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## PLAYING FOR SUCCESS AN EVALUATION OF ITS LONG TERM IMPACT

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### Introduction

The *Playing for Success* (PFS) initiative is targeted at underachieving young people. It aims to contribute to raising educational standards, especially in numeracy and literacy, bringing the attainment levels of lower achieving pupils closer to the average expected for their age. Previous national evaluation studies have measured pupils' performance at the start and end of their attendance at PFS Centres (Sharp *et al.*, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003). The results have shown clear evidence of significant improvements, especially in numeracy and information and communications technology (ICT).

This study set out to consider whether there was any evidence of longer term changes in pupils' performance in National Curriculum Assessments (NCA) associated with attending a PFS Centre. It also aimed to gather information on the strategies adopted by PFS Centres to encourage schools to capitalise on the learning gains achieved by pupils attending PFS.

### Key findings

The statistical analysis indicated that:

- In Key Stages 2, 3 and 4, low attainers who attended PFS Centres did better than expected and higher attainers did less well than expected in NCAs (except in respect of English in Key Stage 4, where no statistically significant difference was found). For example in Key Stage 2 maths, one in four PFS pupils who performed below the expected level in Key Stage 1 maths went on to perform above the expected level at Key Stage 2, compared to one in five similar pupils that did not attend.
- In Key Stage 4, pupils who had attended PFS made greater progress in maths when compared to similar pupils that did not attend. The difference was equivalent to one in seven PFS pupils attaining one higher grade in maths GCSE than expected. PFS pupils also made greater progress overall at GCSE (in terms of the average GCSE score, one in ten PFS pupils attained one grade higher than expected in all subjects they took).
- In Key Stage 2, pupils who attended PFS made less progress in English (by 0.7 of a month). No statistically significant impact was found in Key Stage 3.
- An analysis of the progress achieved by pupils attending each Centre identified eight PFS Centres that had performed significantly better than other Centres on at least two of six NCA outcome measures.

The qualitative analysis of 'more effective' Centres indicated that:

- Centres and partner schools were focussing on the details of liaison and good practice that provided a well targeted, high quality learning experience during the course and facilitated transfer of learning after the pupils had left.
- Partnership working between Centres and schools was critical, before, during and after pupils attended the PFS programme. Establishing a good relationship with the host club was important, as was a good working relationship with local authority colleagues, Critical Friends and the central team at DfES.

## Aims of the study

The study set out to investigate the impact of attending *Playing for Success* on subsequent pupil performance in National Curriculum Assessments.

The aims of the evaluation were:

- to establish the evidence for longer term gains among pupils who have attended PFS Centres
- to consider the evidence for differential effects among different PFS Centres
- to gather information on the strategies adopted by PFS Centres to encourage schools to capitalise on the learning gains achieved by pupils attending PFS
- to identify the implications of the evaluation findings for PFS Centres and their partner schools.

## Background

*Playing for Success* is a national initiative and was established in 1997 by the Department for Education and Skills in partnership with the Football Association Premier League and their clubs, and local authorities. Since then it has expanded to include a wide range of professional sports, including cricket and rugby. It aims to contribute to raising educational standards, especially in urban areas, by setting up Study Support Centres in professional football clubs and other sports venues. The initiative has expanded from three pilot Centres in 1997 to over 150 signed up in 2006.

*Playing for Success* focuses on underachieving young people, mainly in Years 6 to 9, and places a strong emphasis on improving pupils' attitudes and motivation to learn. Centres are managed by experienced teachers. They use the medium and environment of sport to support pupils' work in literacy, numeracy and ICT. Pupils attend the Centres after school for around 20 hours during a period of about ten weeks.

## Methodology

The study took place in 2006-7. Data were collected in two main strands. Strand 1 used quantitative methods to compare the academic performance at Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 of 14,541 pupils who had attended PFS Centres during academic years 2000/1 to 2004/5 (and took their NCAs in 2003, 2004 or 2005) with the performance

of pupils who did not attend. In order to make fair comparisons, multilevel modelling was used to take account of pupil and school factors known to influence pupil progress (including such variables as prior attainment, gender, ethnicity, eligibility for free school meals, special educational needs status and school size).

Strand 2 entailed a qualitative analysis of strategies adopted in 'more effective' Centres in relation to their longer term impact on pupil progress. Seven Centres were identified as more effective on the basis of the quantitative analysis. Two Centres were amongst those identified as more effective by the PFS Central team, based on the judgements of PFS Critical Friends and local evaluation results. Interviews were conducted with Centre Managers and two link teachers sending pupils to each Centre (a total of 27 interviewees).

## Other findings

The study investigated whether the time that had elapsed between a pupil's attendance at PFS and their assessments made any difference to their progress. There was no indication of a consistent relationship between this variable and the progress of PFS pupils.

The qualitative data from 'more effective' Centres demonstrated the importance of partnership working between Centres and schools. Best practice points included:

- Emphasising the importance of selecting pupils who were most likely to benefit from PFS. These Centres took care of practical details and ensured that teachers, pupils and parents were well prepared for the experience.
- Providing a positive ethos, where individuals were welcomed, encouraged and valued. Centres helped pupils to engage in individual target setting and ensured pupils were aware of what they needed to do to achieve their goals.
- Emphasising personalised learning, devising individual programmes and providing constant feedback. These Centres offered practical activities, which enabled pupils to relate curriculum content to real life situations. They also ensured a good communication with schools during the course.

- Helping pupils to recognise their achievements and encouraging them to continue to succeed after PfS. Centres ensured that pupils received public acknowledgement of their effort and attainment at end-of-course celebration events. They provided pupils with a portfolio of work that could be displayed at school and encouraged schools to build on the progress achieved. Some partner schools capitalised on PfS particularly well by adopting similar approaches and using pupils' skills.

- Given that this study has found evidence of greater long term impact among lower-attaining pupils, Centres may wish to reconsider their selection criteria.
- Local authorities and Centre Managers should consider carrying out their own studies of longer term progress. This would entail adopting systems to record which pupils had attended, selecting an appropriate comparison (control) group and analysing progress over time, including progress at Key Stage 4.
- PfS should share information about best practice in contributing to longer term impact.

### Conclusions and recommendations

The overall findings from the statistical analysis employed in this study present a mixed picture. However, rather than see this as evidence of a lack of impact at Key Stage 2 and 3, the contribution of the qualitative analysis suggests that longer term progress should be viewed as a shared responsibility between Centres and schools. PfS is not an inoculation against future underperformance, but it does give underachieving young people a new chance, as long as they receive recognition for their achievement, continued support and opportunities to succeed.

The study of 'more effective' Centres found that staff were paying very detailed attention to liaison and partnership with schools, as well as to the quality of the programme provided at the Centre. The study identified specific strategies adopted before, during and after the pupils attended PfS that helped pupils to transfer their learning to the school environment.

The evaluation findings have the following implications and recommendations for those managing PfS at local and national levels as well as for PfS Centres and their partner schools:

- The government, local authorities and sponsors should continue to support PfS. Further consideration should be given to the opportunities for pupils to transfer their learning from PfS to other contexts (for example, through continued partnerships between Centres and schools, and through developing opportunities for PfS graduates to build on their achievements, both within and outside school hours).

### References

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## **Additional Information**

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