



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

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*executive  
summary*



NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

# 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 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.

## More information

For more information or to view the full report visit [www.nfer.ac.uk](http://www.nfer.ac.uk) or email NFER at [enquiries@nfer.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@nfer.ac.uk).





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