

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE:  
WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?**

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## **Abstract**

This is a paper in question and answer format, to provide an understanding of liP. It also looks at recent developments in liP thinking. The paper is presented as a series of responses to questions concerning the nature of the Investors in People standard, its process and players, why and how organizations use the Standard and the underpinning values, beliefs and issues around the Standard.

**Keywords:** Investors in People, Business planning, People development, Organisation development

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## ***1. The Investors in People Standard***

### **What does 'IiP' mean?**

'IiP' is an abbreviation for the Investors in People Standard. 'Investors in People' is also sometimes shortened to the single word 'Investors' and sometimes to 'the Standard'.

### **What is the Investors in People Standard?**

Senior managers often assert that "our most valuable asset is our people". The Investors in People Standard is a national UK framework to help organisations turn this rhetoric into reality. It is a standard of good practice in developing people intended to be achievable by all organisations. It enables organisations to benchmark their own practices against a nationally recognised standard.

Achievement of the Standard is based on 10 indicators which reflect the 3 core principles of (1) Plan ie developing strategies to improve the performance of the organisation, (2) Do ie taking action to improve the performance of the organisation and (3) Review ie evaluating the impact on the performance of the organisation. To reach the Standard an organisation has to produce evidence against 39 statements (based around the 10 indicator/themes) in which good people development is described. These are shown in the appendix to the paper.

### **What is the IiP vision?**

It is a vision of all organisations recognising the potential value of their people to the goals of the organisation and proactively helping them to realise that value to achieve organisational success.

### **What is the underlying philosophy of IiP?**

Developing people's contribution to the goals of the organisation benefits the people themselves, their organisations and people outside the organisation. It enables individuals to realise more of their potential, organisations to create more wealth through increased productivity and society as a whole to enjoy a higher standard of living.

### **How does an Investors in People organisation help its people enhance their contribution to the organisation?**

It has clear aims, it ensures that everyone knows what those aims are, it identifies how managers, staff and others involved with the organisation can contribute to those aims and it is proactive in helping people to enhance their involvement and contribution to those aims. Finally, it assesses the impact of that help so that the organisation continues to improve at developing its people.

**Who is doing it?**

By the year 2004 over 37,000 organisations had achieved the Standard and a further 24,000 were committed to achieving it. This means that IiP is affecting the working lives of almost 10 million people, which is about 40 per cent of the working population.

**What is Profile?**

Profile was launched in October 2002 as a continuous improvement tool for organisations already recognized against the Standard. The idea was to provide further challenge and momentum for recognized organisations, which may have felt that repeated reviews against the same Standard did not take them forward. Profile was originally launched with a different structure to that of the Standard, based more closely on manager feedback and organisation needs. That structure has since informed the review of the Standard in November 2004 and from May 2005, both the Standard and Profile will be based on 3 principles – Plan, Do, Review – and 10 themes/indicators. From 2005, Profile assessment will also be available to organisations not yet IiP recognized, ie when going for their first review against the Standard, they can also choose a Profile assessment.

Part of the value of Profile assessment is to receive a benchmarked report showing how the organisation matches up to others in its sector on the 10 indicators. Level 1 is the minimum achievement on Profile for any part of the Standard and implies simply that the Standard has been reached. Level 2-4 achievements on any part of the Standard imply exceeding the Standard in these areas. This allows the organisation to focus on areas which, although meeting the Standard, are not yet considered excellent practice.

**What are the IiP models?**

There are currently 3 models associated with Investors in People and therefore aligned with its vision and structure. They are based respectively on Recruitment and Selection, Work-Life Balance and Leadership. Organisations wishing to develop in these specific areas can pay for business model materials to use in practice improvement.

## ***2. The Investors in People process and players***

### **What is the IiP process of people development?**

Once an organisation has committed to achieving the Standard it will be necessary to go through the following process:

1. Clarifying the aims of the organisation and ensuring the aims are understood throughout the organisation.
2. Identifying how each person and team in the organisation can contribute to the achievement of the organisation's aims and planning how to help them to achieve that contribution.
3. Implementing the plans, i.e. taking action.
4. Evaluating the impact of the action on each person's contribution to realising the aims of the organisation so that the organisation can get better at developing its people.

### **What is the process of gaining the IiP Standard?**

Once an organisation has committed to achieving the Standard it will normally go through the following "continuous assessment" process:

1. A diagnostic assessment against the 10 IiP indicators of achievement of the Standard. This might be a self-assessment or it might be a formal assessment by an IiP accredited assessor. In the latter case, it is possible, though unlikely, that this will result in immediate recognition that the organisation already meets the Investors in People Standard.
2. If some indicators are initially met, that evidence can be carried forward to the final assessment, if the evidence remains current, valid, reliable and consistent. For indicators not initially met, actions are planned to satisfy all 10 indicators that the Standard has been reached.
3. Actions are implemented to satisfy the 10 indicators.
4. Formal assessment against the 10 indicators of the Standard. This always involves a visit from an assessor who will be able to interview any staff, walk around the site, ask to sit in on internal meetings and look at planning and staff development documentation.

If the organisation does not reach the Standard on one or more of the indicators then it will need to take further actions and be re-assessed when it is ready to do so.

### **What is the process of maintaining the Standard?**

Once an organisation has achieved recognition against the Standard, the assessor gives feedback to the organisation on any areas of excellent practice and areas which could be targeted for further development. The organisation may retain their recognition for up to three years without further assessment, or they may opt for annual review.

### **What are the 10 indicators that an organisation has met the Standard?**

1. A strategy for improving the performance of the organisation is clearly defined and understood.
2. Learning and development is planned to achieve the organisation's objectives.

3. People management strategies are designed to promote equality of opportunity in the development of the organisation's people.
4. The capabilities managers need to lead, manage and develop people effectively are clearly defined and understood.
5. Managers are effective in leading, managing and developing people.
6. People's contribution to the organisation is recognized and valued.
7. People are encouraged to take ownership and responsibility by being involved in decision-making.
8. People learn and develop effectively.
9. Investment in people improves the performance of the organisation.
10. Improvements are continually made to the way people are managed and developed.

### **Who is involved in IiP assessments?**

Accredited assessors carry out assessments in client organisations. They will always want to talk to senior managers but also choose a sample of people across the organisation to interview. They aim to see representatives of new and experienced staff, all departments, units or functions, all grades, non-executive directors, trustees etc. Prior to producing the sample frame, assessors decide who should be involved especially where some staff are volunteers or have flexible employment relationships with the organisation.

### **Where do the following fit into the process of IiP accreditation?**

**Assessors:** Assessors accredited by IiP UK plan assessment with the client organisation and carry out that assessment, producing a constructive feedback report and a recommendation either to recognise the organisation or to action plan indicators which are not yet met. They make a significant personal investment of effort and money to gain accreditation. This must be kept "live" by continuing professional development and assessment projects.

**Advisers:** help organisations to develop processes to prepare for assessment. They cannot assess the organisations for whom they work. Advisors must be registered with IiP UK.

**Recognition Panels:** are made up of two or more senior members of IiP recognised organisations. They read assessor feedback reports and discuss with assessors as needed to confirm (or not) the assessor's recommendation of recognition. Only the panel can award recognition. They may also add feedback of their own to the organisation from their own experience. Most panel meetings are virtual, with periodic face-to-face panel meetings at which assessors may present their recommendations in person. They have additional roles to develop assessors and promote and maintain the integrity of the Standard.

**Assessment and Recognition Units:** these are regional organisations which deal with commitments, organise assessments (including finding and briefing assessors) and run the recognition process. They have a significant quality assurance role. The local Unit in Sussex is QSE (Quality South East).

**IiP UK:** was established in 1993 to be responsible for marketing, development and quality assurance of the Standard. It is a national body and "owns" the Standard.

***IiP practitioners:*** this is the generic term for anyone involved in assessment and/or recognition against IiP – it thus includes advisers, assessors, Assessment and Recognition Unit staff and recognition panel members.

**Where does this Standard apply?**

This is a UK Standard, but since 1997, IiP UK began to develop an international strategy. In 2005 it is working with 20 partners in countries including Australia, China, Bermuda, Dubai and Slovenia. Many of these countries have national agencies who are running pilot projects, using the IiP Standard under licence from IiP UK. Within the European Union, there are pilot activities or full licence agreements in place in the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Poland, France and Denmark. For multi-national companies who want to work with the Standard, the National Centre for Investors in People based at IiP UK offers advice and assess bases outside the UK.

### ***3. Organisations – why and how they could use the Investors in People Standard***

#### **What are the three main benefits of IiP to organisations?**

1. It causes them to think *strategically* about people development.
2. It causes organisations to think about the development of *all* the people in the organisation.
3. It causes organisations to clarify the *connections* between people development and organisation performance.

#### **What are the three main costs to organisations of gaining IiP?**

1. **Time** It takes time to clarify organisational aims, how to maximise the contribution of people to the organisation, implement the plans and evaluate the results. There will also be a time cost to ensure that the organisation's people know what IiP is and why the organisation wants to achieve recognition. Many organisations take over a year to achieve the Standard and some organisations take over two years.
2. **Energy** For most organisations achieving the IiP Standard requires a degree of culture change. Changing the culture of an organisation is amongst the most difficult forms of organisational change to effect.
3. **Money** In addition to the indirect costs of time and energy the achievement of IiP involves direct costs ranging from the costs of assessment itself through to possible costs of training and support to enable staff to develop processes and understanding to meet the good practice of the Standard. Assessment costs consist of a nationally agreed daily rate, the number of days agreed depends on workforce size, complexity and number of sites involved. Training and support may also be supplied by IiP accredited advisers.

#### **What are the three most common reasons for committing to the Standard?**

1. Managing significant change in the organisation using proven people development practices
2. Benchmarking staff development practices against a nationally recognized standard.
3. Developing a more systematic approach to staff development, usually during a period of organisational growth.

#### **What can help an organisation to achieve the Standard?**

Three main factors are:

1. Commitment of top management to improve people development in any area where it falls below the IiP's national Standard.
2. Recognition that the road to reaching the Standard will contain obstacles and pitfalls and that the organisation will have to learn its way out of difficulties that it experiences on that road.
3. Awareness that the rhetoric of people development and the reality of people development need to be aligned for the IiP Standard to be reached.

### **What different ways do different organisations use the Standard?**

1. New senior managers may use the Standard as a way of introducing improved processes and change in the organisation, this often happens when a manager's previous organisation was recognised against the Standard.
2. Senior management or their advisers may introduce the Standard as a first step in bringing about cultural change.
3. Some managers commit to the Standard to achieve public recognition which is seen as a "badge" to be gained. The assessment involved will either cause these organisations to drop out of the process, or help them to understand the business benefits of achieving the Standard.
4. Some organisations have been known to use the Standard as a benchmark for improvement but not make a final assessment, feeling they have already had the benefit of the process.
5. Some organisations have adopted the Standard after exploring ways of improving specific people management and development processes, such as induction, appraisal or business planning. They find that funding may be available to help them not only improve the process but also go on to achieve recognition.
6. Organisations can also use Profile to maintain momentum towards organisational and people development once the minimum Standard requirements have been achieved.

#### ***4. Understanding the Standard***

##### **Where did IiP come from?**

Towards the end of the 1980s, government set up a National Training Task Force to develop plans to improve the quality and quantity of training nationally. At about the same time the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) produced a report, 'Towards a Skills Revolution' which advanced the concept of an 'Investor in Training' company. Such an organisation would satisfy ten principles of good practice people development. The government asked the National Training Task Force to set up a group to plan an action programme to encourage employers to raise the quality and quantity of their investment in the skills of their people. The result was the Investors in People Standard.

The Investors in People Standard was launched in 1991, and was based on 4 key principles: (1) public commitment to people development, (2) planning people development, (3) action that resulted in people development, and (4) evaluation of actions intended to result in people development. An evaluation in 1995 concluded that no changes were needed. A further evaluation resulted, in 2000, in revised indicators which produced the next version of the Standard, based on the same 4 principles but developing the evidence requirements against 33 statements describing good people development.

Compared to the early version of the Investors in People Standard the 2000 version was more focused on results and behaviours rather than processes. It was less prescriptive about how the indicators were achieved and no longer required significant documentation for smaller or more informal organisations.

The latest revision of the Standard in November 2004 has produced the current Standard. While the ethos remains the same, the revisions reduced the key principles to 3: (1) Plan (Developing strategies to improve the performance of the organisation). (2) Do (Taking action to improve the performance of the organisation and (3) Review (Evaluating the impact on the performance of the organisation). The current Standard has 10 indicators based on these 3 principles. The 10 indicators fit 10 themes and are assessed with reference to 39 requirements for evidence. They are given in the Appendix. The current Standard starts logically with business strategy and is more focused on management capability and employee engagement, each of which are now new indicators in the Standard.

The current standard has been designed to fit with the Profile system, which is based on the same 3 principles and 10 indicators, but offers 4 levels of achievement. Every statement within the Standard can be assessed at level 1-4. Overall Level 1 performance means the organisation meets the requirements of the Standard. Level 2 means an organisation is judged by assessors to exceed requirements in 50% of the Standard. Level 3 means an organisation is judged to exceed requirements in 100% of the Standard at least at level 2 or 3. Level 4 means the organisation is demonstrating excellent practice across the whole Standard by achieving level 4 statements across the Standard. The revised Profile (from 2005) incorporates topics such as leadership, work-life balance, recruitment and selection, diversity and social responsibility.

### **What are the *beliefs* underpinning IiP?**

We have seen already that IiP is founded on the belief that developing people's contribution to the goals of the organisation benefits the people themselves, their organisations and people outside of the organisation. It enables individuals to realise more of their potential, organisations to create more wealth and society as a whole to enjoy a higher standard of living. In addition, IiP is based on the following assumptions and beliefs:

1. An organisation's most valuable asset really is its people.
2. The development of people can improve the performance of individuals, teams and the whole organisation.
3. People development is more likely to be successful if the top management is committed to it.
4. People development is more likely to be successful if the people in an organisation believe that the organisation is committed to it.
5. People investment activities are more likely to take place if they are integrated into the normal planning cycle of the organisation.
6. Feedback is a key element in learning.
7. Recognising people's contributions to the organisation and involving them in decision-making results in enhanced contributions.
8. Awareness of *how* the development of people improves the performance of individual's, teams, and organisations contributes to better people development.
9. Managers' capability is a vital element in developing people and the organisation
10. It is possible and desirable to assess planning and action in people development at the individual, team and organisational level.
11. There are benefits from auditing people development, not just looking at plans but at evidence of action and evaluation resulting from those plans.

### **What are the *values* underpinning IiP?**

1. Enhanced economic performance
2. Continuous learning and development
3. The IiP standard should *support* the client organisation in achieving its aims (rather than being a diversion)
4. The public recognition delivered by the IiP standard should make a difference i.e. it is *not* 'just a badge'
5. Planning and evaluating achievement of objectives to effect continuous improvement
6. Induction and appraisal processes, however informal, as a part of development
7. One way business communication is not enough
8. Equality of opportunity for development
9. The alignment of rhetoric and reality in the field of people development.
10. A visible link between people development and business planning

### **Is this just another management or HR initiative?**

The Standard can be seen by employers and employees as just another initiative at a time when change and growth are a constant in the business and management ideas flow thick and fast. However, IiP is not intended to be an add-on to the business, which will get forgotten as soon as

its advocates move on. Instead it is designed to offer a benchmarking tool to look at the strength of the following existing management activities: business planning, communication, induction, setting objectives, management effectiveness, development, evaluation and performance review. Assessor reports can be written around these activities rather than following the IiP indicators if the organisation requests this as a business improvement tool.

### **What are the most common obstacles to getting the IiP standard?**

1. The belief of some of top management that the organisation is already closer to the Standard than it really is.
2. The belief that the changes needed to reach the Standard will all go smoothly according to plan and have no significant unintended consequences.
3. A lack of effective communication with staff about the reasons for committing to IiP.
4. The belief that throwing money at consultants will necessarily help an organisation achieve the Standard.

### **What are the most common set-backs that organisations experience in getting the IiP standard?**

1. Mergers, acquisitions or major peaks and troughs in business activity which divert energy away from achieving the Standard.
2. Forgetting that a group of people such as administrative or cleaning staff also need to know about their contribution to organisational objectives and offered the chance of development.
3. An enthusiastic IiP champion in the business moves on soon after initial commitment, before the ideas are owned by the organisation.
4. Failure to recognise the degree of cynicism or resistance which may be offered by employees or middle managers to changes in processes associated with the journey towards IiP.
5. Failure to embed the values of the Standard within the core values of the organisation – leading to short-lived process improvements which fail once the initial focus of achieving the Standard has gone.

### **Why should the IiP logo be trusted?**

Apart from the increasing rigour with which all practitioners are expected to perform and the quality checks on the assessment and recognition process, recognised organisations are re-assessed either annually or after a maximum of three years from recognition. An organisation, which does not meet the Standard at re-assessment, will be asked to commit to closing the gaps within a relatively short amount of time. This period and process is called “retaining recognition”. If the organisation does not do so, the organisation can be de-recognised. Potential conflicts of interest where local companies are involved with IiP practitioners in any way are actively monitored and, if such a conflict is possible, the whole assessment and recognition process is moved to another Assessment and Recognition Unit.

## Where can you find out more about IiP?

### Books and other publications:

Barber, L., Hayday, S. & Bevan, S. (1999) *From People to profits*. IES Report 355

Bell, E., Taylor, S. & Thorpe, R. (2001) *Programmatic change and managerial action: a qualitative study of Investors in People*. Maidenhead: Open University

Down, S. & Smith, D. (1998) "It pays to be nice to people: Investors in People – the search for measurable benefits." *Personnel Review* 27, 143-155.

Gilliland, N. (1997) *Developing your business through Investors in People*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Aldershot: Gower

Institute for Employment Studies (2000) *Doing Business Better: The Long Term Impact of Investors in People*. Focus Central London

NOP World (2001) *People and Productivity*, Final Report Investors in People UK

### Web-sites:

IiP UK [www.investorsinpeople.co.uk](http://www.investorsinpeople.co.uk)

DfES [www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk)

QSE [www.qse.org.uk](http://www.qse.org.uk)

## Appendix:

What constitutes evidence that the indicators have been met and the Standard has been reached?

### **Theme 1: Business strategy**

1. Top managers make sure the organisation has a clear purpose and vision supported by a strategy for improving its performance.
2. Top managers make sure the organisation has a business plan with measureable performance objectives.
3. Top managers make sure there are constructive relationships with representative groups (where they exist) and the groups are consulted when developing the organisation's business plan.
4. Managers can describe how they involve people when developing the organisation's business plan and when agreeing team and individual objectives.
5. People who are members of representative groups can confirm that top managers make sure there are constructive relationships with the groups and they are consulted when developing the organisation's business plan.

6. People can explain the objectives of their team and the organisation at a level that is appropriate to their role, and can describe how they are expected to contribute to developing and achieving them.

**Theme 2: Learning and Development strategy**

7. Top managers can explain the organisation's learning and development needs, the plans and resources in place to meet them, how these link to achieving specific objectives and how the impact will be evaluated.
8. Managers can explain team learning and development needs, the activities planned to meet them, how these link to achieving specific team objectives and how the impact will be evaluated.
9. People can describe how they are involved in identifying their learning and development needs and the activities planned to meet them.
10. People can explain what their learning and development activities should achieve for them, their team and the organisation.

**Theme 3: People management strategy**

11. Top managers can describe strategies they have in place to create an environment where everyone is encouraged to contribute ideas to improve their own and other people's performance.
12. Top managers recognize the different needs of people and can describe strategies they have in place to make sure everyone has appropriate and fair access to the support they need and there is equality of opportunity for people to learn and develop which will improve their performance.
13. Managers recognize the different needs of people and can describe how they make sure everyone has appropriate and fair access to the support they need and there is equality of opportunity for people to learn and develop which will improve their performance.
14. People believe managers are genuinely committed to making sure everyone has appropriate and fair access to the support they need and there is equality of opportunity for them to learn and develop which will improve their performance.
15. People can give examples of how they have been encouraged to contribute ideas to improve their own and other people's performance.

**Theme 4: Leadership and management strategy**

16. Top managers can describe the knowledge, skills and behaviours managers need to lead, manage and develop people effectively, and the plans they have in place to make sure managers have these capabilities.
17. Managers can describe the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to lead, manage and develop people effectively.
18. People can describe what their manager should be doing to lead, manage and develop them effectively.

**Theme 5: Management effectiveness**

19. Managers can explain how they are effective in leading, managing and developing people.
20. Managers can give examples of how they give people constructive feedback on their performance regularly and when appropriate.
21. People can explain how their managers are effective in leading, managing and developing them.

22. People can give examples of how they receive constructive feedback on their performance regularly and when appropriate.

**Theme 6: Recognition and reward**

23. Managers can give examples of how they recognize and value people's individual contribution to the organisation.
24. People can describe how they contribute to the organisation and believe they make a positive difference to its performance
25. People can describe how their contribution to the organisation is recognized and valued.

**Theme 7: Involvement and empowerment**

26. Managers can describe how they promote a sense of ownership and responsibility by encouraging people to be involved in decision-making, both individually and through representative groups, where they exist.
27. People can describe how they are encouraged to be involved in decision-making that affects the performance of individuals, teams and the organisation, at a level that is appropriate to their role.
28. People can describe how they are encouraged to take ownership and responsibility for decisions that affect the performance of individuals, teams and the organisation, at a level that is appropriate to their role.

**Theme 8: Learning and development**

29. Managers can describe how they make sure people's learning and development needs are met
30. People can describe how their learning and development needs have been met, what they have learnt and how they have applied this in their role.
31. People who are new to the organisation, and those new to a role, can describe how their induction has helped them to perform effectively.

**Theme 9: Performance measurement**

32. Top managers can describe the organisation's overall investment of time, money and resources in learning and development.
33. Top managers can explain, and quantify where appropriate, how learning and development has improved the performance of the organisation
34. Top managers can describe how the evaluation of their investment in people is used to develop their strategy for improving the performance of the organisation
35. Managers can give examples of how learning and development has improved the performance of their team and the organisation.
36. People can give examples of how learning and development has improved their performance, the performance of their team and that of the organisation.

**Theme 10: Continuous improvement**

37. Top managers can give examples of how the evaluation of their investment in people has resulted in improvements in the organisation's strategy for managing and developing people.
38. Managers can give examples of improvements they have made to the way they manage and develop people.
39. People can give examples of improvements that have been made to the way the organisation manages and develops its people.

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