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Exploring Employer Behaviour in relation to Investors in People

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Exploring Employer Behaviour in relation to Investors in People

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Foreword

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills is a social partnership, led by Commissioners from large and small employers, trade unions and the voluntary sector. Our mission is to raise skill levels to help drive enterprise, create more and better jobs and promote economic growth. Our strategic objectives are to:

- Provide outstanding labour market intelligence which helps businesses and people make the best choices for them;
- Work with businesses to develop the best market solutions which leverage greater investment in skills;
- Maximise the impact of employment and skills policies and employer behaviour to support jobs and growth and secure an internationally competitive skills base.

These strategic objectives are supported by a research programme that provides a robust evidence base for our insights and actions and which draws on good practice and the most innovative thinking. The research programme is underpinned by a number of core principles including the importance of: ensuring '**relevance**' to our most pressing strategic priorities; '**salience**' and effectively translating and sharing the key insights we find; **international benchmarking** and drawing insights from good practice abroad; **high quality** analysis which is leading edge, robust and action orientated; being **responsive** to immediate needs as well as taking a longer term perspective. We also work closely with key partners to ensure a **co-ordinated** approach to research.

In April 2010, the UK Commission took over strategic ownership of the Investors in People (IIP) Standard. The UK Commission's evidence report, *Perspective and Performance of Investors in People: a Literature Review* (Gloster et. al, 2010) summarised existing research on IIP to inform strategic development of the Standard. The review identified areas requiring further investigation, particularly in relation to the value derived from the IIP offering, and barriers and motivations to pursuing the Standard. This report builds upon the research base to develop our understanding of the decision-making processes and experiences of both existing and potential IIP employers.

Sharing the findings of our research and engaging with our audience is important to further develop the evidence on which we base our work. Evidence Reports are our chief means of

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reporting our detailed analytical work. Each Evidence Report is accompanied by an executive summary. All of our outputs can be accessed on the UK Commission's website at www.ukces.org.uk

But these outputs are only the beginning of the process and we will be continually looking for mechanisms to share our findings, debate the issues they raise and we can extend their reach and impact.

We hope you find this report useful and informative. If you would like to provide any feedback or comments, or have any queries please e-mail info@ukces.org.uk, quoting the report title or series number.

Lesley Giles

UK Commission for Employment and Skills

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The UK Commission has strategic ownership of the Investors in People (IIP) Standard and is continuously developing a strategy for its development and implementation. To inform this strategy and summarise the existing evidence about IIP, the UK Commission commissioned an evidence review about the performance and perspectives of IIP (Gloster et. al 2010). The review found that although the Standard has been in operation for twenty years, no previous research had examined the reasons organisations discontinue with IIP. This report starts to build this evidence base and is based on 36 qualitative interviews with employers. It focuses on the decision-making processes and experiences of three employer groups: employers that have held IIP accreditation for a number of years (long-term IIP accredited employers); employers who previously held IIP accreditation (previously accredited IIP employers); and employers who committed to gaining IIP accreditation but subsequently chose not to go through the assessment process (de-committed IIP employers). This report presents the findings of the research.

Employer understanding and views of IIP

Long-term IIP accredited employers were broadly positive towards IIP and tended to understand its purpose, but its relevance to them had changed over time. More so than the other employer groups, long-term IIP-accredited employers were actively involved in continuously adapting and applying IIP to their organisation, and in doing so, continued to make it relevant and ensure the longevity of its value.

Previously accredited IIP employers were the least positive about the relevance and value of the Standard. This group felt IIP provided the firm with an initial one-off benefit, but had run its useful course within their organisation. In particular IIP was felt to help organisations to develop their Human Resource (HR) practices at a critical juncture, such as when the firm had grown or where there was a fresh impetus to renew policies.

Overall the Standard was well-regarded among de-committed IIP employers. The perceived value and relevance had not changed over time them, most still felt that IIP had value and relevance to their organisation.

Some employers reported differences between the understanding of IIP and its relevance and value to the organisation among HR staff and staff in other areas of the business, such as senior managers. A common example was the perceived difference in the purpose of the

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Standard. In HR it was more likely to be seen as a business improvement tool, whereas some senior managers were reported to see the Standard more narrowly and focused on HR.

How are decisions made about IIP?

Within medium and large organisations IIP tended to be owned by and accreditation led from within the HR function that then made recommendations about whether or not to (re)accredit to senior managers, such as directors, or the chief executive who then made the final decision. In smaller organisations it was common for the IIP lead to be both responsible for overseeing both implementation and to make decisions about whether or not to commit and (re)accredit.

Interviewees in long-term IIP accredited employers described a high level of organisational commitment to IIP, with IIP accreditation a part of their organisation's policy, characteristic of organisations which are 'believers' in IIP.

In previously accredited IIP employers and de-committed IIP employers there seemed a greater degree of expectation and pressure from senior managers for the costs and benefits of IIP to be justified. The cost of IIP outweighing the benefits was often given as a reason for not seeking (re)accreditation. However, these decisions seemed to have been made on the basis of perceived costs and perceived benefits rather than using measurable or quantifiable data. The likely adviser/assessor time costs were typically the only hard cost or benefit data organisations reviewed.

Why do some employers commit to IIP but not accredit?

There were two main reasons for not progressing from commitment to accreditation identified by de-committed IIP employers.

First, for some employers the amount of work required to put the processes in place and make the changes to the business required for a successful IIP accreditation was substantial. The staff time and opportunity costs of achieving IIP accreditation were therefore perceived to be relatively high. Over time these organisations found that work towards IIP stalled, or received lower priority in the face of other business pressures, resulting in loss of momentum to achieve the Standard.

Second, restructuring and a change in business climate between commitment and accreditation meant some de-committed IIP employers felt that the costs of working towards

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and assessing against the Standard could not be justified to staff against a backdrop of budget cuts and job losses.

Why do some employers not regain IIP accreditation?

There were three main reasons why previously-accredited IIP employers decided not to regain IIP accreditation.

First, some organisations felt that they had maximised the organisational benefits from the Standard by simply putting the processes in place to pass their earlier IIP assessments. The benefits to IIP were viewed as relatively static and would remain with the organisation whether or not they sought reaccreditation. Over time the assessment process was felt to have lost value, and the assessor was thought to be unable to add insight. This may demonstrate differences both in how organisations chose to use IIP and their business strategies. In contrast with previously-accredited employers, some long-term accredited employers were using IIP as a continuous improvement tool which they perceived was important to managing business change.

Second, when budgets were reduced and there had been restructuring and staff redundancies, employers in the previously accredited group also reported that reaccreditation did not seem appropriate. This suggests a lack of managerial confidence in being able to justify investment in staff during difficult economic conditions.

Third, externally, there was a perceived decline in the value of the Standard, both in the focus of national policy and within organisational supply chains. Some felt that other quality standards, such as International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO), held more market relevance and commercial value.

Employer experience of IIP assessment

Most of those organisations that had been assessed against the Standard had had positive experiences of assessment. A key reason for this was the organisation's relationship with their adviser/assessor. Long-standing relationships between assessors and employers were perceived to add value to the assessment process as they helped the adviser/assessor to understand a firm's strategy and how the business operated, to therefore draw on their relevant external business knowledge to make more effective, useful and actionable recommendations.

The perceived match between the organisation and the assessor influenced the employer experience of IIP assessment. The match was affected by the adviser/assessor's

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understanding of the organisation's culture values as well as their previous business experience in a relevant sector.

The benefits of IIP

The costs and benefits of IIP were not measured by the employers we interviewed, although most described a number of benefits they perceived to have resulted from their involvement with IIP. This lack of measurement highlights the importance of attitudes and belief in the value of the Standard in informing employer perceptions of its costs and benefits.

Long-term IIP-accredited employers reported the largest number of benefits from IIP. They perceived there were benefits from having an independent perspective on the business from the adviser/assessor, and some external validation of business practices. Some felt that having an independent assessor interviewing staff resulted in more honest feedback from them than would be the case if internal managers asked staff the same questions. A better understanding of staff views was felt to be invaluable in business planning, and for some this was one of the most beneficial parts of the IIP process.

Previously-accredited IIP employers reported benefits from IIP, especially from improved training practices and HR processes. These benefits had been particularly apparent on initial IIP accreditation, but were reported to have since diminished. For previously-accredited IIP employers the external validity and perceived kudos of having the Standard was felt to be a benefit. However, some previously accredited employers, like long-term IIP employers, felt that this had decreased over time.

Are organisations likely to gain IIP (re)accreditation in the future?

Of the long-term accredited employers we interviewed all except one planned to regain accreditation in future, reflecting the organisational commitment to IIP among this group. However, there were indications that the costs of IIP assessment may be scrutinised more keenly in future, particularly among employers in the public sector facing budget reductions.

The previously-accredited IIP employers were divided over whether or not they would consider regaining IIP accreditation in the future. Some felt very strongly that they would not, whereas others said they might if business circumstances changed. Some felt that the decline in external value of the Standard would need to be addressed before they would consider reaccrediting.

Some of the de-committed IIP employers interviewed for this research were planning to undertake IIP assessment in the future, but others were not, and other de-committed IIP

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employers felt that they had gained enough from adopting the Standard's processes without seeking accreditation.

Implications for action

Suggested implications for action based on the research findings are summarised below for the UK Commission, IIP Delivery Centres and central government policy relating to IIP (re)accreditation.

UK Commission for Employment and Skills

- Consider differentiating the Standard at the lower end of the framework for organisations such as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) which have furthest to travel to encourage conversion from commitment to accreditation.
- Find ways to encourage employer representative bodies, such as Chambers of Commerce, Sector Skills Councils, and the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development, as well as private sector organisations to advocate IIP to private sector organisations. Local Enterprise Partnerships and other employer partnerships and networks may also offer a forum to do this.
- Foster peer-to-peer learning, for example using IIP ambassador organisations to ensure organisations perceive relevant benefits and are supported through any parts of the Standard they find challenging.
- Develop marketing to illustrate how IIP can be used for businesses facing different market situations including growth, restructuring and mergers. Market to a wide range of sectors, including targeted marketing to high growth businesses which may be expanding employment. Target some communication materials at senior non-HR managers.
- Ensure accurate management information is captured on organisational accreditation status to take account of mergers and changes in approach to accreditation within organisations. Detailing business and departmental units enhances accuracy in reporting.
- Ensure definition of commitment is clear to IIP Delivery Centres and organisations. Offer the possibility of extending commitment period for longer than 3 years for organisations which are genuinely progressing towards the Standard.

IIP Delivery Centres

- Consider using advisers to apply a gap analysis systematically to all first-time committed organisations to help them understand, action and resource work to gain accreditation and enable realistic planning.

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- Offer a choice of assessors/advisers to employers using CVs to enable good match for organisational needs based on strengths such as sectoral familiarity. Provide organisations with an option to use the same or different assessor for subsequent accreditations.
- Recruit selectively and provide regular training for IIP assessors to ensure credibility with senior non-HR managers
- Build adviser/organisation relationships using timeframes for contact to discuss progress and to troubleshoot, maintain momentum and ensure accuracy of management information.
- Support advisers/assessors in developing dialogue about business strategy with organisations to challenge and promote higher value added routes and continuous improvement.
- Through advisers and assessors, support staff responsible for IIP within organisations to undertake more formal measurement of IIP impact to maintain Standard credibility with senior decision-makers and enable decision-making about the Standard on the basis of evidence rather than perceptions.

Central government policy

- Consider how to maintain levels IIP accreditation in the public sector alongside spending reductions in order to maintain the role of the public sector in promoting IIP.
- Increase the external value of the Standard by enhancing requirements within public sector procurement policies, for example, for second and third tier suppliers.

1 Introduction and background

This report explores employer behaviour in relation to choices they make about Investors in People (IIP) accreditation in order for the future IIP strategy to ensure IIP is relevant, adds value to employers and tackles any barriers to successful delivery. The research focuses on the decision-making processes and experiences of three key groups of employers: employers that have held IIP accreditation for a number of years; employers who previously held IIP accreditation but have let this lapse; and employers who committed to gaining IIP accreditation but subsequently did not to go through the assessment process.

1.1 Investors in People in the UK

Investors in People (IIP) was developed in 1990 by the National Training Task Force to set out a national framework aiming to improve business performance by linking staff development to business objectives. A number of revisions have been made to the IIP framework and standard (the Standard) since its inception, and in recent years IIP has been repositioned as a business improvement tool.

In 2009 IIP gained further flexibility in the way it is delivered and presented to employers through the New Choices approach. This places added emphasis on leadership and management capability, and allows organisations to specify their central business goals and to concentrate on those elements of the Standard above a core minimum, which will best support their business aims. This can lead to additional achievement of Gold, Silver or Bronze status.

In April 2010, strategic ownership of the IIP Standard and framework transferred to the UK Commission from IIP UK. The UK Commission has responsibility for the development of IIP policy and its strategic direction, and for awarding licenses to organisations to deliver the IIP accreditation process.

The delivery infrastructure for IIP differs by nation. In Northern Ireland IIP is administered from the Department for Employment and Learning (DELNI). In Wales, IIP structures are similar to those in Northern Ireland. IIP sits within the devolved government and is linked to other business support initiatives. In Scotland, IIP is delivered and administered through Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise. In England, IIP operates independently to other business support services.

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Each nation has a different policy on employer subsidy to support the adoption of IIP. Table 1.1 summarises the varying approaches to subsidy between the devolved nations.

Table 1.1: Summary of available subsidy for IIP by UK nation

UK Nation	Subsidy
England	Currently no subsidy. Between 2002-2005 the Small Firms Initiative subsidised the costs of participation of small firms.
Ireland	Financial subsidy to private and voluntary sector organisations with fewer than 250 employees to support the assessor costs of their first IIP assessment. There is no subsidy for re-accreditation.
Scotland	No subsidy through Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Scottish Enterprise subsidises businesses that advisers believe could benefit with a fully funded initial assessment and action plan, up to 50 per cent of the costs of implementation support and, up to 50 per cent of the costs for the assessment.
Wales	Targeted subsidy covers half of the costs of IIP assessment for employers with fewer than 250 employees. The same funding is available for re-accreditation.

The IIP Literature Review (Gloster et. al 2010) summarised existing evidence on IIP and found a number of reasons why organisations engaged with the Standard, including: improving organisational performance; managing change effectively; meeting the personal ambitions of individual members of staff; and demand from customers in the supply chain (Gloster et al., 2010).

There is evidence that several of the expected benefits are realised and IIP can have a wide range of organisational impacts. These impacts can differ from one organisation to another, depending on their characteristics, motivations for engagement and starting positions. The benefits cover training, operational performance and business outcomes (Gloster et al., 2010).

Despite evidence that organisations can benefit from IIP, the review found that in the last two years (2008 and 2009) the number of IIP accounts had reduced. This fall was explained by:

- **Reduced inflow:** A falling number of new organisations expressing interest in and committing to IIP for the first time;
- **Increased drop out between commitment and accreditation:** the number of organisations committing to IIP and not seeking accreditation had been rising, and was approximately half of all commitments in 2007;
- **Increased outflow:** A large number of organisations not pursuing reassessment after a period of accreditation. Over 3,000 previously-accredited IIP employers a year had not sought reaccreditation between 2004 and 2009 (Gloster et al, 2010).

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While some aspects of IIP were found to be well-researched the review identified a number of evidence gaps. These included:

- understanding the inherent value derived from IIP by long-term IIP accredited employers (see sections 3.3, 3.6 and 4.2);
- understanding why previously accredited IIP organisations choose to let their accreditation lapse (see section 3.4); and
- understanding why organisations commit to IIP, but do not become accredited (see section 3.5).

It is these three questions that are the focus of this research. It is particularly notable that although the Standard has been in operation for 20 years, no previous research was located which examined why organisations discontinue IIP accreditation.

1.2 Research aims and objectives

The aim of the research was to develop a deeper understanding of employer behaviour in relation to the IIP product and service offering in order to help inform future strategy for IIP development and delivery.

The research objectives were to:

- better understand the decision-making process of long-term IIP accredited employers;
- understand how the IIP offer achieved sustained impact among some organisations;
- examine why some employers are committed to IIP, but do not progress towards IIP accreditation;
- examine why some employers do not pursue IIP re-accreditation;
- identify any barriers or problems managers face when implementing IIP and how these could be overcome to maximise accreditation;
- distil key messages concerning the IIP offer and the customer journey in order to attract and retain more employers through to accreditation.

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1.3 Methodology

An overview of the methodology is outlined below. Further details are given in Appendix 1.

The research methodology adopted was qualitative because the research required an in-depth exploration of decision-making processes and insights into personal and organisational motivations, inhibitors, and barriers to IIP use. Thirty-six interviews were carried out with three types of employers. These were:

- Thirteen interviews with long-term IIP accredited employers: An organisation or organisational unit that has demonstrated through assessment that it meets fully all the principles, indicators and evidence requirements of the IIP standard on more than one occasion.
- Twelve interviews with previously accredited IIP employers: An organisation or organisational unit that had demonstrated through assessment that it met all the principles, indicators and evidence requirements of the IIP standard on one or more occasions, but which subsequently decided not to be reassessed and is no longer IIP accredited.
- Eleven interviews with de-committed IIP employers: An organisation or organisational unit that committed to undertaking IIP, developed an action plan and/or strategy that outlined how it planned to implement IIP, but withdrew from the process before being assessed.

These definitions are used throughout this report.

1.3.1 Sampling and recruitment

The sampling strategy sought to increase the chances of capturing a full range of views and experiences across key sub-groups within the population of interest in order to increase the robustness of the research. However, as the research is qualitative it cannot be used to provide a statistically representative analysis of key differences in employers' views or experiences of IIP based on, for example, organisational size.

Quotas were set for the achieved sample on the basis of organisational size and UK nation (see Appendix Table A1 and A2 for a breakdown). Interlocking quotas by public, private and voluntary and community sector organisations were not adopted, but the majority of the sample sought were private sector organisations whose decision-making process in relation to IIP is of particular interest to the UK Commission. Approximately two-thirds of the achieved interviews were with private sector employers, and one third with public sector organisations.

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The sample for previously accredited IIP employers, and de-committed IIP employers was drawn from UK Commission IIP management information that is collected and updated by the delivery centres, advisers and assessors, and is also collated centrally. Attempts were made to sample employers in these two customer groups that had disengaged from IIP within the past year, in order to ensure that they were able to recall and discuss the decisions, influences and processes involved. Leads were selected at random from this sample.

Long-term accredited IIP employers could not be easily identified from the management information. This sample was selected by targeting accredited employers who had responded to a previous survey and consented to be approached for further research.

The selected employers received a letter from the research team outlining the purpose of the research and requesting a telephone interview. The letters were followed up with telephone calls. A number of screening questions were used to ensure that interviewees were selected who would be able to speak about the topics of interest. Participants had to be in post at the time of the previous IIP accreditation, or in post when the decision not to pursue or retain IIP accreditation was taken. Further details of the recruitment and screening process are detailed in the Appendix.

1.3.2 Discussion guides

A tailored interview guide was used to conduct interviews with employers from each group, although they shared some common questions to facilitate comparability in the analysis (copies of the topic guides are in Appendix 2).

The topic guide design drew on the *Customer Journey Mapping – Guide for Practitioners* (Cabinet Office, 2010). Customer journey mapping enables those delivering a product or service to view the process and experience from a customer's perspective, and to enable the delivery of services or support at the most appropriate time. The process can also help to target limited resources for maximum impact at sticking points during the process and identify 'baton change' points where communication may break down. By adopting the perspective of 'walking in the shoes' of employers to understand how they experience the process and delivery of IIP accreditation, this helped to identify key points or elements of the journey where customers experience most difficulty and may drop out, or are potentially getting less value than they might from the Standard.

The length of the interviews varied, depending on the sample group and how much the interviewee wanted to contribute to the research topics. Interviews with long-term accredited employers were approximately an hour in length, interviews with de-committed IIP employers

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and previously-accredited IIP employers tended to be shorter, lasting approximately 30 minutes.

1.3.3 Achieved interviews

The interviews were carried out by telephone in order to maximise participation from people with senior management responsibilities. Research on mode effects in qualitative interviewing has found there are few differences when comparing telephone and face-to-face interviews, in particular with high-level businesses or stakeholder audiences (Social Policy Research Unit, 2010).

In total 36 interviews were achieved. Table 1.2 and 1.3 outline the achieved interviews by country and size of employer.

Table 1.2: Achieved interviews by country

Country	Long-term IIP accredited employer	Previously accredited IIP employer	De-committed IIP employer	Total
England	12	8	8	28
Scotland	0	3	1	5
Northern Ireland	1	1	2	3
Total	13	12	11	36

Source: IES, 2011, N.B.: There was not sufficient data within the Management Information to develop a better understanding of commitments and accreditations in Wales, or to recruit any interviews with IIP employers. We have therefore had to withdraw research activities in Wales for this project.

Table 1.3: Achieved interviews by number of employees

Number of employees	Long-term IIP accredited employer	Previously accredited IIP employer	De-committed IIP employer	Total
Less than 50	3	5	5	13
50-249	5	1	3	9
250-999	2	3	0	5
1000+	3	3	3	9
Total	13	12	11	36

Source: IES, 2011

The employers interviewed operated in a range of sectors. Long-term IIP accredited employers included a local authority, two retailers, a school, a veterinary practice, two manufacturers, an organisation providing building control services, and one providing industrial control systems. These organisations served a mix of international, national and local product markets.

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Previously-accredited IIP employers interviewed for this research served primarily national or local product markets. The employers included a law firm, a health and social care provider, a further education college, a local authority, a retailer, a pharmaceutical supplier and a provider of security services.

De-committed IIP employers interviewed included two manufacturers, an architectural practice, a local authority, a provider of care services, two construction companies, and two business service providers.

The interviewees had a range of job roles. Some focused on learning and development or Human Resources (HR), whereas others, particularly in smaller organisations, were senior managers with wide ranging responsibilities. The interviewees from de-committed IIP employers had more varied roles, and less of a specific focus on training, development or HR. De-committed employers included an accountant, an HR and finance manager, a personal assistant to the managing director, an office manager, and a number of general managers. By contrast interviewees from long-term accredited employers and previously-accredited IIP employers had a larger part of their role dedicated to HR and training. They included HR managers and directors, learning and development managers, and managing partners. However, a larger number of employers interviewed in these two groups were medium-sized or large organisations, and a large number of de-committed IIP employers were small organisations, which may go some way to explaining this difference.

1.3.4 Limitations and biases of the research

The difficulties of sampling and recruitment mean that the research has a number of limitations and potential biases.

First, the sample for long-term IIP accredited employers was drawn from a subset of organisations that had previously participated in a survey about IIP. This means that all long-term IIP accredited employers did not have an equal chance of participating in this research. The long-term IIP-accredited sample is likely to be biased towards employers who were willing to participate in research, and to have low levels of staff turnover, for example with staff responsible for IIP remaining in post over a period of time, as the methodology required that the interviewee had been in post at the last IIP accreditation. Results could therefore exaggerate the lack of suitability of IIP for businesses experiencing (negative) types of change as these were not captured by the long-term accredited sample.

Second, in recruiting from the sample of de-committed IIP employers it is clear that there was a spectrum of involvement with IIP among this group, reflecting some ambiguities in how

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employers were classified within historical management information. Some employers reported at the recruitment stage that they had had minimal involvement with IIP and were therefore not interviewed, whereas others had been working towards the Standard for a number of years, and indeed a small number said they were continuing to do so. The employers that were willing to take part in the research tended to be those that had had relatively extensive involvement with IIP and some reported their intentions to continue to work towards the Standard in future. There is a risk that the achieved interviews with de-committed IIP employers do not reflect the full spectrum of experiences and reasons for de-committing and are therefore biased towards employers that are most positive towards the Standard.

Third, in all of the samples there were a considerable number of contacts that had left organisations and others that had incorrect telephone contact details. There is a risk that overall the research has primarily captured the views of more stable employers and is therefore less likely to have explored the views of employers experiencing significant change. Given profound changes that many businesses are experiencing within the UK economy, the views of these organisations on IIP may be important for the UK Commission to track in the future. Alternatively, the incorrect data could be a reflection on the relative strength of the relationship between the adviser/assessor and the employer, or how advisers, assessors and delivery centres collect and collate employer data, and the consistency of approach to this.

1.4 The IIP customer journey

The analysis contained in the rest of this report broadly follows the employer journey through the IIP process. The employer journey to IIP accreditation involves several stages: pre-commitment, commitment, accreditation, and re-accreditation. At each stage there are enablers and deterrents that interact to determine the employer's decision. How the factors identified in the existing literature map onto the IIP customer journey are detailed in Figure 1.1.

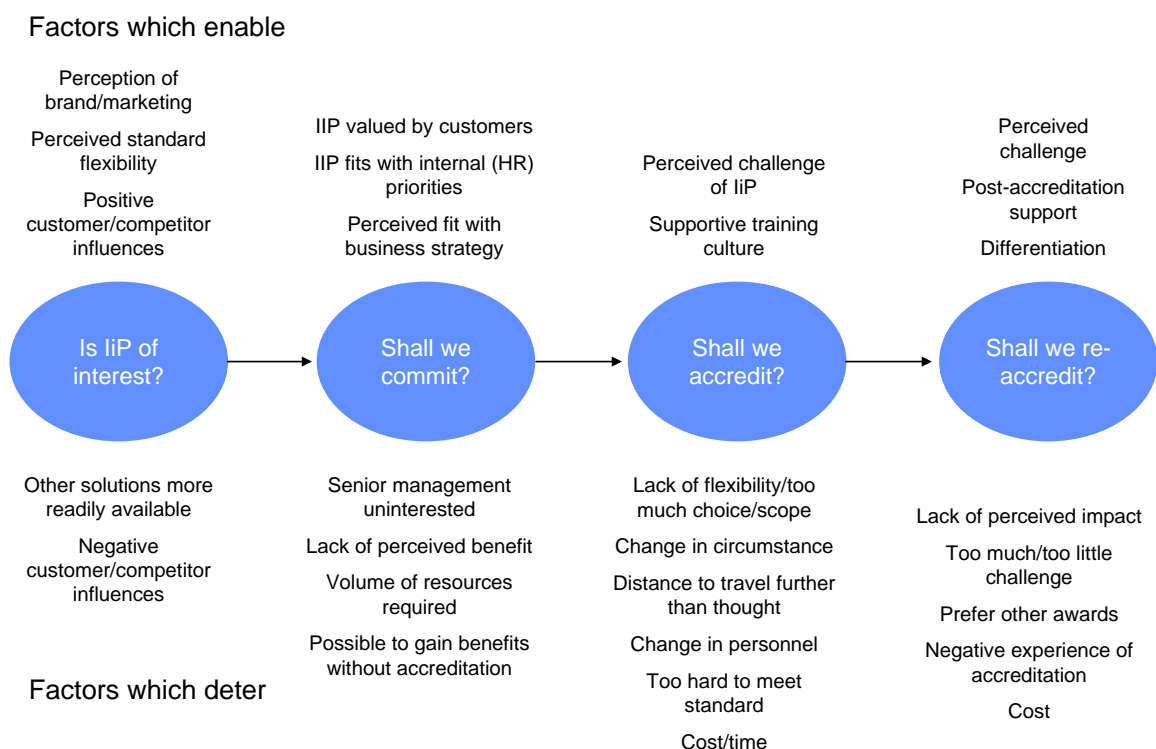
The IIP Literature Review (Gloster et. al, 2010) found that there were several interacting barriers and drivers affecting whether organisations engaged with IIP. The perceived relevance of IIP to an organisation and the value of IIP as a good business decision were two key factors in explaining organisations' interest in gaining IIP (Ipsos MORI, 2010). Previous research distinguished between: 'compliance seekers' who engage with IIP to win contracts; 'badge seekers' who use the Standard to improve company profile and to aid recruitment and marketing; and 'idealists' who engage in order to attain best practice in training and people management (Jigsaw Research, 2007). Numerous studies have concluded that employers'

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perceptions of the time required to achieve IIP is one of the main barriers to IIP take-up (Gloster et al., 2010).

Previous evidence suggests that some organisations find IIP easier to achieve than others. In part this relates to the extent to which organisations already have the relevant mechanisms and processes in place prior to committing to IIP and the distance they have to travel to meet the Standard (Gloster et al., 2010). The perceived challenge of the Standard is also likely to affect progression along the customer journey.

Figure 1.1: The IIP customer journey and decision-making process



Source: IES, 2011

In interpreting Figure 1.1 it is important to stress a number of issues:

- **Decision-making is not linear:** while the customer journey is necessarily chronological, the factors involved in the decision-making process are not necessarily considered sequentially by organisations. Multiple factors may interact at any one stage and factors which may initially appear (un)important may become more or less salient at later stages in the journey.
- **Defining enablers and deterrents:** Some factors, such as benefits from IIP, can be enablers or deterrents: the presence of a factor can be an enabling factor and its

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absence a deterrent (and vice versa). There are also factors, such as costs, which are uniquely positive or negative influences.

- **Decision-making can be both an individual and group process:** With the exception of the smallest organisations, many of the decisions involved in the journey are likely to be taken collectively.
- **Experiences affect customers' feelings as well as thoughts:** Much of the literature on researching customer experiences stresses that the emotions or feelings triggered at each stage of the process can be powerful influences on subsequent decisions about future interactions with that service.

The report seeks to acknowledge the interplay of different factors at different points during the customer journey in undertaking the analysis and drawing the conclusions.

1.5 Report structure

The remainder of this report follows the IIP customer journey and draws out differences between how the three groups of employers view and experience IIP. At each stage factors influencing employers' decisions about IIP are illustrated, and any key differences between how the three sample groups experience the IIP customer journey are highlighted.

Chapter 2 presents the evidence about employers' understanding of the purpose and views about IIP.

Chapter 3 details the findings about employers' experience of making the initial decision to commit to IIP, the decision to (re)accredit, and experience of the (re)accreditation process.

Chapter 4 outlines employer perceptions of the benefits of IIP, and how IIP compares to other quality standards.

Chapter 5 summarises employers' views on their future business priorities, and whether and how IIP fits with those plans.

Chapter 6 presents a summary of the findings, conclusions and implications for action.

The Appendix contains full details of the methodology and the discussion guides.

2 Employer understanding and views about IIP

Summary

Some employers reported differences in the understanding of the purpose of IIP and its relevance and value to the organisation between HR staff and staff in other areas of the business, such as senior managers. A common example was the perceived difference in the purpose of the Standard. In HR IIP was more likely to be seen as a business improvement tool, whereas some senior managers were reported to see the Standard as more narrowly- focused on HR.

Long-term IIP accredited employers were broadly positive towards IIP and tended to understand its purpose. The relevance of IIP to long-term IIP accredited employers had changed over time. These employers tended to continuously adapt how IIP was applied to their organisation, and in doing so continued to make it relevant and ensure the longevity of its value, a reflection of their organisational capability. However, some long-term IIP accredited employers felt that they had either outgrown or were outgrowing the Standard.

The value in being assessed against an external standard was valued by long-term IIP accredited employers. However, some felt that the Standard may have become devalued over time, due to the large number of firms which are now accredited. This requires further exploration to assess whether there are other factors that have contributed to the devaluing of the Standard.

Previously accredited IIP employers were the least positive about the relevance and value of the Standard. They felt it provided the firm with an initial one-off benefit, but had run its useful course within the organisation. In particular it was felt to help organisations to develop their HR practices at a critical juncture, such as when the firm had grown or where there was a fresh impetus to renew policies.

Overall the de-committed IIP employers were fairly positive about IIP. The Standard was generally well-regarded, however, their understanding of the purpose of the Standard tended to be more limited than the other groups, and to focus in on specific functions for IIP within the organisation. The perceived value and relevance had not changed over time for de-committed IIP employers, most still felt that it had value and relevance to their organisation.

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes employers' general views on IIP as a business support tool. We distinguish differences in the views held by the three employer groups to assess IIP's value and to draw out implications for the content and delivery of the Standard. We explore three dimensions of employer attitudes: understanding of the purpose of IIP; relevance of the Standard to their organisation; and interviewees' perception of IIP's value.

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2.2 Employer understanding and views of IIP

This section describes employers' understanding of the purpose of IIP, its relevance and value to their organisation. It starts with long-term IIP accredited employers, before moving on to present the views of previously accredited IIP employers, and de-committed IIP employers.

Across all three types of organisations, some employers reported differences between the attitudes towards IIP among HR staff and staff in other areas of the business, such as senior managers. A common example was the perceived difference in the purpose of the Standard. In HR it was more likely to be seen as a business improvement tool, whereas some senior managers were reported to see the Standard more narrowly and focused on HR issues.

2.2.1 Long-term IIP accredited employers

Long-term IIP accredited employers were broadly positive towards IIP and their understanding of its purpose is consistent with the policy aspirations for the Standard. The relevance of IIP to long-term IIP accredited employers had changed over time. These employers tended to continuously adapt how IIP was applied to their organisation, and in doing so continued to make it relevant and ensure the longevity of its value.

When asked about the purpose of IIP, long-term IIP accredited employers' tended to demonstrate a clear **understanding of the Standard's purpose**, for example:

'To engender a culture of continuous improvement through people'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 1,000+ employees, Health and social care, Northern
Ireland

'Well the purpose I understand is to drive the business and help our business to be more successful'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Construction, England

Some interviewees felt that the main purpose of IIP was as an external process for structuring training decisions:

'It's a framework for looking at how we train our staff really and I suppose it acts as a guide for us in terms of, are we making the right decisions, and how we make those

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decisions, and then we look to them for feedback as to whether we're doing the right things'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, less than 50 employees, Retail, England

By contrast, other long-term IIP accredited employers described the purpose of IIP to be a way of recognising existing good practice. Some employers saw IIP less as a guide to the kind of processes and practices they needed to introduce and more as a reward for practices they had already implemented.

Additionally long-term IIP accredited employers highlighted one purpose of IIP as being a means of signalling their commitment to employees, both as a way of improving engagement or morale amongst existing staff and as a way of attracting new recruits.

While long-term IIP accredited employers' understanding of the purpose of IIP remained relatively constant over time their views on the **relevance** of IIP to their organisations had changed over time. This tended to be either due to changes in the circumstances of the organisation or changes in the way the Standard was applied. An example of the former comes from a long-term IIP accredited employer facing changes to his firm from the recession:

'I think it's become more relevant because I have to say... It made me consider all the aspects of the business because we're going through this cultural change... [IIP helped] us in implementing change in a more effective way'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Construction, England

Other interviewees from long-term accredited organisations claimed to have made a conscious effort to use IIP in new ways, for example in response to a feeling that the Standard was not working for the organisation.

'What I've done is to seek to move it from being, 1, an event every three years to an on-going management tool, 2, to make the ownership of it within the IIP constitution, so a constituency that the accreditation relates to, rather than it being HR driven and, 3, for it to be seen as very good framework in which to ensure that people just check some of the things that they're doing against the framework'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 1,000+ employees, Housing Association, England

It is notable that these interviewees talked about changes in relevance in terms of what they had done, rather than as a result of changes to the Standard. Long-term accredited

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organisations made use of IIP tools in a strategic and purposeful way to meet their business needs.

Some interviewees said that they had given some consideration to allowing their accreditation to lapse, but had continued in part because there was little perceived difficulty for them in maintaining the Standard.

Long-term accredited IIP employers generally had quite clear ideas about IIP's **value** to their organisation and believed that it added to the way they worked internally. The external value of IIP was also noted by some and specifically the value in being assessed against an external standard. This was reported to add weight to management's claims to care about and value their employees:

'One thing we want to do is to ensure that we are using an industry standard benchmark, in order to be able to demonstrate how we show a commitment to continuing staff training and development in the workforce'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Education, England

However, a minority of long-term IIP accredited employers expressed some doubts about the value of the Standard to their organisation.

Some long-term IIP accredited employers felt that the Standard may have become devalued over time, and attributed this to the large number of firms which are now accredited and to a perception that the Standard was easy to achieve:

'It's almost like [IIP is] the norm now, so it's not special to have'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Manufacturing, England

'It [IIP] was a way that genuinely differentiated ourselves as a company that thought people in the business were important. I think that's been devalued too much because absolutely everyone has an IIP plaque whether they're a good employer or not'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Professional Scientific & Technical Services, England

The first example below describes one employer's perception of the perceived difficulty of obtaining the Standard and the second example illustrates IIP's perceived failure to keep up-to-date and be able to assess the new systems the employer had implemented:

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'I think the standard [of IIP] is fairly low to be honest. I think anyone who puts their mind to it can get the piece of paper.'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Professional Scientific & Technical Services, England

'I think the IIP is a bit stuck in the old days'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, less than 50 employees, Veterinary surgery, England

The perceived decline in value over time requires further exploration to assess whether there are other factors that have contributed to the devaluing of the Standard.

Despite the New Choices approach being available, a key reason for this more negative view of IIP seemed to be a perception that the Standard was not able to accommodate organisations that were more sophisticated in their practices. Some long-term IIP accredited employers felt that they had either outgrown or were outgrowing the Standard because they were 'so far beyond' it (Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Professional Scientific and Technical Services, England).

There are some tensions between the employer view that IIP no longer differentiates and the New Choices approach, which offers employers additional options and higher levels of the Standard. The UK Commission has commissioned an evaluation of the New Choices approach which explores the issue of providing additional stretch to organisations.

Among the interviewees in this research, one employer had been assessed at, and achieved the Gold standard, but the assessor later withdrew Gold level accreditation because the organisation had not paid for or set out to achieve this standard at the start of the assessment process. Another employer had discussed the New Choices approach with their assessor, but felt that they were not encouraged to go for anything above the core standard. One firm reported that the assessor felt there were too many changes within the business to undertake a Gold assessment at that time. This led to the employer feeling that IIP did not reflect their current position:

'We're basically developing without it, although we do value it, but I think there could be closer links between what we're doing and what IIP offers...We consider it to be of lower value, but it could have a higher value to us if you recognised more of what we're doing...or there was more within your systems... for us to be able to benchmark our systems.'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, less than 50 employees, Veterinary surgery, England

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An example of how one long-term accredited organisation viewed the purpose and relevance of IIP to their organisation is detailed in the case-study in Box 1.

Box 1: Long-term IIP accredited employer: a case-study of purpose and relevance

The organisation has held IIP for approximately six years and is a large multi-site retailer with operations throughout the UK and has thousands of employees. At the most recent assessment the organisation had been awarded the Gold Standard. IIP preparation and assessment is led from within the HR function, and the member of staff responsible is also a board member.

A key purpose of the Standard for the organisation is to support employee engagement. The organisation uses IIP as a way of demonstrating to staff that they are a good company to work for, that they invest in staff development and that this is externally recognised. Being IIP accredited was reported to fit well with their corporate responsibility principles. Having IIP was also felt to attract potential recruits to work for the organisation.

The organisation had worked with the same adviser/assessor for more than one assessment and this was felt to increase the relevance and added value of the assessment process:

'A number of the assessors, they tried to keep the same, and I think that's really helpful for the employer because actually they can see what the improvements have been...then you talk about what they saw last time and how they haven't seen it this time or the changes they've seen'

While the organisation felt that IIP had been relevant to their organisation and had provided them with the opportunity to develop further and assess at Gold standard, they hoped that the Standard would continue to develop over time, so that it continued to remain relevant, provide challenge and support their process of continuous improvement. If the Standard stayed the same, the likely benefits of accreditation were felt likely to decrease:

'If it looked exactly the same, I probably would be challenged on what we're going to get out of it from a business perspective, so I hope they move it on'.

Long-term accredited employer, 1000+ employees, retail, UK

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Table 2.1 summarises the findings among long-term IIP accredited employers about their understanding of the purpose of IIP and their views on its relevance and value.

Table 2.1: Long-term accredited IIP employers’ understanding of the purpose of IIP and views on its relevance and value

Purpose of IIP	Understand the purpose of IIP Valuable as a benchmark
Perceived value of IIP	IIP has value to the organisation Some felt external value has decreased as a large number of organisations have it
Relevance of IIP	Relevance changed over time. How organisations apply IIP continues to make it relevant.

2.2.2 Previously-accredited IIP employers

Previously-accredited IIP employers were the least positive about the relevance and value of the Standard. Views ranged from a belief that IIP had once been of value to their organisation but is now less relevant, to a deeper scepticism about the value of the Standard generally. However, very few were unreservedly negative; most believed the Standard either had been or could be useful in some way.

In general this group had a clear **understanding about the overall purpose of the Standard** which was not dissimilar from the long-term accredited group. For example:

‘Investors in People, for me, it’s about maximising the potential of your people and the people management processes that support them in order to deliver your external customer service’

Previously-accredited IIP employer, 250-999 employees, Public administration and defence, Scotland

‘My dealings with it and my understanding of it is about promoting good business practices. It looks at the management skills that are required to get the best from employees, make them more productive.’

Previously-accredited IIP employer, 250-999 employees, Professional Scientific and Technical Services, Scotland

A common understanding of the purpose of the Standard was that it provided the firm with an initial one-off benefit. In particular IIP was felt to help organisations to develop their HR

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practices at a critical juncture, such as when the firm had grown or where there was a fresh impetus to renew policies, for example:

'We needed to have a 360 on all the systems and structures that were in place... [IIP] was a good tool to use there, at every level'

Previously accredited IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Education, England

'We were looking at it [IIP] as a mechanism of reflecting on where we were, and where perhaps we were looking at going in the future... we did a lot of work on our appraisal process as a result of it'

Previously-accredited IIP employer, 550-999 employees, Education, England

There was a mix of views among previously accredited firms as to whether the main purpose of IIP was as a business improvement tool or a HR tool. Some interviewees, particularly those whose job role was HR focussed, reported a tension between how IIP was perceived by different areas of their organisation. Typically, this meant they believed IIP should be used as a broader tool for business improvement, while others in the firm saw it as an 'HR-thing'.

'I would argue that that's probably one of its [IIP] downfalls is that it's seen as an HR activity... It's seen as something that HR do and 'HR will get it for us'... My own belief is that that's incorrect'

Previously-accredited IIP employer, 250-999 employees, Professional Scientific and Technical Services, Scotland

'I think it's probably often the case that...people want to go to get Investors but it ends up the preserve of either HR or learning and development'

Previously-accredited IIP employer, 1,000+ employees, Local Authority, England

'The CEO does not have the understanding, in management terms, of where IIP fits in to the organisation'

Previously-accredited IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Telecoms, Scotland

While the purpose of IIP was generally well understood, previously -accredited IIP employers tended to believe that the **relevance** of the Standard had declined over time. Some organisations believed that this was because it had been poorly implemented, but most felt IIP had run its useful course within the organisation:

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'I'm afraid I'm too much of a cynic to see it overall as a good thing. My view has been that... it's seen very much as an exercise to get a badge.'

Previously-accredited IIP employer, 250-999 employees, Public administration and defence,
Scotland

'Investors...is seen as something that's had its day'

Previously-accredited IIP employer, 1,000+ employees, Local Authority, England

The perceived **value** of the Standard had also changed over time. When accredited, this group of employers emphasised they had valued IIP as a way of checking their practices against an external benchmark or framework:

'Looking at a lot of the things I wanted to do with my staff, when I looked at IIP, it seemed a lot of it was included in the IIP standard, so I felt it would be useful to have IIP as a benchmark and a target to aim for, rather than develop my staff based on what I thought was right'

Previously-accredited IIP employer, 50-249 employees, Other Service Activities, England

'I think it gives a framework to make sure that your investment in your people is structured and supports the business strategy'

Previously-accredited IIP employer, 250-999 employees, Housing Association, England

The value of an external benchmark was also important to long-term IIP accredited interviewees, but while these firms found other uses for IIP over time, or valued regular IIP audits, the previously IIP accredited employers tended to see IIP assessment as an exercise that did not need to be regularly repeated and whose value had declined over time. This was an important reason for many previously accredited IIP employers deciding not to gain reaccreditation. Further evidence on this is provided in section 3.4.

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Table 2.2 summarises the findings among previously accredited IIP employers about their understanding of the purpose of IIP and their views on its relevance and value.

Table 2.2: Previously accredited employers’ understanding of the purpose of IIP and views on its relevance and value

Purpose of IIP	Understand the purpose of IIP Valuable as a benchmark
Perceived value of IIP	Once of value, but now less so: initial one-off benefit
Relevance of IIP	Relevance decreased over time as they feel they have maximised the value of the Standard

2.2.3 De-committed IIP employers

Overall the de-committed IIP employers were fairly positive about IIP. However, their **understanding of the purpose of the Standard** tended to be more limited than the other groups, and focused in on specific functions for IIP within the organisation:

[the purpose of IIP is] to recognise the link between business objectives and the development of staff'

De-committed IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Electronics Manufacturing, England

'As a business, we always say that we are a people business... IIP, for me, really checks whether or not we are a people business. Are we investing in our people? Have we got the right communication strategies? Do... general level staff as we call them, actually understand the company mission, where we're going to and what we want to achieve?'

De-committed IIP employer, 250-999 employees, Administrative and Support Services, England

'I understood it [IIP] as being a way of gaining accreditation for being... training standards basically was what I... the impression I got from it was to get all the employees and managers on the same wavelength working towards common goals and everybody agreeing on what the common goals were I suppose.'

De-committed IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Manufacturing, Scotland

De-committed IIP employers seemed less likely to make a distinction between IIP as a business improvement or HR tool. Some were clearer in their understanding of whether they

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wanted to use IIP as a business improvement or HR tool but there was no consensus on whether either of these functions was more important than the other:

'I think anything to do with the sort of training side of it is just one element of it, really... It is a bigger framework. It's about the organisation. It's about improving the business'

De-committed IIP employer, 1,000+ employees, Local Authority, England

'[IIP] was mainly about personal development... I don't think it really helped us with business development'

De-committed IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Professional and Technical Services, England

De-committed IIP employers tended to be positive about the potential **relevance** and **value** of IIP to their organisation:

'I think to have Investors in People, it looks good for the company and it shows that you and your employees are aware of what the company... you know, the company targets, and that everybody's involved... that's it really... I just think that if you've got the time and everything else, it's good for the company to have'

De-committed IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Manufacturing, England

The perceived value and relevance had not changed over time for de-committed IIP employers, most still felt that it had value and relevance to their organisation. One small firm described IIP as peripheral to profit-maximising activities:

'So because we're doing Investors in People, we're doing quality assurance, we're doing vision and value then you can spend too much of your time doing all these worthy things but things that aren't earning you money and make sure that you get the right balance on that really.'

De-committed IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Professional and Technical Services, England

Further evidence on this is provided in section 3.5.

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Table 2.3 summarises the findings among de-committed IIP employers about their understanding of the purpose of IIP and their views on its relevance and value.

Table 2.3: De-committed employers’ understanding of the purpose of IIP and views on its relevance and value

Purpose of IIP	Some understand the purpose of IIP, others vague about its purpose
Perceived value of IIP	IIP has value to the organisation
Relevance of IIP	IIP viewed as relevant, despite de-commitment

2.3 Conclusion

There are a number of factors that appear to influence employers’ views about IIP. These are linked to organisations’ experiences of using the Standard, the perceived and actual benefits and the relevance to the organisation as well as perceptions about how other organisations value the Standard.

Long-term accredited employers were mainly positive about IIP, understood its purpose, and felt that it was of value to their organisation, although largely because they continued to exploit this and make it relevant over time. Previously accredited IIP employers were the least positive about IIP. They tended to have a good understanding of the Standard, but felt that the value to their own organisation had diminished over time, and this experience was reflected in their more negative views about the relevance of the Standard to their organisation. De-committed IIP employers were fairly positive about IIP and felt it was of value and had relevance to their organisation, although some only gave vague explanations of its purpose, perhaps because this group had only had limited interactions with the Standard and had never achieved the assessment.

The next chapter will investigate some of these factors amongst the different groups of employers in exploring the IIP decision-making process within organisations.

3 The decision to commit to and (re)accredit to IIP and experiences of the accreditation process

Summary

The majority of interviewees' job roles covered solely HR, training or development. While IIP tended to be led by and owned within the HR function, in most cases the final decisions were taken by senior managers with HR staff making recommendations.

Several long-term accredited employers suggested the decision to accredit had come at a point where the organisation was still relatively new and going through a period of growth and development, creating an impetus to re-shape people management processes. Among previously accredited IIP employers, the decision to commit was particularly focussed on the anticipated benefits to the firm from IIP, through ensuring that HR processes were fit for purpose. Most de-committed IIP employers committed for similar reasons.

Long-term IIP accredited employers tended to have an ongoing policy of commitment to IIP without a decision-making process during which the perceived value of the Standard was reviewed, characteristic of organisations which are 'believers' in IIP. Other accredited organisations were inspired to continue to use IIP as they sought continuous organisational improvement. IIP was used to underpin business strategy and was perceived to continue to offer benefits over a prolonged period of time.

In contrast, previously-accredited IIP employers described a decision-making process about IIP accreditation in which senior managers considered the perceived costs and benefits. However, employers did not seek to quantify these. The main reason for not seeking IIP reaccreditation among previously accredited IIP employers was a perception, particularly among senior managers, that the costs of IIP outweighed the benefits. A perceived decline in the external value of the Standard was also cited as a reason by some previously accredited IIP employers why they did not to pursue IIP reaccreditation. They also reported that the accreditation process had lost value over time.

De-committed IIP employers reported several interlinking reasons why they had not pursued IIP accreditation. The scale of the changes to policies and processes that IIP required, coupled with staff time constraints and other business priorities, meant that some had been unable to complete the necessary changes before their commitment timed out (three years after committing).

Most organisations had had positive experiences of assessment. A key reason for this was the organisation's relationship with the adviser/assessor. Long-standing relationships between assessors and employers were perceived to add value to the assessment process as they helped the adviser/assessor to understand firm strategy and how their business operated to therefore draw on their relevant external business knowledge to make more effective, useful and actionable recommendations.

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The perceived match between the organisation and the assessor was also important. Match is influenced by the adviser/assessor's understanding of the organisation's culture and values, as well as their previous business experience in a relevant sector.

3.1 Introduction

It is important to understand where decisions are made about IIP within organisations because this signals where effort needs to be placed in influencing engagement with the Standard. The majority of interviewees' job roles covered solely HR, training or development, particularly in medium and large organisations. While IIP tended to be led by and owned within the HR function, in most cases the decision whether to commit or (re)accredit was taken by senior managers, such as the senior management team, board or directors with HR staff making recommendations. In smaller organisations the person with responsibility for leading IIP accreditation tended also to have overall responsibility for whether or not to commit or accredit to IIP.

This chapter follows the customer journey outlined in Figure 1.1 and presents the evidence on:

- the reasons for all employer groups to commit to IIP;
- long-term IIP accredited employers' decisions to reaccredit;
- previously accredited IIP employers' decisions not to regain IIP accreditation; and
- de-committed IIP employers' decisions not to seek IIP accreditation.

It then reports on the experiences of all three groups of the IIP (re)accreditation process, as far as they pursued it.

A common theme from the recruitment and interviews was the state of flux of the workplace unit at which IIP accreditation is sought and awarded in many organisations. This affected IIP status. Several employers described how changes in organisational structures, and mergers and acquisitions, for example, could mean that the previous organisational unit seeking or awarded IIP accreditation would lapse or de-commit, while the organisation overall could remain IIP accredited. In some instances there could be a short period of non-IIP accreditation where merged or restructured organisations made their policies and processes consistent across multiple sites or departments, before re-seeking IIP accreditation.

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3.2 The decision to commit to IIP

This section describes employers' decision to commit to IIP starting with long-term IIP accredited employers, before outlining the views of previously accredited IIP employers, and de-committed IIP employers.

3.2.1 Long-term IIP accredited employers

In most of the long-term IIP accredited employers, the individual responsible for making the initial commitment decision was no longer in post as the original commitment decision was taken many years previously. In some instances the current post holder was able to suggest some reasons for the initial decision, but overall the information for this group was patchy and incomplete. Requirements or encouragements from central government appear to be a factor for public sector organisations:

'Central government decided that all of its organisations should go for Investors in People status. So I think that was the main driver. In many ways, it was imposed upon us. And I don't mean that in a negative way, but I think we were told this is something we need to achieve and aim for'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Public Administration and Defence,
Northern Ireland

Business change affected the decision to accredit. In several instances interviewees suggested the decision to accredit had come at a point where the organisation was still relatively new and going through a period of growth and development, creating an impetus to re-shape the people management processes of the firm. For example:

'At that time [when making the decision to commit] we didn't have many systems, or we didn't have enough systems and we were growing and realised that we needed a manager to help to supply the systems and develop the systems and it [IIP] was very appropriate then'

Long-term IIP-accredited employer, less than 50 employees, Veterinary surgery, England

'We hadn't been in business a long time, I think probably about eight years, and it was around the time when we had really hotted up on training and... [IIP] was probably seen as a good catalyst to have'

Long-term IIP-accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Manufacturing, England

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Others suggested the key reason for committing was to send a signal, either to the staff themselves or to other companies, that the organisation was committed to investing in their staff:

‘We wanted our staff to feel good about the company they work for... these things go towards showing that we care about staff, but also show other organisations that we are on the right level and take our business seriously’

Long-term IIP-accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Construction, England

Long-term IIP-accredited employers did not consider cost, time or contact with IIP assessors when deciding to commit. Finally, in most cases where we have information about the initial commitment, the decision tended to be made by senior managers or directors.

Table 3.1 summarises the factors affecting long-term IIP accredited employers’ decision to commit to IIP.

Table 3.1: Factors affecting long-term IIP accredited employers’ decision to commit

Factor	The decision to commit
Anticipated internal benefits from IIP	Way to put in place and develop internal management processes. IIP useful as an external benchmark to measure progress against
‘Kudos’ of IIP	Way of demonstrating organisation values staff
Policy decision	Public sector requirement in some instances
External pressures for IIP	Not a factor
Costs and time	Cost and time considered but not a key factor
Contact with IIP advisers	Not a factor

3.2.2 Previously-accredited IIP employers

Like the long-term IIP-accredited employers, a number of the interviewees from previously accredited IIP employers were not in post when the initial decision to commit was made. Among previously accredited IIP employers, the decision to commit was particularly focussed on the anticipated benefits to the firm from IIP, through ensuring that HR processes were fit for purpose. Employers in this group seemed to value IIP as an external reference point, to act as a benchmark against which to judge their policies or as a framework around which to structure policies. Previously IIP-accredited employers’ decisions to commit were therefore predominantly focussed on direct internal benefits from improved management processes. Much less common were considerations of ‘kudos’, in fact this group tended to be quite sceptical of reasons for IIP accreditation which related to organisational image. For example:

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‘Having a logo is nice and whatever, but at the end of it... that’s just wallpaper really’

Previously accredited IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Education, England

While the external value of the Standard may not be a consideration for previously-accredited employers at the commitment stage, this is in contrast to the importance of the external value in their decisions not to re-accredit (section 3.4).

Many of the respondents said that cost and time were considered when deciding to commit, but in most cases this did not seem to be a deciding factor. Some of the more disenchanted respondents were inclined to see the initial decision as at least partially a response to the external campaigns and available funding at a specific point in time, with the implication that senior managers had never fully bought in to IIP. Contact with IIP advisers and external pressure to gain IIP accreditation did not emerge as particularly important to previously-accredited IIP employers’ decision to commit to the Standard.

Where the interviewee was in place at the time of the organisation’s original decision to go for IIP, the decision-making process tended to be characterised as an HR recommendation to be approved by directors or senior managers.

Table 3.2 summarises the factors affecting previously accredited IIP employers’ decision to commit to IIP.

Table 3.2: Factors affecting previously accredited IIP employers’ decision to commit

Factor	The decision to commit
Anticipated internal benefits from IIP	Way to put in place and develop internal management processes. IIP useful as an external benchmark to measure progress against
‘Kudos’ of IIP	Not a factor
Policy decision	Not a factor
External pressures for IIP	Not a factor
Costs and time	Not a key factor, but some evidence of influence of external funding/promotion (i.e. the Small Firms Initiative)
Contact with IIP advisers	Not a factor

3.2.3 De-committed IIP employers

De-committed IIP employers were fairly diverse in their reasons for commitment. Most consistent was a belief, similar to that expressed by a number of long-term and previously - accredited employers, that IIP was a way to develop their internal processes, particularly in times of change. For example:

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'[We chose to commit to IIP] purely because of all the changes we were making... because in days gone by when we were first formed it was quite easy to do all this...but now as a big organisation, we've just had to shift how we do things, and that's why I wanted to use IIP'

De-committed IIP employer, 250-999 employees, Administrative and Support Services,
England

The kudos of being an IIP organisation, particularly aimed at current or potential staff was attractive to some de-committed IIP employers. These employers felt IIP was a way of demonstrating their commitment to both current employees and potential recruits. However, other employers in this group were more sceptical about IIP as a 'badge', such as this employer:

'[An IIP badge] would have been good on literature, but then we've got other things that we do that demonstrate that we really are good with our people... it wasn't a driving factor'

De-committed IIP employer, 250-999 employees, Administrative and Support Services,
England

Some external business factors influenced decision-making. In particular employers dealing with the public sector felt IIP might be useful in securing either work or funding from the public sector:

'I think sometimes to secure work we have to do prequalification questionnaires and quite often they might say, are you Investors in People, and for every one you say, no, on that type of thing you think, is that hindering my chance of getting work?'

De-committed IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Professional and Technical Services,
England

However, the same interviewee added that they were unaware whether not having IIP accreditation was costing them work:

'We've never been told in feedback that we haven't got a job because we're not Investors in People registered... if that was the one reason we weren't getting somewhere getting work... that would give us the initiative to actually get it sorted'

De-committed IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Professional and Technical Services,
England

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Time and costs were either not seen as a factor or were mentioned as a subsidiary factor when deciding to commit. One interviewee mentioned they had received financial support which had been helpful in maintaining the commitment, but it did not seem that this was a major reason for the organisation deciding to commit. Similarly, contact with IIP advisers was not discussed as a key factor in deciding to commit, as most organisations’ contact with IIP advisers appeared to take place after the commitment decision had been made. In general, among de-committed IIP employers, the final decisions about IIP tended to be made by directors or senior managers.

Table 3.3 summarises factors affecting de-committed IIP employers’ decision to commit to IIP.

Table 3.3: Factors affecting de-committed IIP employers’ decision to commit

Factor	The decision to commit
Anticipated internal benefits from IIP	Way to put in place and develop internal management processes. IIP useful as an external benchmark to measure progress against
‘Kudos’ of IIP	Way of demonstrating organisation values staff
Policy decision	Not a factor
External pressures for IIP	Not a factor
Costs and time	Not a key factor, but some evidence of influence of external funding/promotion (i.e. the Small Firms Initiative)
Contact with IIP advisers	Not a factor

3.3 The decision to (re)gain IIP accreditation

A number of the long-term IIP-accredited employers reported no distinct decision-making process about whether or not to gain re-accreditation. In some large employers IIP accreditation was undertaken on a rolling basis, with department after department, or business unit after business unit, being assessed. This may serve to contribute to a sense of momentum, ensure a loose sense of sustained familiarity with IIP across an organisation, and break down the accreditation process into phases which cover relatively smaller groups of staff.

Generally, among long-term accredited IIP employers there was a working assumption among HR staff, with the support of senior management, that the organisation would seek IIP re-accreditation. Long-term IIP employers, even those that expressed some concerns about the diminishing external value of the Standard, tended to have an organisational commitment to IIP. As these long-term IIP accredited employers explained:

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'It was something that we would always do...it was never a question of whether we should re-accredit...it is an ongoing policy'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, less than 50 employees, Retail, England

'We reaccredited because our accreditation had run out...there wasn't really a final decision. Will we? Won't we?'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Public Administration and Defence,
Northern Ireland

Interviewees reported that their business situation continued to make IIP relevant over the long-term. Some long-term IIP accredited employers had faced mergers and take-overs, or internal restructuring and felt IIP was beneficial in these situations, for example, by helping to improve the consistency of management across merging organisations, or putting common processes and values in place. They also reported that regaining IIP accreditation helped to show and reaffirm the organisation's commitment to investing in their employees in difficult times. These positive messages are testament to the fact that IIP is a tool for continuous improvement in a variety of business circumstances. Extracting these messages and presenting them to both HR staff and senior managers in peer businesses may well encourage accreditation rates, even in an economic downturn:

'We felt that if we didn't go for it [IIP], it sent out a bad message to say that we no longer cared...bearing in mind that when you consider that we've reduced staff numbers every element of cost has to be considered very closely'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Construction, England

Other organisations were inspired to continue to use IIP from a desire for continuous organisational improvement. In using IIP to underpin business strategy, IIP was perceived to continue to offer benefits over a prolonged period of time, for example:

'We've tried to link it very much to the business strategy, for example, Indicator 1, which is about direction, what's happening in the business, one of the things that we've moved significantly is the involvement of people within the team.'

Long-term IIP-accredited employer, 1,000+ employees, Housing Association, England

The reasons why one long-term IIP-accredited employer continues to reaccredit is detailed in the case-study in Box 2.

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Box 2: Long-term accredited IIP employer: a case-study of reasons for reaccrediting

The organisation employs 62 staff and has expanded over the last five years, taking on 20 people. It is an independent organisation based in England and supplies professional, scientific and technical services to manufacturing and construction companies. It operates over four sites. The organisation has held IIP accreditation for ten years. The organisation does not have an HR function, so IIP is led by a senior manager that is part of the organisations' senior management team.

The Standard was initially felt to be relevant as a stepping stone to support the organisation manage its expansion. They continue to be IIP accredited to demonstrate to staff that they invest in their development and because if they didn't *'it would seem like going backwards'*.

They felt that the costs of reaccrediting were relatively small, as they maintained and developed the processes throughout the periods between assessments, and felt that it was easier to regain IIP accreditation than to make the decision not to.

The organisation values receiving independent feedback more than the IIP 'badge':

'I think the really good thing we get out of IIP is every three years we get someone independent who does a bit of in depth interviewing and it's the feedback we get from her really [that is of value] more than the IIP in itself or the plaque on the wall'.

Long-term accredited IIP employer, 50-249 employees, Professional, Scientific and Technical Services, England

Despite there being an ongoing organisational commitment to IIP among long-term IIP - accredited employers, the perceived costs of accreditation were considered in assessing its value. However, the benefits were seen to outweigh any costs. In part this was because the costs of the assessment process were minimised. Long-term IIP accredited employers felt that assessment involved reviewing processes that were embedded within usual business operations and ongoing work.

Since 2009, as part of the New Choices approach, organisations seeking IIP accreditation have been able to choose from the core standard, or Bronze, Silver and Gold. Two of the long-term IIP accredited employers we interviewed had sought assessment at a level above the core standard. One organisation had recently been awarded the Gold standard, and another Bronze. The Gold organisation felt that increasing the challenge of IIP, and offering an assessment against the Gold criteria, had helped to continue to make the Standard relevant to their organisation. The Bronze organisation aimed to work towards the Gold standard within three years. This was set out in their business plan because they wanted to continue to invest in staff development and to be recognised as 'outstanding'.

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Some of the other long-term accredited employers had considered being assessed at the levels above the core standard, but their views about the New Choices approach were mixed. Some described they felt pressure to go for Gold, as there would be little value in being awarded the Bronze or Silver standard. In fact they felt it would be better to remain at the core standard rather than gain a Bronze or Silver accreditation. Others said that they were waiting to see if the new levels of the Standard gained external recognition and value before deciding whether to seek them. This focus on the external value seems in contrast to the largely internal focus on the benefits of the core IIP standard (see section 4.2.1). The New Choices approach is still relatively new in relation to the core IIP Standard. Over time the external value of the different levels is likely to become clearer to employers.

Table 3.4 summarises the factors identified in this section that influence long-term IIP accredited employers’ decisions to regain IIP accreditation.

Table 3.4: Long-term IIP-accredited employers: influences on re-accrediting

Factor	Influences on re-accrediting
HR capacity	Dedicated HR resource
Attitudes to IIP in the recession	IIP supports investing in staff in recession
Perceived fit of IIP with business	IIP meets changing business needs. Desire for feedback. Continuous improvement philosophy
Adviser/assessor relationship	Long-standing relationship with adviser/assessor
Value of assessment	Assessment process adds value
Costs and time	Costs of assessment embedded in ongoing improvement processes
External value	Not a factor

3.4 The decision not to regain IIP accreditation

When IIP accreditation came up for renewal, previously accredited IIP employers were more likely than long-term accredited IIP employers to formally review whether or not they would seek reaccreditation, and to involve senior managers in decision-making. There was less likely to be a longstanding organisational commitment to the Standard in these organisations. Re-accreditation was reported to be decided on the basis of the perceived costs and benefits. However, employers were unable to explain this decision-making process in any detail and they did not seek to quantify the costs and benefits.

The main reason for not seeking IIP reaccreditation among previously accredited IIP employers was a perception, particularly among senior managers, that the costs of IIP outweighed the benefits. This was justified on the grounds that organisational benefits from

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IIP had diminished since a previous successful accreditation. Improvements reported from earlier accreditations centred on developing a working package of training and HR processes and professionalising their HR systems, which is unsurprising because it was one of the main reasons for original commitment to IIP among this group (see section 3.2). Once these new processes were in place, and being used, previously-accredited IIP employers felt that they had reaped the benefits of IIP, and the IIP re-assessment process therefore lost value, as these quotes illustrate:

'It became harder for IIP to demonstrate any added value within the organisation...this is business as usual...so why are we paying money for an assessor to come in and tell us that? Particularly now in the current climate that resource could be directed elsewhere'

Previously-accredited IIP employer, 250-999 employees, Public administration and defence,
Scotland

'We had a limited budget...all the systems and everything that were in place to achieve recognition were still there...we didn't want to lose money to tell us something that we felt we already knew...they [senior managers] felt it was going to be poor value for money'

Previously-accredited IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Education, England

While it is evident that for some organisations, IIP accreditation may lose its value over time, this may demonstrate differences both in how organisations chose to use IIP and their business strategies. In contrast with previously accredited employers, some long-term accredited employers were using IIP as a continuous improvement tool which they perceived was important to managing business change.

Some previously accredited IIP employers cited a perceived decline in the external value and kudos of the Standard as a reason why they did not pursue IIP reaccreditation. This perceived decline in external value fed into their decision-making processes and contributed to a fall in the likely benefits to the organisation from IIP accreditation. Some previously accredited employers mentioned there had been a fall in profile of IIP at national policy level and others perceived there had been a decline in the value of the Standard in their supply chain. For example:

'We polled various suppliers and customers and the general opinion was, well, it doesn't really matter if you've got it [IIP] or not. Commercially there wasn't a lot of point in continuing seeing as we're going to continue with the same stuff internally'

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Previously-accredited IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Retail, England

'Investors was largely seen as something that had had its day that doesn't really confer any great benefit, prestige...on the organisation'

Previously accredited IIP employer, 1,000+ employees, Local Authority, England

Another common reason among previously-accredited IIP employers for not pursuing re-accreditation was perceived difficulties about managing IIP status alongside staff redundancies. Similar to long-term IIP accredited employers, some of the previously IIP accredited employers had been restructuring and making redundancies. Whereas long-term IIP accredited employers tended to report that it was important to reaffirm commitment to developing and investing in staff during difficult economic conditions, previously accredited IIP employers were more likely to say that maintaining IIP alongside reducing staff numbers created difficulties for management, sent out mixed messages to staff, and believed that the two were incompatible. For example:

'It seemed a bit of a paradox to say we're IIP, but we're letting you go, and then it becomes a bit of a rod for your own back and people will beat you up about being made redundant'.

Previously accredited IIP employer, 250-999 employees, Professional Scientific and Technical Services, Scotland

Other reasons previously accredited IIP employers gave for not reaccrediting were specific to their organisation. One organisation had had a change of Director, who now wanted the organisation to work towards a sector-specific standard instead of IIP, and in another the HR function had been reduced and the post of training and development manager, who had led IIP accreditation, had been made redundant.

A number of factors that had arisen previously in the literature about employer decision - making with regards to IIP were not cited by any of the previously accredited IIP employers as reasons why they did not seek IIP reaccreditation. These included: the degree of support available from the IIP adviser; availability of subsidy if they were in Scotland or Northern Ireland; and the design of the IIP standard.

The reasons why one previously accredited IIP employer chose not to reaccredit is detailed in the case-study in Box 3.

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Box 3: Previously accredited IIP employer: a case-study of reasons for not reaccrediting

The organisation employer 25 staff and was first IIP accredited in 2005 as they aimed to develop the organisation's training and HR policies. They decided not to reaccredit at the time of their first assessment. They are a private organisation and based in Scotland, but provide services to business throughout the UK. The work towards IIP was led by the Learning and Development Manager but the Chief Executive made the decision not to reaccredit.

IIP was still felt by the Learning and Development Manager to be relevant to the organisation, but the Chief Executive felt that the organisation had achieved the benefits it set out to from the Standard and felt that the costs could not be justified:

'He [the Chief Executive] said he was not prepared to shoulder the cost because he felt that IIP was not bringing any added value to the company and so he could not justify the cost'

The costs of retaining IIP accreditation were not estimated beyond reviewing the assessor costs. Internal costs, such as staff time, were not quantified or costed, but the Chief Executive felt that these would be considerable.

Previously accredited IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Telecommunications, Scotland

Some previously-accredited IIP employers were not willing to be interviewed for the research but fed back their main reasons for not seeking IIP reaccreditation to the recruiters. Some of these support the main reasons outlined above, and others are specific to organisations. The main reason given for not reaccrediting was that the perceived costs outweighed the benefits. Some felt that there were no longer any benefits from being IIP accredited as they had worked with the Standard as far as they could. Others described that it was the extent of work and associated time costs that would be required in order for them to have a successful IIP accreditation that led them not to reaccredit. This implies that unlike the long-term accredited IIP employers, some of the previously-accredited IIP employers had experienced change under which processes and policies relating to the IIP standard may not have been updated, therefore requiring pre-assessment work in order to meet the Standard once again.

Other reasons cited for not continuing to accredit were unique to organisations. In one workplace the training and skills department had been restructured and the remaining staff did not have the capacity to oversee the IIP reaccreditation. Another organisation reported they had tried various quality standards (including EFQM and ISO), and did not continue with IIP as they wanted to consolidate quality assessments. In this one instance, IIP was dropped in favour of the others because it was seen to have a narrower focus. Lastly, another organisation reported that they had previously had a relatively weak IIP assessment, and had

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sought help from their assessor. They were given an action plan which they felt was unrealistic in the timescale so decided to let their IIP accreditation lapse.

The table below summarises the factors identified by previously accredited IIP employers that affected their decision not to regain IIP accreditation.

Table 3.5: Previously accredited IIP employers: influences on the decision not to re-accredit

Factor	Influences on the decision not to re-accredit
HR capacity	Reductions in HR capacity
Attitudes to IIP in the recession	Tension between using IIP and reducing staff costs
Perceived fit of IIP with business	No further benefits perceived from IIP
Adviser/assessor relationship	Organisation perceives that the adviser does not have a full understanding of the business
Value of assessment	Assessment process lost value
Costs and time	The perceived costs of assessment outweigh the perceived benefits
External value	Perceived decline in the external value (customers and national policy)

3.5 The decision to de-commit to IIP

The de-committed IIP employers we interviewed reported several interlinking reasons why they had not pursued IIP accreditation. The scale of the changes to policies and processes that IIP required, coupled with staff time constraints and other business priorities, meant that some de-committed IIP employers had been unable to complete the necessary changes before their commitment timed out (three years after committing). This seemed to be a particular issue for small organisations that did not have a dedicated HR function (as noted earlier there were more interviewees in the de-committed IIP employers group whose main job role was not HR, training or development, see section 1.3). The staff time and opportunity costs of achieving IIP accreditation were therefore relatively high. Over time these organisations found that work towards IIP stalled, or received lower priority in the face of other business pressures, resulting in loss of momentum to achieve the Standard. For example:

‘With a large organisation and the staff they can allocate the people to it [IIP] but...there’s only two or three people that have been able to do it and they have a lot of responsibility and they were snowed under’

De-committed IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Health and social care, Northern Ireland

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'It got so busy and there wasn't the time...we're not like some companies that are able to have a set HR department...everything that was involved in it [IIP], it was just too time-consuming at the time.'

De-committed IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Manufacturing, England

Additionally, restructuring and a change in business climate between commitment and accreditation meant some de-committed IIP employers felt that the costs of working towards and assessing against the Standard could not be justified to staff against a backdrop of budget cuts and job losses.

The reasons why one employer de-committed to IIP is detailed in the case-study in Box 4.

Box 4: De-committed IIP employer: a case-study of the reasons for de-committing

The organisation employed approximately 15 staff and committed to IIP four years ago. They are a private organisation and provide support for people with disabilities. The work towards IIP was led by the General Manager of the organisation as they had responsibility for the organisation's policies and procedures. The original decision to commit was taken by the board of directors.

Senior managers decided to no longer pursue IIP because of the introduction of a new set of health and social care standards that they were required to achieve. Working towards this framework increased the workload of the General Manager quite considerably and IIP accreditation was reprioritised:

'With the small staff...we're not a large organisation, there was 15 staff...only a couple of senior staff, those are the people dealing with these kind of demands, so there's only so many hours in the day'

The decision to de-commit was signed off by the board that were reported to understand the imperative behind gaining the health and social care standard, and they reflected that not having IIP was not going to lose them any business.

De-committed IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Health and social care, Northern Ireland

Other reasons interviewees gave for de-committing to IIP included staff turnover among those responsible for IIP who were preparing for assessment. Similar to previously - accredited IIP employers, there were examples of internal restructuring and redundancies which interviewees felt had made it hard to justify committing resources to IIP, particularly to employees, and for others IIP accreditation had been reprioritised in the face of other pressures and business priorities. For example:

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'The appetite in the organisation is what's changed...it's [IIP] nice to have isn't it...It's not a requirement'

De-committed IIP employer, 1,000+ employees, Local Authority, England

Some de-committed IIP employers did not participate in full interviews but reported their main reasons for de-committing to the recruiters. There were examples of financial reasons and the length of time required to make changes, but unlike the de-committed employers interviewed who all tended to have gone some way in preparing for IIP assessment, some of those who were not interviewed in full reported that they had not made a commitment to IIP. For example, one de-committed IIP employer said that they had attended an awareness-raising event about IIP but chosen not to work with the Standard, and another reported that they had met once with an adviser but did not regard this as commitment. While there could be problems of accurate recall, it raises a question about what level of engagement by an employer counts as an IIP commitment and how this is recorded in the IIP management information. It is possible that there may be inconsistent practice across some advisers and delivery centres.

One de-committed IIP employer in the public sector had withdrawn from IIP as they felt there was overlap between IIP and another quality standard that they were required to achieve by their government department and they did not have capacity to work towards both standards. Another public sector employer felt that they had attempted to replicate the IIP approach without being accredited and that given the recently reduced budgets felt that IIP accreditation would not be an investment they could justify. Finally, one de-committed IIP employer reported that they had withdrawn because the grants they had benefited from had ceased to be available.

Table 3.6 summarises the factors identified by de-committed IIP employers that affected their decision to de-commit to IIP.

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Table 3.6: De-committed IIP employers: influences on the decision to de-commit

Factor	Influences on the decision to de-commit
HR capacity	Staff managing IIP have multiple responsibilities
Attitudes to IIP in the recession	Tension between using IIP and reducing staff costs
Perceived fit of IIP with business	Other business priorities
Adviser/assessor relationship	Not a factor
Value of assessment	Not a factor
Costs and time	Costs of assessment large as significant changes required. Budget pressures in public sector organisations.
External value	Not a factor

3.6 Employer experiences of the IIP (re)accreditation process

Although the IIP (re)accreditation process did not lead to employers withdrawing from IIP (re)accreditation, it is still important to explore perceptions of the process in order to continuously improve the IIP offer to employers and enhance their experiences. Generally, employers that had experienced re-accreditation found it to be valuable. This section now explores experiences of the (re)accreditation process for the three sample groups as far as they pursued it.

3.6.1 Long-term IIP accredited employers

Many long-term IIP-accredited employers discussed their positive experiences of the accreditation process. Long-term IIP-accredited employers tended to have had good experiences of the IIP accreditation process in the past, and those that had been involved over a number of years reflected positively on the change to evidencing outcomes. Long-term accredited employers typically described that there was little, if any, preparation required prior to the assessment visit, other than organising the assessor's appointments, and briefing staff about the visit.

A key reason for the positive experience of reaccreditation was the organisation's relationship with the adviser/assessor. There were several examples of long-term accredited IIP employers engaging in continuous dialogues with their advisers and assessors in the periods between assessments. This took the form of email or telephone communication and tended to be initiated by the long-term IIP accredited employer. For example, long-term IIP accredited employers described how they would let the adviser/assessor know when business priorities had changed or there was a new business strategy, or update them

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periodically about how progress towards a specific outcome or action resulting from the previous accreditation was going. These long-standing relationships between assessors and employers were perceived by the employers to add value to the assessment process as they helped the adviser/assessor to understand firm strategy, how their business operated and to therefore draw on their relevant external business knowledge to make more effective, useful and actionable recommendations. These were also undertaken to ensure that the assessor was fully briefed to ensure a smooth re-assessment process.

There were a couple of examples where communication between the adviser/assessor and a long-term IIP accredited employer had been fragmented or at cross purposes, and then employers felt the accreditation process had been less useful. For example, one long-term IIP accredited employer felt that in the last assessment the assessor did not examine or recognise certain aspects of the business they had been developing. This employer wanted more engagement from the assessor in future reaccreditations, as otherwise they felt that the value from the IIP process would diminish. They said:

'It was one of the tick-box exercises, so it wasn't as useful as in the past'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, less than 50 employees, Veterinary surgery, England

Long-term accredited employers' perceptions of the quality of IIP assessors varied. Where (large) employers had teams of assessors some reported that they would be reluctant to put some of their assessors in front of senior staff. Adviser/assessor knowledge and understanding of the organisation and general commercial awareness informed this view:

'I am selective about who she gets involved with, it's more the level of her business knowledge...she's ok at a lower level within the organisation, but I wouldn't want to put her in front of the chief executive'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 1,000+ employees, Retail, England

It was not just a long-standing relationship with their adviser/assessor that long-term IIP accredited employers valued. The match between the organisation and the assessor was also important. This included the adviser/assessor's understanding of the organisation's culture, values and their previous business experience in a relevant sector, as one long-term accredited employer explained:

'It was good to know that he knew where we were coming from, and he was coming at it not from just a teacher point of view, but his actual experience'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Manufacturing, England

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A long-standing relationship and understanding of the business was also felt to help the accuracy and usefulness of the assessment feedback report. It was important to organisations that the content of the feedback report contained no unanticipated issues and as several employers described: 'no surprises'. Long-term IIP accredited employers seemed open to external scrutiny, but there was a tension if this scrutiny did not produce the right answers.

Where long-term IIP accredited employers found the feedback report had contained unanticipated issues, then these tended to be challenged, with clarification sought or edits made to later versions. For example, one long-term IIP-accredited employer whose feedback report content had been edited between drafts felt that the assessor had given undue weight to some of the staff feedback, without checking whether there was evidence to support or contradict this:

'There was a lot of emphasis put on individuals' opinions without maybe evidence to back that up...we felt there should have been more evidence gathering in terms of what was being said'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Public Administration and Defence,
Northern Ireland

3.6.2 Previously accredited IIP employers

In contrast to long-term IIP accredited employers, previously accredited IIP employers were less likely to describe an involved and long-standing relationship with advisers/assessors, although the perceived match between the organisation and the adviser/assessor was still important. It was felt to be important that the adviser/assessor understood and preferably had experience of working in the employer's sector or a related industry and particularly that they understood the organisation. This included understanding the organisational culture and values, how it worked operationally, as well as business strategy and goals. This understanding could then be drawn on in the assessment process to ensure that feedback was relevant and that recommendations were tailored to the organisation, realistic and actionable.

Again there were examples of employer's perceptions of the adviser/assessor's understanding of their business influencing the usefulness of the assessment process. As one employer that had had a change in adviser/assessor between IIP assessment explained:

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'The first time we did it we had a very helpful adviser, and then when we came to renew I think the person wasn't quite a helpful...our assessor didn't understand our business insofar as he felt we should have a much more complicated training plan...he made it too complicated'

Previously accredited IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Manufacturing, England

For previously-accredited IIP employers the accreditation process had lost value over time. In their first or early IIP assessments, they saw value in being assessed against whether they had the necessary processes in place, particularly as many had developed these in order to gain IIP accreditation. They also described how the adviser/assessor was able to offer useful feedback about how these were developing and bedding in. For example:

'My experience of the assessors in the past has been excellent...they held your hand through the process, but at the same time have been able to give the company really good robust feedback about how to make improvements'

Previously accredited IIP employer, 250-999 employees, Professional Scientific and Technical Services, Scotland

'Our assessor was very good, and had a very good understanding of the nature of our business and how we might interpret, or how we might take forward some of the aspects of her recommendations'

Previously accredited IIP employer, 250-999 employees, Public administration and defence, Scotland

However, this value diminished over time, particularly for those with established processes in place that were now operating as 'business as usual'. For example:

'Once you achieve it, a lot of the value and a lot of the interest fades...the process became stale on both sides...we were going through the motions, it just felt like we had a consultant coming in, no intention of removing our status. It felt like it was just a money earning exercise for them without any real added value for us...it had become a badge rather than something that intrinsically meant something'

Previously accredited IIP employer, 1,000+ employees, Local Authority, England

3.6.3 De-committed IIP employers

De-committed IIP employers had not gone through a formal IIP accreditation process, but several had met an adviser and some had asked the assessors to undertake pre-

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assessment interviews with staff. They reported a mixed experience of working with advisers/assessors; some felt they had added value, but other de-committed IIP employers felt that the adviser/assessor had not added insight. The perceptions of any likely benefit derived from the assessment process were reflected on by de-committed IIP employers alongside the direct costs of paying for the adviser/assessors' time in order to assess the value of the pre-accreditation process, as these two examples illustrate:

'He didn't really tell us anything we didn't know already, so I think it was like it was good to have another pair of eyes come into the business...I don't know whether I'd want him to come back....he didn't tell us anything we didn't already know'

De-committed IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Information and Communications,
England

'If you want to get some guidance and help, some of the people are charging quite a lot per day to just come in and explain Investors in People, so it just seems quite an expensive thing to do'

Previously accredited IIP employer, 50-249 employees, Local Authority, England

This could indicate that de-committed IIP employers are more cost sensitive to the IIP adviser/assessor costs than long-term IIP accredited employers.

3.7 Conclusion

Across all groups, periods of organisational change, requiring reassessment and reworking of management processes and procedures, feature as fairly consistent reasons for making an original decision to commit. The value of IIP as an external benchmark or framework was also a recurring theme across all groups. Where 'kudos' or the value of having an IIP as a 'badge' was discussed as a factor, it tended to be seen as a way of sending a signal to both current and potential future staff about being a good employer. This may reflect previous decisions about IIP being taken in the context of a relatively tight labour market where employers have experienced recruitment difficulties. Previously accredited employers appeared less likely than other groups to consider kudos a factor in choosing to commit. Cost and time involved in achieving the Standard and assistance from IIP advisers were rarely, if ever, cited as factors in the original decision to commit and where they did feature, they were minor reasons.

The decision to regain IIP accreditation seems to be driven by staff with responsibility for HR, but the final decision rests with senior managers. Long-term accredited employers tend to have a sustained and embedded organisational commitment to IIP and therefore do not

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make a decision about whether or not to regain IIP accreditation every three years. Previously-accredited IIP employers and de-committed IIP employers applied a decision-making process when considering (re)accreditation which was informed by informal perceptions of costs and benefits. The full range of costs and benefits were not quantified to inform the decision-making process. This suggests that employer beliefs and perceptions about the value of IIP are more important in influencing the choices they make than hard data.

There was variation across organisations in how they had used IIP in the context of managing in a recession. Long-term accredited IIP employers tended to report it was important to reaffirm a commitment to staff development at a time of restructuring, whereas previously-accredited IIP employers and de-committed IIP employers were more likely to say that IIP did not fit alongside making redundancies and cutting staff costs. This suggests that these organisations saw IIP as a people management tool rather than a business improvement tool, contrary to recent efforts to reposition IIP. This also illustrates contrasting levels of management confidence and capability in justifying investment in staff development during difficult business conditions. This may reflect different levels of sophistication in people management among long-term IIP accredited versus previously IIP accredited and de-committed IIP employers.

Long-term IIP-accredited employers continued to report value added from the assessment process, but for many previously-accredited IIP employers the assessment process had lost value. There was less perceived value to assessment over time as these organisations believed that they had the processes in place and they would continue to operate whether or not they were IIP-accredited. The match between the adviser/assessor and the organisation was felt to be central to the employer gaining value from the assessment process. The adviser/assessor needed to understand their business, its culture and to be able to draw on relevant business knowledge from other similar employers.

De-committed IIP employers commonly withdrew from IIP before accreditation because they were either unable to complete the necessary changes within the time available or they felt that the required changes were too great for them to dedicate resource. Responsibility for IIP within these organisations often lay with someone with multiple responsibilities, only part of which were HR related. In some cases IIP accreditation was reprioritised in the face of other business pressures.

4 The benefits of IIP and use of other quality standards

Summary

The costs and benefits of IIP were not measured by the employers we interviewed, although most described a number of benefits they perceived to have resulted from their involvement with IIP. This lack of measurement highlights the importance of attitudes and belief in the value of the Standard in informing employer perceptions of its costs and benefits.

Long-term IIP-accredited employers reported the largest number of benefits. They perceived there were benefits from having an independent perspective on the business from the adviser/assessor, and some external validation of business practices. External validation was felt to be valuable to demonstrate to staff that the organisation was a good employer. Some felt that having an independent assessor asking staff for their feedback resulted in more honest feedback from staff than would be the case if internal managers asked staff the same questions. A better understanding of staff views was felt by some to be invaluable in business planning, and for some long-term IIP accredited employers this was one of the most beneficial parts of the IIP process.

Previously-accredited IIP employers reported benefits from IIP, especially from improved training practices and HR processes. These benefits had been particularly apparent on initial IIP accreditation, but were reported to have since diminished. For previously accredited IIP employers the external validity and perceived kudos of having the Standard was felt to be a benefit. However, some previously accredited employers, like the long-term IIP employers, felt that this had decreased over time.

Among some previously accredited IIP employers, interviewees reported that although their organisations had reaped all of the possible benefits from IIP, it had been a positive process, and other organisations wishing to develop HR policies and practices could benefit from the Standard.

We asked employers whether they had either International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) quality standard or were accredited under the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) 'Excellence' model. Among all three groups of employers, ISO was viewed as more essential for business than IIP because of its perceived market value and because it was required within supply chains.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings about employers' views of the benefits of IIP. These are important because they affect the perceived value and relevance of the Standard over time. The organisational benefits of IIP need to be maintained to encourage retention. This chapter also explores employers' use of other quality standards, such as ISO, and perceptions about how IIP compares.

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4.2 The benefits and impacts of IIP

A recent review of IIP literature identified a range of organisational impacts from IIP relating to training, operational performance and business outcomes (Gloster et al., 2010). The benefits were found to differ from one organisation to another, with the reported benefits relating to the reasons for commitment and to the level of organisational commitment to IIP.

Before discussing benefits of IIP in detail the most important point to make is that none of the employers interviewed formally measured the costs and benefits of IIP. The attitude and commitment of managers in the organisations seemed to override, either positively or negatively, the necessity to make any formal assessment of costs and benefits. It was these views and attitudes, and the perceptions of costs and benefits that guided the decision-making process. For example:

'We haven't got a cost on it because we just felt that – I'm sure there is one – but it's a cost that we've decided is worthwhile because we need to improve the business'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Construction, England.

Where employers did assess the costs of IIP these tended to be approximate, and typically only included the direct costs of the assessor time rather than also including the staff time involved in preparing for and undertaking the assessment. Employer estimates of assessor costs ranged from a few hundred pounds to tens of thousands of pounds for very large organisations. The scale of the adviser/assessor costs depended on the size of the organisation, the number of staff interviews to be included as part of the assessment and whether pre-assessment support was carried out by telephone or face-to-face.

IIP has a wide range of organisational impacts which seem to differ from one organisation to another reflecting how they use the Standard and their motivations for IIP accreditation. However, these benefits are based on perceptions, and had not been measured. For employers that are or have been involved with the Standard, there may be a tendency to justify their organisation's commitment and investment in IIP and their involvement with the intervention. All of the benefits and impacts reported in this section are self-reported and therefore may not be objective or accurate.

4.2.1 Long-term IIP accredited employers

Long-term IIP accredited employers perceived the largest range of benefits to IIP of the three groups. This supports earlier research which found that organisations with the greatest level

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of commitment to IIP were most likely to report benefits from the Standard (e.g. Tamkin, 2000). Long-term IIP employers reported the following five main benefits:

- Benefits to training practices and developing and supporting HR capability;
- A mechanism to re-engage staff;
- Integration of HR strategy with business planning;
- External validation of organisational systems and processes; and
- Gaining independently gathered feedback from staff.

Several long-term IIP accredited employers described benefits to training practices, such as increasing training opportunities to all employees, and to developing and supporting HR capability. For example:

'It helps guide them [managers]; this is what you should be doing. And this is not just me telling them, but it's a set standard that is nationally recognised. This is how you manage training; this is how you do appraisals'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Manufacturing, England

For long-term IIP accredited employers that had made recent redundancies, IIP was felt to be a valuable mechanism by which to re-engage with staff and to re-establish that investing in staff was a business priority. For example:

'IIP helped us to focus on the important issues to make sure our staff got back on board [after redundancies]'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Construction, England

Other business benefits were also reported, such as the integration of HR strategy and practices with business planning and measuring staff performance:

'IIP helped to link different measurements of performance to professional practice'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, less than 50 employees, Veterinary surgery, England

'I think the impacts are in the business plan, they're in the self-assessment reports, in the quality improvement plan'

Long-term IIP-accredited employer, less than 50 employees, Education, England

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Long-term IIP accredited employers also perceived there were benefits from having an independent perspective on the business from the adviser/assessor, and some external validation of business practices. External validation was felt to be valuable to demonstrate to staff that the organisation was a good employer, as one long-term accredited IIP employer explained:

'It's not just us telling you that you have a good working place and working environment and you're working for a good business in terms of your HR policies, but actually, others are saying that too'

Long-term IIP-accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Public Administration and Defence,
Northern Ireland

Some felt that having an independent assessor asking staff for their feedback resulted in more honest and candid feedback from staff than would be the case if internal managers asked staff the same questions. A better understanding of staff views was felt by some to be invaluable in business planning, and for some long-term IIP accredited employers this was one of the most beneficial parts of the IIP process.

For long-term IIP accredited employers that worked for the public sector, some felt that IIP accreditation helped them to win public sector contracts.

How one organisation perceived the impacts and benefits of IIP is detailed in the case-study in Box 5.

Box 5: Long-term IIP accredited employer: a case-study of benefits and impacts

The organisation has held IIP accreditation for 14 years. They are a construction-related consultancy that operate nationally and have recently undergone a period of restructuring and redundancy following recession in the construction sector. They now employ approximately 120 staff across 18 sites. The organisation outsources their HR function. Responsibility for the IIP assessment sits with the Chief Operating Officer. The organisation also holds ISO 9001 accreditation and is working towards ISO14001.

The organisation uses IIP to help drive the business and to maximise the value of their staff. The organisation has a long-standing commitment to IIP from the board, although they also consider the assessor costs of re-accrediting.

The organisation felt it had benefited in several ways from being IIP accredited for many years, although these benefits were never quantified. The main benefits were reported to be the opportunity IIP provided for reflection on HR issues. The organisation reported that IIP had helped them to focus on and prioritise the areas that are essential to the business, improving communications, and helping managers to manage staff more effectively:

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'We can look inwardly at our company and address the issues that are necessary in a structured way...it's all about people understanding their role in the company, and I think IIP has helped us to focus on the areas that are essential...it's focused us on making sure people in the business understand what we do and have more transparency, we try to improve communications'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Construction, England

Organisations that are committed to the principles of IIP have been found to be more likely to report an impact on training and development than organisations simply seeking the badge (Tamkin, 2000; Bell et al., 2002). The findings from interviews with long-term IIP accredited employers and previously-accredited IIP employers support this. Long-term accredited employers tended to have a greater focus on the internal benefits that IIP accreditation could offer than previously accredited employers, who discussed a perceived decline in the external value of the Standard as a key reason for diminishing benefits and a reason why they were no longer accredited (see Section 3.3).

However, although long-term IIP accredited employers overall had a greater focus on the internal benefits of IIP, some also believed that the external benefits and reputation effects they had once derived from IIP accreditation were declining:

'At the beginning it was seen as something...it was almost affirmation that you are a good organisation on the HR front, whereas now, I'm not sure that it has such great significance as then'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Public Administration and Defence,
Northern Ireland

'In the early days it was a way that genuinely differentiated ourselves as a company that thought people in the business were important. I think that's been devalued too much because absolutely everyone has an IIP plaque whether they are a good employer or not'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Professional Scientific and Technical
Services, England

Table 4.1 summarises the benefits resulting from IIP that long-term accredited IIP employers self-reported.

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Table 4.1: Summary of the benefits of IIP among long-term IIP accredited employers

Benefit	Impact
Improvements to HR and training processes/practices	Wide ranging
Re-engaging staff after redundancies	Yes
Independent perspective and external benchmarking	Yes
Feedback from staff	Yes
Win public sector contracts	Yes
External value of IIP accreditation	Declining
Business outcomes: i.e. profit, shareholder value	No

4.2.2 Previously accredited IIP employers

Previously-accredited IIP employers also reported benefits from IIP, especially from improved training practices and HR processes. These benefits had been particularly apparent on initial IIP accreditation, but were reported to have since diminished.

For previously-accredited IIP employers the external validity and perceived kudos of having the Standard was felt to be a benefit. However, some previously accredited employers, like the long-term IIP employers, felt that this had decreased over time:

‘It provided a really good route map to improve on business and development; it helped me to raise the profile of development initiatives...it gave our services a real edge and a lot of organisational legitimacy...its currency depreciated and there were no real benefits perceived by the organisation’

Previously-accredited IIP employer, 1,000+ employees, Local Authority, England

‘Nobody ever told me that it impressed anyone...since we’ve lost it they haven’t made any comments about it’

Previously-accredited IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Manufacturing, England

The extent and nature of perceived benefits depended on types of policies and processes that employers had in place prior to working towards IIP accreditation. Organisations that had made more substantial changes as a result of their involvement with IIP tended to recognise and attribute these to IIP to a greater extent than employers who felt they had had to make minimal changes to gain IIP. Compare the following previously-accredited IIP employer experiences:

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'Initially there was quite a buzz within the organisation because we'd got it [IIP], but after the initial buzz...there were not many new things we put in place in order to get it, so there were benefits, but not very measurable'

Previously-accredited IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Retail, England

'It would be hard to pin point anything specific...nothing particular really changed'

Previously accredited IIP employer, 250-999 employees, Professional Scientific and Technical Services, Scotland

'Staff and involvement and engagement. The concept that you don't just have an objective and you achieve it and it's done, but it's a continuous improvement. These were major, major things for us...the engagement of all staff was the biggy...we didn't have an awful lot of those building blocks in place and it was about embedding those at all levels in the organisation'

Previously-accredited IIP employer, 1,000+ employees, Health and social care, Northern Ireland

Where previously accredited IIP employers had made changes as a result of IIP, some felt that these benefits would continue. The employer below reflects on the extent to which aspects of IIP are now an embedded part of their processes compared to ten years earlier when they first sought IIP accreditation:

'I think it [IIP] did have an influence, not so much on HR, but definitely in training strategy in terms of just being more co-ordinated about that...finding the balance between training need and training demand...I think there was a lot of stuff embedded, and probably people starting now maybe take for granted things that ten years ago weren't in place'

Previously-accredited IIP employer, 250-999 employees, Public administration and defence, Scotland

Among some previously-accredited IIP employers, interviewees reported that although their organisations had reaped all of the possible benefits from IIP, it had been a positive process, and other organisations wishing to develop HR policies and practices could benefit from the Standard.

The perceived impacts and benefits of IIP in one previously accredited organisation is detailed in the case-study in Box 6.

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Box 6: Previously accredited IIP employer: a case-study of benefits and impacts

The organisation held IIP for six years, and let their IIP accreditation lapse in 2010. The organisation is a retailer of computer hardware and software and employs 35 staff in the UK. The organisation also has two other sites in Europe. Responsibility for IIP accreditation rests with the training and development facilitator, and the overall reaccreditation decision was taken by senior managers.

The organisation was initially interested in IIP as it offered a way of benchmarking their existing HR processes against a nationally recognised standard. The organisation had seen changes to the Standard in the time they were accredited and felt that while it could offer them potentially beneficial internal changes, these would not be recognised externally. The external and commercial value of IIP was felt to be a critical factor in the decision not to reaccredit.

They felt that benchmarking against an external standard gave them a one-off benefit, which diminished over time. They said:

‘It’s a case of having been there and done it, and knowing that we are going very well, and we don’t need to be told that all the time’

The organisation currently holds ISO 9001 and reported that this had significant commercial benefits. The senior managers felt that without the ISO standard they would lose business partners and not qualify for preferred supplier lists.

Over the next two to three years the organisation did not have plans to gain IIP reaccreditation, but were planning to continue operating the processes that had secured them IIP accreditation.

Table 4.2 summarises the benefits resulting from IIP that previously accredited IIP employers self-reported.

Table 4.2: Summary of the benefits of IIP among previously accredited IIP employers

Benefit	Impact
Improvements to HR and training processes/practices	Declining
Re-engaging staff after redundancies	No
Independent perspective and external benchmarking	No
Feedback from staff	No
Win public sector contracts	No
External value of IIP accreditation	Declining
Business outcomes: i.e. profit, shareholder value	No

4.2.3 De-committed IIP employers

Despite never gaining IIP accreditation, some of the de-committed IIP employers reported benefits from work undertaken as part of the IIP process, particularly in improvements to

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training practices and HR processes. It should be noted that the de-committed IIP employers willing to participate in the research had in general taken significant steps towards IIP accreditation, so this finding may not apply to any de-committed IIP employers who disengaged from the Standard earlier in the process.

One employer who had made changes to their training processes said:

'Hopefully most of the things that would be required of Investors in People we are now actually doing even though we haven't gone through to the formal accreditation step'

De-committed IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Professional and Technical Services,
England

Another de-committed IIP employer which had used the Standard to facilitate discussions about management style within the organisation felt that it had helped the organisation to gain some consistency in management approaches:

'Gave them [senior managers] the chance to look at how they actually do manage their teams...I think it pulled us together more as a team'

De-committed IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Information and Communications,
England

Those de-committed IIP employers that had undertaken some external benchmarking or pre-assessment with an adviser/assessor felt that this had had benefits:

'It has helped us to focus on how best to communicate; how many conferences should we be having; how much site visibility should we be having; what sort of training should we be doing'

De-committed IIP employer, 250-999 employees, Administrative and Support Services,
England

Table 4.3 summarises the benefits resulting from IIP that de-committed IIP employers self-reported.

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Table 4.3: Summary of the benefits of IIP among de-committed IIP employers

Benefit	Impact
Improvements to HR and training processes/practices	Yes (those that had made changes)
Re-engaging staff after redundancies	No
Independent perspective and external benchmarking	Yes
Feedback from staff	No
Win public sector contracts	No
External value of IIP accreditation	No
Business outcomes: i.e. profit, shareholder value	No

Some of the benefits and impacts previously found in the literature were not reported by the employers interviewed for this research. These included: changes to employee wellbeing, commitment, morale and staff turnover; the organisation's ability to manage change; and the organisation's capacity to innovate and develop new products and services. Business outcomes identified from the IIP literature reviewed in Gloster et al. (2010), such as profit, shareholder value, and customer satisfaction, were not mentioned, even when prompted, by long-term IIP accredited employers as benefits they had realised from IIP. This reflects how organisations view the costs and benefits of the Standard and the importance of commitment, attitudes and perceived value over calculations of monetary benefits in decision-making.

4.3 Employer use of other quality standards

We asked employers whether they had attained either the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) quality standard or were accredited under the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) 'Excellence' model. These two quality standards were chosen as comparators because they are both nationally available business improvement tools and can be applied to a range of businesses, regardless of size or sector. However, there are some key differences between the take-up of the standards and the degree to which the standards are perceived as voluntary or required within their industry.

One of the employers interviewed for this research had the EFQM 'Excellence' model, whereas many more held an ISO standard, most typically ISO 9001. Employers in each of the three sample groups had an ISO standard and they included an organisation in health and social care, a local authority, manufacturers, office furniture suppliers, and a business services organisation. Additionally a provider of architectural services was currently working towards ISO. Some organisations that did not currently hold ISO had also investigated the quality standard and were able to discuss the relative importance of ISO in their sector

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compared to IIP. Some employers also held sector-specific quality standards, although these were generally felt to be complementary to IIP.

When comparing IIP to ISO, long-term IIP accredited employers and previously accredited IIP employers reflected positively on the IIP assessment process. They felt it could add more value to the organisation than that of ISO, as it was not simply an audit process:

'The administration and the process of getting them...I would say IIP wins hands down because it's not a box ticking audit based system'

Long-term IIP-accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Professional Scientific and Technical Services, England

However, among all three groups of employers, ISO was viewed as more essential for business than IIP because of its perceived market value, whereas IIP was viewed as an optional luxury. ISO was perceived to have more market relevance because it was required by the businesses within supply chains. As these employers explained:

'We need ISO in order to sell to certain clients. I don't think any clients have said to us you need to have IIP. It's a nice to have rather than essential'

Long-term IIP-accredited employer, less than 50 employees, Retail, England

'Industry standards take precedence. They are perceived to be more important than IIP as IIP does not have a direct effect on being able to tender for business'

Previously-accredited IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Information and Communications, Scotland

'We have ISO9001 here, and externally, that's got much higher profile [than IIP]; people are looking for you to have that. We couldn't do without that, because we would lose some of our prospective business partners.'

Previously-accredited IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Retail, England

'More customers are asking for ISO rather than Investors in People'

Previously-accredited IIP employer, 50-249 employees, Local Authority, England

One employer interviewed for the research had EFQM. They felt that there was some overlap between IIP and EFQM, and that IIP fitted into EFQM which also covered other areas, making it a wider-ranging and more useful quality tool for their organisation.

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4.4 Conclusion

Long-term IIP accredited employers were most likely to self-report a range of benefits resulting from IIP, such as improved HR processes, re-engaging staff after redundancies and restructuring, providing an independent perspective and external benchmark, and getting feedback from staff. However, employers in this research did not quantify or measure the benefits or costs of IIP accreditation and based their accreditation decisions and views on the benefits of IIP largely on their beliefs, attitudes, and observations about how IIP was benefiting the business.

Previously-accredited IIP employers identified improved HR practices and processes as the main benefit of IIP, but felt that the immediate benefits of accreditation had decreased over time. To maintain the interest of this group of employers, the Standard needs to continue to offer benefits beyond the early assessment processes.

Among some employers there was a perception that the value of having the Standard had decreased. Some felt that so many organisations were accredited that the Standard was no longer a differentiator, and others reported that it was not required by their customers.

The business outcome benefits described in the literature, such as increased profit, were not identified by any of the interviewees as benefits they had experienced from IIP. This perhaps reflects the lack of internal monitoring and measurement of the impact of the Standard identified in this research.

Several employers were aware of, or had ISO accreditation. Employers typically preferred the IIP assessment approach, based on outcomes, rather than an audit process. However, employers viewed ISO as having more market relevance and of being of greater commercial advantage than IIP.

The following chapter considers the likelihood of taking up the IIP Standard amongst the three groups of employers.

5 Future business priorities and IIP

Summary
<p>Of the long-term IIP-accredited employers we interviewed all except one planned to regain accreditation in future, reflecting the organisational commitment to IIP among this group. However, there were indications that the costs of IIP assessment may be scrutinised more sharply in future, particularly among long-term IIP accredited employers in the public sector facing budget reductions.</p> <p>The previously accredited IIP employers were divided over whether or not they would consider regaining IIP accreditation in the future. Some felt very strongly that they would not, whereas others said they might if (business) circumstances changed. Some felt that the external value and the kudos of having IIP accreditation status had waned, and that this would need to be addressed, for example at national policy level, before they would consider recommitting to the Standard.</p> <p>Some of the de-committed IIP employers interviewed for this research were planning to undertake IIP assessment in the future, but others were not, and other de-committed IIP employers felt that they had gained enough from adopting the Standard's processes without seeking accreditation.</p> <p>Interviewees were asked for their views on which type of organisations might benefit from IIP. There was no clear pattern of responses or firm views about the relevance of IIP to specific sectors: the Standard was generally seen as applicable to any sector.</p>

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings relating to employers' future business priorities and whether IIP accreditation is part of these. This is important to explore in order to look at ways in which IIP take-up and accreditation might be increased in future. First this chapter starts by presenting the evidence from long-term accredited employers about whether they will reaccredit, then whether previously accredited IIP employers would consider re-accrediting, and then whether any of the de-committed IIP employers might consider trying to gain accreditation in future. Finally, it explores interviewees' general perceptions on the types of organisations that might benefit from IIP in the future.

5.2 Future business priorities: (re)gaining IIP accreditation?

This section reports on the future business priorities of each of the three sample groups.

5.2.1 Long-term accredited IIP employers

Of the long-term IIP accredited employers we interviewed all except one planned to regain accreditation in future, reflecting the organisational commitment to IIP among this group. It

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also reflected the lack of a formal decision-making process operating among this group when IIP accreditation came up for renewal (see section 3.2) as this employer explained:

'The easy decision will be to do that [reaccredit] because that doesn't require any real thinking...it's far more likely we'll be, well we've got it, so we'll keep it'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Professional Scientific and Technical Services, England

However, there were indications that the costs of IIP assessment may be scrutinised more sharply in future, particularly among long-term IIP-accredited employers in the public sector facing budget reductions:

'All our budgets are so close to the bone these days and we have got to be very conscious about the investment that we're making in anything'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 1,000+ employees, Housing Association, England

'What does it [IIP] bring to us? We haven't really come to a conclusion on that, but I think it's something we need to come to a conclusion on before we accredit again'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Public Administration and Defence, Northern Ireland

The one long-term accredited employer actively considering not re-accrediting to IIP was in the public sector and felt that the change of the Standard towards a business improvement tool did not fit with how the organisation wanted to use the Standard:

'In terms of its new format, it's losing its relevance...in terms of being a public sector organisation. I think its emphasis is probably towards private sector than public sector'

Long-term IIP accredited employer, 50-249 employees, Public Administration and Defence, Northern Ireland

The business priorities for long-term accredited private sector employers over the next two to three years focused largely on trying to rebuild growing and profitable businesses after the recession. For long-term IIP-accredited employers in the public sector, the focus of the organisation over the next two to three years was reported to be primarily about cost-saving and greater efficiency.

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5.2.2 Previously accredited IIP employers

The previously-accredited IIP employers were divided over whether or not they would consider regaining IIP accreditation in the future. Some felt very strongly that they would not, whereas others said they might if (business) circumstances changed. Among previously - accredited IIP employers there remained a sense that the next few years were going to be challenging for their business, and some reported that in the face of declining markets and public spending reductions they were seeking to survive or to maintain their current market position. Some felt that the external value and the kudos of having IIP accreditation status had waned, and that this would need to be addressed, for example at national policy level, before they would consider recommitting to the Standard. As one employer explained:

'I think there'd have to be some national recommitment to the Standard and the role Investors should be playing before we'd look at it again'

Previously accredited IIP employer, 1,000+ employees, Local Authority, England

5.2.3 De-committed IIP employers

Over the next two or three years the business plans for de-committed IIP employers were to stay stable and consolidate their position in the market before seeking to expand in the medium-term. Some of the de-committed IIP employers interviewed for this research were planning to undertake IIP assessment in the future, but others were not, and other de-committed IIP employers felt that they had gained enough from adopting the Standard's processes without seeking accreditation:

'Have we not got it by another name really, effectively in what we do...therefore is the cost and the extra time for accreditation warranted in the current situation?'

De-committed IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Professional and Technical Services,
England

The economic climate seems to have played a part in the reasons given by *some* employers about the reasons why they did not seek IIP (re)accreditation. The recession may have intensified the difficulties in continuing and justifying involvement with the Standard. It is not clear from the research which employers were most likely to be affected by the recession and why, but there was evidence to suggest that there were apparent difficulties with accrediting for the first time during the recession:

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'There are probably other public sector organisations that will continue with it, but potentially probably more embedded and it's not their first recognition'

De-committed IIP employer, 1,000+ employees, Local Authority, England

5.3 Perceptions of organisations that might benefit from IIP

Interviewees were asked for their general views on which type of organisations might benefit from IIP. There was no clear pattern of responses or firm views about the relevance of IIP to specific sectors: the Standard was generally seen as applicable to any sector.

A number of previously accredited IIP employers felt the Standard could be most relevant to smaller or younger companies which were growing and developing and needed some assistance in developing appropriate procedures:

'People who haven't got organised internally, with... a reasonable number of staff [benefit most from IIP]'

Previously accredited IIP employer, less than 50 employees, Retail, England

'New organisations that are starting out and want a clear framework that will be able to demonstrate to them that they're performing'

Previously accredited IIP employer, 250-999 employees, Public administration and defence,
Scotland

De-committed IIP employers tended to frame their responses in terms of the kind of organisation that would find it easier to go through the accreditation process. For example, they highlighted the greater resources of larger organisations or more nimble smaller firms finding it easier to make the necessary changes. This suggests that the process of IIP assessment looms large in the minds of managers who chose not to go through it.

5.4 Conclusion

Long-term accredited employers are likely to continue to be IIP accredited, although there are indications that IIP budgets in the public sector may be under greater scrutiny than in the past. This may be an influence on future decisions regarding IIP accreditation. Indeed there were some public sector organisations in the de-committed IIP employer sample that cited reductions in budgets as a reason for withdrawing from the Standard.

There were some previously-accredited IIP employers that felt they had maximised the benefits from the Standard and would not seek reaccreditation in the future. Others said they might consider reaccrediting in future if they perceived there to be greater external value to

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IIP accreditation. This would need to be addressed, for example at national policy level, and particularly within supply chains, before they would consider recommitting to the Standard.

Some de-committed IIP employers are planning to seek IIP accreditation in the (near) future but others felt that they had gained enough from adopting the Standard's processes without seeking accreditation.

6 Conclusions and implications for action

Despite evidence that organisations can benefit from IIP, analysis of IIP management information shows that the number of IIP accounts has fallen in the last two years. Two of these factors were explored in this research:

- drop out between commitment and accreditation; and
- organisations not seeking reassessment after a period of accreditation.

Although the Standard has been in operation for twenty years, no previous research has examined the reasons organisations discontinue with IIP. This report has started to build this evidence base.

This chapter draws together the main findings for each of the research questions and then presents suggested implications for action about how the issues raised might be addressed, focusing particularly on increasing retention, and increasing the conversion of IIP commitments to accreditations.

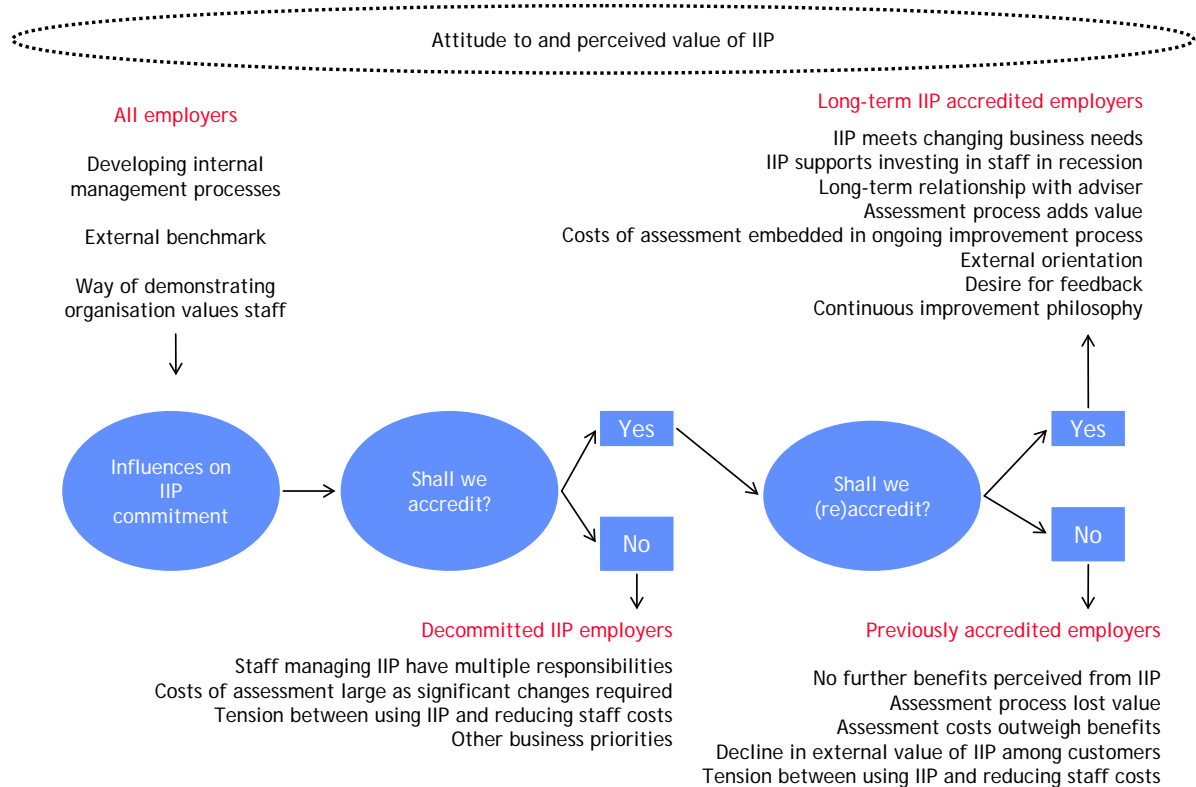
6.1 Summary of evidence

Summary of factors affecting employer behaviour in relation to IIP

Figure 6.1 outlines the IIP customer journey and decision-making points from commitment, through to accreditation and reaccreditation. It summarises the factors we have found to affect employer behaviour at each of the decision-making points: commitment; accreditation; and reaccreditation.

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Figure 6.1: Factors affecting employer behaviour along the IIP customer journey



Source: IES, 2011

There are a number of factors suggested by the literature to affect employer behaviour in relation to IIP that have not been found in this relatively small, but focussed research and a number not identified in previous research that seem to be important. This indicates that the influences on the employer decision-making process are complex and varied.

Who makes decisions about IIP accreditation?

IIP tended to be owned by and accreditation led from within the HR function which then made recommendations about whether or not to (re)accredit to senior managers, such as the directors, or the chief executive who made the final decision. In smaller organisations it was common for decisions about IIP and implementation to be made by the same individual. Interviewees in long-term IIP accredited employers described their confidence in the level of organisational commitment to IIP, with IIP accreditation a part of their organisation's policy.

In previously-accredited IIP employers and de-committed IIP employers there seemed a greater degree of expectation and pressure from senior managers for the costs and benefits of IIP to be justified, and for accreditation to reflect a positive commercial decision. The cost of IIP outweighing the benefits was often given as a reason for not seeking (re)accreditation. However, these decisions seemed to have been made on the basis of perceived costs and

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perceived benefits rather than quantified using measurable data and there is no evidence that long term accredited organisations used more quantified data. The likely adviser/assessor time costs were typically the only hard cost or benefit data organisations reviewed, and there was a perception that the organisational benefits of IIP had declined over time.

Why do some employers commit to IIP, but not accredit?

There were two main reasons for not progressing from commitment to accreditation identified from the interviews completed with de-committed IIP employers.

First, for some employers the amount of work required to put the processes in place and make the changes to the business required for a successful IIP accreditation were substantial. The staff time and opportunity costs of achieving IIP accreditation were therefore perceived to be relatively high. Over time these organisations found that work towards IIP stalled, or received lower priority in the face of other business pressures, resulting in loss of momentum to achieve the Standard.

Second, restructuring and a change in business climate between commitment and accreditation meant some de-committed IIP employers felt that the costs of working towards and assessing against the Standard could not be justified to staff against a backdrop of budget cuts and job losses. There are some shared implications with organisations which chose not to regain IIP accreditation for the same reasons and these are discussed in the section below.

Why do some employers not pursue IIP re-accreditation?

Previously accredited IIP employers described three main reasons why their organisation decided not to regain IIP accreditation.

First, some organisations felt that they had maximised the benefits for their organisation from the Standard by simply putting the processes in place to pass their earlier IIP assessments. This is reflected in the relatively longstanding IIP accreditation that some organisations in the sample had held before choosing to relinquish it. Only three previously-accredited employers were assessed once (their first assessment); four were assessed twice; two were assessed three times; and the remainder had been assessed against the Standard on four or more occasions. The benefits to IIP were viewed as relatively static and would remain with the organisation whether or not they sought reaccreditation. Over time the assessment process

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was felt to have lost value, and the assessor was thought to be unable to add insights, nor add significant value to the organisation.

A number reported that costs of accreditation outweighed the perceived benefits. This was primarily due to a decline in the perceived internal and external benefits over time. Organisations reported that they did not need to change management policies and processes, and therefore would not benefit from regular IIP reviews.

While it is evident that for stable organisations, IIP accreditation may lose its value over time, this may demonstrate differences both in how organisations chose to use IIP and their business strategies. In contrast with previously accredited employers, some long-term accredited employers were often using IIP as a continuous improvement tool which they perceived was important to managing business change. However, previously accredited IIP employers or de-committed employers appeared to be subject to more turbulence in business circumstances than long-term accredited IIP employers and to be less likely to adopt a continuous improvement philosophy. These organisations do not recognise IIP as a tool that can help them during organisational change. This suggests that businesses may need some support in enabling them to recognise and make use of IIP in tough business conditions. There is a further question about the degree of ambition and motivation of the previously accredited or de-committed organisations to pursue 'high road' business strategies of continuous improvement which may affect their perception of the role of IIP. Because IIP does not question or judge the appropriateness of each organisation's business strategy, there may be limited scope to use IIP to engage businesses for a long period, that are not founded on a commitment to continuous quality enhancement. The scope of the research did not allow us to enquire deeply into organisational business strategies but this may be worth further consideration in any targeting of the IIP offer.

Second, when firm budgets were reduced and there had been restructuring and staff redundancies, employers in the previously-accredited group also reported that re-accreditation did not seem appropriate. This suggests a lack of managerial confidence in being able to justify investment in staff during difficult economic conditions, although a wide body of existing evidence shows that retraining and bolstering staff engagement can be critical to rebuilding organisations after restructuring. This is unsurprising given that younger managers currently steering organisations through tough times may be experiencing their first ever period of an adverse economic climate since entering the labour market, as the last recession took place in the early 1990s. Support may be needed to help businesses understand how IIP can be used following significant organisational change and to position IIP as a tool that is suitable for businesses in a variety of circumstances, not just growth. The

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recession may have had an effect on reaccreditation reasons in the short-run. In the longer-term the reasons for not gaining IIP accreditation are likely to focus more on the long-term value of the Standard and whether organisations see it as a one-off process.

Third, externally, there was a perceived decline in the value of the Standard, both in the focus of national policy and within organisational supply chains. Some felt that other quality standards, such as ISO, held more market relevance and commercial value. Strengthening the value attached to IIP through supply chains may therefore be important to improve re-accreditation and penetration rates.

What factors affect the decision-making process of employers that have achieved IIP status over a number of years?

Long-term accredited employers had a positive attitude towards IIP within their organisational policies and accreditation was supported by senior management. It was common for the decision to reaccredit to be taken automatically, without the costs and benefits of doing so being reviewed, in large part because long-term IIP accredited employers tended to believe that IIP was beneficial to the organisation. Alongside this, long-term IIP accredited employers appeared to have a philosophy of continuous improvement.

The long-standing and strong relationships many long-term IIP accredited employers had with their adviser/assessors seemed to add value to the assessment process. The relationship itself was not specifically identified by long-term accredited IIP employers as a reason why they regain IIP accreditation, but the added value from the assessment process was important.

These organisations appeared to value the external scrutiny and validation of business processes that IIP provided and the independent and constructive feedback they received, engaging with the process wholeheartedly and valuing it for the suggestions for improvement received as well as gaining IIP accreditation itself. Openness to external 'criticism' may demand a degree of management confidence that basic organisational processes are adequate.

It was common for long-term accredited employers, particularly those that were medium or large, to have a dedicated staff resource allocated to HR and with responsibility for IIP. This seemed important to maintain the profile and resourcing for the Standard. Several long-term IIP accredited employers described how they met the Standard in their usual business operations, so little preparation was required prior to the assessment. This helped to minimise the costs of reaccreditation. The belief that IIP was relevant to their organisation

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even during restructuring and periods when staff were made redundant also reflects a deep commitment and belief in the significance of people management which is embedded in long-term accredited organisations through regular management processes.

There is a potential tension in positioning IIP for enhanced penetration of the Standard versus enhanced reaccreditation. To increase penetration, the assessment process may require review to make it less daunting, however, retention of customers over the long-term appears to be more common among organisations which value a thorough assessment process. This raises the question about how far it may be possible to convert organisations which initially gain IIP for market-based or external factors to those which embed it as part of their toolkit of management processes.

How has IIP achieved sustained impact among some organisations?

Long-term accredited organisations had a positive attitude towards IIP but it is important to note that no organisation had formal measurement processes in place to assess whether IIP had had a sustained impact on their organisations. However, this group self-reported benefits to several aspects of their business, and discussed a more wide ranging list of benefits than the employers in the other sample groups.

Long-term IIP accredited employers were focussed on continuous improvement, and worked with IIP to help them to direct the improvement process. This attitude meant that they felt they had not yet maximised the value and potential benefits from the Standard, which was a common reason among previously accredited IIP employers for letting their IIP accreditation lapse. Indeed most long-term IIP accredited employers said they would regain IIP accreditation in the future, highlighting a belief in IIP's continued relevance.

What are the critical decision points in the customer journey?

There are three critical decision points in the customer journey at which employers may risk ending their involvement with the Standard:

1. Making a commitment: This research shows that for some employers it is not entirely clear what 'committing' to IIP involves and/or that there may be some inconsistency in how commitment is defined and recorded by delivery centres. Employers seemed to have approached this 'commitment' with varying degrees of resources, determination and momentum. Indeed it seems that some employers are not clear that they had committed to IIP at all.
2. Working towards a first accreditation: Once an employer commits to IIP, several of the de-committed IIP employers described the large amount of work they needed to do in order

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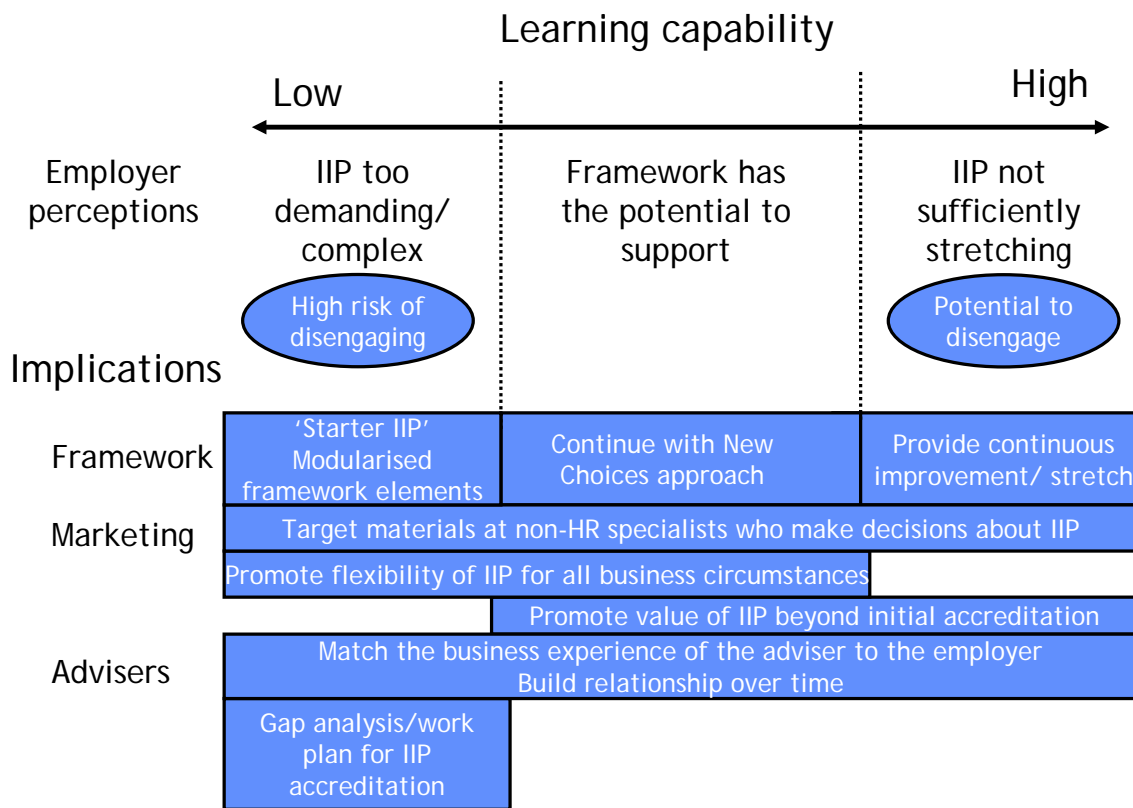
to make the changes required by the IIP standard. At the commitment stage IIP advisers/assessors might be able to undertake a gap analysis, and help the organisation to plan how to resource this, with a timeframe, in order to maintain momentum towards accreditation. At the commitment stage, breaking down the activities required into smaller chunks might make the process appear less daunting. Organisations did not report receiving significant input from advisers to undertake this work. Some organisations, particularly those without a dedicated HR function may benefit from advisers/assessors maintaining greater contact after commitment. This would also provide an opportunity to keep the IIP management information up-to-date. If staff members working on IIP leave, it would also be an opportunity for IIP to make another contact within the organisation.

3. Maintaining the value of the reaccreditation process: Once IIP accreditation had been awarded, some previously accredited IIP employers felt the reassessment process lost value over time. Consideration needs to be given to how employers can continue to get value from the IIP assessment process. Long-term IIP accredited employers described a process of continuous improvement that IIP was part of, rather than accreditation being an end in itself. They also emphasised the importance of maintaining investment in staff during restructuring and redundancies, in contrast to some previously accredited IIP employers and some de-committed IIP employers. The relevance of IIP in difficult business circumstances and not just for growing or stable organisations, needs to be emphasised and promoted. Long-term IIP accredited employers seem to be more internally focused in their decision-making about IIP compared to previously-accredited IIP employers and de-committed IIP employers who are more externally focused in their recent decisions about IIP accreditation. Among previously accredited IIP employers there seems to have been a change in emphasis over time from internal benefits to external benefits. Emphasis on the external value of IIP needs to be maintained to ensure that the award has value to all employers.

This discussion has illustrated the multiple needs of different types of IIP customer. The capacity to learn and adopt new processes within an organisation, alongside sophistication of approaches to Human Resource Management (HRM) have proved to be important dimensions in aiding our understanding of employer interaction with IIP and this has implications for how best to engage and support them. There is a need for tailoring and customisation of the framework, targeted approaches to marketing and differing approaches for advisers to support employers. Figure 1 illustrates how employer perceptions of IIP can relate to their capacity for innovation. Some of the resulting implications are detailed for the IIP framework, marketing of the Standard and how advisers work with and support employers. These are further expanded in section 6.2.

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Figure 6.2: Capacity to learn for continuous improvement, engagement with IIP and implications



Source: IES, 2011

As illustrated by Figure 6.2, the learning capability of employers that use IIP is important in maintaining take-up and engagement with the Standard. Therefore some consideration needs to be given to how to best encourage and enhance collective learning for continuous improvement in organisations. This relates to a wider and ongoing policy debate about how best to encourage high performance working practices (HPWP) in organisations. Case-study research with organisations that had recently developed a high performance working approach noted that in organisations that operated HPW policies and practices need to be underpinned by a philosophy of people management that emphasises autonomy, participation and learning. The research found that an underpinning belief in the value of people to the organisation was also critical in seeking to engage with HPWP (Tamkin et al., 2010). This mirrors the findings in this report which show differences in employers' perceptions of the value of IIP and their confidence about retaining IIP accreditation despite the recession and staff redundancies. This would suggest developing a learning culture and philosophy within organisations that is sympathetic to staff development and skills utilisation is important to encourage and promote continuous organisational improvement. As illustrated

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by some of the previously-accredited IIP employers, simply having processes and policies in place does not guarantee an ongoing commitment to and engagement with HPWP, including IIP. We make further suggestions for tailoring IIP to different employer views and types in the recommendations section below.

6.2 Implications for action

Our suggested improvements in relation to increasing IIP (re)accreditation are detailed in the Table 6.1. The section number in brackets gives the section in the report where the evidence on which the area for improvement and suggested action is based.

Table 6.1: Summary of areas for improvement and suggested action

Area for improvement	Suggested action
Actions for the UK Commission	
Product development: the IIP framework	
Differentiate within the framework at the lower end (section 3.5)	New Choices provides stretch at the top of the framework, consider extending the framework at the lower end to encourage retention and conversion between commitment and accreditation
Marketing	
Demonstrate added internal value beyond initial accreditation(s) (section 3.4)	Promote how long-term IIP accredited employers use the Standard and their process of continuous improvement in a variety of circumstances, including restructuring, and how IIP can underpin business strategy. The Compare and Learn tool feature 'learning from others' may offer an opportunity for this.
Increase buy-in from senior decision-makers (section 3.3-3.5)	Seek to target marketing materials at non-HR specialists, particularly focusing on peer communications and messages as employers are most likely to be receptive to this. Use IIP ambassador network to promote benefits and use as a tool which can be continuously adapted and applied.
Seek to expand IIP in new markets (section 5.3)	Some previously accredited IIP employers and de-committed IIP employers would not return to the Standard. However, they view IIP as potentially relevant to all organisations (particularly those seeking to develop HR practices). Market IIP to employers in sectors where there has traditionally been little take-up.
Encourage increased management capability	Promote the relevance of IIP to a diverse range of business situations including restructuring, redundancies, mergers, and expansion. The Compare and Learn tool feature 'learning from others,' alongside the IIP ambassador network may offer an opportunity for this. Ensure IIP is considered within other UK Commission work on leadership and management development.
Increase advocacy for IIP from employer representative bodies and private sector organisations	Find ways to encourage employer representative bodies, such as Chambers of Commerce, Sector Skills Councils, and the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development, as well as private sector organisations to advocate IIP to private sector organisations. Local Enterprise Partnerships and other employer partnerships and networks may also offer a forum for this.
Management information	
Capture change of organisational status	Change in status caused by reorganisation of departments/mergers can mean that IIP accreditation terminates when new processes merge.

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Area for improvement	Suggested action
(section 1.3)	Develop a way to track mergers/splits of organisations/organisation units to track the IIP journey.
Define a commitment (section 3.5)	Ensure definition of a commitment is understood by both employers and advisers. Maintain relationships so that organisations determine when they have de-committed rather than three years being the default maximum.
Actions for IIP Delivery Centres	
Minimise the time period between commitment and accreditation (section 3.5)	Prior to commitment undertake a gap analysis and develop a work plan outlining resource commitments and timescales to demonstrate to the employer the amount of work and commitment required to gain the Standard.
Ensure a better match between adviser and employer (section 3.3)	Offer a choice of adviser/assessors to an employer with CV/details of experience from which to choose and option to use the same or different adviser/assessor for each accreditation. Match the business experience of the adviser/assessor to the employers' sector. Select/train IIP assessors/advisers to ensure credibility with non-HR senior managers.
Build adviser/employer relationships (section 3.3)	Build in/agree timeframes for discussion of progress which would also be an opportunity to troubleshoot, maintain momentum and to update MI. Foster development of the relationship over time to gain a good understanding of the organisation.
Demonstrate added internal value beyond initial accreditation(s). Increase the long-run market value. (section 3.4)	Advisers should have a dialogue with organisations about business strategy and challenge and promote higher value added routes and continuous improvement to position IIP more closely to supporting policy aspirations for business growth.
Increase buy-in from senior decision-makers (section 3.3-3.5)	Encourage and help staff responsible for IIP accreditation to put in place the processes to assess whether IIP accreditation has helped them to achieve their original objectives and to deliver against their business strategy. Formally measuring the costs and benefits of IIP accreditation is difficult, but advisers/assessors could encourage organisations to collect data about the costs and benefits in order to inform senior decision makers and help to base their decisions on evidence of commercial value rather than attitudes and perceptions.
Actions for policy	
Maintain public sector accreditation during spending reductions (section 3.3 and 3.5)	The public sector needs to remain an ambassador for IIP, especially if it is to be used to increase demand for IIP through its supply chains. The cost of assessment is likely to be under increasing scrutiny in the public sector over the coming years. Consider ways to maintain levels of IIP accreditation in the public sector.
Increase the external value of the Standard (section 3.4)	An increase in the external value of the Standard could be partially achieved through raising requirements within public sector procurement policies, for example through second and third tier suppliers.

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Appendix 1: Methodology

Sampling and recruitment

Tables A1 and A2 outline the quotas set to achieve a spread of interviews among employers in different parts of the UK and small, medium and large organisations.

Table A1: Quotas by sample and country

Country	Longstanding accredited	Lapsed accredited	Committed but never accredited	Total
England	7	7	7	21
Scotland	3	3	3	9
Wales	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Northern Ireland	2	2	2	6
Total	12	12	12	36

Source: IES, 2011

NB: no sample was available for Wales

Table A2: Quotas by sample and number of employees

Number of employees	Longstanding accredited	Lapsed accredited	Committed but never accredited	Total
Less than 50	3	3	3	9
50-249	3	3	3	9
250-999	3	3	3	9
1000+	3	3	3	9
Total	12	12	12	36

Source: IES, 2011

For all three samples we stratified the sample frame by customer type, and within customer type, by country. We then drew a random sample using Excel. We anticipated that research participation rates were likely to vary according to the degree of engagement with IIP, so we drew the samples in different ratios according to customer group as follows:

- Long-term IIP accredited employers: 76 leads.
- De-committed IIP employers: 155 leads, plus a further 17 leads in Scotland to try and meet that quota (172 leads in total).
- Previously accredited IIP employers: 116 leads.

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However, during the course of initial recruitment it became apparent that problems in the way management information (MI) was coded had led to a discrepancy in the definition and sampling of the long-term IIP accredited sample. The group identified by the MI were IIP accredited employers, who were 'retaining recognition' beyond the three year accreditation period while they made changes to try again for IIP accreditation within a year.

This meant that we had to seek alternative ways to identify long-term IIP accredited employers. This sample was therefore identified from responses to a previous survey undertaken in 2007 that had collected the number of times the organisation had been IIP accredited, and this was matched back to the current UK Commission IIP management information. In total there were 55 useable leads from this source, from 938 responses overall. There was no information about the original purpose of the survey, or who had originally been sampled for the survey and why.

All the selected employers received letters outlining the purpose of the research, what participation would involve and stressing its confidentiality, and were contacted by telephone to arrange interviews. The MI data included a named contact and in the first instance recruiters asked to speak to this person. Additionally they were asked whether they made strategic business decisions about IIP or whether they are involved in administration relating to IIP. If they were involved in administration we asked to speak to someone more senior who was involved in implementing IIP and had an input into decisions about whether to apply for it. In small organisations (eg with less than 50 staff) this was typically the Owner/Manager or Chief Executive of the company. In larger organisations there tended to be a dedicated HR or Learning and Development Manager (or Director in organisations with 250+ staff).

For each of the three samples further screening was applied to check the status of the company. In each case the interviewee needed to have been in post at the time the most recent decision regarding involvement in IIP was taken.

- Long-term IIP accredited employers had to be: still IIP accredited; IIP recognised more than once; the interviewee needed to have been in post at the time of the most recent decision on re-assessment.
- Previously accredited IIP employer: they had IIP accreditation once (or more), but not currently; they decided to withdraw from IIP or did not re-apply for it rather than not meet the assessment standard required; the interviewee had to have been in post at the time of the most recent decision on re-assessment.
- De-committed IIP employer: they had committed to IIP, but had never experienced IIP assessment; they had some direct involvement with IIP and made a start on the

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commitment process (eg they had some interaction with an IIP Adviser or Delivery Centre in terms of working towards IIP and planning the process/ making changes to meet the IIP criteria); the interviewee had been in post at the time of the most recent decision on pulling out of the process.

When recruiting there were two issues with regards to the quality of the management information:

- The accuracy of the IIP status (a relatively small issue); and
- The accuracy of the contact details (the number of incorrect telephone numbers and contacts that had left).

In a few cases the employer’s actual IIP status differed from their coding. For example, an employer may have been recorded as lapsed, but have regained accreditation. Where possible we included any employers interested in participating in the research and placed them in the appropriate sample category.

The quality of the contact details within the management information is described in the tables below. A number of leads had incorrect telephone contact details. In many cases the named contact had left the organisation, and therefore there was no one able to discuss decisions concerning IIP. As recruitment progressed, some leads fell out of scope, for example, once the quota for employers based in England was met. For de-committed IIP employers it was also apparent that while we tried to sample those that had de-committed less than a year ago, the sample included many that had de-committed long before this and in some cases three years earlier.

Tables A3-A5 outline the extent of these issues by sample type.

Table A3: Long-term IIP accredited employers

	Number	% of leads
Number of leads	55	-
Number of incorrect telephone numbers	6	11
Contact left/not at the organisation	4	7
Refusals	3	5

Source: IES, 2011

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Table A4: Previously accredited IIP employers

	Number	% of leads
Number of leads	116	-
Number of incorrect telephone numbers	8	7
Contact left/not at the organisation	21	18
Refusals	11	9
Out of scope	2	2
Quota complete	17	15

Source: IES, 2011

Table A5: De-committed IIP employers

	Number	% of leads
Number of leads	172	-
Number of incorrect telephone numbers	28	16
Contact left/not at the organisation	44	26
Refusals	16	9
Out of scope	9	5

Source: IES, 2011

In the long-term IIP accredited employer sample six of the fifty-five leads were from Scotland and Northern Ireland. All of these leads were tried. One interview was secured, two employers refused, one number did not work, and two employers were tried on a number of occasions and did not return recruiters calls.

Among previously accredited IIP employers the country quotas for England and Scotland were met. We were one under quota for previously accredited IIP employers in Northern Ireland. Comparing the quality of the sample in this country with the quality of the sample overall, it seems there were a larger proportion of contacts that had left and refusals among previously accredited IIP employers.

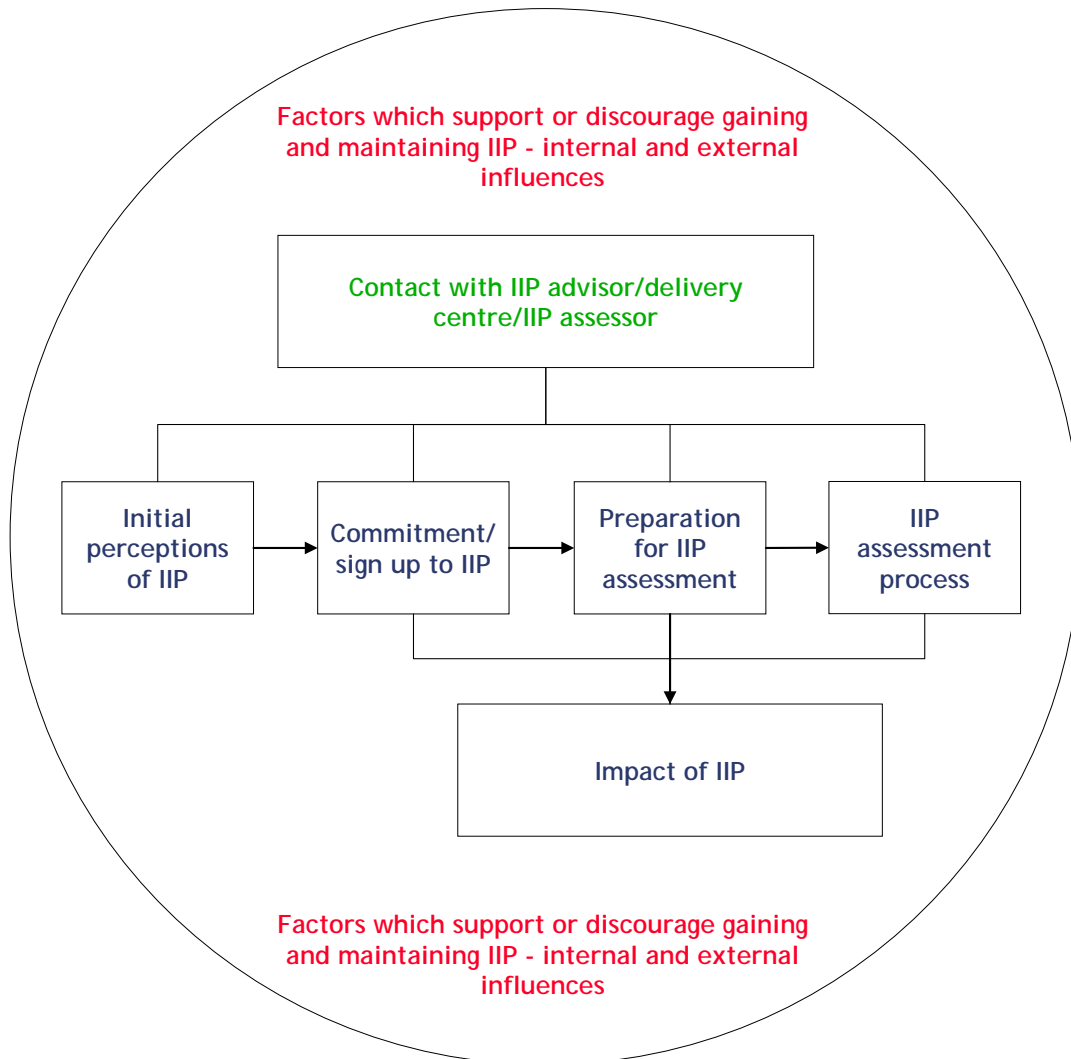
Among de-committed IIP employers the quality of the sample for Scotland (where the quota was not achieved) was no better or worse than for Northern Ireland or England. There were similar proportions of contacts leaving the organisation etc. In this group three de-committed IIP employers in Scotland arranged times to participate in the research and then were not available at the agreed time (sometimes on more than one occasion).

Employers that were willing to participate in the research were emailed a confirmation letter. It stressed that no preparation was required for the interview, but included a diagram of one

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way of looking at an organisation's journey through the Investors in People process (see Figure A1). Interviewees were asked to think about their views on Investors in People at different points, whether these had changed over time and what factors influenced their perceptions.

Figure A1: Diagram of the IIP process sent to interviewees



Source: IES, 2011

The most common reasons given by previously accredited IIP employers and de-committed IIP employers for refusing to participate in the research were that:

- It was company policy not to participate in research.
- There were time pressures resulting from the economic climate (interviewee time would need to be paid for as they could not afford the time/costs of participation).

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- They felt they did not have anything to add. For example, some de-committed employers reported that they only spoke to an adviser about IIP once, or the organisation felt their reason for their lapsed IIP recognition was straightforward, explained their reasons briefly to the recruiter and did not want to take part in an interview.

Limitations and biases of the research

The difficulties of sampling and recruitment explained above mean that the research has a number of limitations and potential biases.

First, the sample for long-term IIP accredited employers was drawn from a subset of organisations that had participated in a survey previously. Long-term IIP accredited employers that were not sampled for that survey or that did not participate would have been out with the sample for this research. In addition, since the earlier research was undertaken other employers would have become long-term IIP accredited, and they would not have been sampled for this research. The long-term IIP accredited sample is therefore likely to be biased towards employers that have had IIP for a number of years, are willing to participate in research about IIP, and that have remained quite stable, for example with staff with responsibility for IIP remaining unchanged over a period of time. Results could therefore exaggerate the lack of suitability of IIP for businesses experiencing (negative) types of change.

Second, using the sample of de-committed IIP employers it is clear that there was a spectrum of involvement with IIP among this group. Some employers fed back at the recruitment stage that they had had minimal involvement with IIP, whereas others had been working towards the Standard for a number of years and continued to do so. The employers that were willing to take part in the research tended to be those that had had relatively extensive involvement with IIP and many were currently still working towards the Standard. There is a risk that the achieved interviews with de-committed IIP employers do not reflect the full spectrum of experiences and reasons for de-committing.

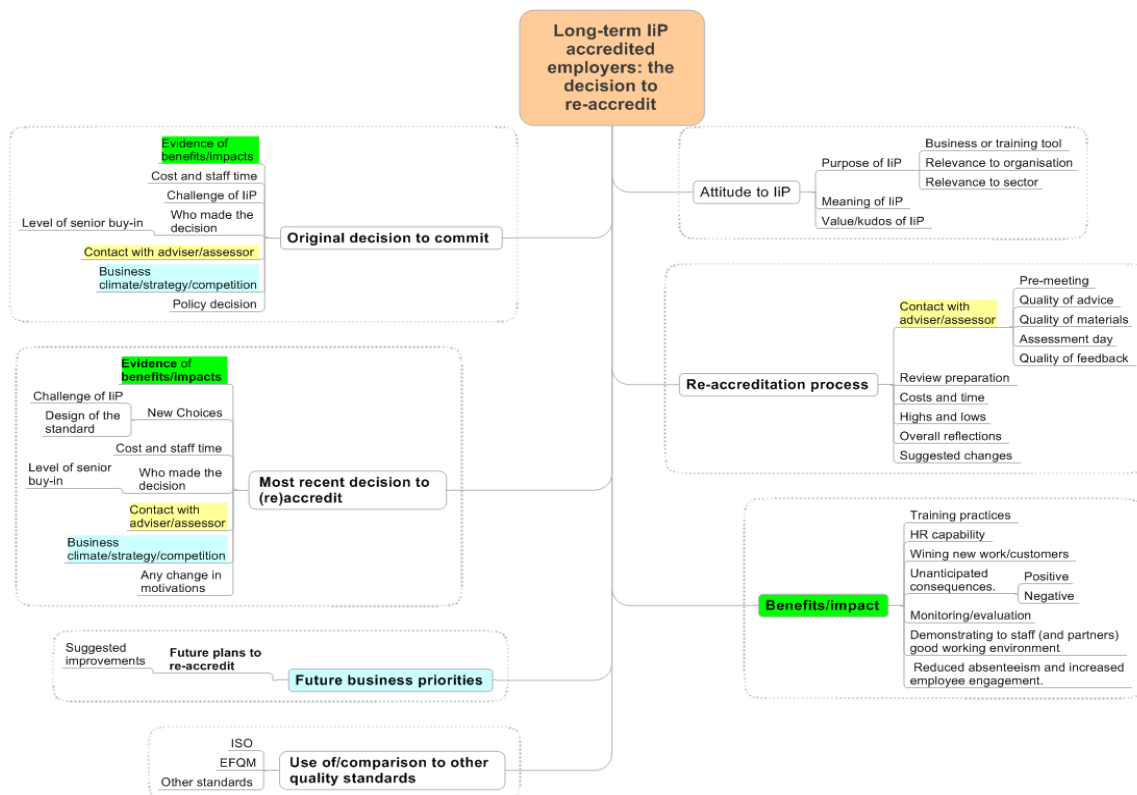
Third, in all of the samples there were a considerable number of contacts that had left organisations, and others had incorrect telephone contact details. There is a risk that the research has captured the views of relatively stable employers, for example those whose staff have remained in post over a number of years, and those that have remained at the same premises, and have not been able to access employers that have had staff turnover in staff responsible for IIP or that have relocated. Alternatively the incorrect data could be a reflection on the relative strength of the relationship between the adviser/assessor and the employer.

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Analysis process

With the interviewee's permission the interviews were recorded and transcribed. A first stage in the analysis process was the use of mind-mapping software to structure the customer journey for the three sample groups and to attach key quotes and evidence to each stage. See below for an example of the basic structure of the mind-map for long-term accredited IIP accredited employers. These three mind-maps were then compared and contrasted at the key decision-points and in terms of wider experience to see how IIP accreditation differed. These data were supplemented by a researcher fieldwork debrief where the main points arising from the interviews were discussed. The data were then analysed thematically, following the IIP customer journey.

Figure A2: Example mind map for long-term accredited IIP employers



Appendix 2: Topic guides

Topic guide: Long-term accredited IIP employers

A I'd like to start by asking you for some background about your organisation and job role

- What is your job title? What are the main aspects of your job role?
 - How long have you worked at this organisation/ in this role?
 - How old is your organisation?
- What is your organisation's main area of business? What does it mainly make or do?
 - Who are your main customers/ clients (eg other businesses, consumers purchasing a product or service, members of the public receiving a service)?
 - Are your products/services mainly sold/delivered locally, regionally, nationally or internationally?
 - Has the nature of the business changed markedly over the past five years? If so, how and why?
- Number of employees in UK, any change over past 5 years and reasons why.
 - Is the organisation multi-site? If so, how many sites does it have in the UK? Are these spread locally, regionally or nationwide?
 - Is it part of a larger organisation/ parent company? If so is this based in the UK or overseas?
 - To what extent is the organisation's workforce unionised?
- What is your involvement with IIP within the organisation?
 - Probe for level of involvement: check respondent is involved in business decisions about IIP not just in implementation.
 - When did you personally first become involved with IIP?

B Now I'd like to understand the organisation's overall attitude to IIP

- When did the organisation first become IIP accredited/ committed? (probe for whether respondent was in post at that time/ involved in that decision). *Interviewer note: check response against the MI if this data is included.*
- (Ask if not in MI): What is your current level of IIP accreditation? Have you achieved any specialist IIP awards? Probe for whether have Gold, Silver, Bronze under New Choices; whether Champions; whether got Health and Wellbeing Award.
- What do you understand to be the purpose of the IIP standard?
 - Probe: When you see that an organisation is IIP recognised, what does that mean to you? What do you expect that organisation to be like a) to do business with and b) to work for?

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- Prompt: To what extent do you use IIP as an HR/ training tool? To what extent do you use it as a business development tool?
- Probe: Do you think the content of IIP balances these two objectives or does it place more emphasis on one more than the other? If so, which?
- Probe: Has the balance of these two types of objective changed for your organisation, over the course of your involvement with IIP? If so, in what way and why?
- What can you tell us about why the IIP standard was initially felt to be relevant to this organisation?
- What about now? How has its relevance changed since your organisation first became accredited?
 - What is driving that? Probe for: influence of changes in the business eg in product/service market strategies, organisational structure, business performance, HR strategies; versus influence of changes in IIP structure and delivery eg introduction of New Choices

C We'd now like to know a bit more about your decision to gain re-accreditation and your experience of the re-accreditation process

Most recent decision to re-accredit

- When and why did the organisation decide to re-accredit under IIP, most recently?
- Probe on whether the organisation was accredited under New Choices and if so, how did they choose which level of award to aim for?
 - Did you notice any differences between the New Choices approach and the previous version of the Standard? If so, what and to what extent was this an improvement?
 - How many times had you gained IIP accreditation prior to this renewal?
- Prompt: what factors did you take into account when deciding whether to (re-) accredit?
 - Probe for:*
 - Cost and staff time involved
 - Level of senior buy-in within the organisation
 - Ongoing positive impacts within the organisation eg developing a supportive training culture; improving staff morale and motivation, demonstrating commitment to staff development
 - Degree of fit with other personnel/ HR policies – how and why does IIP support these?
 - Degree of support available from the IIP adviser and (if in Scotland/ Wales/ NI) any subsidy
 - 'Kudos' of the IIP standard (ie as a 'badge')
 - Inherent value of the IIP process/ service
 - External factors such as business climate, what competitors are doing, compliance with external standards, demands from customer base

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- The level of challenge within the IIP standard. Probe for whether and how this has changed over the period that the organisation has been accredited, with particular relevance to the introduction of New Choices (interviewer note: if not already covered at the start of this section).
- Anticipated benefits not yet realised eg developing a supportive training culture; improving staff morale, motivation and commitment
- Which of these factors were the most important? Why? Probe for whether any have changed compared to previous rounds of accreditation and if so, how.
- Who were the key decision-makers within the organisation at the time of the most recent decision to re-accredit? (Probe for whether driven by HR or elsewhere eg senior management, Board).

The (re-)accreditation process

- How long did it take to prepare for your successful review? What scale/ type of changes did you make to achieve it?
 - Who was involved in making these changes? Probe for whether HR only or whether these involved people from across the organisation eg line managers, staff.
 - How much engagement would you say the organisation as a whole has with IIP? How engaged are line managers and staff? eg Probe: How do they react to any changes that have been introduced as a result of the IIP process?
- Do you know how much it cost (or can you estimate these) in terms of fees and staff time?
- Did you have any contact with an IIP adviser or delivery centre? What role did they play in helping you prepare to gain IIP?
 - Probe on: whether advice given, perceived quality of advice? Probe on perceptions of how knowledgeable/supportive adviser was about IIP and the organisation's sector and business issues? Did support provided meet/exceed/not meet your expectations?
 - What did you think of any documentation/materials they used or gave you? Probe on quality and clarity of materials.
 - Have you used the IIP website? If so, what did you think of it? How useful was it?
- Did you have a meeting with an adviser or assessor to discuss and plan the assessment visit? Why/why not? What did you think of it? Would you have liked one (if not received)?
- How did you feel about the assessment process? Probe on advance contact with assessor, process and timing of selection of staff to interview?
- How did the assessment process go on the day? Were there any difficulties? What did the assessor do to help you overcome them?
- Did you attend a debrief meeting with the assessor? How did you find it? How useful/informative was it?
- What was the feedback report like that you received from the IIP assessor?
 - Probe on: speed of delivery, length, level of detail, language used, any surprises? Were you given the opportunity to clarify/seek further information? Quality of presentation?

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Thinking about the assessment experience overall,

- Overall, how did you feel about the process of gaining (re-)accreditation?
- What really stood out for you (good or bad) in the contact you had with assessor/adviser/delivery centre?
- What was the most valuable part of the process and why? Probe: Which parts of the process did you find most and least relevant to your organisation? Why?
- Were there any bottlenecks or delays? If so, why and what did you do about them?
- Were there any low points during the process when the organisation might have decided not to re-accredit? If so, why and how were these concerns overcome?
- Were there any high points during the process which spurred you on? If so, what and why?
- If you could change one thing about the experience of gaining IIP accreditation, what would it be and why?

D Thinking back a bit further in time, it would be helpful to know why the organisation originally decided to commit to IIP

- Can you take me through the history of IIP at this organisation?
 - Why did the organisation decide to commit to IIP? What factors did the organisation consider when making its initial decision? Were there any factors which acted as a deterrent (if so, probe on how overcome)?

Probe for role of:

- Cost and staff time involved
- Level of senior buy-in within the organisation
- Degree of fit with other personnel/ HR policies – how and why does IIP support these?
- Degree of support available from the IIP adviser and (if in Scotland/ Wales/ NI) any subsidy
- 'Kudos' of the IIP standard (ie as a 'badge')
- Inherent value of the IIP process/ service
- The level of challenge within the IIP standard.
- External factors such as business climate, what competitors are doing, compliance, demands from customer base
- Anticipated benefits within the organisation eg developing a supportive training culture; improving staff morale, motivation and commitment
- Who were the key decision-makers within the organisation at that time? (Probe for whether driven by HR or elsewhere eg senior management, Board). If this has changed compared with the most recent decision to re-commit to IIP, probe for why?
- What were the initial goals for gaining IIP accreditation?

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- Which of these factors were the most important?
- Has the importance of different factors changed since the organisation first committed to IIP? If so, how and why?
- Has the organisation's general attitude to IIP changed since the organisation first committed to IIP? If so, how and why?

E We'd like to know a bit more about the impact of IIP on the organisation

- What benefits has IIP given the organisation, over time? Were any of these specific goals that the organisation was hoping to achieve? (if respondent could comment on these)? If so, how do the impacts compare with your initial expectations?

Probe for impacts on:

- Training levels and practices
 - Managerial capability and leadership (senior and line managers)
 - Overall staff capability and development / deployment of skills
 - Improve approach to HR management (probe on different elements including HR systems/procedures)
 - HR indicators eg employee engagement/morale/wellbeing/absence/turnover
 - Integration of HR strategy/practices with business strategy
 - Organisational performance (how defined/measured?)
 - Ability to manage change
 - Capacity to innovate eg ability to develop new products/services
 - Which of the impacts are most valuable to you and why?
- What do you value most about IIP and why? What if anything do you think your organisation has learned from the IIP process overall?
 - Does the organisation conduct any internal monitoring or evaluation of the impacts of IIP? If so, how do you go about this and what are the results?
 - How if at all have these changed over time?
 - Could you send us any relevant reports/ evidence? – emphasise these will be kept confidential and destroyed after the end of the project.
 - Has IIP had any unanticipated consequences on the organisation, either positive or negative? If so, what are these?
 - (If negative consequences): How have these influenced decisions to renew accreditation? How were any concerns overcome?

F Lastly we'd like to know about any other quality standards your organisation has attained and your future plans

- Has your organisation gained accreditation using any other business quality standards eg European Quality Framework, ISO 9001?

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- If so, what was your involvement in decisions about whether to apply for these standards? Probe for whether had same, more or less involvement than in decisions about IIP (interviewer note: this is important to contextualise the findings in this area).
- Why have you chosen to gain multiple awards?
- Which award(s) did you achieve first? Probe for influence on decisions to gain other awards – in particular IIP.
- How does IIP compare with these in terms of quality/ level of support; time and cost of accreditation; level of challenge; benefits for the organisation.
- What are the main priorities for your organisation, going forward ie in the next 2-3 years? What impact if any has the recession and/or government spending cuts had on your business? What do you expect? Probe for plans on business growth/ contraction, diversification, consolidation, survival.
- Do you know yet whether your organisation plans to re-accredit under IIP, next time its accreditation is up for review?
 - (If known): Why/why not? (Probe for reasons particular to this point in time, not already mentioned).
 - (If plan to re-accredit): You have been IIP recognised for a number of years. What is the main reason that you plan to maintain this in future?
- At what point in the accreditation cycle was/ will this decision (be) made? Who will make it within the organisation? Who influences it? Probe for whether driven by HR or elsewhere eg senior management, Board. If this is a change since the most recent decision to re-commit to IIP, probe for why?
- How could the IIP accreditation process be improved, i) from your organisation's perspective? and ii) from your own individual perspective?
- Which type of organisations do you think benefit most from IIP? Which benefit least? Why is that?
- How, if at all, could a) the design/content and b) the delivery of the IIP standard be made more relevant to your organisation in future?
- Probe: Do you think IIP is relevant to your sector, generally? How could its *particular* relevance to your sector be improved?
- Probe: What about its relevance to your supply chain/ business partners?

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Topic guide: Previously accredited IIP employers

A I'd like to start by asking you for some background about your organisation and job role

- What is your job title? What are the main aspects of your job role?
 - How long have you worked at this organisation/ in this role?
 - How long has your organisation been operating?
- What is your organisation's main area of business? What does it mainly make or do?
 - Who are your main customers/ clients (eg other businesses, consumers purchasing a product or service, members of the public receiving a service)?
 - Are your products/services mainly sold/delivered locally, regionally, nationally or internationally?
 - Has the nature of the business changed markedly over the past five years? If so, how and why?
- Number of employees in UK, any change over past 5 years and reasons why.
 - Is the organisation multi-site? If so, how many sites does it have in the UK? Are these spread locally, regionally or nationwide?
 - Is it part of a larger organisation/ parent company? If so is this based in the UK or overseas?
- To what extent is the organisation's workforce unionised?
- What is your involvement with IIP within the organisation?
 - Probe for level of involvement: check respondent is involved in business decisions about IIP not just in implementation.
 - When did you personally first become involved with IIP?

B I'd like to understand the organisation's overall attitude to IIP

- When did the organisation first become IIP accredited/ committed? (probe for whether respondent was in post at that time/ involved in that decision). *Interviewer note: check response against the MI if this data is included.*
- And can I just check, when did your IIP status last come up for review, and at what point before that did you decide not to apply for re-accreditation?
- What do you understand to be the purpose of the IIP standard?
- Probe: When you see that an organisation is IIP recognised, what does that mean to you? What do you expect that organisation to be like a) to do business with and b) to work for?
- Prompt: To what extent did you use IIP as an HR/ training tool? To what extent did you use it as a business development tool?

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- What can you tell us about why the IIP Standard was initially felt to be relevant to this organisation?
- What about now? How has its relevance changed since your organisation first became accredited?
 - What is driving that?

C Thinking back, it would be helpful to know why the organisation originally decided to commit to IIP and your experiences of the accreditation process

- Can you take me through the history of IIP at this organisation:
- Why did the organisation decide to commit to IIP? What factors did the organisation consider when making its initial decision? Were there any factors which acted as a deterrent (if so, probe on how overcome)?
- Who were the key decision-makers within the organisation at that time? (Probe for whether driven by HR or elsewhere eg senior management, Board).
- What were the initial goals for gaining IIP accreditation?
 - Has the importance of different factors changed since the organisation first committed to IIP? If so, how and why?
 - Has the organisation's general attitude to IIP changed since the organisation first committed to IIP? If so, how and why?

The accreditation process

- How long did it take to prepare for your most recent successful IIP review? What scale/type of changes did you make to achieve it?
- Do you know how much it cost (or can you estimate these) in terms of fees and staff time?
- Did you have any contact with an IIP adviser or delivery centre? What role did they play in helping you prepare to gain IIP?
 - Probe on: whether advice given, perceived quality of advice? Probe on perceptions of how knowledgeable/supportive adviser was about IIP and the organisation's sector and business issues? Did support provided meet/exceed/not meet your expectations?
 - What did you think of any documentation/materials they used or gave you? Probe on quality and clarity of materials.

Thinking about the assessment experience overall,

- Overall, how did you feel about the process of gaining accreditation?
- What really stood out for you (good or bad) in the contact you had with assessor/adviser/delivery centre?
- What was the most valuable part of the process and why? Probe: Which parts of the process did you find most and least relevant to your organisation? Why?
- If you could change one thing about the experience of gaining IIP accreditation, what would it be and why?

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D We'd now like to know a bit more about your decision not to gain re-accreditation

Decision not to re-accredit

- When and why did the organisation decide not to re-accredit under IIP? How many times had you gained IIP accreditation prior to deciding to withdraw from IIP?
 - Prompt: what factors did you take into account when deciding whether to re - accredit?

Probe for:

- Cost and staff time involved - prompt for the amount of administration time that was anticipated, the extent of any (further) changes that were anticipated, anticipated costs
 - Level of senior buy-in within the organisation – if declined – probe for why
 - Anticipated benefits of IIP not being realised. Refer back to initial goals mentioned in Section C. eg developing a supportive training culture; improving staff morale and motivation, demonstrating commitment to staff development. If so what were the barriers to this/ these being achieved using IIP?
 - Degree of fit with other personnel/ HR policies – to what extent did IIP support these?
 - Degree of support available from the IIP adviser and (if in Scotland/ Wales/ NI) any subsidy
 - 'Kudos' of the IIP standard (ie as a 'badge')
 - Inherent value of the IIP process/ service
 - External factors such as business climate, what competitors are doing, compliance with external standards, regulatory drivers, demands from customer base
 - The level of challenge within the IIP standard. Probe for whether and how this changed since the organisation was last accredited, with particular relevance to the introduction of New Choices.
- Was there anything about the actual process of gaining accreditation, or the service you received from IIP advisers/ assessors/ delivery centres, that influenced your decision not to re-accredit?
 - If so, probe for what and why.
 - Was there anything about the design of the IIP Standard itself that influenced your decision not to re-accredit?
 - If so, probe for what and why.
 - Overall, which of the factors we have discussed were the most important in our decision not to re-accredit? Why?
 - Who were the key decision-makers within the organisation at the time of the decision not to re-accredit? (Probe for whether driven by HR or elsewhere eg senior management, Board).

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E We'd like to know a bit more about the impact of IIP on the organisation

- What if any benefits did IIP give the organisation, over time? Were any of these specific goals that the organisation was hoping to achieve? If so, how do the impacts compare with your initial expectations?

Probe for impacts on:

- Training levels and practices
 - Managerial capability and leadership (senior and line managers)
 - Overall staff capability and development / deployment of skills
 - Improve approach to HR management (probe on different elements including HR systems/procedures)
 - HR indicators eg employee engagement/morale/wellbeing/absence/turnover
 - Integration of HR strategy/practices with business strategy
 - Organisational performance (how defined/measured?)
 - Ability to manage change
 - Capacity to innovate eg ability to develop new products/services
- Which of these impacts were most valuable to you and why? What if anything do you think your organisation has learned from the IIP process overall?
 - (If relevant) Why did the organisation decide not to re-accredit, even though these benefits had been achieved?
 - Did the organisation conduct any internal monitoring or evaluation of the impacts of IIP? If so, how did you go about this and what were the results?
 - Could you send us any relevant reports/ evidence? – emphasise these will be kept confidential and destroyed after the end of the project.
 - Did IIP have any unanticipated consequences on the organisation, either positive or negative? If so, what were these?
 - (If negative consequences): How did these influence the decision not to renew accreditation?

F Lastly we'd like to know about any other quality standards your organisation has attained and your future plans

- Has your organisation gained accreditation using any other business quality standards eg European Quality Framework, ISO 9001?
 - If so, why chosen to gain multiple awards?
 - How does IIP compare with these in terms of quality/ level of support; time and cost of accreditation; benefits for the organisation.
 - Were any of these other accreditations a factor in your decision not to re-accredit under IIP?

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- If so, why did you decide on one more than the other? Who is involved in that decision within the organisation?
- In hindsight how do you feel about the decision not to re-accredit under IIP?
- What are the main priorities for your organisation, going forward ie in the next 2-3 years?
- Would you/ your organisation ever consider gaining IIP accreditation again in future? Why/ why not? Who would make this decision within the organisation? Who would influence it? Probe for whether driven by HR or elsewhere eg senior management, Board.
- How, if at all, could a) the design/content and b) the delivery of the IIP standard be made more relevant to your organisation in future?

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Topic guide: De-committed IIP employers

A I'd like to start by asking you for some background about your organisation and job role

- What is your job title? What are the main aspects of your job role?
 - How long have you worked at this organisation/ in this role?
 - How long has your organisation been in operation?
- What is your organisation's main area of business? What does it mainly make or do?
 - Who are your main customers/ clients (eg other businesses, consumers purchasing a product or service, members of the public receiving a service)?
 - Are your products/services mainly sold/delivered locally, regionally, nationally or internationally?
 - Has the nature of the business changed markedly over the past 2 years? If so, how and why?
- Number of employees in UK, any change over past 2 years and reasons why.
 - Is the organisation multi-site? If so, how many sites does it have in the UK? Are these spread locally, regionally or nationwide?
 - Is it part of a larger organisation/ parent company? If so is this based in the UK or overseas?
 - To what extent is the organisation's workforce unionised?
- What was your involvement with IIP within the organisation?
 - Probe for level of involvement: check respondent was involved in business decisions about IIP not just in implementation.
- When did the organisation first become IIP committed? (probe for whether respondent was in post at that time/ involved in that decision). *Interviewer note: check response against the MI if this data is included.*

B To start with I'd like to understand the organisation's overall attitude to IIP

- What do you understand to be the purpose of the IIP standard?
 - Probe: When you see that an organisation is IIP recognised, what does that mean to you? What do you expect that organisation to be like a) to do business with and b) to work for?
 - Prompt: To what extent do you view IIP as an HR/ training tool? To what extent do you view it as a business development tool?
 - Probe: Do you think the design of IIP balances these two objectives or does it place more emphasis on one more than the other? If so, which?
- What can you tell us about why it was initially felt to be relevant to this organisation? Probe for which factors were most important to making the decision to commit to IIP

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Probe for role of:

- Cost and staff time involved
 - Level of senior buy-in within the organisation
 - Degree of fit with other personnel/ HR policies – how and why does IIP support these?
 - Degree of support available from the IIP adviser and (if in Scotland/ Wales/ NI) any subsidy
 - ‘Kudos’ of the IIP standard (ie as a ‘badge’)
 - Inherent value of the IIP process/ service
 - The level of challenge within the IIP standard.
 - External factors such as business climate, what competitors are doing, compliance, demands from customer base
 - Anticipated benefits within the organisation eg developing a supportive training culture; improving staff morale, motivation and commitment
- Who were the key decision-makers within the organisation at the time you committed to IIP? (Probe for whether driven by HR or elsewhere eg senior management, Board).
 - Has this changed since the initial decision to commit to IIP? If so, how and why?
 - How has its relevance changed since your organisation committed to IIP?
 - What is driving that? Probe for: influence of changes in the business eg in product/service market strategies, organisational structure, business performance, HR strategies, versus influence of changes in IIP structure and delivery eg introduction of New Choices.

C We’d now like to know a bit more about your decision not to gain IIP accreditation

- How far into the IIP accreditation process did you get? Probe for whether they started preparing for assessment or not.
- When and why did the organisation decide not to go ahead with IIP accreditation? Probe on whether the organisation first committed under New Choices and if so, which level of award they were aiming for?
- Can you tell me a bit about how that decision was reached within the company? Was it the result of a gradual process, or a specific review?
 - Prompt: what factors did you take into account when deciding whether to proceed with the IIP accreditation process? Who made the final decision?
 - *Probe for:*
 - Scale/ type of changes made or planned to achieve IIP?
 - (If relevant): Who was involved in making these changes? Probe for whether HR only or whether these involved people from across the organisation eg line managers, staff.

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- How much engagement would you say the organisation as a whole had with IIP? How engaged were line managers and staff? eg Probe: How did they react to any changes that were introduced as a result of the IIP process?
- Speed of progress in terms of preparing for assessment
- Any other impacts of preparing for accreditation within the organisation (positive or negative)

Probe for role of:

- Cost and staff time involved. Was this different from your initial expectations? If so, how? What if any difficulties did this cause within the organisation?
- Level of senior buy-in within the organisation
- Degree of fit with other personnel/ HR policies – how and why does IIP support these, or not?
- Degree of support available from the IIP adviser and (if in Scotland/ Wales/ NI) any subsidy
- 'Kudos' of the IIP standard (ie as a 'badge')
- Inherent value of the IIP process/ service
- The level of challenge within the IIP standard.
- External factors such as business climate, what competitors are doing, compliance, demands from customer base
- Anticipated benefits within the organisation not being realised eg developing a more supportive training culture; improving staff morale, motivation and commitment?
- Did the importance of different factors change after the organisation first committed to IIP? If so, how and why? What influence did this have on your view of the IIP Standard and its relevance to your organisation?

D It would be helpful to understand any changes you made in preparation for seeking IIP accreditation

Interviewer note: tailor these questions depending on how far they got into the IIP accreditation process.

I know you decided not to proceed with the IIP assessment process, but it would be really helpful if you could answer a few questions on your perceptions of that process.

- Do you know how much it cost (or can you estimate these) in terms of fees and staff time?
- Did you have any contact with an IIP adviser or delivery centre? What role did they play in helping you prepare for IIP assessment?
 - Probe on: whether advice given, perceived quality of advice? Probe on perceptions of how knowledgeable/supportive adviser was about IIP and the organisation's sector and business issues? Did support provided meet/exceed/not meet your expectations?

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- What did you think of any documentation/materials they used or gave you? Probe on quality and clarity of materials.
- Did you use the IIP website? If so, what did you think of it? How useful was it?
- Did you have a meeting with an adviser or assessor to discuss and plan the assessment visit? Why/why not? What did you think of it? Would you have liked one (if not received)?

Thinking about the IIP experience overall,

- What really stood out for you (good or bad) in the contact you had with assessor/adviser/delivery centre?
- What was the most valuable part of the process and why? Probe: Which parts of the process did you find most and least relevant to your organisation? Why?
- Was there anything about the IIP process, or the service you received from IIP advisers/ assessors/ delivery centres, that influenced your decision not to proceed with accreditation?
 - If so, probe for what.
 - Did you raise this with IIP at the time or have you raised it since? Who with?
 - Was anything done to try to resolve the issue? If so, why was it not resolved?
 - How could this have been addressed?
- If you could change one thing about your experience of the IIP Standard and process, what would it be and why?
- Did the organisation conduct any formal or informal evaluation of the impacts of IIP? If so, how did you go about this and what were the results? What if anything do you think your organisation has learned from this?

E Lastly we'd like to know about any other quality standards your organisation has attained and your future plans

- Has your organisation gained accreditation using any other business quality standards eg European Quality Framework, ISO 9001?
 - If so, what was your involvement in decisions about whether to apply for these standards? Probe for whether had same, more or less involvement than in decisions about IIP (interviewer note: this is important to contextualise the findings in this area).
 - Why have you chosen to gain multiple awards?
 - Which award(s) did you achieve first? Probe for influence on decisions to gain other awards – in particular IIP.
 - How does IIP compare with these in terms of quality/ level of support; time and cost of accreditation; level of challenge; benefits for the organisation.
 - Were any of these other awards a factor in your decision not to continue with IIP? If so, why did you decide on one more than the other? Who (else) is involved in that decision within the organisation?
- What are the main priorities for your organisation, going forward ie in the next 2-3 years? What impact if any has the recession and/or government spending cuts had on your

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business? What do you expect? Probe for plans on business growth/ contraction, diversification, consolidation, survival.

- In hindsight how do you feel about the decision not to proceed with the IIP assessment process?
- Would you/ your organisation ever consider gaining IIP accreditation in future? Why/ why not?
- How could the IIP process be improved, i) from your organisation's perspective? and ii) from your own individual perspective?
 - Probe: What would need to change about IIP before you would reconsider going for it?
- Which type of organisations do you think benefit most from IIP? Which benefit least? Why is that?
- How, if at all, could a) the design/content and b) the delivery of the IIP standard be made more relevant to your organisation in future?
- Probe: Do you think IIP is relevant to your sector, generally? How could its *particular* relevance to your sector be improved?
- Probe: What about its relevance to your supply chain/ business partners?

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Evidence Report 5

High Performance Working: Developing a Survey Tool

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Evidence Report 7

Review of Employer Collective Measures: Empirical Review

Evidence Report 8

Review of Employer Collective Measures: Policy Review

Evidence Report 9

Review of Employer Collective Measures: Policy Prioritisation

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UK Employment and Skills Almanac 2009

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