbers of 14–16 year olds was having on older learners, the college staff and the wider community.

3 Impact

This chapter considers the impact of 14–16 year olds on different stakeholders within FE colleges and the wider impact beyond the college. The evidence suggests that the degree and extent of impact is dependent on the context within which a college is located, for example, whether it is a college primarily catering for 16–19 year olds or one that has a more traditional FE mix of adults and younger students, or one situated in an affluent semi-rural setting or an inner city area of deprivation. It is also worth noting that the approach, for example, whether provision is discrete or infill, adopted to the inclusion of 14–16 year olds in the five colleges in this study has been influenced partly by the context in which colleges were situated and that the approach, detailed in the previous chapter, has evolved over time. These contextual and historical influences should be taken into consideration when exploring the impact of 14–16-year-old learners in colleges outlined below.

3.1 Impact on older learners

On the whole the majority of interviewees believed that students aged over 16 years old were largely unaffected by the presence of 14–16 year olds in college for two main reasons. Firstly, because it was perceived that many older learners were **unaware of the presence of the 14–16-year-old students**. One head of faculty thought that the older students could not ‘tell the difference between the 14–16 year olds and the 16–19 year olds’. A lecturer in another college said that ‘often older students don’t distinguish between pre- and post- 16s’. It was apparent that in two colleges the older learners and the 14–16 year olds rarely encountered each other, for example, where the adults attended college in the evening and the younger students during the day or the different age groups studied in discrete sections of the college.

Secondly, older learners, who were aware of the 14–16 year olds, either **did not mind or were positive** about their presence. For example, two 16–19 year olds believed that having 14–16 year olds at college ‘do not affect us at all’, while other 16–19 year olds believed ‘they were a welcome addition to the college’. Furthermore adult learners, in another college, felt it was ‘good for the younger ones to have the opportunity’. Some lecturers felt that the older

students (mainly 16–19 year olds) benefited from the presence of the younger ones through ‘explaining’ to or ‘mothering’ them and that, in some cases, their attendance improved because the younger students were better attendees. (It was suggested by the lecturer that this was due to closer surveillance from the college and school.)

There was evidence that some older learners were *not so enthusiastic* about 14–16 year olds attending college, but, on the whole, it was considered to be a minority. For example, a student development manager said: ‘some adults probably think they [14–16 year olds] are a bit of a pain’, and a head of faculty, while acknowledging that 14–16 year olds could not always be distinguished from 16–19 year olds (as discussed above) observed:

adult learners may be irritated by litter and minor vandalism, but would not distinguish between pre- and post-16 students as they are all the same to them.

There were observations, made by college staff and older students, that the younger students were noisier and sometimes misbehaved in the corridors and canteens, and occasionally in lessons. However, the evidence from these colleges suggested that staff in these five colleges had honed their techniques (see sections 2.2.1 ‘selection’ and 2.2.4 ‘behaviour’) with regard to selecting and managing 14–16 year olds as they gained experience and that misbehaviour on behalf of the younger students was largely under control, especially in comparison to when 14–16 year olds first attended college. Additionally there were observations, for example, that the number of 14–16 year olds was small (see chapter 2) and therefore they had not affected the ethos of the college, and there was evidence that, in at least two colleges, this had been a deliberate policy to maintain the ‘balance’ in the college. Furthermore there was evidence from all five colleges that staff, particularly senior managers, believed, to some extent, that the 14–16 year olds had a right to be at college and that attitudes towards the younger students were managed by senior staff at these colleges who promoted an inclusive ethos. One curriculum manager asserted:

This is a 14-plus institution and taking pre-16s is part of what we do, not an addition. If there are complaints about behaviour the Principal’s reaction is ‘they’ve got as much right to be here as you have’. I don’t see why it should be a surprise to 16 to 18 year olds, they were at school with

younger students, it's part of education. Some adult students complained in the early days, but it's a community college so all ages are represented. We even have visits from primary schools.

3.2 Impact on lecturers

It appeared that teaching 14–16 year olds in colleges was becoming increasingly embedded and an expected element of the lecturers' role. Staff observed that attitudes amongst lecturers towards teaching 14–16 year olds had become more understanding in recent years largely because of a greater awareness of:

- the benefits to students
- the challenges involved
- the skills needed
- the importance of a more refined selection of students (see section 2.2.1).

One curriculum manager observed that lecturers were more tolerant of 14–16 year olds now because they could see the value of working with these young people and they can see that 'it is the way things are going now, job adverts say teaching 14–19 now'. One lecturer with experience of teaching the younger age group observed that ten years ago teaching them was regarded as 'lion taming' and no one wanted to do the job. This attitude had changed partly because college policy reflected the expectation that teaching 14–16 year olds is 'part of the job' but also because staff now felt 'more driven to help these young people' largely due to greater awareness of the purpose of 14–16 year old inclusion in colleges. Five members of staff observed that it was now felt to be important to ensure that appropriate lecturers, who were willing to teach younger students, were used for this age group, as pointed out by one head of faculty:

We did not get it right at first and there were negotiations with staff. We are very careful about who teaches them now – they need the best staff, not those who are ... inexperienced. Staff also need to be volunteers and know how to engage with them. Staff may sometimes find them challenging but they know they are our future.

Three lecturers and one head of faculty commented on the fact that they enjoyed teaching the younger age group largely because they enjoyed the

challenge, were more comfortable teaching the age group (after some initial reservations), related well to the age group and appreciated the sense of achievement when students engaged with learning and progressed onto the next stage.

3.2.1 Students' perceptions of lecturers' attitudes

Interestingly, students of all ages perceived that lecturers were happy to teach the younger students. Student comments on what lecturers thought of 14–16 year olds included:

It's a good idea [to have them at college] so they can learn faster and then get a job more quickly.

They're like everyone else.

They're all right and they deserve the chance to come to college.

They're not that different to post-16 students, but the lecturers want to teach them and don't have to if they don't want to.

They [lecturers] don't think of us as 14–16.

Nevertheless it was reported that some lecturers would still rather not teach this younger age group and some young people understood this. One 14–16 year old student observed that 'some lecturers did not want to teach some young people because they were badly behaved' and that if he was a lecturer he would refuse to teach some of his peers. Meanwhile, a lecturer observed:

Some colleagues believe these young people should not be in college alongside adults who pay for their courses...some are badly behaved, aggressive and disrespectful.

Overall, the evidence pointed to the majority of staff, when well-supported, accepting the need to teach the younger age group, as one curriculum manager observed:

The bottom line is that most staff would rather not leave their comfort zone but they have to respond to an inclusive approach and to the local community needs.

In the majority of cases the key to lecturers' acceptance appeared to be training, support and involvement in selection (as reported in chapter 2), without these the impact on lecturers could be very negative as the case study in Box 2 illustrates.

Box 2 Impact on lecturers

In one college that had a very inclusive attitude towards 14–16 year olds, and where there was clear evidence of successful integration in most faculties, the impact of 14–16 year olds on lecturers in one particular faculty was reported to be negative. The head of faculty observed that lecturers said: 'give me any class but this one'. He explained that there was considerable resentment amongst staff for several reasons.

- They were not involved in selection (and many of the students were of low ability).
- They were not trained to teach 14–16 year olds.
- They did not have any in-class support.
- The young people were badly behaved.
- They did not want the extra pressure and hours on the timetable.

This head of faculty had recently joined the college from another one where he reported lecturers enjoyed teaching 14–16 year olds because staff were involved in the selection of students in negotiation with schools, and groups would be accompanied by a school tutor who would handle any discipline issues.

Box 2 illustrates the value of involving lecturers in recruiting 14–16 year olds on to courses and the importance of ensuring that they received appropriate support and guidance on behaviour and classroom management techniques.

3.3 Impact on college management

Management interviewees in all five colleges were very aware and supportive of the 14–19 agenda and were keen to provide career and professional development (CPD) for lecturers in areas such as behaviour management, health and safety and child protection. The evidence from these case studies suggest that the colleges have prioritised inclusivity and the Every Child Matters agenda but, as discussed in chapter 2, college staff were aware that more needed to be done in areas such as entitlements (for example, free school meals) and health and safety, as discussed in more detail in section 2.2.3.

College managers were also very aware of the context in which their college was located, and, as described in chapter 2, this impacted on strategies for development. For example, one of these colleges was located in an area of deprivation, where many young people did not continue in education post-16 so the college had been very proactive in encouraging 14–16 year olds to attend college and had built a 14–16-year-old unit for the exclusive use of the younger students. Whereas another college located in a more affluent suburban location reported that they wanted to maintain their FE environment and were in discussion with schools concerning setting up ‘skills academies’ in schools and were planning to build a higher education (HE) centre in the college thereby freeing up the main college campus for 16–19-year-old students (and some 14–16 year olds).

A number of interviewees mentioned that, as staff in schools and colleges increasingly share responsibility for teaching 14–16 year olds, so equality of funding and pay would become more relevant. They were also keen to achieve a balance of age of students and explained that provision for 14–16 year olds was positive for the college:

As it provides alternative learning for young people, more choice, better relationships with schools and better trust and partnership working ... but there is an ‘opportunity cost’ where we will hit a point where there is a maximum of 14–16 year olds that we can take. For every 14–16 year old that we take we can’t take a 16–19 year old and we make less money from 14–16 year olds.

3.4 Wider impact

Staff in three colleges commented on the livelier or ‘noisier’ atmosphere associated with 14–16 year olds. One curriculum manager said:

People say there has been a change of atmosphere, that it is livelier. Some people like the livelier atmosphere, some don't. Ofsted like it – they liked the fact there was a lot going on – the ‘buzz’.

In another college one lecturer observed that: ‘The atmosphere can be more vibrant, but it can be a nightmare.’ This lecturer also noted that there was a need for colleges to adapt more to deal with ‘non-class time’ because the 14–16 year olds: ‘need something to do at lunch-time as it can lead to problems when they have nothing to do’. (See also section 2.2.4 with regard to managing lunch-times.)

3.4.1 Impact on post-16 progression

Staff in all five colleges commented on the positive impact of young people attending college between 14 and 16 years old on progression post-16. Staff reported raised progression rates, for example: ‘the impact has been that 67 per cent [of the course] have progressed onto college post-16, most wouldn't have if they had not attended college in years 10 and 11’. A few lecturers cited individual cases such as:

One of my students had real problems at school, but progressed from a pre-16 course to a Level 3 course. Another is 17 years old and is now going onto a Level 2 course and she has had a lot of personal issues and problems at school, but she has now really matured.

Furthermore eight interviewees commented on additional benefits.

- **Making an informed choice** – Many of those students who experienced college in years 10 and 11 exhibited a more positive attitude to college post-16 and there was a perception that in many cases that: ‘the right student was on the right course’ as a result of their pre-16 experiences.
- **Aiding transition** – Many students who attended college pre-16 were better prepared for post-16 college as one head of faculty observed: ‘We can see the difference in students who come here pre-16 and those who

have only come post-16, they [the post-16 students] find it more difficult to adjust.’

- **Raising awareness of the future** – A few staff also pointed out that experiencing vocational courses pre-16 enabled some young people to engage with the future and contemplate the next stage. One curriculum manager reported that:

Coming here gives them [14–16 year olds] an insight into the future. This area had an industrial structure which no longer exists. They need to think more about their careers and gaining an insight is important.

It was also pointed out that it was not just the young people who benefited from pre-16 exposure to college, but that the college itself benefited from the progression of students who understood the system and that staff could gain from a better understanding of 16-year-old students. One manager also noted that including 14–16 year olds ‘creates future customers for the college’.

3.4.2 Impact on the community

Staff and students in four out of the five colleges commented on the positive repercussions that having 14–16 year olds in college was having on the local community. Three interviewees felt that communication and collaboration with schools improved as a result of closer liaisons.

There was a widely held view that attending college had improved the behaviour of many young people who were not progressing well at school. One year 11 pupil said: ‘college was taking a lot of pre-16 [year olds] who would otherwise be truanting or causing trouble at school’. Whilst another young person commented that: ‘I would have been kicked out of school if it had not been for college.’

Some staff also felt that including 14–16 year olds in college had benefited the local community, for example: ‘it has changed education in [the area] ... it’s the way forward ... a lot of young people have outgrown school by 13 or 14 years old’. The curriculum manager at this college believed: ‘the impact has been huge on the whole area, it’s about everybody being involved in education and training in [the area]’ and talked about ‘getting kids off the streets and stopping antisocial behaviour’, saying this could only be

achieved ‘by turning them around at 14 years old, so they are not dropping out’. He continued to explain that the 14–16 collegiate was part of the overall strategy to lower crime and disaffection in the community.

Staff from three other colleges, commented that encouraging young people in years 10 and 11 impacted more widely on society as it encouraged young people to develop self-worth. One lecturer observed that:

Helping to motivate pre-16s, especially those who were not keen on school, benefits society as a whole because young people have better communication skills.

A head of faculty pointed out that:

It gives certain students a chance that they would not have had to gain a trade, and that can be a life-changing experience for some of them. It’s not just a career, but self-esteem and discipline. For some of them this will be the only thing they have ever achieved.

3.4.3 Wider impact on future provision for 14–16 year olds

College staff reported three main successes of college provision for 14–16 year olds:

1. Staff in all five colleges cited the **benefit to the young people** in terms of their achievements, including both qualifications and also their life skills and employability skills. These achievements manifested themselves in the numbers progressing onto post-16 education, the perceived increase in young people’s self-esteem, and, in two colleges, the reported wider positive impact on local communities.
2. The **increased collaboration and partnership working** with schools and employers was noted by staff in all five colleges. The links with schools were seen to be stronger and more flexible as a result of this collaboration. A curriculum manager in one college observed how there had been a shift from a ‘blame’ culture to one where the focus is now ‘let’s work it out’.
3. The lessons learnt from the 14–16-year-old provision, and the subsequent increased collaboration mentioned in the previous point, had helped to

inform the approach to the [introduction of the new Diplomas](#), according to staff in three colleges. One curriculum manager reported that ‘We’re now thinking about a joint delivery team with schools.’

Individual colleges also mentioned the benefit to the college of the progression of 14–16-year-old students onto further courses, the raising of the profile of 14–16 year olds and their rightful access to their community college and lastly, the fact that young people have further benefited as lecturers have had the opportunity to focus on teaching and learning strategies.

3.5 Summary

Overall, this chapter has shown that, in the five case-study colleges, there was a widely held belief that the impact of having 14–16 year olds attend college part time was not having any adverse impact on older learners. Additionally, most lecturers and managers held the view that provided the number of young people was contained, and if they were taught by lecturers willing to teach the younger age group, and if behaviour and issues such as health and safety were addressed, then the strategy of having 14–16 year olds attending college was perceived to have impacted favourably on the young people, the college and the wider community.

4 Conclusions and issues for consideration

Interviewees outlined some significant successes over recent years with regard to the progress of strategies for the inclusion of 14–16 year olds in colleges. Whilst the evidence points to the need for further refinement and development in the future, worthwhile steps in the learning journey have been achieved. Furthermore although the presence of 14–16 year olds in colleges has been noted, lecturers and older learners accepted the younger learners and acknowledged that the impact on them had, on the whole, been minimal. In general, when older learners came in contact with their younger peers, they accepted them.

College management felt they had developed some worthwhile strategies to enhance the experience for the young people and those college staff involved in the provision of the courses. They also observed that challenges remained with regard to implementing the successful strategies for the future provision for the 14–16 age group. These strategies and associated issues for consideration, along with the main points with regard to the impact of the presence of 14–16 year olds on college staff and older learners are summarised below.

4.1 Impact

The evidence suggests that the degree and extent of impact of the presence of 14–16 year olds on college staff and older learners is dependent on the situation within which a college is located. Furthermore the context influences the approach adopted to the inclusion of 14–16 year olds and, in all contexts, approaches have evolved over time. So the impact summarised below must be considered within this framework.

On the whole the majority of interviewees believed that students aged over 16 years old were largely unaffected by the presence of 14–16 year olds in college for two main reasons. Firstly, because it was perceived that many older learners were unaware of the presence of the 14–16-year-old students and secondly older learners, who were aware of the 14–16 year olds, either did not mind or were positive about their presence. A minority were not

enthusiastic about the inclusion of 14–16 year olds in college largely because the younger students were perceived to be noisier and sometimes misbehaved in the corridors and canteens, and occasionally in lessons.

It appeared that teaching 14–16 year olds in colleges was becoming increasingly embedded and an expected element of the lecturers' role. Staff observed that attitudes amongst lecturers towards teaching 14–16 year olds had become more understanding in recent years largely because of a greater awareness of:

- the benefits to 14–16 year old students
- the challenges involved
- the skills needed
- the importance of a more refined selection of students.

Senior managers who were interviewed were very aware and supportive of the 14-19 agenda and were keen to provide career and professional development (CPD) for lecturers teaching 14–16 year olds in areas such as behaviour management, health and safety and child protection. The evidence suggests that the colleges have prioritised inclusivity and the Every Child Matters agenda, but college staff were aware that more needed to be done in areas such as entitlements (for example, free school meals and SEN) and health and safety. College managers were also aware of the context in which their college was located, and this further impacted on strategies for development.

Staff in all five colleges commented on the positive impact of young people attending college between 14 and 16 years old on progression post-16. Additional benefits included young people making a more informed choice with regard to their choice of pre-16 courses, better preparation for post-16 courses and greater awareness of future career paths.

Staff and students in four out of the five colleges commented on the positive repercussions that having 14–16 year olds in college was having on the local community, partly because communication and collaboration with schools improved as a result of closer liaisons, but also because there was a widely held view that attending college had improved the behaviour of many young people who were not progressing well at school. Some staff also felt that

including 14–16 year olds in college had benefited the local community as it encouraged young people to develop self-worth, and this impacted more widely on society.

4.2 Successful strategies for 14–16-year-old provision

On the whole interviewees felt they had learnt a lot from their recent experiences of hosting 14–16 year olds in their colleges and their subsequent reflections on the impact on older learners, lecturers and college management. The main strategies for the inclusion of 14–16 year olds in college, that were considered to be successful were as follows.

- **An appropriate and transparent selection process of young people on to courses.** It was considered to be vital to ensure that the right student was on the right course. One curriculum manager observed: ‘It’s about what they [the young people] want to do, not what the school wants them to do.’ Effective selection was considered to include ensuring that the young people were thoroughly informed about the skills required and the course content, and that college staff were involved in the selection process. It was therefore considered important to have proactive communication with schools with two-way liaison where schools, for example, were transparent about pupils’ prior learning and colleges provided comprehensive details about courses.
- **Close liaison with schools.** Effective communication with schools was necessary not only during the selection process, but also subsequently throughout the young person’s college course so that both institutions could work together in the best interests of the young person.
- **Ensuring that 14–16 year olds were taught by lecturers who were committed to and enjoyed teaching them,** and who were enthusiastic and positive towards the young people. It was observed that this often involved lecturers who volunteered to teach the younger age group; many interviewees commented on the fact that they enjoyed the challenge younger students presented.
- **Consideration of the college context, in terms of available facilities and the characteristics of the local community, in determining the type of provision.** Four of the case-study colleges had ‘14–16 units’ or ‘collegiate

units' because they felt that it raised the profile and gained recognition of the 14–16-year-old provision. It also benefited both the young people and the lecturers to have a specialised team working with the younger students, because as one curriculum manager observed: 'it's nonsense to expect lecturers to cope with everything'. However the fifth college catered predominantly for 16–19-year-old students and felt that the 14–16 year olds fitted in comfortably with their slightly older peers and so in that case the college management did not feel that they needed a special unit.

In addition, some staff felt it was more appropriate to provide infill places to younger students because it was believed to enhance behaviour amongst the younger students as they aspired to behave like their older peers. When there were few 14–16 year olds infill provision was also seen to be more financially viable. Other staff felt that discrete provision, within the college context, was preferable as lecturers could then teach at an appropriate pace for the younger students. These preferences were often influenced by subject choice.

- **The provision of support for the young people.** Strategies had developed to provide pastoral support for the 14–16-year-old students, on subjects such as transport as well as course-related issues, by means of, for example, tutorial systems and anti-bullying policies. It was also seen to be desirable to provide extra support in the classroom either for specific pupils or more general assistance for lecturers. As well as training for staff in, for example, teaching and learning strategies (as outlined below) interviewees also commented on the need to educate all staff (not just lecturers directly involved with 14–16 year olds) that the young people were not necessarily 'naughty' and represented all abilities.
- **A college-wide and holistic approach to the inclusion of this new age group.** It was suggested that the 14–16 year olds should have a comprehensive induction to the whole college so that they felt part of the community. It was also pointed out by interviewees that although it was advisable to have, for example, cross-college meetings (to ensure that all staff were aware of the purpose and issues surrounding 14–16 year olds and strategies adopted to meet ECM outcomes for young people in their care) and an inclusive ethos to 14–16 year olds, careful monitoring of numbers of 14–16 year olds should be maintained as a balance of age groups was felt to be important to maintain the FE community ethos.

- **Training for lecturers in teaching and managing the younger age group.** As outlined in chapter 2, lecturers with experience of teaching 14–16 year olds said that it was important, for example, to set very clear expectations and objectives, to break tasks down into smaller chunks, to rotate activities, to set out clear ground rules for discipline and to always be on time for lectures.

4.3 Issues for consideration

Overall, the experiences from the five case-study colleges, who have extensive experience of 14–16 provision, indicate that, although they have not resolved all the issues associated with the inclusion of 14–16 year olds in colleges, they have made significant progress in many areas, such as selection and teaching and learning approaches. The following issues are raised here for consideration.

4.3.1 Workforce capacity

Evidence suggests that lecturers feel more comfortable teaching 14–16 year olds subsequent to their first year as they gain experience in, for example, behaviour management and teaching and learning strategies for this age group. Additionally this research further emphasises the importance of having staff who are enthusiastic about teaching this age group and who are fully involved in the process of selection of the students. It is suggested that it is worth considering how to systematically support lecturers with regard to sharing their learning and growing expertise by, for example, methodically cascading learning down to all or through seminars open to all lecturers of 14–16 year olds.

4.3.2 Physical capacity

The inclusion of 14–16 year olds into further education colleges brings with it the need to consider the capacity and adequacy of the physical resources of the college. As colleges expand to include another target audience, it may be necessary to consider how best to cater for them. This research indicated that the college context was important in this consideration. For example, one college had already built a specialist 14–16 unit while another was

considering building a specialist unit for their higher education students (another area of expansion) since they felt it was more appropriate, in their circumstances, to include the 14–16 year olds in with their 16–19-year-old students. As well as the physical resources necessary for the delivery of courses such as motor vehicle maintenance or hairdressing, colleges may also wish to consider the provision of social facilities for this age group, for example, space to play football or a common room with a pool table.

4.3.3 FE ethos

Fourteen to sixteen-year-old pupils value the different relationship they have with FE lecturers, as opposed to school teachers. Whilst there is some suggestion from this research that there is a need for more parity with schools with regard to behaviour management and discipline, college management might wish to consider how to endorse this while at the same time maintaining the FE ethos (for example, students calling lecturers by their first names and the more informal atmosphere) which is important to 14–16 year olds. Furthermore with increasing numbers of 14–16 year olds in college, it is suggested that consideration should be given as to how best to maintain a balance of age groups so that the traditional FE ethos is preserved.

4.3.4 Partnership issues

There appears to be little doubt that collaborative working with partners is beneficial to young people and this research further emphasises the advantages of partnership working. Although it is apparent that there are variations according to geographical area depending on whether an area is predominantly urban or rural or whether there are school sixth forms, sixth form colleges or FE colleges, nevertheless certain issues remain constant. For example, the delivery of courses and open evenings on days that suit colleges, schools and students might be given further thought to ensure the structure is working in everyone's best interests. Further collaboration might be considered by, for example, shared INSET days which could be used to further reflect on mutual issues such as discipline and practical considerations, such as conformity of approach with regard to students' absence and expectations of students as to how and to whom they should report. Other

issues of concern to both schools and colleges, and similarly worthy of further consideration, might include parity of funding with regard to 14–16-year-old students and pay between school and college lecturers teaching the same age group.

4.3.5 Health and safety

Although the colleges involved in this research clearly had comprehensive health and safety procedures in place, the inclusion of 14–16 year olds into colleges, which have traditionally served students over 16 years old, raised issues of concern. For example, although all staff are checked by the Criminal Records Bureau, older students are not, and supervision of all 14–16 year olds in break-times proved to be challenging. It is hard for colleges to mitigate all risks and issues such as this must remain an ongoing consideration.

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