Outcomes for the first cohort of Diploma learners

Sarah Lynch, Kelly Kettlewell, Clare Southcott, Tami McCrone (National Foundation for Educational Research)

Department for
Education

Contents

Executive Summary

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and the University of Exeter were commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to carry out a national evaluation of Diplomas. Diplomas for 14-19 year olds were introduced by the previous government as a major innovation in educational opportunity for young people in England, and were first taught in 2008.

The Diploma qualification comprises a number of components and is being offered at three levels: Foundation (Level 1); Higher (Level 2); and Progression/Advanced (Level 3). Learners doing a Foundation level Diploma can achieve grades A* to B and U.[1] In comparison, for a Higher level Diploma, learners can achieve grades A* to C and U. Progression/Advanced level Diploma learners can achieve grades A* to E and U. Diplomas are offered across 14 subjects and have been implemented in three phases (from September 2008, 2009 and 2010). The first cohort of learners who started the qualification in 2008 took one of the first five Diploma subjects: Construction and the Built Environment; Creative and Media; Engineering; Information Technology; and Society, Health and Development. Those who completed the Diploma typical two-year course did so in the summer 2010.

The main aims of the evaluation were to assess the impact of the Diplomas on learners – in terms of attainment of qualifications and progression to further (FE) and higher education (HE) and to review the implementation and delivery systems of Diplomas. This summary focuses on such impact for the first cohort of Diploma learners (those who did one of the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10; analysis excluded learners who did a one-year course). This has been assessed by analysing nationally available datasets, which provide details of attainment and can be analysed to explore progression following the Diploma course[2]. Telephone interviews were also conducted with 25 Year 12 learners and 17 'Year 14' learners who had participated in a Diploma either pre- or post-16. These interviews illustrate the views of Diploma learners, but should not be generalised as numbers of interviewees were small.

The Diplomas have been reformed through the current government and updates can be found at:
http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/qualifications/diploma/a0064056/diploma-announcements

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[1] A U grade is awarded to learners if insufficient scores are achieved for the principal learning and the project element of the Diploma and other components are achieved. The final Diploma grade is based on an aggregation of the principal learning and project results. All other Diploma components must be successfully completed but do not contribute to the overall Diploma grade.

[2] Datasets used were the Diploma Aggregation Service (DAS), the National Pupil Database (NPD), and the Individual Learner Record (ILR). See the main report for full explanations of the datasets and for information on limitations with the data and, therefore, the scope of the analysis. Please note that the Diploma figures reported may vary from other sources due to the processes used to match the DAS dataset to other datasets.

Key Findings

- A total of 3545 Year 11 learners and 696 Year 13 learners in the first Diploma cohort completed a Diploma.

- Most Diploma achievers were awarded a grade B or below for all levels of the Diploma, both pre-16 and post-16. A minority achieved grades A*/A (for example, 13 per cent at Foundation level, 11 per cent at Higher level pre-16, and three per cent at Advanced level post-16).

- Pre-16 Diploma participants scored higher overall at Key Stage 4 compared with other learners in their schools in a comparison group[3].

- Overall, females and learners with higher prior attainment achieved a higher Diploma grade pre-16 and post-16.

- Learners interviewed reported finding principal learning, the project and employer involvement in the Diploma useful. Learners' awareness of Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS) and Additional and Specialist Learning (ASL) were limited, which might have contributed to the learners perceiving them as less useful. Views on functional skills were mixed.

- The majority of pre-16 Diploma learners had progressed to post-16 education destinations and were most likely to be attending an FE college. Data relevant to the destinations of the first post-16 Diploma cohort was not available for analysis, although a recent report published by UCAS[4] showed that over two-thirds of all students who had undertaken a Progression or Advanced Diploma were accepted onto a HE course.

What can we say about the first Diploma cohort's experience and achievements?

A total of 3545 Year 11 learners completed a Diploma in the summer of 2010. Of these, the majority (86 per cent) of completers[5] studied a Higher Diploma; 14 per cent studied a Foundation Diploma. Just under one third (32 per cent) completed an Engineering Diploma and just under one third (29 per cent) completed a Creative and Media Diploma. Subjects with the lowest number of completers were Construction and the Built Environment (12 per cent) and Society, Health and Development (12 per cent). These proportions reflect national patterns of take-up of Diploma subjects. Most learners (91 per cent) took at least one GCSE as their ASL and just under a half (46 per cent) took at least one Vocationally Related Qualification (VRQ).

A total of 696 Year 13 learners completed a Diploma in the summer 2010. The majority (65 per cent) studied an Advanced Diploma; 14 per cent studied a

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[3] The comparison group consisted of learners in the same institutions and in the equivalent academic age groups to Diploma learners (Year 10/11 or Year 12/13 in September 2008-July 2010) but who do not appear in the Diploma participation data. As they are in the same institutions, we have compared Diploma learners with similar learners in similar schools/colleges where a Diploma was a potential option for them.

[4] UCAS (2010) *UCAS 14-19 Diploma Project Findings.* [online]. Available: http://www.ucas.ac.uk/documents/diploma/diplomaproject-findings.pdf [9 May 2011].

[5] Note that when the analysis discussed includes those who have received a U grade, we refer to them as '**completers**'. Diploma '**achievers**' are defined as those learners who received a grade A*-E (where relevant).

Progression Diploma (Level 3), 13 per cent a Higher (Level 2) Diploma and eight per cent a Foundation (Level 1) Diploma. Between 20 and 25 per cent of learners completed a Creative and Media, Society, Health and Development, Information Technology or Engineering Diploma. Less than 10 per cent of learners completed a Construction and the Built Environment Diploma (which reflects lower proportions of learners taking up this Diploma subject post-16). On average, they completed just over one ASL qualification each. VRQs were the most frequently taken qualifications (56 per cent of learners), which *could* suggest they were Specialist learning qualifications.

Diploma grades

The evaluation found a similar pattern of Diploma achievement for pre-16 and post-16 learners. Achievement was concentrated in grade B and below for all levels of the Diploma both pre-16 and post-16. A minority achieved grades A*/A: for example 11 per cent at Higher level Diplomas pre-16 and three per cent at Advanced level post-16. This is compared with 30 per cent of all learners achieving A*/A grades for GCSE full courses in summer 2010 (seven per cent achieved an A* and 23 per cent an A) and 35 per cent of all learners who achieved A*/A grades at GCE A level in summer 2010 (eight per cent achieved an A* and 27 per cent a grade A)[6]. However, it should be acknowledged that achieving a Diploma A* or A grade is equivalent to achieving multiple GCSEs/A levels at A* or A grade (see main report Appendix A for equivalences) and therefore you might expect fewer A* or A grades amongst the Diploma cohort.

Amongst both pre-16 and post-16 age groups, females and learners with higher prior attainment achieved a higher grade for their Diploma (for all Diploma subjects), which is also consistent with factors associated with the national picture of qualification attainment.

Amongst pre-16 Diploma achievers only, those who achieved a Construction and the Built Environment, a Society, Health and Development or a Creative and Media Diploma achieved significantly lower Diploma grades than learners who achieved an Engineering Diploma. There were no significant differences between the Diploma grades for learners who achieved different Diploma subjects post-16. Post-16 learners in consortia in which leads had concerns about preparedness for Diplomas *prior* to delivery achieved higher Diploma grades, suggesting they worked hard to overcome any challenges. This was not significant pre-16.

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[6] Figures are from the Joint Council for qualifications: http://www.jcq.org.uk/national_results/index.cfm

Overall Key Stage 4 achievement[7]

In terms of overall Key Stage 4 point scores[8], Diploma participants scored higher compared with other learners in their schools in a comparison group. However, some caveats should be considered when interpreting these findings. Firstly, the point score equivalences for Diplomas and other qualifications, such as GCSEs should be considered (see Appendix A in the main report for our understanding of equivalences). For example, a Diploma achieved at Higher level at any grade is equivalent to 5.5 GCSEs at the same grade, *plus* grades/points achieved for ASL qualifications. It may be, therefore, that a Diploma learner has more *opportunity* to achieve more/higher grades. Secondly, the analysis is based only on Diploma participants who had been *registered* on DAS (it *might* be the case that, as this was a new qualification with a new system of registering learners, by the time learners were registered some of the less able could have dropped out of the Diploma, leaving the more able learners to continue). It should be noted that learners who were never registered on DAS would appear in the comparison group rather than the participation group. It has unfortunately not been possible to explore whether Diploma learners score higher than comparison learners at Key Stage 5 due to limitations in being able to match learners with Key Stage 5 scores in the ILR to Diploma participants in DAS[9].

Learners who participated in an Engineering Diploma scored highest overall at Key Stage 4; learners who did a Construction and the Built Environment Diploma scored the lowest (but still higher than the comparison group). Whilst females and Diploma learners scored higher *overall* at Key Stage 4, females who did Construction and the Built Environment Diploma and Creative and Media Diploma performed particularly well.

Diploma learners who participated in the Foundation level Diploma had *lower* overall Key Stage 4 point scores compared to other equivalent/comparable learners.

Some consortium-level variables had a significant influence on overall Key Stage 4 point scores. As was the case for Diploma grades for post-16 learners, pre-16 learners in consortia in which leads had concerns about preparedness for Diplomas *prior* to delivery achieved higher Diploma grades. Learners in larger consortia (with seven or more schools/colleges delivering Diplomas) scored higher at Key Stage 4. It *could* be the case that in larger consortia there was a particular perceived need amongst staff for better planning, for staff with a greater range of skills, and for enhanced communication between institutions and staff, which *could* lead to

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[7] We had hoped to also conduct analysis of overall Key Stage 5 achievement for post-16 learners, but the data available was not robust enough for this analysis to be feasible. Key Stage 5 scores were only available on the ILR for approximately one third of Year 13 learners; missing data could be due to learners not doing qualifications with Key Stage 5 point scores attached (i.e. lower level courses) or not completing courses. When matching the one third of learners with Key Stage 5 scores to Diploma participants in DAS, the proportion of learners with data available was too small to be able to carry out meaningful analysis of overall achievement at Key Stage 5 of Diploma learners versus comparison learners.

[8] Key Stage 4 point score is made up of *all* relevant qualifications that carry a point score (not just the Diploma for Diploma learners).

[9] See main report Section 1.2.1 for full explanation.

improved delivery and thus higher scores. Where consortia crossed local authority boundaries, learners scored lower. It *could* be that in such consortia learners were travelling some distances to and from institutions at the detriment to their academic performance (as time for learning was spent travelling), although evidence from the evaluation to date has not revealed concerns amongst learners in relation to travelling to learn.

Learners' perceptions of their achievements

Interviews with learners provided an illustration of views of young people in relation to Diploma achievement, although findings should not be generalised, as numbers of interviewees are small. Nevertheless, learners interviewed in both age groups were generally satisfied with their Diploma experience and the grade they achieved. Learners reported finding principal learning, the project and employer involvement in the Diploma useful. The range of topics covered by the principal learning component was considered helpful for deciding future pathways. The project was useful for developing communication, research and team working skills and, post-16, for preparation for assignments in higher education. Employer involvement helped learners gain a valuable insight into the way companies operate. Learners' awareness of PLTS and ASL was limited and these components were seen to be less useful, possibly due to a lack of awareness.

There were mixed views about functional skills amongst both age groups; some reported that they would be beneficial when applying for work, whereas others had found them difficult or too similar to core GCSE subjects.

Most of the young people interviewed felt satisfied with their experience (16 of the 25 learners who did a Diploma pre-16 and 13 of the 17 who did a Diploma post-16 were *very* or *quite satisfied*). Most pre-16 learners (16) and around half (nine) post-16 learners would recommend the Diploma to another learner, which reflects their largely positive experience of studying for this qualification, particularly pre-16. The majority of learners pre-16 (13) said they would choose the Diploma again. Post-16, around a third (seven) reported they would do a Diploma again; a similar proportion would not due to concerns about progression (a few perceived that universities would not accept Diplomas as entry to HE). Reasons for dissatisfaction included: lack of course organisation and a lack of practical elements to the course.

What can we say about the first Diploma cohort's progression pathways?

The majority of pre-16 Diploma learners had progressed to post-16 education destinations and were most likely to be attending an FE college. Those who did a Foundation level Diploma pre-16 were more likely than those who did a Higher Level to progress to an FE/HE college; those who did a Higher level were more likely than learners who did Foundation level to go to a school with a sixth form. Data relevant to the destinations of the first post-16 Diploma cohort was not available for analysis, although a recent report published by UCAS showed that over two-thirds of all

students who had undertaken a Diploma were accepted onto a HE course. The findings on destinations imply that the Diploma has contributed towards learners' progression. Indeed, the Diploma qualification is now included in the course entry requirements for FE and HE institutions, providing further evidence of its positive exchange value when young people are applying for either post-16 or post-18 courses. Learners' decisions on which pathways to pursue were influenced by their Diploma (many went on to study the same subject area, for instance), suggesting that they do not just value their Diploma experience in isolation from their future plans but that it has achieved a significant place in their decision-making process.

What are the implications for policy and practice?

- **Understanding among Higher Education Staff:** While learners were satisfied with the Diploma experience and their level of achievement, some reported a lack of understanding among HE staff regarding the Diploma qualification. However, this was the first cohort to apply to HE so this was not entirely unexpected. Our survey of HEIs in 2009/10[10] found increasing levels of awareness of the qualification and its relevance to undergraduate study. Building on this will be instrumental for the Diploma to be used by young people for entry to HE.

- **Diploma components:** Learners' lack of awareness and understanding of ASL and PLTS means that they are less likely to value these components of the Diploma. If these two elements are to be maintained as part of the qualification then there needs to be considerable raising of learner's awareness and understanding of them, without which the educational benefit of these elements will not be realised. It should be noted that evidence from our survey of HEIs revealed that some HEIs request certain qualifications as ASL for entry on to some HE courses, indicating the importance they place on the ASL component. In addition, the Education and Skills survey of 694 employers, conducted in 2010[11], revealed that improving the employability skills of young people entering the labour market is businesses' top priority for both schools and universities (PLTS could be particularly relevant here).There was some learner dissatisfaction with functional skills. These were considered too similar to GCSEs, not relevant or too challenging. This indicates that a collaborative approach by policy makers and practitioners could be helpful to ensure that functional skills are embedded effectively within the Diploma. If this is achieved, learners could be more motivated and committed when they can see the value, relevance and utility of studying functional skills.

- **Unit re-takes:** There was evidence from interviews with learners that some who had failed units of the Diploma did not always have the opportunity to re-take them. It was not clear from the qualitative data if failed units had been assessed via controlled assessments which might be difficult for teachers to re-schedule due to time constraints; this should be explored, as it is important to consider

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[10] See Haynes, G. and Richardson, W. (2011). *Evaluation of the implementation and impact of diplomas: findings from the 2009/10 survey of higher education institutions* [online]. Available: https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-RR093
[11] See CBI/ETI(2010). *Ready to grow: business priorities for education and skills. Education and skills survey, 2010* [online]. Available: http://www.cbi.org.uk/ndbs/content.nsf/802737AED3E3420580256706005390AE/C4393B860D00478E802576C6003B0679

whether it is necessary for learners to re-take units in order to progress following their Diploma.

1   Introduction

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and the University of Exeter were commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to carry out a national evaluation of Diplomas. Diplomas for 14-19 year olds were introduced by the previous government as a major innovation in educational opportunity for young people in England, and were first taught in 2008.

The qualification comprises a number of components:

- Principal learning – this is the sector-related learning developed by employers and universities, and is a combination of practical and theoretical learning.
- Project – This is a single piece of work of a learner's choosing related to the Diploma subject or sector area.
- Functional Skills – in English, mathematics and ICT.
- A minimum of 10-days work experience.
- Personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) such as team work and creative thinking.
- Additional/specialist learning (ASL) – Diploma learners will complete either an 'additional' qualification to add breadth or a 'specialist' qualification to add depth to their principal learning.

The Diplomas are being offered at three levels: Foundation (Level 1); Higher (Level 2); and Progression/Advanced (Level 3). For the purpose of this report, it is relevant to note that learners doing a Foundation level Diploma can achieve grades A* to B and U.[12] In comparison, for a Higher level Diploma, learners can achieve grades A* to C and U. Progression/Advanced level Diploma learners can achieve grades A* to E and U. The Diplomas are offered across 14 subjects and have been implemented in three phases (from September 2008, 2009 and 2010). The first cohort of learners who started the qualification in 2008, and on which this analysis has focused, will have undertaken one of the first five Diploma subjects: Construction and the Built Environment; Creative and Media; Engineering; Information Technology; and Society, Health and Development. Those who completed the Diploma two-year course would have done so in the summer 2010.

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[12] A U grade is awarded to learners if insufficient scores are achieved for the principal learning and the project element of the Diploma and other components are achieved. The final Diploma grade is based on an aggregation of the principal learning and project results. All other Diploma components must be successfully completed but do not contribute to the overall Diploma grade.

The Diplomas have been reformed through the current government and updates can be found at:[13]

http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/qualifications/diploma/a0064056/diploma-announcements

1.1 Aims of the evaluation

The purpose of the national evaluation was to provide policy makers and practitioners with systematic and robust evidence which would enable them to make informed judgements about the outcomes of the Diplomas for different stakeholders and to make improvements to design and delivery, if appropriate. The two main aims of the national evaluation of Diplomas were:

- To review the **implementation** and delivery of the Diplomas – in terms of the processes and factors facilitating or hindering successful implementation; the structural issues related to design and content; and the systems for planning, organising and resourcing provision and supporting progression.
- To assess the **impact** of the Diplomas on learners – in terms of their participation in education and training; attainment of qualifications; and progression to further and higher education, training and employment.

This report focuses on the second aim and summarises the outcomes for the first cohort of Diploma learners in terms of their attainment and progression pathways following their Diploma course. The analysis focused on learners who did one of the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10; it excluded learners who did a one-year course. There were achievements at all Diploma levels in 2009/10 of learners who studied one of the second phase Diploma subjects as a one-year course; these have not been included in the analysis.

1.2 Research methods

The overall research design for the evaluation provided a complementary mixed-method approach to address the complex range of issues and aims associated with the implementation and outcomes of the Diplomas. The study had three main strands: surveys of a range of stakeholders (including consortium leads, learners, teaching staff, parents, employers and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)); a longitudinal programme of qualitative case studies; and statistical analyses of administrative datasets.

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[13] Following the establishment of the Coalition government in May 2010, a number of changes to the implementation and delivery of the Diploma qualification were introduced. The Minister of State for Schools announced that development of new Diplomas in science, humanities and social sciences, and languages and international communication, which were due to be introduced from September 2011, would be discontinued. Additionally the Diploma entitlement, whereby all young people within an area would be able to access any of the Diploma subjects, would be removed and that the decision about which Diploma subjects would be available to students would in future be made by schools and colleges. Moreover, it was decided that the Gateway application process whereby consortia (of schools, colleges, training providers, employers and HEIs) had previously submitted an application to the DfE for each Diploma subject they wanted to offer would no longer be required for provision commencing from 2012. Other changes included the freedom for institutions to decide whether or not they wanted to work collaboratively to provide Diploma provision.

The attainment and progression of the first Diploma cohort were assessed using the following methods:

- Statistical analysis of datasets.
- Telephone interviews with learners in case-study consortia who started a Diploma in 2008.

1.2.1 Statistical analysis of datasets

A critical element of assessing the outcomes for learners is the analysis of nationally available datasets which provide details of attainment and can be analysed to explore progression following the Diploma course.

The datasets used

- The Diploma Aggregation Service (DAS) data. DAS aggregates the results of constituent qualifications to produce final Diploma grades. The end of year total release for the 09/10 academic year, based on three termly DAS releases for that year, was used. This provides details of the students' achievement of the overall Diploma and information on components achieved[14]. Please note that the Diploma figures reported may vary from other sources due to the processes used to match the DAS dataset to other datasets described below.
- The National Pupil Database (NPD). This provides details of the characteristics and attainment at each Key Stage of individual learners. Moreover, 2010/11 data was used to identify whether learners who had completed a Diploma pre-16 progressed to a school sixth form post-16.
- The Individual Learner Record (ILR). This provides details of the qualifications undertaken and achieved post-16 in institutions other than schools for individual learners. The 2010/11 data was used to identify post-16 destinations of learners who had completed a Diploma pre-16.[15]

These datasets were matched by the DfE. Anonymised data was accessed, which allowed for the identification of all learners who undertook Diplomas nationally, and their achievement. It also allowed for the identification of a comparison group of similar students who did not take a Diploma (see below).

In addition to the nationally available datasets, responses to 2010 (second year of the Diploma) learner surveys carried out by NFER were used purely as variables for

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[14] The analysis focused on learners who did one of the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10; it excluded learners who did a one-year course. A total of 26 learners were removed from the analysis as they were identified as duplicates in DAS: 14 were removed as they were logged as having studied the same subject at two levels; three were logged as having studied more than one Diploma subject; and nine were removed as they were logged as having achieved the same Diploma but at different grades.

[15] We had hoped to use the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data which provides details for individual learners' progression to higher education, but the data relevant to the first Diploma cohort will not be available until 2012. See Section 4.5 for further details on post-18 destinations of learners who had completed a Diploma post-16.

multi-level models (see below for details).[16] Because the data was required for the multi-level models, the number of respondents to the post-16 survey (Year 13 in 2010) was too small to include, so the analysis has been restricted to the Year 10/11 pre-16 cohort. The learner survey was matched to named DAS/NPD/ILR data in order to explore the relationship between experiences and attitudes of learners, as defined by their responses to the questionnaire survey, and their outcomes.

Points of clarification concerning the data

The following points should be considered by the reader of this report:

- This report explores outcomes, primarily in terms of **attainment** and **progression,** of the first cohort of Diploma learners (2008 starts) who took any of the first five Diploma subjects during a two-year course in Years 10/11 (pre-16) and in Years 12/13 (post-16).

- The analysis focused mainly on Diploma **achievers** – a Diploma achiever has been defined as such if they appear in the achiever dataset supplied by DfE and have received a grade A*-E (where relevant).[17] Note that when the analysis discussed includes those who have received a U grade, we refer to them as '**completers**'. Data on Diploma completers/achievers used by DfE for 2008 starters was analysed, which was based only on three DAS releases for the 09/10 academic year (this did not therefore include learners who did a one-year course in 2008/09 and rather focuses on those who completed their Diploma in the summer 2010). Note that *academic age* (i.e. those in Year 11 or Year 13 in 2009/10) of Diploma completers/achievers has been identified. This has been achieved either by matching to NPD/ILR, or by using date of birth on DAS matched to the start date of the Diploma.

- It proved difficult to define Diploma '**participants**' (someone who was registered as having *started* a Diploma regardless of whether they achieved it or not). This is because some learners who had dropped out of their Diploma course early were still registered on DAS (i.e. they did not continue with the course, which is not the same as having continued with it and *failed* it). They, therefore, did not participate in the whole course. Neither was it possible from DAS to identify learners who finished their Diploma learning in summer 2010 but who *failed* their Diploma. Moreover, some (who cannot be identified on the DAS extracts) might have extended their period of learning and still be continuing with their Diploma; such is the flexibility of the Diploma. It is not possible to separate these learners or the non achievers from active learners on DAS to determine success rates.

- The DAS participant extract data *has* been used to compare Diploma participants to the comparison group (defined below). This is because the achiever group will be by definition a higher performing subset of learners taking a Diploma, and so does not constitute a fair comparison to all non-Diploma pupils. However, note that any analysis specific to the Diploma group has been based on Diploma achiever data. It should also be noted that it is not possible to

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[16] See the report Golden, S., McCrone, T., Wade, P., Featherstone, G., Southcott, C., Evans, K and Haynes, G. (2011). *National evaluation of Diplomas: cohort 1 - the second year* [online]. Available: **https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/RSG/AllPublications/Page1/DFE-RR125**
[17] Information provided by the DfE clarifies that a student may only need to *complete* the principal learning and project components to pass their Diploma *if* marks for other components (which all need to be passed) are sufficient. 'Sufficient marks' is defined by the Awarding body. Note that the DAS extracts used did not include *grades* achieved for individual components, just the Diploma overall.

determine current 2010/11 learners who are actively participating in Diploma learning (those Cohort 1 learners who achieved a Diploma then went on to study for another Diploma).

- Diploma learners have been compared with a **comparison group** which consists of those in the equivalent academic age groups (Year 10/11 or Year 12/13 in September 2008-July 2010) not appearing in the participation data. We have restricted this *only* to institutions that are Diploma offering institutions (based on at least one learner registered in the participation data from the 2008/2010 cohort) so that we have compared Diploma learners with learners with similar characteristics in similar schools/colleges where a Diploma was a potential option for them.

The analysis of datasets

To explore key outcomes, the analysis of datasets comprised the following:

- Basic descriptive analysis – including the numbers and types of learners who achieved different Diploma subjects and Levels

- Multi-level modelling – a technique which takes account of data which is grouped into similar clusters at different levels (in this case, pupils grouped in schools and schools grouped in Diploma consortia). It is used to analyse the outcomes for learners while taking account of the range of factors that influence these outcomes, such as the characteristics of learners, their prior attainment and the school they attended. This analysis would explore the outcomes for the different Diploma subjects (which may be limited by small numbers of learners taking some subjects) while taking into account the effect of learners' characteristics thereby enabling an assessment of the different outcomes for each subject regardless of the nature of the learners who chose that subject. In addition, where survey data was available, this would include an exploration of the relationship between learners' experiences and attitudes and their attainment and destination outcomes.

It should be noted that multi-level modelling has been carried out to explore the following outcomes: Diploma grade received by Diploma achievers; overall Key Stage 4 achievement for all learners (including the comparison group); and learners' post-16 destinations. For each, a number of models of interest have been explored, each of which is listed in Appendix A. Where models relating to Diploma grade are concerned, the main body of this report focuses on the most prevalent group of Diploma achievers, namely those who achieved a Higher level Diploma grades A*-C pre-16 (see Section 2.2) and who achieved an Advanced level Diploma post-16 (see Section 3.2). Models on all learners (including those who received a U grade) are also reported for interest in Appendix A.

1.2.2 Telephone interviews with Diploma learners

Follow-up telephone interviews were carried out with 42 learners in the first Diploma cohort (25 in Year 12 and 17 in 'Year 14') in a sample of 15 case-study consortia. These were Diploma learners who had provided their contact details when they were interviewed face-to-face during visits in the spring term of 2010.Table 1.1 shows the Diploma subjects and levels participated in by the interviewees.

Table 1.1   Diploma subject and level studied pre-16 by interviewees

Number of interviewees	Interviewees in Year 12	Interviewees in Year 14
Construction and the Built Environment	2	2
Creative and Media	6	2
Engineering	7	5
Information Technology	4	4
Society, Health and Development	6	4
Foundation/Level 1	1	-
Higher/Level 2	24	2
Advanced/Progression/Level 3	0	15
N	25	17

Interviews explored:

- Progression pathways post-16 or post-18, including whether learners continued onto a Diploma at a higher level

- the effect of their Diploma on their decision on what route to pursue and its usefulness to the activity in which they are now engaged

- pupils' reflections on the experience of undertaking a Diploma and their recommendations to other Diploma or potential Diploma pupils.

It should be noted that the qualitative findings from these interviews provide illustration of views only which should not be generalised, as numbers of interviewees are small. However, individual responses are reported where deemed interesting, given that these views come from the first cohort of Diploma learners to have a voice.

1.3   Structure of the report

The content of each section of the report is detailed below:

- **Section 2: pre-16 Diploma learners' achievement**. This section includes descriptive analysis exploring the number of pre-16 Diploma completers, by subject, level and grade. Multi-level modelling analysis, exploring the characteristics associated with Diploma grades and the characteristics associated with overall Key Stage 4 achievement, is also included. The section summarises learners' perceptions of their achievements.

- **Section 3: post-16 Diploma learners' achievement**: This section includes descriptive analysis exploring the number of post-16 Diploma completers, by subject, level and grade. Multi-level modelling analysis, exploring the

characteristics associated with Diploma grades, is also included. The section summarises learners' perceptions of their achievements.

- **Section 4: Diploma learners' destinations:** This section summarises the number of pre-16 Diploma completers who were registered in national datasets as attending post-16 education institutions, by Diploma subject and level. The destinations of pre-16 Diploma *participants* are compared with that of the comparison group. Multi-level modelling analysis exploring the characteristics associated with post-16 destinations is also included. Reference is made to the post-18 destinations of learners who achieved their Diploma post-16.

- **Section 5: conclusions and implications for policy and practice.**

2   Pre-16 Diploma Learners' Achievement

Key Findings

- In the summer of 2010, 3545 pre-16 learners completed a Diploma. Of these just under a third completed an Engineering Diploma and a similar proportion completed a Creative and Media Diploma. Smaller proportions of learners completed Information Technology, Society, Health and Development and Construction and the Built Environment Diplomas. These proportions reflect patterns of take-up of Diploma subjects.

- The majority (86 per cent) of these learners completed a Higher (Level 2) Diploma.

- Diploma learners who completed the Higher level Diploma most commonly achieved grades C (44 per cent) or B (39 per cent). Foundation level Diploma learners most commonly achieved a B grade (63 per cent).[18]

- Learners who achieved Construction and the Built Environment, Society, Health and Development and Creative and Media achieved significantly lower Diploma grades than learners who achieved Engineering.

- In terms of overall Key Stage 4 point scores, Diploma learners scored higher compared to other learners overall. Those who did Engineering scored highest overall; learners who did Construction and the Built Environment scored the lowest (but still higher than the comparison group).

- Diploma learners who participated in the Foundation level Diploma had *lower* overall Key Stage 4 point scores compared to other equivalent/comparable learners.

- Girls scored higher at Key Stage 4 than boys; girls who participated in Construction and the Built Environment and Creative and Media Diplomas scored particularly well.

- Qualitative evidence suggested that the young people interviewed were most positive about the principal learning, the project and employer involvement in the Diploma.

- Although half of young people interviewed found functional skills useful, half did not, largely because they were perceived to be too similar to GCSEs, not relevant or too challenging.

- Most young people reflecting on their pre-16 Diploma, felt satisfied with their experience (16 of the 25 learners interviewed were *very* or *quite* satisfied). The majority of learners interviewed said they would take the Diploma again (13) and would recommend it to a friend (16). Reasons for dissatisfaction included: lack of course organisation and a lack of practical elements to the course.

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[18] Higher level Diploma grades are equivalent to 5.5 GCSE grades at the same grade (for example a Diploma C grade is equivalent to 5.5 GCSE grade C's) **in addition to** extra grades/points awarded for ASL qualifications. A Foundation level Diploma is equivalent to between two and one and a half GCSE grades at the same grade (depending on the grade; the higher grades are equivalent to more GCSEs) **in addition to** extra grades/points awarded for ASL. See Appendix A for GCSE and Diploma point scores.

2.1 The number of pre-16 Diploma completers, by subject, level and grade

As shown in Table 2.1, a total of 3545 Year 11 learners, who started one of the first five Diploma subjects introduced in September 2008, completed their Diploma in the summer of 2010. Just under one third (32 per cent) of Diploma learners completed an Engineering Diploma, just under one third completed a Creative and Media Diploma. Subjects with the lowest number of completers were Construction and the Built Environment (12 per cent) and Society, Health and Development (12 per cent). These proportions reflect patterns of take-up of Diploma subjects.

Table 2.1   Numbers of Year 11 learners completing Diploma subjects

Diploma subject	Number of learners	Learners %
Construction and the Built Environment	419	12
Creative and Media	1009	29
Engineering	1136	32
Information Technology	561	16
Society, Health and Development	420	12
N =	3545	100

Source: Diploma Aggregation Service (DAS) database, end of year total release for the 2009/2010 academic year based on termly releases.
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.
Note that the analysis focused on learners who did one of the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10; it excluded learners who did a one-year course.

As shown in Table 2.2, just under half (46 per cent) of all male Diploma completers were registered in DAS as having studied for an Engineering Diploma; half (50 per cent) of females studied for a Creative and Media Diploma. Boys were more likely than girls to have completed an Engineering Diploma, Construction and the Built Environment or Information Technology Diploma. Girls were more likely than boys to have completed a Creative and Media or Society, Health and Development Diploma.

Table 2.2   Diploma subject completed, by gender (Year 11)

Diploma subject	Males	Females
	%	**%**
Construction and the Built Environment	18	1
Creative and Media	16	50
Engineering	46	7
Information Technology	18	12
Society, Health and Development	2	30
N = 3545	2259	1286

Source: Diploma Aggregation Service (DAS) database, end of year total release for the 2009/2010 academic year based on termly releases
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.
Note that the analysis focused on learners who did one of the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10; it excluded learners who did a one-year course.

The majority (86 per cent) of Year 11 completers studied a Higher (Level 2) Diploma. Table 2.3 below shows that 84 per cent of those who completed a Higher Diploma attained grades B or C[19]. A minority achieved grades A*/A: 11 per cent at Higher level pre-16. This is compared with 30 per cent of all learners achieving A*/A grades for GCSE full courses in summer 2010 (seven per cent achieved an A* and 23 per cent an A)[20]. However, it should be acknowledged that achieving a Diploma A* or A grade is equivalent to achieving multiple GCSEs at A* or A grade (see Appendix A for equivalences) and therefore you might expect fewer A* or A grades amongst the Diploma cohort.

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[19] Higher level Diploma grades are equivalent to 5.5 GCSE grades at the same grade (for example a Diploma C grade is equivalent to 5.5 GCSE grade C's) **in addition to** extra grades/points awarded for ASL qualifications. See Appendix A for GCSE and Diploma point scores.
[20] Figures are from the Joint Council for qualifications: http://www.jcq.org.uk/national_results/index.cfm

Table 2.3   Grades of Higher (Level 2) Diplomas (by subject) achieved by Year 11 learners

Diploma subject	Grade (%)						Total N of Higher N
	A*	A	B	C	U**	Total	
Construction and the Built Environment	0	2	19	64	16	100	296
Creative and Media	1	8	36	45	10	100	936
Engineering	1	14	48	33	5	100	935
Information Technology	<1	7	37	52	3	100	528
Society, Health and Development	1	13	42	40	5	100	367
All subjects	1	10	39	44	7	100	3062

Source: Diploma Aggregation Service (DAS) database, end of year total release for the 2009/2010 academic year based on termly releases.
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.

Note that the analysis focused on learners who did one of the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10; it excluded learners who did a one-year course.

**Learners awarded a U grade if they did not score high enough in the Principal Learning or Project, but still completed their Diploma. (Grades awarded for the Higher Diploma are A* to C.)

Approximately 14 per cent of those Year 11 learners, who started one of the first five Diploma subjects in 2008, studied a Foundation (Level 1) Diploma[21]. Table 2.4 below shows that just under two-thirds (64 per cent) of learners who completed a Foundation Diploma got a B grade.[22] As above, there was less achievement at grades A* and A of Diplomas.

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[21] Foundation level Diploma grades are equivalent to between two and one and a half GCSE grades at the same grade (depending on the grade; the higher grades are equivalent to more GCSEs) **in addition to** extra grades/points awarded for ASL qualifications. See Appendix A for GCSE and Diploma point scores

[22] Higher level Diploma grades are equivalent to 5.5 GCSE grades at the same grade (for example a Diploma C grade is equivalent to 5.5 GCSE grade C's) **in addition to** extra grades/points awarded for ASL qualifications. See Appendix A for GCSE and Diploma point scores.

Table 2.4   Grades of Foundation (Level1) Diplomas (by subject) achieved by Year 11 learners

Diploma subject	Grade (%)					Total N of Foundation achievers N
	A*	A	B	U**	Total	
Construction and the Built Environment	0	2	48	50	100	123
Creative and Media	0	19	60	21	100	73
Engineering	0	12	77	11	100	201
Information Technology	3	48	45	3	100	33
Society, Health and Development	0	9	64	26	100	53
All subjects	<1	13	63	24	100	483

Source: Diploma Aggregation Service (DAS) database, end of year total release for the 2009/2010 academic year based on termly releases.
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.

Note that the analysis focused on learners who did one of the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10; it excluded learners who did a one-year course.

***Learners awarded a U grade if they did not score high enough in the Principal Learning or Project, but still completed their Diploma. (Grades awarded for the Higher Diploma are A* to B.)*

The fact that most learners completing a Diploma Foundation or Higher level course achieved the lowest available grade (other than U) *could* be due to the level of assessment and the weight of what is required to achieve a Diploma (in terms of the separate components) and/or a lack of organisation amongst some teachers of this new course (issues raised by learners who were interviewed; see Sections 2.4.3 and 3.3.4). However, findings show that the Diploma learners (across all five subjects) scored *higher* Key Stage 4 point scores compared with other learners (see discussion below in Section 2.3).

As shown in Table 2.5, most Diploma completers (91 per cent) took a GCSE as their ASL[23] and just under a half (46 per cent) took a Vocationally Related Qualification.

Table 2.5 Numbers of ASL qualifications taken by Year 11 Diploma completers

ASL qualifications	Number taken	% who completed *at least one* of qualification type
GCSE	3228	91
Vocationally Related Qualification (VRQ)	1636	46
Other General Certificate	621	18
Qualifications and Credit Framework* Qualifications	76	2
GCE AS Levels	45	1
Other	30	1
N = 3545	5636	100

Source: Diploma Aggregation Service (DAS) database, end of year total release for the 2009/2010 academic year based on termly releases.
More than one qualification could be taken by each learner so percentages sum to more than 100.

Note that the analysis focused on learners who did one of the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10; it excluded learners who did a one-year course.

* QCF is the Governments' new framework for recognising vocational achievement through the award of credit for units and qualifications across England, Wales and Northern Ireland

On the whole, the number of ASL qualifications taken by learners who completed a Higher Diploma was similar across Diploma subjects. Small differences by Diploma subject emerged, for example more (92 per cent) learners taking the Creative and Media Diploma completed at least one GCSE as the ASL component of their Diploma than those on any other Diploma subject. In contrast, learners taking the Construction and the Built Environment Diploma were least likely to have taken GCSEs (87 per cent). Whereas 39 per cent of those taking the Creative and Media Diploma completed at least one VRQ, in contrast 57 per cent of those taking the Construction and the Built Environment Diploma did.

2.2   Characteristics associated with Diploma grades

Multi-level modelling analysis (see Appendix A for details) was undertaken to investigate characteristics associated with Diploma grade[24]. This sub-section of the report focuses on the most prevalent learners (those who **achieved** a Higher level

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[23] It was not possible to distinguish between qualifications which were Specialist or Additional learning, although previous case-study interviews have suggested that it was more prevalent for learners to be studying Additional rather than Specialist learning

[24] Note that the analysis focused on learners who did one of the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10; it excluded learners who did a one-year course.

Diploma grades A* to C). However, DAS data included pre-16 learners who achieved grades A* to C and also those who received a U grade (if a learner received a U grade they are categorised as having *completed* their Diploma, not having *achieved* it). U grades are awarded to learners if insufficient scores are achieved for the principal learning and/or the project element of the Diploma. Models on *all* learners (including those who received a U grade and those who completed a Foundation level Diploma) can be found Appendix A[25].

Multi-level modelling analysis was carried out to compare the **characteristics associated with Diploma grades** achieved by the first cohort of Diploma achievers. A number of models explored the outcome 'Diploma grade':

- a 'basic' overall model, including a number of learner-level variables which could have an impact on Diploma grade, for example gender, average Key Stage 3 attainment point scores[26], and special educational needs (Appendix A, model 1)

- an 'interaction model'[27] which explored the relevance of the interactions between variables (such as gender and Diploma subject) on Diploma grade (Appendix A, model 2)

- a model including consortium-level variables on Diploma grade (Appendix A, model 3)

In each model, the Diploma Learners were compared with an average learner, or for learners from different categories, compared to a default category, known as a base case (for example, females were compared with males, the different Diploma subjects were compared with Engineering, different ethnic groups were compared to the 'White British' group).

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[25] Grades achieved for Foundation and Higher Diplomas are essentially different outcomes, and so we did not combine them in our core set of models, instead focusing solely on Higher learners – the majority group. Similarly, a U grade is a qualitatively different outcome to achieving an A*-C, and the relationship between background factors and achieving a U grade is likely to be different. Therefore, to avoid misleading conclusions being drawn for the majority A*-C group, U grades were also excluded from the core models. The effect this has on modeling results can be seen in the appendix by comparing the core models to models based on the full cohort of Year 11 completers.

[26] Prior attainment at Key Stage 3 is based on average Key Stage 3 point scores, which are obtained by converting Key Stage 3 level in each of the three core subjects into the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency point score equivalents, and then taking an average for each learner.

[27] An interaction model compares the combined effect of two or more variables to what you might expect to happen if each was taken into account separately.

Figure 2.1   Characteristics associated with Diploma grades, Year 11
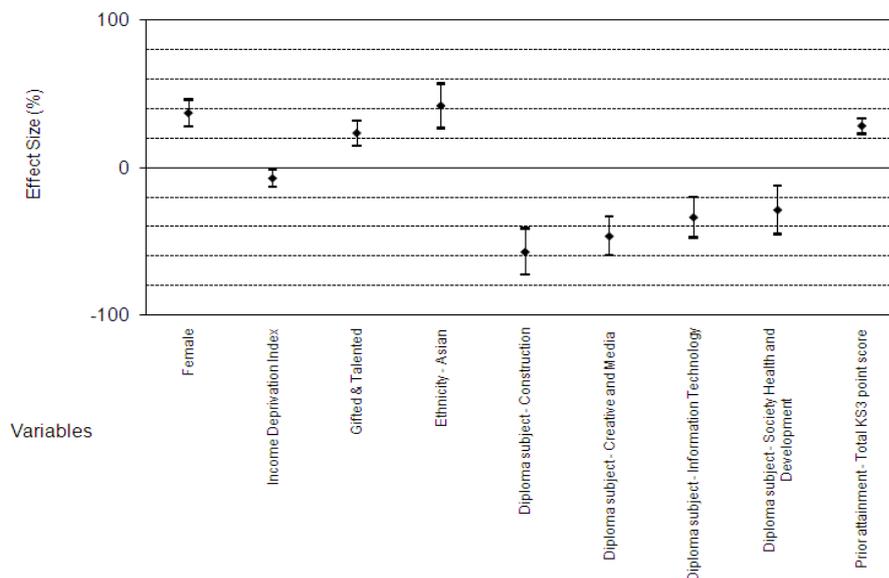
As shown in Figure 2.1, as compared with the base case (detailed above) factors associated with achieving a **Diploma at a significantly higher grade** (indicated by symbols above the central 'average' line in Figure 2.1) included:

- being female
- being classified as gifted and talented[28]
- being 'Asian'
- having higher than average Key Stage 3 point scores.

Compared with the base case (detailed above) factors associated with achieving a **significantly lower Diploma grade** (indicated by symbols below the central 'average' line in Figure 2.1) included studying any of the Diploma subjects:

- Construction and the Built Environment.
- Creative and Media
- Information Technology.
- Society, Health and Development.

There were no significant interactions (i.e. combined effects) between gender and Diploma subject, and average Key Stage 3 point scores and Diploma subject. There were also no significant differences in the Diploma *grades* achieved by learners in different consortia with different characteristics.

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[28] See the following website for a definition of 'gifted and talented':
http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Schoolslearninganddevelopment/ExamsTestsAndTheCurriculum/DG_10037625

2.3   Characteristics associated with overall Key Stage 4 achievement

Multi-level modelling analysis was carried out to compare the **overall Key Stage 4 point scores** achieved by the first cohort of Diploma *participants*[29], compared with learners in the same schools who had not participated in a Diploma (the comparison group). Key Stage 4 point score is made up of *all* relevant qualifications that carry a point score (not just the Diploma for Diploma learners).

A number of models explored the outcome 'overall Key Stage 4 point scores':

- a 'basic' overall model, including a number of learner-level variables which could have an impact on overall Key Stage 4 point score, for example gender, average Key Stage 3 attainment point scores, and special educational needs (Appendix A model 7)

- an 'interaction model' which explored the relevance of the interactions between variables (such as gender and Diploma subject) on overall Key Stage 4 point scores (Appendix A model 8)

- a model including consortium-level variables for *all* learners (as comparison learners were from the same schools as Diploma learners and therefore in the same consortia) (Appendix A model 9)

- models as above, but focusing on the Key Stage 4 point scores achieved by the first cohort of Diploma participants **who responded to the learner surveys only** (a total of 705 learners, including 271 Diploma learners and 434 comparison learners). Note that these results should be treated with some caution due to the lower numbers of learners involved (Appendix A models 10, 11 and 12).

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[29] Not necessarily Diploma *achievers* – see Section 1.2.1. Note that the analysis focused on learners who did one of the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10; it excluded learners who did a one-year course.

Figure 2.2   Characteristics associated with Key Stage 4 point scores, Year 11
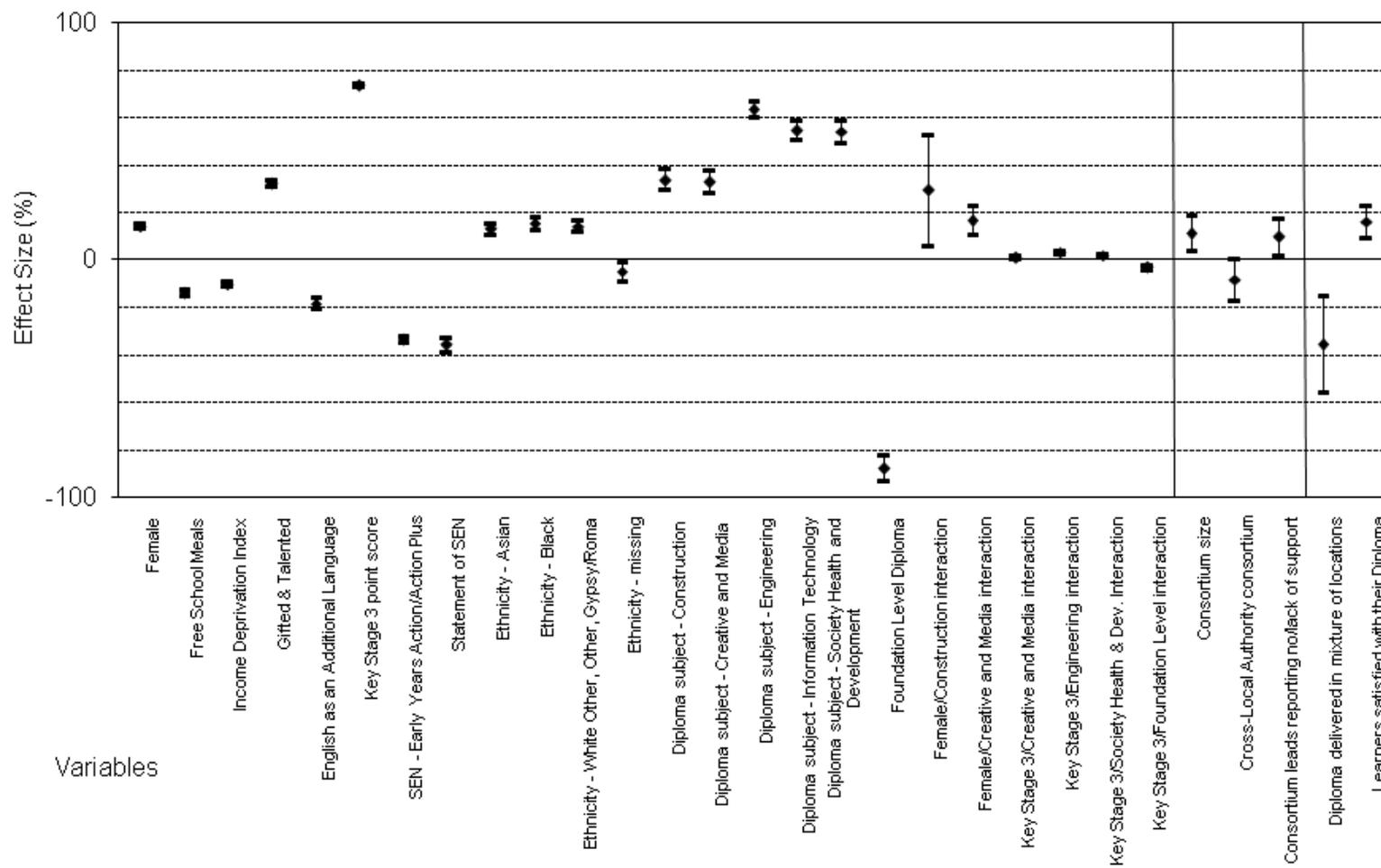
A vertical line partitioning the graph separates variables from different models

In Figure 2.2 above, the central line represents the average Key Stage 4 point score for the average learner. Variables shown above the 'average' line indicate characteristics associated with significantly higher Key Stage 4 scores that are above average. In contrast, variables below the line indicate characteristics associated with scores significantly below average.

To expand, accounting for all other factors which could have an impact on overall Key Stage 4 point scores, the following variables had an influence:

- **Doing a Diploma**: the Diploma learners (all five subjects) scored *higher* overall at Key Stage 4 compared with other learners (see Figure 2.2 above and model 7 in Appendix A). However, some caveats should be considered when interpreting these findings. Firstly, the point score equivalences for Diplomas and other qualifications, such as GCSEs should be considered (see Appendix A for our understanding of equivalences). For example, a Diploma achieved at Higher level at any grade is equivalent to 5.5 GCSEs at the same grade, *plus* grades/points achieved for ASL qualifications. It may be, therefore, that a Diploma learner has more *opportunity* to achieve more/higher grades. Secondly, the analysis is based only on Diploma participants who had been *registered* on DAS (it *might* be the case that as this was a new qualification with a new system of registering learners, that by the time learners were registered some of the less able could have dropped out of the Diploma, leaving the more able learners to continue). It should be noted that learners who were never registered on DAS would appear in the comparison group rather than the participation group. It has unfortunately not been possible to explore whether Diploma learners score higher than comparison learners at Key Stage 5 (see Section 3.2).

- **Diploma subject**: although Diploma learners doing *any* of the five Diploma subjects seemed to have scored *higher* than comparison learners, those who did Engineering scored highest overall at Key Stage 4, followed by those who did: Information Technology; Society, Health and Development; Creative and Media; and Construction and the Built Environment (in that order; see Figure 2.2 above and model 8 in Appendix A). Amongst survey respondents only, those who had participated in Engineering, Creative and Media, Information Technology or Society, Health and Development all scored higher than comparison learners who responded to the survey (see model 10 in Appendix A). However, amongst the survey respondents, this was not the case for learners who participated in Construction and the Built Environment.

- **Diploma level:**[30] Diploma learners who participated in the Foundation level Diploma had *lower* overall Key Stage 4 point scores compared to other equivalent/comparable learners (see Figure 2.2 and model 7 in Appendix A). This was also the case amongst the learners who responded to the survey only (see model 10).

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[30] It would have been interesting to carry out more detailed analysis by level. For example, to compare Foundation level Diploma participants with comparison learners with similar ability doing other Level 1 courses, and to compare Diploma learners participating in a Higher level Diploma with comparison learners with similar ability doing other Level 2 courses (for example GCSEs or vocational qualifications). However, while the NPD identifies learners who have achieved qualifications at each level, it does not divide learners into definitive groups of Level 1 or Level 2 learners; for example, a learner could achieve different qualifications at each level. Therefore, the comparison group could not be classified as 'Level 1' or 'Level 2'. For this reason, Diploma and comparison groups are taken as a whole, but Diploma level is included as a variable in the models.

- **Interaction between gender and Diploma subject:** whilst females and Diploma learners scored higher *overall* at Key Stage 4, females who did Construction and the Built Environment Diploma and Creative and Media Diploma performed particularly well (see Figure 2.2 above and model 8 in Appendix A). Amongst the survey respondents only (see model 11), there was no longer a relationship between gender and achievement *overall*. However, females who participated in the Creative and Media Diploma did still attain higher points scores (this was no longer the case for females doing the Construction and the Built Environment Diploma). Amongst the survey respondents, females studying the Society, Health and Development Diploma did less well (although still better than average for non-Diploma participants).

- **Interaction between prior attainment at Key Stage 3 and Diploma subject and level**: high performance at Key Stage 3 (higher than average Key Stage 3 point scores) made a greater difference to performance at Key Stage 4 for learners who did Engineering, Society, Health and Development and Creative and Media compared to other learners (see Figure 2.2 above and model 8 in Appendix A). As mentioned above, learners who participated in the Foundation level Diploma scored lower at Key Stage 4 than other learners; their prior attainment at Key Stage 3 was a less influencing factor than for other learners. Among the survey respondents only (see model 11), higher performance at Key Stage 3 still led to greater increases in performance at Key Stage 4 for those who did Engineering and Society, Health and Development compared to non-diploma participants. For the survey respondents doing other subjects, the opposite was true – Key Stage 3 performance was less closely related to performance at Key Stage 4.

- **Consortium size:** learners in larger Diploma consortia (with seven or more schools/colleges delivering Diplomas) scored *higher* at Key Stage 4 than learners in smaller consortia. This was still the case amongst survey respondents only. It *could* be the case that in larger consortia there was a particular perceived need amongst staff for better planning, for staff with a greater range of skills, and for enhanced communication between institutions and staff, which *could* lead to improved delivery and thus higher scores. See Figure 2.2 above and model 12 in Appendix A.

- **Support for consortium leads**: learners in consortia where the lead felt they had received inadequate support from the local authority, the then Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), the then Qualifications and Curriculum Agency (QCA) and/or others scored *higher* at Key Stage 4 compared with learners in consortia with reported sufficient support, suggesting that the perceived lack of support received did not unduly influence outcomes for learners. Alternatively, it may simply be that these consortia had higher expectations of the support that would be provided to them. See Figure 2.2 above and model 9 in Appendix A.

- **Consortium preparedness prior to Diploma delivery**: Interestingly, amongst the survey respondents only, in consortia where leads raised concerns about preparedness *prior* to delivery, learners scored *higher* at Key Stage 4. This could suggest that they worked hard to address concerns following the consortium lead survey. See model 12 in Appendix A.

- **Crossing local authority boundaries**: where the Diploma consortium crossed local authority boundaries, learners tended to score *lower* at Key Stage 4. It *could* be that in such consortia learners were travelling some distances to and from institutions to the detriment of their academic performance (as time for learning was spent travelling), although evidence from the evaluation to date has

not revealed concerns amongst learners in relation to travelling to learn. Also note that this result was only marginally significant and was not the case amongst the survey respondents only. See Figure 2.2 above and models 9 and 12 in Appendix A.

- **Location of learning**: Amongst the survey respondents only, Diploma participants who reported having Diploma lessons in various locations (for example, at their home institution as well as a local FE college) had lower Key Stage 4 point scores compared with the comparison group. See model 10 in Appendix A. As suggested above, it *could* be that when learners were travelling to and from different institutions this was at the detriment to their academic performance, although evidence from the evaluation to date has not revealed concerns amongst learners in relation to travelling to learn. In fact, learners report enjoying learning in locations other than their home institution.

- **Satisfaction with the Diploma**: Amongst the survey respondents only, unsurprisingly, those who reported being satisfied with their Diploma had higher overall Key Stage 4 scores than those who were not, as did those whose survey responses suggested they were committed to learning. See Figure 2.2 above and model 10 in Appendix A.

2.4   Pre-16 Diploma learners' perceptions of their achievements

Interviews with young people ascertained their views on their own Diploma achievements. It should be noted that the qualitative findings from these interviews provide illustration of views only which should not be generalised, as numbers of interviewees are small.

Amongst pre-16 learners who were interviewed in the autumn following completion of their Diploma, the vast majority [24 out of 25] in Year 12 (who did their Diploma pre-16) reported that they had completed their Diploma course and around two-thirds could provide details of their overall grade (which ranged between a grade A and D).[31] However, despite having completed their Diploma overall, around one fifth of interviewees [10], and in particular, those who undertook the Creative and Media Diploma subject [five] reported that they did not manage to complete or failed particular units of the principal learning. In most cases [eight], learners reported a lack of opportunity to re-take these parts in order to gain the full Diploma. One of these interviewees, for example, stated that the course was no longer being delivered at the institution. In other cases, it was not clear if failed units had been assessed via controlled assessments which might be difficult for teachers to re-schedule due to time constraints.

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[31] One interviewee reported that he had failed the Diploma overall.

2.4.1 Diploma components considered most useful

Principal Learning

Diploma learners interviewed appeared largely positive about the principal learning aspect of the qualification; with around three-quarters [19] of learners interviewed in Year 12, and in particular, those who had studied the Engineering Diploma [seven out of seven] having reported that it had been useful (either 'quite useful' or 'very useful'). There was some indication that learners valued the range of topics covered. For example, [three] young people felt that this helped to provide an insight into potential areas of interest that they might pursue in the future.

Amongst those interviewees who said that the principal learning had not been very useful [six] (most frequently Creative and Media students [three]), this was most commonly attributed to a lack of practical work.

The project

The project was considered a useful aspect of the qualification by just over-half of Diploma learners interviewed in Year 12 [13]. The more frequently cited ways in which the project was viewed as helpful included:

- the development of soft skills including, for example, communication skills, team working and time management [four]
- the development of research skills such as how to design a survey or undertake interviews [three]
- involvement of independent learning which enabled learners to take responsibility for decision making [two].

Moreover, a few learners perceived this to be the most useful aspect of the Diploma overall. For example, one interviewee explained that he felt he would be able to use what he had directly learnt in his project in the future.

Nonetheless, just under two-fifths [11] of Diploma learners across a range of subjects felt that the project had not been useful (either 'not very useful' or 'not at all useful'). Diverse reasons were given; however in a few cases, interviewees said that they did not understand the relevance of the project in relation to the Diploma; a finding which perhaps highlights the need to better inform learners of the reasons for undertaking each component.

Work placement

Around half of Diploma learners interviewed in Year 12 [12] felt that their work placement had been useful as it provided an insight into the working environment and what it entails.

Around a third of interviewees and in particular, those who had studied the Society, Health and Development Diploma [five out of six who had] stated that the work

placement had not been useful [nine], largely because they reported not having experienced relevant work experience at all or of a long enough duration.

Previous reports also highlighted the limited opportunities for Society, Health and Development students to find placements in particular sectors[32]. Findings from the National Evaluation of Diplomas: First Year of Delivery report suggested that this might be attributed to, for example, *'…age restrictions and legal issues associated with access'* (p38).

Other employer involvement

Interviewees were most positive about other employer involvement (including, for example, visits and guest speakers) with four-fifths [19] reporting that it had been useful. Comments generally related to the opportunities to hear, see or experience work undertaken by companies. One interviewee's remark reflected this view: '[it is useful to]*...see how it actually is'*. In addition, there was recognition that such opportunities had helped them to develop their knowledge and improve their skills (such as, presentation skills).

Personal Learning and Thinking Skills

Around two-fifths of interviewees [nine] said that they were unaware that Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS) were part of the Diploma. Some comments illustrated that Diploma learners could not recall having undertaken PLTS. This could be because PLTS are embedded within the other components of the Diploma; making them more explicit could be beneficial for learners to understand the value of PLTS.

Amongst those learners who were aware of and positive about PLTS, reasons included that they provided the opportunity to reflect on the work undertaken and evaluate their performance.

Around a third of Diploma learners perceived that PLTS were not useful [eight]. Reasons given by individual respondents were that they were 'unexciting' and 'repetitive', or were seen as a tick box exercise at the end of lessons. It *could* also be because PLTS were often embedded and not explicit; if learners are unaware of PLTS they might not recognise the value.

Additional and Specialist Learning

Overall, there appeared to be some scope for improvement with regard to raising awareness of the additional and specialist learning component of the Diploma; around half of learners commenting [10] did not know that this component was part of the Diploma, while other responses [four] suggested a lack of understanding in so far

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[32] Lynch, S., McCrone, T., Wade, P., Featherstone, G., Evans, K., Golden, S. and Haynes, G. (2010). *National Evaluation of Diplomas: the First Year of Delivery* (DCSF Research Report 220). London: DCSF.
O'Donnell, L., Lynch, S., Wade, P., Featherstone, G., Shuayb, M., Golden, S. and Haynes, G. (2009). *National Evaluation of Diplomas: Preparation for 2008 Delivery* (DCSF Research Report RW079). London: DCSF.

as learners reported their employability skills or GCSEs unrelated to the Diploma as the specialist learning component.

Functional Skills

More frequently cited responses amongst those Diploma learners who found functional skills useful [13] included having gained an additional qualification [three], which one interviewee stated as beneficial when applying for job opportunities and that the content covered was relevant and could be applied within the workplace [three]. However, a few learners reported the level of difficulty of the functional skills, and, in particular, maths as a particular challenge.

Functional skills were considered the least useful aspect of the Diploma amongst interviewees overall; around half [12] said that that they were not useful (either 'not very useful or 'not at all useful') which was most frequently attributed to their similarity to core GCSE subjects.

2.4.2 Satisfaction

Overall, most learners interviewed in Year 12 [16 learners], and in particular, those who had undertaken the Engineering Diploma [six out of six], were satisfied with their course (either 'very satisfied' or 'quite satisfied'). Reasons included:

- opportunities to meet new people [three comments]
- practical experience [three comments]
- providing an overview of industry and what is involved [two comments]
- development of their knowledge and skills [three comments].

The main cause for dissatisfaction with their Diploma course [seven] related to a lack of organisation and planning amongst staff [four comments].

Over a third of Diploma learners across a range of subjects [11] stated that they would have liked the qualification to have been more practical, while some others [four] would have welcomed additional work experience or more visits. In addition, just under half of those interviewees who had undertaken the Creative and Media Diploma subject [three out of seven] stated that they would have liked the course to have involved more media (and in one case art) content.

Overall, aspects of the Diploma that were reported as particularly challenging included:

- principal learning units [four comments]. One interviewee for example, stated that the teacher had not provided clear instructions and despite all efforts, they failed the unit.
- functional skills (either some or all subjects) [four comments].
- PLTS [two comments]. For example, one interviewee spoke of the challenge of completing these within the timescales provided.

2.4.3 Attainment and outcomes

The majority of interviewees in Year 12 [19] on reflection felt that they understood the way in which their work for the principal learning had been assessed. Overall, understanding was reported to have been achieved through teachers providing an explanation or through the provision of a mark scheme which outlined the requirements.

Of those who lacked understanding, reasons generally appeared to relate to the lack of explanation of mark schemes or confusion over the grades awarded. For example, one interviewee spoke of his disappointment having achieved high grades throughout the course but a final overall grade lower than expected.

Overall, most learners said that they were happy with their Diploma result/grade [19 out of 25]. There was some indication that, for example, interviewees [three] felt that the grades achieved had exceeded their expectations.

Interestingly, of those who reported that they were not happy with their grade, most [four out of the five[33]] were learners who had taken the Creative and Media Diploma. Some learners [three] felt that, on reflection, they could have achieved better. A comment from one interviewee provides illustration of the level of work and commitment required in order to achieve a good grade overall:

> *I started working in the breaks and after school in the second year but I wish I had realised this earlier and started in the first year, you have to if you want a more than average grade. You have to work harder and longer to get the higher grades. It's the only way.*

Interviewees were asked what, if anything, was the most useful skill or knowledge they had learnt from their Diploma. The more frequently cited responses included:

- presentation and communication skills [three comments]
- drawing skills [three comments – two Engineering learners, one Creative and Media learner]
- team working skills, in terms of, for example, taking responsibility for particular tasks and learning to listen to peers [two comments]

In addition, some interviewees [five] spoke more generally about particular aspects or units they found useful, reporting that they had since had the opportunity to put the knowledge and skills into practice.

Around half of interviewees [13] said that if they could go back in time, they *would* do a Diploma again. Where explanation was provided, reasons included having enjoyed the course [one] and the number of GCSEs equivalencies achieved [one].

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[33] One learner was neutral in their opinion about whether they were happy with their Diploma result/grade or not and so did not answer 'yes' or 'no'.

Two-fifths of interviewees [10] said they would *not* do a Diploma again. Some learners [four] said that, on reflection, they would have opted to take different qualifications such as GCSEs or BTEC. The view of one interviewee, for illustration, was that other qualifications were viewed more favourably by colleges and universities. In addition, two learners believed that they could have been better informed prior to selecting the course. To expand, one had been told that the course would involve a lot of practical work but that was not the case, while the other remarked: *'when I picked my options, they suggested the Diploma but I was not well advised, the suggestions were not good enough'.*

Around two-thirds of interviewees [16] said that they would recommend taking a Diploma to another young person. Amongst those commenting, a couple of interviewees [two] felt that the qualification should be recommended to learners who are hard working and organised.

Poor organisation and a lack of understanding with regard to what the course entailed were examples of the reasons provided by those interviewees [five] who would not recommend it to another young person.

3 Post-16 Diploma Learners' Achievement

Key findings

- In summer 2010, 696 post-16 learners completed a Diploma. Of these, between 20 and 25 per cent of learners completed a Creative and Media, Society, Health and Development, Information Technology or Engineering Diploma. Less than 10 per cent of learners completed a Construction and the Built Environment Diploma. These proportions reflect national patterns of take-up of Diplomas; Construction and the Built Environment was taken by lower proportions of learners than other subjects.

- The majority (65 per cent) of Year 13 learners who completed a Diploma studied an Advanced (Level 3) Diploma. They most commonly achieved grades C or D (29 per cent and 28 per cent respectively). Learners on a Progression level Diploma most commonly achieved a D grade (33 per cent). For those on a Foundation level Diploma it was a grade B (59 per cent) and for those on a Higher level Diploma it was a grade C (54 per cent).[34]

- Characteristics associated with achieving a Diploma at a higher grade were: being female; having higher prior attainment at Key Stage 4; and being in a consortium with a lead who was concerned about preparedness for Diplomas *prior* to delivery.

- For post-16 learners, the Diploma subject had no influence over the grade they achieved.

- Qualitative evidence suggests that young people were particularly positive about employer involvement in the Diploma, largely because they gained practical experience and widened their knowledge of, for example, how businesses operate.

- Half of young people interviewed perceived functional skills as useful. Responses amongst those who were less positive related to a perceived lack of relevancy because they had already gained GCSEs in these subjects.

- Around a third of learners interviewed said they would take the Diploma again, while a similar number said they would not due to a lack of progression opportunities and concerns about the qualification not being recognised by universities. Those remaining were unsure if they would take a Diploma again.

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[34] Advanced level Diploma grades are equivalent to between 2.3 and 2.8 A level grades at the same grade (depending on the grade) **in addition to** extra grades/points awarded for ASL qualifications. The Progression Diploma is a smaller programme of study. It comprises the same elements as the Advanced Diploma, but without ASL, and is therefore equivalent to fewer A levels. A Higher level Diploma grades are equivalent to 5.5 GCSE grades at the same grade (for example a Diploma C grade is equivalent to 5.5 GCSE grade C's) **in addition to** extra grades/points awarded for ASL qualifications. A Foundation level Diploma is equivalent to between two and one and a half GCSE grades at the same grade (depending on the grade; the higher grades are equivalent to more GCSEs) **in addition to** extra grades/points awarded for ASL. See Appendix A for A level and Diploma point scores.

3.1 The number of post-16 Diploma completers, by subject, level and grade

Table 3.1 below presents the number of Year 13 learners, who started one of the first five Diploma subjects introduced in September 2008 and completed their Diploma in the summer of 2010. A smaller proportion of Year 13 Diploma learners (20 per cent) completed an Engineering Diploma than Year 11 Diploma learners (32 per cent). This suggests that the Engineering Diploma, for this first cohort of learners, appeared to be more attractive to young people in Year 9 than for those in Year 11 (the years in which learners would have been selecting their options). The smallest proportion of learners in Year 13 completed a Construction and the Built Environment Diploma (eight per cent). These proportions reflect national patterns of take-up of Diplomas; Construction and the Built Environment was taken by lower proportions of learners than other subjects.

Table 3.1   Numbers of Year 13 learners completing Diploma subjects

Diploma subject	Number of learners	learners %
Construction and the Built Environment	58	8
Creative and Media	173	25
Engineering	136	20
Information Technology	161	23
Society, Health and Development	168	24
N =	696	100

Source: Diploma Aggregation Service (DAS) database, end of year total release for the 2009/2010 academic year based on termly releases.
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.

Note that the analysis focused on learners who did one of the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10; it excluded learners who did a one-year course.

As shown in Table 3.2, as was the case pre-16, boys were more likely than girls to have completed an Engineering, Construction and the Built Environment or Information Technology Diploma. Girls were more likely than boys to have completed a Creative and Media or Society, Health and Development Diploma.

Table 3.2   Diploma subject completed, by gender (Year 13)

Diploma subject	Males	Females
	%	%
Construction and the Built Environment	13	1
Creative and Media	23	28
Engineering	31	4
Information Technology	31	12
Society, Health and Development	2	54
N = 696	100	100

Source: Diploma Aggregation Service (DAS) database, end of year total release for the 2009/2010 academic year based on termly releases
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100. For 22 Year 13 learners, their Diploma subject was unknown.
The number of males was 338 and the number of females was 247.

Note that the analysis focused on learners who did one of the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10; it excluded learners who did a one-year course.

The majority (65 per cent) of Year 13 learners who completed their Diploma in 2010, studied an Advanced (Level 3) Diploma[35], 14 per cent studied a Progression Diploma (Level 3), 13 per cent a Higher (Level 2) Diploma and eight per cent a Foundation (Level 1) Diploma. It should be noted that it is likely for learners who do a Foundation or Higher level Diploma post-16 to do so in one year, thus they will have been excluded from the analysis which focuses on learners who undertook two-year courses. The following tables (3.3 to 3.6) show the grades learners achieved on the different levels of Diplomas.

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[35] Advanced level Diploma grades are equivalent to between 2.3 and 2.8 A level grades at the same grade (depending on the grade) **in addition to** extra grades/points awarded for ASL qualifications. The Progression Diploma is a smaller programme of study. It comprises the same elements as the Advanced Diploma, but without additional and specialist learning, and is therefore equivalent to fewer A levels. See Appendix A for A level and Diploma point scores

Table 3.3   Grades of Foundation (Level 1) Diplomas (by subject) achieved by Year 13 learners

Diploma subject	Grade (%)				Total %	Total N of Foundation achievers
	A*	A	B	U		
Creative and Media	0	13	75	13	100	8
Engineering	0	100	0	0	100	1
Information Technology	0	56	40	4	100	25
Society, Health and Development	0	5	79	16	100	19
All subjects	0	32	59	9	100	53

Source: Diploma Aggregation Service (DAS) database, end of year total release for the 2009/2010 academic year based on termly releases.
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.
Note that the analysis focused on learners who did one of the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10; it excluded learners who did a one-year course.

Most (59 per cent) Year 13 learners who completed a Level 1 Diploma in 2010 achieved a grade B (see Table 3.3 above).[36] Most (54 per cent) Year 13 learners who completed a Level 2 Diploma in 2010 achieved a grade C (see Table 3.4 below).[37]

Table 3.4   Grades of Higher (Level 2) Diplomas (by subject) achieved by Year 13 learners

Diploma subject	Grade (%)					Total	Total N of Higher achievers
	A*	A	B	C	U		
Creative and Media	0	7	21	64	7	100	14
Engineering	0	0	46	46	9	100	11
Information Technology	0	9	21	49	21	100	33
Society, Health and Development	0	4	31	58	8	100	26
All subjects	0	7	27	54	13	100	93

Source: Diploma Aggregation Service (DAS) database, end of year total release for the 2009/2010 academic year based on termly releases.
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.
Note that the analysis focused on learners who did one of the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10; it excluded learners who did a one-year course.

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[36] Higher level Diploma grades are equivalent to 5.5 GCSE grades at the same grade (for example a Diploma C grade is equivalent to 5.5 GCSE grade C's) **in addition to** extra grades/points awarded for ASL qualifications. See Appendix A for GCSE and Diploma point scores.
[37] See footnote 34 for information on grade equivalences.

As can be seen in Table 3.5 below, none of the learners completing a progression Diploma in 2010 achieved a grade A* or A. The majority of Year 13 learners who completed a Level 3 Advanced Diploma in 2010 achieved either a grade C (29 per cent) or a grade D (28 per cent) (see Table 3.6 below). A minority (three per cent) achieved a grade A* or A.

Table 3.5   Grades of Progression (Level 3) Diplomas (by subject) achieved by Year 13 learners

Diploma subject	Grade (%)								
	A*	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total	Total N of Progression achievers
Construction and the Built Environment	0	0	0	0	50	25	25	100	4
Creative and Media	0	0	7	14	21	29	29	100	14
Engineering	0	0	4	28	44	20	4	100	25
Information Technology	0	0	0	19	29	38	14	100	21
Society, Health and Development	0	0	12	29	29	27	3	100	34
All subjects	0	0	6	24	33	28	10	100	98

Source: Diploma Aggregation Service (DAS) database, end of year total release for the 2009/2010 academic year based on termly releases.
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.
Note that the analysis focused on learners who did one of the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10; it excluded learners who did a one-year course.

There was little achievement of Diplomas at grades A* and A overall post-16; three per cent at Advanced level. This was also a lower proportion compared with other national qualifications; 35 per cent of all learners who achieved a GCE A level in summer 2010 achieved grades A*/A (eight per cent achieved a A* and 27 per cent a grade A)[38]. However, it should be acknowledged that achieving a Diploma A* or A grade is equivalent to achieving multiple A levels at A* or A grade (see Appendix A for equivalences) and therefore you might expect fewer A* or A grades amongst the Diploma cohort.

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[38] Figures are from the Joint Council for qualifications: http://www.jcq.org.uk/national_results/index.cfm

Table 3.6   Grades of Advanced (Level 3) Diplomas (by subject) achieved by Year 13 learners

Diploma subject	Grade (%)								Total N of Advanced achievers
	A*	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total	
Construction and the Built Environment	0	0	11	29	27	22	11	100	45
Creative and Media	2	4	4	26	26	31	7	100	137
Engineering	0	4	10	26	37	20	2	100	99
Information Technology	0	2	6	31	32	24	5	100	82
Society, Health and Development	0	3	26	35	18	18	0	100	89
All subjects	<1	3	11	29	28	24	5	100	452

Source: Diploma Aggregation Service (DAS) database, end of year total release for the 2009/2010 academic year based on termly releases.
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.
Note that the analysis focused on learners who did one of the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10; it excluded learners who did a one-year course.

As was the case for pre-16 learners, the fact that most learners completing a Diploma post-16 achieved low grades *could* be due to the level of assessment and the weight of what is required to achieve a Diploma (in terms of the separate components) and/or a lack of organisation amongst some teachers of this new course (issues raised by learners who were interviewed; see Sections 2.4.3 and 3.3.4).

As shown in Table 3.7, VRQs were the most frequently taken qualifications (56 per cent of learners) for learners' ASL component, which *could* suggest they were Specialist learning qualifications. Others are listed in Table 3.7 below.

Table 3.7   Number of ASL qualifications taken by Year 13 Diploma completers

ASL qualifications	Number taken	% who completed *at least one* of qualification type
Vocationally Related Qualifications (VRQ)	336	56
GCE A Levels*	174	29
GCE AS Levels	107	18
GCSE	47	8
QCF Qualifications	33	6
Other General Certificate	17	3
Free Standing Maths Qualification	9	2
NVQ	3	1
No response	98	14
N =	598	100

Source: Diploma Aggregation Service (DAS) database, end of year total release for the 2009/2010 academic year based on termly releases.
*More than one qualification could be taken by each learner so percentages sum to more than 100.*Recorded in DAS as GCEs.*
Note that the analysis focused on learners who did one of the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10; it excluded learners who did a one-year course.

On the whole, the proportion of Level 3 Diploma learners taking the different ASL qualifications was similar across Diploma subjects. Consistent with the pattern that appeared with the pre-16 learners, some differences emerged, for example 36 per cent of those taking the Creative and Media Diploma post-16 completed at least one VRQ in contrast to 94 per cent of those taking the Construction and the Built Environment Diploma.

3.2   Characteristics associated with Diploma grades

This sub-section of the report focuses on the most prevalent post-16 learners (those who achieved an Advanced level Diploma and grades A* to E) and therefore the multi-level modelling undertaken to investigate characteristics associated with Diploma grade included only these learners.[39] However, DAS data includes learners who received all available Diploma grades, including U grades (a learner who received a U grade has been defined as having *completed* their Diploma, not having *achieved* it). U grades are awarded to learners if other components have been achieved, but insufficient scores are achieved for the principal learning and/or the project element of the Diploma. Models on *all* post-16 Diploma learners (including

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[39] Note that the analysis focused on learners who did one of the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10; it excluded learners who did a one-year course.

those who received a U grade and those who completed a Foundation, Higher or Progression level Diploma) can be found in Appendix A. [40]

Multi-level modelling analysis was carried out to compare the **characteristics associated with Diploma grades** achieved by the first cohort of post-16 Diploma achievers. A number of models explored the outcome 'Diploma grade':

- a 'basic' overall model, including a number of learner-level variables which could have an impact on Diploma grade, for example gender, prior attainment at Key Stage 4, and special educational needs (model 13)

- an 'interaction model' which explored the relevance of the interactions between variables (such as gender and Diploma subject) on Diploma grade (model 14)

- a model including consortium-level variables on Diploma grade (model 15)

Learners were compared with an average learner, or for learners from different categories, compared to a default category, known as a base case (for example females were compared with males, the different Diploma subjects were compared with Engineering and different ethnic groups were compared to the 'White British' group).

See Appendix A for detail of each model (models 13, 14 and 15).

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[40] Grades achieved in the different Diploma levels are essentially different outcomes, and so we did not combine them in our core set of models, instead focusing solely on Advanced learners – the majority group. Similarly, a U grade is a qualitatively different outcome to achieving an A*-E, and the relationship between background factors and achieving a U grade is likely to be different. Therefore, to avoid misleading conclusions being drawn for the majority A*-E group, U grades were also excluded from the core models. The effect this has on modeling results can be seen in the appendix by comparing the core models to models based on the full cohort of Year 13 completers.

Figure 3.1   Characteristics associated with Diploma grades, Year 13
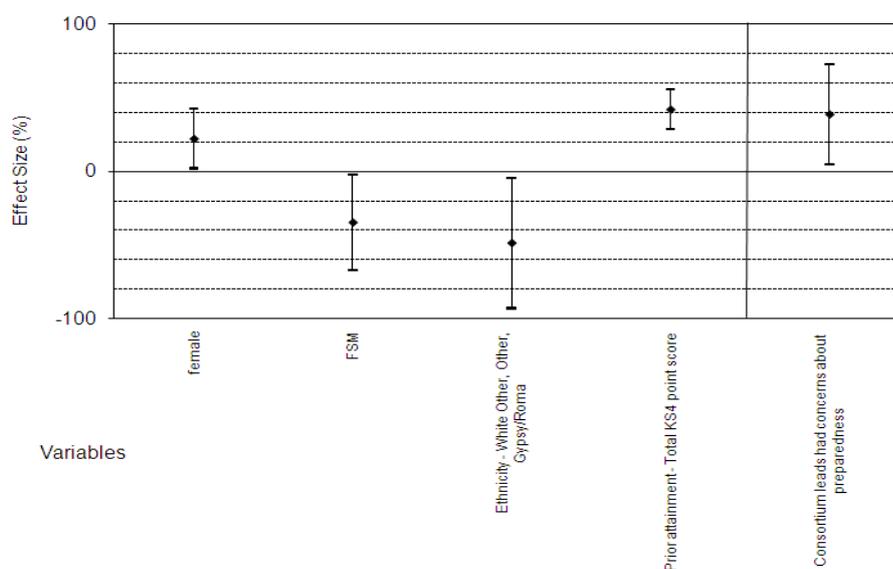
A vertical line partitioning the graph separates variables from different models

As shown in Figure 3.1, compared with base case (detailed above) factors associated with achieving a **Diploma at a higher grade** (indicated by symbols above the central 'average' line in Figure 3.1) included:

- **Consortium characteristics:** learners belonging to a consortium in which leads had concerns *prior to delivery* on their preparedness to deliver Diplomas achieved a higher Diploma grade, suggesting they worked hard to overcome any challenges.
- **Gender.** Females achieved higher grades than males overall. Females who studied the Information Technology Diploma did particularly well.
- **Prior attainment at Key Stage 4**. Higher scores at Key Stage 4 were associated with higher Diploma grades overall.

Compared with base case (detailed above) factors associated with achieving a **lower Diploma grade** (indicated by symbols below the central 'average' line in Figure 3.1) included being eligible for free school meals and being classified as from an 'other' ethnic group.

Interestingly, there were no significant differences between the Diploma grades achieved by post-16 learners on different Diploma subjects.

We had hoped to also conduct analysis of overall Key Stage 5 achievement for post-16 learners, but the data available was not robust enough for this analysis to be feasible. Key Stage 5 scores were only available on the ILR for approximately one third of Year 13 learners; missing data could be due to learners not doing

qualifications with Key Stage 5 point scores attached (i.e. lower level courses) or not completing courses. When matching the one third of learners with Key Stage 5 scores to Diploma participants in DAS, the proportion of learners with data available was too small and disproportionate to be able to carry out meaningful analysis of overall achievement at Key Stage 5 of Diploma learners versus comparison learners.

3.3 Diploma learners' perceptions on their achievements

Interviews with young people ascertained their views on their own Diploma achievements. It should be noted that the qualitative findings from these interviews provide illustration of views only which should not be generalised, as numbers of interviewees are small [17 in total, two of whom had completed a Higher level Diploma post-16, while 15 had completed an Advanced level Diploma].

Overall, evidence suggested that the majority of learners interviewed in 'Year 14' after doing a Diploma post-16 [15 out of 17] had completed the Diploma and, in most cases, they could provide details of their overall grade (which ranged between a grade A* and E). However, one interviewee stated that she did not manage to complete most units of the principal learning component. She further added that she would not be retaking any parts in order to gain the full Diploma. The remaining learner could not provide details of their Diploma grade.

3.3.1 Parts of the Diploma considered most useful

Principal learning
Post-16 learners were largely positive about the principal learning component of the Diploma; the majority of interviewees [15 out of 17] felt that it had been useful (either 'very useful' or 'quite useful'). The most frequently cited reasons included:

- increased knowledge and skills [five] – one interviewee for example said that he was able to apply what he had learnt to his current job
- links to the course they were studying after their Diploma, in terms of, for example, the content covered [three] One interviewee, felt that this had provided him with a 'head start' compared with his peers
- the breadth of units covered [two].

The project
Around two-thirds of interviewees [11] felt that the project was a useful part of the Diploma qualification. Some comments [three] indicated that learners valued the experience because it had helped prepare them for the way in which assessments were undertaken at university. One interviewee for example, felt that the project had given him a good insight into how to conduct his dissertation. Examples of other responses provided included:

- developed an understanding of how to use tools and equipment
- provided the opportunity to do practical work

- developed soft skills such as confidence

- provided the opportunity to focus on an area of interest.

Amongst those learners who expressed less positive views [five], there was some evidence [two] to suggest that while the project was enjoyable, on reflection, it had not been useful because they had not since put what they had learnt into practice.

Work placement

Learners were also largely positive about the work placement element [12]. More frequently cited reasons included; helping to determine possible career options for the future [three] and providing hands-on, practical experience [two].

A small number of learners [three] did however report that they did not have an opportunity to undertake a work placement. One interviewee attributed this to the course being disorganised and as a result, having to carry out work for different units.

Other employer involvement

Overall, learners appeared most positive about other employer involvement, with the majority [14 out of 17] reporting that they found it useful. Interviewees enjoyed opportunities to undertake visits to different companies [seven] because, for example, they were able to see and experience the work that is undertaken and gain and extend their knowledge. In addition, guest speakers were also considered valuable; one interviewee considered that such discussions helped provide an understanding of the organisation.

Personal Learning and Thinking Skills

Learners appeared least positive about the personal learning and thinking skills component; just under half of the interviewees [seven] reported that they were not useful. Some comments suggested that these were an additional burden, with comments such as 'tedious' and 'repetitive' being expressed. It is worth noting, however, that around two-fifths [seven learners] lacked awareness that this was part of the Diploma or could not recall doing this component. These findings could be due to the fact that PLTS were often embedded in other components of the Diploma and not explicit; if learners are unaware of PLTS they might not recognise the value.

Additional and specialist learning

As learners interviewed post-16 either did a Higher level Diploma [two] or an Advanced level Diploma [15], they will all have had to complete the ASL component (only those doing a Progression level would not do this component). Half of those interviewees who expressed an opinion [seven] felt that the additional and specialist learning part of the Diploma was useful. A few learners for example, reported that it complemented the rest of the Diploma. Having acquired additional knowledge and since having had the opportunity to put the knowledge and skills into practice were examples of other responses provided by interviewees. In a small number of cases [three], learners were less positive about this part of the qualification. Two comments suggested that, on reflection, interviewees would have preferred to have taken a

different qualification (for example, mathematics). To expand, one felt that this would have been helpful with the more technical aspects of the course he was currently undertaking. He also stated that this was a qualification that universities wanted.

Here again, there was some indication to suggest that learners [six] lacked knowledge that this component was part of the Diploma.

Functional Skills

Around half of learners [eight] felt that the functional skills were useful which two interviewees attributed to not having gained a pass in a related subject (for example, mathematics) at GCSE level. Being able to apply their learning to 'real life' situations, perceiving them as relevant to a particular course or having been requested by an employer to have achieved this aspect of the Diploma, were examples of other responses provided by interviewees.

The most frequently cited response [mentioned by five out of nine learners] amongst those who felt that they were not useful related to already having achieved GCSEs in some or all subjects. To illustrate, one interviewee commented: *'...it was stupid, a waste of time and no-one else had to do them – only Diploma students'.*

3.3.2   Satisfaction

Most interviewees interviewed after completing a Diploma post-16 [13 of 17] were satisfied (either 'very satisfied' or 'quite satisfied') with the Diploma course overall. Around half of those who were satisfied [five] reasoned that the course had helped them to develop and further extend their knowledge and skills. In addition, satisfaction amongst a few interviewees [two] related to the progression opportunities the Diploma provided, in terms of, for example, being accepted onto a university course.

Despite a largely positive response, some interviewees spoke of the problems associated with being the first cohort to undertake the course. Issues related to a lack of organisation, lack of understanding amongst teaching staff and uncertainty surrounding the assessment criteria. To illustrate this point, one learner remarked: *'...they* [teachers] *seemed in the dark about what we were supposed to be doing'.*

3.3.3   Parts of the Diploma considered particularly difficult

Overall, most learners did not find any parts of the Diploma particularly difficult. However, some interviewees [seven] spoke more generally about the challenges associated with the course in terms of, for example, the workload, the time required to undertake the assignments, lack of structure and organisation with regard to delivery.

Around a third of interviewees [five] reported that they would have welcomed more practical application. To expand this point, one learner felt that this would have been beneficial in terms of helping to provide a greater understanding of how to use particular resources and the rationale behind it. In addition, two interviewees said that

the opportunity to focus more on a particular area of interest would have been appealing.

3.3.4   Attainment and outcomes

Evidence indicated that learners [nine] lacked understanding about the way in which their work for the principal learning was assessed. The following comment provides an illustration of the confusion about the marks awarded: *'I got a grade A for my project, but D and E grades for some assignments, and I never understood how there could be such a difference…'* In two cases, comments further suggested that teachers also lacked clarity about what was expected.

Overall, it appeared that most learners lacked understanding about how each part of the Diploma (for example, the principal learning or the project) contributed to the final grade, as illustrated by the following comment: *'the Diploma is supposed to be equivalent to three and a half A-Levels but it's not clear how that is worked out'.*

In contrast, a small number of interviewees [four] said that this only became clear at the end of the course; one interviewee stated that during which time teaching staff had gained a better understanding.

Some learners [seven] reported receiving an alternative record of achievement which included certificates (in some cases, this was a single certificate, while in other cases this had been provided for each unit) [five] or a progression statement.

Over half of learners [ten] said that they were happy with their Diploma result. However, amongst those who were not [six], reasons included:

- Capability to have achieved better grades. One interviewee reflected on his experience, stating that he was very keen and eager at the outset to perform well but due to the qualification being new and the problems experienced as a result of that, motivation levels decreased.
- Grades not having matched expectations.
- Confusion regarding the way in which the units should be taught.

Of those who expressed an opinion, there was evidence to suggest that learners particularly valued the knowledge and skills they had learnt because, for example, they had been able to apply them to their current course or employment. Some learners [five] particularly valued the soft skills that they had acquired such as project management, independent working, organisation and time management.

Over a third of interviewees said that if they could go back in time, they *would* do a Diploma again [seven]. Reasons expressed included, having enjoyed the course, providing the opportunity to progress onto a chosen course and feeling pleased with what had been achieved. Six learners stated that they would not do a Diploma again. In a few cases, interviewees reported that they were unable to progress onto a course that they wanted to undertake, or that it would have been beneficial to opt for

a qualification recognised by universities. Those remaining [four] were unsure if they would do a Diploma again. Reasons given were the perception that the qualification is not accepted by universities and lack of awareness amongst employers and institutions about the course.

Approximately half of interviewees stated that they *would* recommend taking a Diploma to another young person [nine]. In a few cases, learners highlighted the importance of having a key interest in the particular subject area.

The main reasons for learners not recommending the Diploma to another young person related to poor organisation and lack of clarity in terms of, for example, the assessment and what is required in order to achieve a particular grade.

4 Diploma Learners' Destinations

Key findings

- The majority of pre-16 Diploma and comparison learners were able to be matched to NPD and the ILR which suggests that they had progressed to post-16 education destinations and were therefore engaged in education or training. Both groups were most likely to be attending an FE/HE college[41].

- Those who did a Foundation level Diploma pre-16 were more likely than those who did a Higher Level to progress to an FE/HE college; those who did a Higher level were more likely than learners who did Foundation level to go to a school with a sixth form.

- Surprisingly (given that they score highly at Key Stage 4 overall), learners who did Engineering pre-16 were marginally less likely than other learners to be registered at a post-16 education establishment, suggesting they might join the workforce earlier than learners doing other Diploma subjects. Those who did Information Technology were marginally more likely to have progressed to a post-16 establishment.

- Interviews with learners suggests that when they progressed to post-16 education, most said that their current course accepted their Diploma as part of the entry requirements.

- The majority of Diploma learners interviewed remained in education or training post-18 (commonly doing degree courses). Some Year 14 learners who had studied for a Diploma post-16 who were interviewed reported a lack of understanding amongst university staff about the Diploma qualification.

4.1 Post-16 destinations of pre-16 Diploma completers

Analysis was undertaken to explore the post-16 destinations of learners who had completed a Diploma pre-16.[42] Diploma completers were matched to the NPD and the ILR post-16 data which showed whether learners were registered as attending a post-16 education institution.

Table 4.1 shows that the majority of Diploma completers could be matched to NPD or the ILR, suggesting that they were indeed attending a post-16 education institution following completion of their Diploma pre-16. Five per cent of Diploma completers were not matched and therefore might not be registered at any of the institutions; this could suggest that they are either employed or not in education, employment or training (NEET). The proportion of completers that were registered in NPD or the ILR but the institution was unknown was similar (six per cent). Diploma completers were most frequently registered as attending an FE college or a school with sixth form (34 per cent and 32 per cent respectively).

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[41] A college of Further Education where Higher Education courses are also taught.
[42] Note that the analysis focused on learners who did one of the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10; it excluded learners who did a one-year course.

Table 4.1 Post-16 destinations of pre-16 Diploma completers

Post-16 destination	Diploma completers %
FE/HE college	34
Schools with sixth forms (comprehensive to 18, Grammar and Academies)	32
Sixth form college	12
Tertiary college	8
In NPD/ILR but institution unknown	6
Other secondary schools (including comprehensive to 16, secondary modern, middle schools and other)	3
Learner not matched to NPD/ILR	5
N	3545

Sources: Diploma participants in DAS matched to National Pupil Dataset and Individual Learner Record (see Section 1.2.1).

Diploma learners who had completed any of the first five Diploma subjects were all most likely to have been registered at an FE college and/or in schools with sixth forms. As might be expected due to the practical nature of the course, Diploma completers who had undertaken a Construction and the Built Environment Diploma (53 per cent) were most commonly registered at an FE college.

Five per cent of all Diploma completers could be identified in 2010/11 participation data as undertaking another Diploma qualification. It is not possible to comment, however, on the type and level of course studied by other learners known to be registered at a post-16 education institution. In general, of those who embarked on another Diploma, most learners chose to undertake a Diploma in the same subject as they undertook pre-16. The majority of these learners were undertaking an Advanced Diploma.

4.2 Post-16 destinations of pre-16 Diploma participants compared with the comparison group

Post-16 destinations of Diploma participants were compared with destinations of the comparison group (those in the equivalent academic age groups in the same schools not appearing in the DAS participation data) by exploring whether they were registered in the NPD at a school sixth form or on the ILR at other post-16 institutions.

As shown in Table 4.2 below, the majority of Diploma participants and comparison learners were matched to NPD or the ILR, suggesting they were attending some type of post-16 education institution. Nine per cent of the Diploma participants and eight per cent of the comparison learners were not matched, so we are unable to comment on their post-16 destination. Similar proportions of learners were registered in NPD or the ILR but the type of institution they attended was unknown. However, it is clear that Diploma participants and comparison learners were most likely to be registered as attending an FE/HE college (38 and 32 per cent respectively) or a school with a sixth form (24 and 31 per cent). Interestingly, Diploma participants were slightly more likely than the comparison learners to be registered at an FE/HE college, whereas those in the comparison group were slightly more likely than Diploma participants to be attending a school sixth form. Comparison learners were also slightly more likely than Diploma participants to be attending a sixth form college (12 and nine per cent). Similar proportions were attending a tertiary college. Small proportions of learners were attending other types of institutions.

The data did not provide information on the type of course studied post-16 (including whether Diploma participants went on to do another Diploma post-16).

Table 4.2   Post-16 destinations of Diploma participants compared to the comparison group

Post-16 destination	Diploma participants %	Comparison group %
FE/HE college	38	32
Schools with sixth forms (comprehensive to 18, Grammar and Academies)	24	31
Sixth form college	9	12
Tertiary college	8	7
In NPD/ILR but institution unknown	9	7
Other secondary schools (including special schools, comprehensive to 16, secondary modern, middle schools and other)	3	2
Learner not matched to NPD/ILR	9	8
N	7762	124983

Sources: Diploma participants in DAS and comparison learners in the same schools, matched to National Pupil Dataset and Individual Learner Record (see Section 1.2.1).

As shown in Table 4.3 below, a total of 15 per cent of Diploma participants who were doing a Foundation Diploma, compared with eight per cent doing a Higher Diploma, were not matched to NPD or the ILR, suggesting that they might not be attending an education institution post-16. Of those matched to NPD/ILR who had participated in a Foundation *or* a Higher level Diploma, learners in both groups were most likely to

have gone on to attend an FE/HE college (although proportions were greatest amongst learners who had participated in a Foundation Diploma; 50 per cent compared with 36 per cent participating in a Higher Diploma). Those who had participated in a Higher Diploma were more likely to have gone on to a school with a sixth form compared to those who participated in a Foundation Diploma (27 per cent compared with 12 per cent). Similarly, they were also more likely to have gone on to attend a sixth form college (11 per cent compared with three per cent).

Table 4.3   Post-16 destinations of Diploma participants, by Diploma level

Post-16 destination	Foundation level Diploma participants %	Higher level Diploma participants %
FE/HE college	50	36
Schools with sixth forms (comprehensive to 18, Grammar and Academies)	12	27
In NPD/ILR but institution unknown	11	8
Tertiary college	6	8
Sixth form college	3	11
Other secondary schools (including special schools, comprehensive to 16, secondary modern, middle schools and other)	3	3
Learner not matched to NPD/ILR	15	8
N	1538	6224

Sources: Diploma participants in DAS matched to National Pupil Dataset and Individual Learner Record (see Section 1.2.1).

Across all Diploma subjects, learners were most likely to have progressed to a FE/HE college than other post-16 destinations, although the proportion of learners doing so was highest amongst those who did Construction and the Built Environment (50 per cent compared with between 38 and 29 per cent of learners who did other subjects). Those doing Construction and the Built Environment pre-16 were least likely to have gone on to a school with a sixth form (12 per cent compared with between 28 and 24 per cent of learners who did other subjects).

4.3   Characteristics associated with post-16 destinations

Multi-level modelling analysis was carried out to explore the characteristics that influenced whether or not learners could be matched to NPD or the ILR post-16

institutions (indicating they remained in education post-16), comparing Diploma participants with the comparison group (Appendix A).

A number of models explored the outcome 'attending post-16 education':

- a 'basic' overall model, including a number of learner-level variables which could have an impact on whether learners went on to post-16 education, for example gender, special education needs, and Diploma subject and level (for Diploma learners) (model 19)

- an 'interaction model' which explored the relevance of the interactions between variables (such as prior attainment and Diploma subject) on whether learners progressed to post-16 education (model 20)

- a model including consortium-level variables for *all* learners (as comparison learners were from the same schools as Diploma learners and therefore in the same consortia). (model 21)

See Appendix A for details of each model (models 19, 20 and 21).

Figure 4.1   Characteristics associated with post-16 destinations
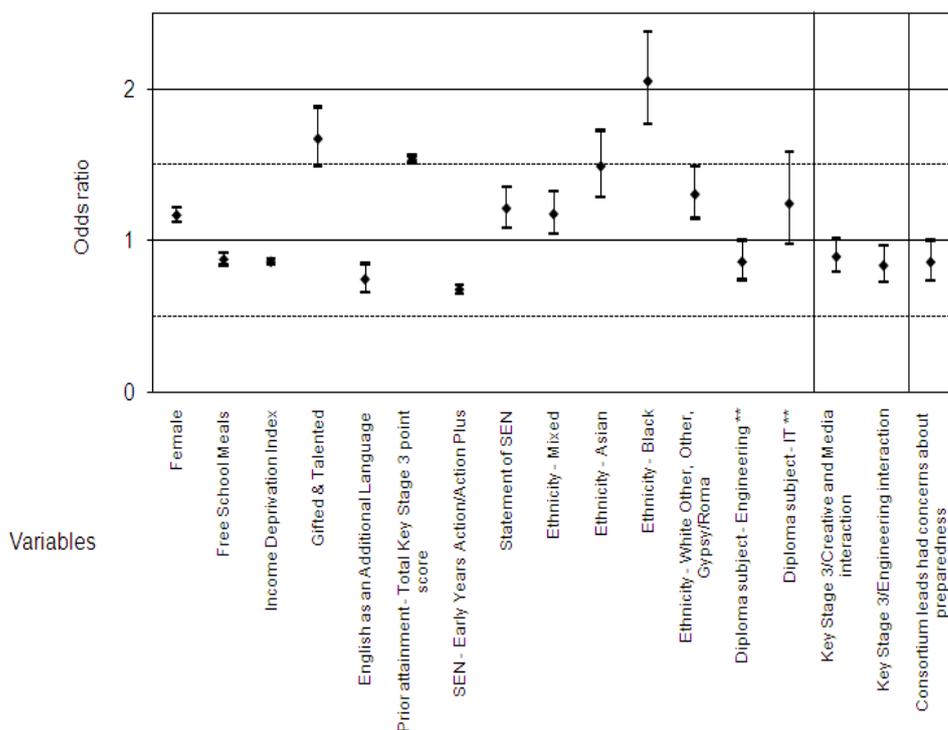
A vertical line partitioning the graph separates variables from different models

**Significant at 10 per cent level (see Appendix A)*

Odds ratios apply here as this Figure is based on logistic regression analysis

Positive influences on progression are illustrated with an odds ratio above 1 in Figure 4.1; negative influences are illustrated below 1. As shown in Figure 4.1 above,

overall, across *all* learners (Diploma participants and comparison learners), the models revealed that, accounting for all other factors, the following Diploma-specific variables had an influence on progression:

- **Diploma subject:** there was some evidence to suggest that learners who participated in Engineering were marginally less likely than other learners to be registered post-16 on NPD or the ILR (suggesting they might join the workforce earlier than those doing other Diploma subjects), whereas those who participated in Information Technology were marginally more likely. See model 19.

- **Interaction between prior attainment at Key Stage 3 and Diploma subject:** overall, there was a positive relationship between Key Stage 3 point scores and whether learners went on to attend a post-16 education institution. However, this relationship was weakened for Diploma learners who participated in Creative and Media or Engineering (illustrated in Figure 4.1 after the vertical line[43]). There were no other significant interactions. See model 20.

- **Consortium preparedness prior to Diploma delivery:** learners in consortia in which leads had expressed a number of concerns about preparedness prior to Diploma delivery were less likely to go on to attend a post-16 institution than learners in consortia where leads had lower levels or no concerns. This is surprising given findings reported above which suggest that learners in such consortia achieved better Diploma grades and overall Key Stage 4 scores. See model 21.

Other variables which had a statistically significant influence on progression (see Model 19 in Appendix A) were:

- **Gender**: females were more likely than males to attend an education institution post-16

- **Gifted and Talented**: those categorised as such were more likely than those not to be attending post-16 education

- **Eligibility for free school meals**: those eligible for free school meals were less likely than those not eligible for free school meals to appear in NPD or the ILR

- **English as an Additional Language**: those categorised as such were less likely to be attending an education establishment post-16.

4.4 Learners' perceptions of their post-16 destinations

Interviews with learners explored perceptions of post-16 destinations, although it should be noted that the findings highlighted here provide an illustration of views only which should not be generalised, as numbers of interviewees are small [25]. Nevertheless, the majority of Year 12 learners interviewed, who had finished their pre-16 Diploma qualification, reported being in post-16 education [23 out of 25 interviewees]. Interviewees were undertaking a range of courses across different subject areas, with around two-thirds [16 interviewees] studying a course at Level 3.

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[43] Although the Figure shows the interaction between Key Stage 3 point scores and learners who participated in an Engineering or Creative and Media Diploma *below* the line illustrating an odds ratio of 1, suggesting there is a negative relationship with progression, there is in fact just a *weakened* relationship for those Diploma subjects (it is still positive, given that the relationship between Key Stage 3 point scores and progression was positive overall).

The courses tended to be either BTEC or A-Level qualifications. However, a small number of interviewees [four] had taken a Diploma at a higher level either in the same or a different subject.

More than half [13] of learners reported that their current course was either directly linked [seven] or indirectly linked [six] to their Diploma subject. Despite having chosen to specialise in their particular Diploma subject pre-16 level, just under half of learners [10 out of 23] stated that their current course was not linked to their Diploma subject. Amongst those who provided further explanation, reasons included wanting to try something new, a lack of enjoyment or the desire to change from a vocational to a more academic pathway.

Young people were largely studying their post-16 course at a college [12 interviewees] or a school sixth form [11 interviewees] and, in most cases this was at the same institution as they studied their Diploma. Being treated like adults and already having established relationships with other learners and teachers were examples of the reasons identified amongst young people for continuing their studies at the same institution.

While the general view expressed amongst interviewees was that their current course accepted their Diploma as part of the entry requirements, around half of interviewees explained that there was a particular interest in the number of GCSEs or equivalencies and grades achieved. In two cases, young people reported a lack of understanding from the institution they had applied to about the qualification. One young person for example, recalled that the institution accepted the qualification only after having sought out additional information. Additionally, two young people expressed concern that universities may not accept the Diploma as part of entry requirements in the future.

One young person who was currently in employment stated that his employer lacked understanding about the Diploma qualification. He was required to have achieved a few GCSEs at grade C or above and he reported that the ICT functional skills was of particular interest to the employer because there was an expectation that he would use computers as part of his role. In contrast, another learner who had applied to the Royal Marines to do Engineering said that he had been informed that they would not accept functional skills in place of GCSE qualifications.

4.4.1 Perceptions of the impact of the Diploma on post-16 destinations

According to the views of around two-thirds of interviewees in Year 12, the Diploma experience had, at least to some extent, affected their decision about what to do next. Positive responses included:

- the experience had helped them to identify areas of interest that they wanted to pursue [three]
- enjoyment of the course had led them to continue their studies in the same subject area [two who had embarked on the Engineering Diploma].

Amongst those who felt that the Diploma had a negative impact on their decision, reasons included:

- the course was too focused on a particular subject and that learners preferred to keep their 'options open'
- the course did not meet their expectations due to practical work
- concerns regarding whether universities would accept the Diploma
- the disorganisation of the course was an influencing factor for a small number of Creative and Media learners not to take the course at Level 3.

Half of those interviewees who responded to the question [ten] felt that the Diploma had helped them progress onto their next course. Reasons included:

- previous experience of teachers who would be delivering the course, which as one interviewee stated, meant that they were aware of the teachers' capabilities [three comments]
- the equivalency of the Diploma to 7 GCSEs helped to ensure that they could enrol on their chosen course [two comments]
- the skills and knowledge acquired through the Diploma gave the learners a competitive edge [two comments].

A lack of understanding of the qualification amongst institutions [one comment] and having gained a sufficient number of GCSEs at an appropriate grade anyway [two comments] were examples of the reasons provided amongst those interviewees who felt that the Diploma had not helped them get onto their course.

Overall, it appeared that staff at institutions that young people applied to had an understanding of the Diploma because in most cases they offered or delivered the qualification.

4.4.2 Choices of post-16 courses

Approximately two-thirds of interviewees [16] had progressed on to their first choice of course after leaving school, suggesting that they had achieved the required entry requirements and that the Diploma was perceived by institutions as appropriate for entry.

Nonetheless, amongst those who had not engaged in their first choice of course, reasons included reluctance amongst institutions to accept the Diploma as entry on to the course, the lack of relevance (according to learners) of the Diploma to future career plans and not having achieved the grades required.

4.5   Post-18 destinations of post-16 Diploma achievers

The evaluation planned to analyse the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data which provides details of individual pupils' progression to higher education, but the data relevant to the first Diploma cohort's progression will not be available until 2012. However, UCAS recently published the findings from their investigation of the first cohort of Diploma applicants and Diploma entry requirements for higher education.[44] In total, 743 students who had completed an Advanced or Progression Diploma applied to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in 2009/2010. Applications were most frequently received from those who had undertaken the Creative and Media Diploma (229 applicants). In contrast, fewest applications had been received from those who had completed the Construction and the Built Environment Diploma (75 applicants)[45]. However, it should be noted that fewer students took the Construction and the Built Environment Diploma.

Diploma learners applied to all types of universities but most frequently applied to two Mission Groups[46]; Alliance Universities and Million Plus (32 per cent and 30 per cent respectively) institutions. Courses applied for most often related to the Diploma principal learning component. For example, learners who had undertaken the Construction and the Built Environment Diploma applied to courses related to subject areas such as civil engineering or architecture.

In terms of acceptance rates, over two-thirds of all students who had undertaken a Diploma (503 learners, 68 per cent) were accepted onto a HE course by 27 October 2010, a pattern which is largely consistent with the percentage of UCAS applicants overall. Applications were accepted across all Mission Groups, although the groups that most commonly accepted Diploma applicants by that date were Alliance Universities followed by Million Plus institutions (176 and 167 respectively). Most (83 per cent) were accepted on to Honours Degrees.

4.5.1   Learners' perceptions of their post-18 destinations

Of the 17 'Year 14' learners who were interviewed, the majority who had finished their Diploma [13] were in education or training[47]. Interviewees were more commonly undertaking a Degree course [eight]. Examples of other types of qualifications cited included an NVQ, HND or an apprenticeship.

Overall, it appeared that most interviewees amongst those commenting felt that their current course was linked to their Diploma subject. Where explanation was provided,

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[44] UCAS (2010) *UCAS 14-19 Diploma Project Findings.* [online]. Analysis of the first cohort of Diploma applicants and Diploma entry requirements. Available: http://www.ucas.ac.uk/documents/diploma/diplomaproject-findings.pdf [9 May 2011].
[45] In addition, a total of 165 Society, Health and Development learners, 144 Engineering learners and 130 Information Technology learners applied to HEIs.
[46] Mission groups are defined as *'…groups of higher education institutions with common aims and values'* (p8).
[47] It should be noted that the qualitative findings from these interviews provide illustration of views only which should not be generalised, as numbers of interviewees are small.

some learners reported that they had previously covered some of the content while undertaking the Diploma. One reported, for example, that this was beneficial because his experience of the subject had been broader than his current peers.

Around half of those learners [four out of nine] who had been accepted to university reported a lack of understanding amongst staff about what the Diploma was. Two interviewees said that they had to provide explanation at an interview.

Moreover, around half of interviewees [four who did Engineering, two who did Information Technology, and one who did Construction and the Built Environment] who had been accepted to university said that they were required to, or that it was favourable to have achieved an A-level in mathematics. Two learners reported that they only became aware of the potential need to have acquired this qualification when they began the application process. In the majority of cases [seven], learners were not interviewed before they received an offer from the university.

Two interviewees who were doing a course at a college or training provider said that they wanted to go to university but that they did not achieve the appropriate grades. In one instance, it was reported that the learner had embarked on a HND in order to be able to apply to university later.

In all cases, those who were undertaking a course at university felt that their Diploma experience had affected their decision of what to do next. For example, some learners [five] felt that the experience had helped them to identify or confirm a particular area of interest that they wanted to pursue further. In addition, two learners said that the experience had provided them with an indication of the progression options that were available to them.

In addition, most learners [eight out of nine] studying a course at university felt that their Diploma had helped them to get on the university course, at least to some extent. Two interviewees, for example, felt that particular components such as the project or the work experience were particularly valued by the university. Providing a qualification in a related subject and being able to see the advantage of having already covered a broad subject content were examples of other responses reported by interviewees.

Overall, the majority of learners [12] appeared to be currently engaged in the route that they tried to embark on. However, amongst those learners who sought alternative routes, reasons for not doing so included the qualification not having insufficient currency and not achieving the grades required.

5   Conclusions

The final section of the report presents conclusions and implications for policy and practice.

What can we say about the first Diploma cohort's experience and achievements?

The evaluation found a similar pattern of Diploma achievement for pre-16 and post-16 learners. Achievement was concentrated in grade B and below for all levels of Diploma qualifications at both pre- and post-16. There was less achievement of Diplomas at grades A* and A, and proportions achieving A* and A were lower compared with proportions achieving those grades for GCSEs and A levels (although it is acknowledged that a Diploma is equivalent to multiple GCSEs or A levels).

Diploma participants scored higher at Key Stage 4 compared with learners in their school in the comparison group. Monitoring this difference over time would let us know whether it is sustained, and if it is, what the likely explanatory factors are. It has unfortunately not been possible to explore whether Diploma learners score higher than comparison learners at Key Stage 5.

It would have been interesting to carry out more detailed comparisons of Diploma and comparison learners by the level of qualifications taken. However, the NPD does not divide learners into definitive groups of Level 1 or Level 2 learners.

There were similarities between pre- and post-16 Diploma learners. Learners in both age groups were generally satisfied with their Diploma and the grade they achieved. Overall, females and those with higher prior attainment achieved a higher grade for their Diploma in both the pre- and post-16 age groups which is consistent with the national picture of qualification attainment.

The evaluation found that learners in both age groups considered principal learning, the project and employer involvement in the Diploma to be the most useful elements of the Diploma. The range of topics covered by the principal learning component was considered helpful for deciding future pathways. The project was useful for developing communication, research and team working skills and, post-16, for preparation for assignments in higher education. Employer involvement helped learners gain a valuable insight into the way companies operate. Learners' awareness of PLTS and ASL was limited and these components were seen to be less useful, possibly due to a lack of awareness.

What can we say about the first Diploma cohort's progression pathways?

Analysis undertaken to explore post-16 destinations of learners who had completed a Diploma pre-16 showed that the majority had progressed onto education following their Diploma. This implies that the qualification has not had an adverse effect on

their progression. Indeed, the Diploma qualification is now included in the course entry requirements for FE and HE institutions, providing further evidence of its positive exchange value when young people are applying for either post-16 or post-18 courses. Data relevant to the destinations of the first post-16 Diploma cohort was not available for analysis, but the recent report published by UCAS showed that over two-thirds of all students who had undertaken a Diploma were accepted onto a HE course.

Learners' decisions on which pathways to pursue are influenced by their Diploma (many went on to study the same subject area, for instance), suggesting that they do not just value their Diploma experience in isolation from their future plans but that it has achieved a significant place in their decision-making process.

What are the implications for policy and practice?

While pre- and post-16 learners were satisfied with the Diploma experience and their level of achievement, some post-16 learners felt that there was a lack of understanding among HE staff regarding the Diploma qualification. However, this was the first cohort to apply to HE so this was not entirely unexpected. Our survey of HEIs in 2009/10 found increasing levels of awareness of the qualification and its relevance to undergraduate study. Building on this will be instrumental for the Diploma to be used by young people for entry to HE.

Learners' lack of awareness and understanding of ASL and PLTS means that they are less likely to value these components of the Diploma. If these two elements are to be maintained as part of the qualification then there needs to be considerable raising of learners' awareness and understanding of them, without which the educational benefit of these elements will not be realised. It should be noted that evidence from our survey of HEIs revealed that some HEIs request certain qualifications as ASL for entry on to some HE courses, indicating the importance they place on the ASL component. In addition, the Education and Skills survey of 694 employers, conducted in 2010,[48] revealed that improving the employability skills of young people entering the labour market is businesses' top priority for both schools and universities (PLTS could be particularly relevant here).

There is some learner dissatisfaction with functional skills. They were considered too similar to GCSEs, not relevant or too challenging. This indicates that a collaborative approach by policy makers and practitioners could be helpful to ensure that functional skills are embedded effectively within the Diploma. If this is achieved, learners could be more motivated and committed when they can see the value, relevance and utility of studying functional skills.

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[48] See CBI (2010). *Ready to grow: business priorities for education and skills. Education and skills survey, 2010.* [online]. Available:
http://www.cbi.org.uk/ndbs/content.nsf/802737AED3E3420580256706005390AE/C4393B860D00478E8 02576C6003B0679

There was evidence from interviews with learners that some who had failed units of the Diploma did not always have the opportunity to re-take them. It was not clear from the qualitative data if failed units had been assessed via controlled assessments which might be difficult for teachers to re-schedule due to time constraints. This should be explored further; it is important to consider whether it is necessary for learners to re-take units in order to progress following their Diploma.

Finally, most Diploma learners, regardless of age group, Diploma subject and level, would recommend the Diploma to another learner which reflects their largely positive experience of studying for this qualification.

6   Reference List

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Appendix A   Technical Details

A1   Definition of Diploma point score equivalences

Progression and Advanced/Level 3

Each of the accredited components of the Diploma at Level 3 (Principal Learning, Additional and Specialist Learning) attracts points independently, which are dependent on the grade achieved. These component points are added together along with an additional 147 points to arrive at the point score for the Diploma qualification where a learner has passed the Level 3 Diploma. 147 points is allocated for achieving a pass grade (A*-E) in the Advanced and Progression Diploma, reflecting that the Diploma is a complex, composite qualification requiring the achievement and completion of a number of additional components.

Foundation/Level 1 and Higher/Level 2

Where a pupil passes either the Foundation or Higher Diploma the performance figures used for reporting in the Performance Tables are again derived from the accredited components only (excluding work experience and Personal Learning and Thinking Skills).

Anyone passing the Foundation Diploma will be treated as meeting the Level 1 threshold (5+A*-G GCSEs and equivalent) in the Performance Tables. Anyone passing the Higher Diploma will meet the Level 2 threshold (5+A*-C GCSEs and equivalent).

Where a pupil has not passed the Foundation, Higher or Advanced Diploma overall, but has passed some individual components, those components are included in the relevant performance tables.

Details of the points awarded and the threshold contribution for the Principal Learning and Project elements at the different levels can be found on the following page.

Points awarded and the threshold contribution for the Principal Learning and Project elements

Advanced and Progression Diplomas (Level 3)

	A*	A	B	C	D	E	Level 1 Threshold	Level 2 Threshold	Level 3 Threshold
Principal Learning	450	405	360	315	270	225	120	120	75
Extended Project	90	81	72	63	54	45	24	24	15
Additional and Specialist learning	Points awarded according to qualifications taken and grades achieved						As per individual qualifications and grades		
Points on achieving a pass in the Diploma	147	147	147	147	147	147			

Higher Diplomas (Level 2)

	A*	A	B	C	D	E	Level 1 Threshold	Level 2 Threshold	Level 3 Threshold
Principal Learning	290	260	230	200			100	100	0
Project (Level 2)	29	26	23	20			10	10	0
Additional and Specialist learning	Points awarded according to qualifications taken and grades achieved						As per individual qualifications and grades		

Foundation Diplomas (Level 1)

	A*	A	B	C	D	E	Level 1 Threshold	Level 2 Threshold	Level 3 Threshold
Principal Learning	102	84	57				60	0	0
Project (Level 2)	17	14	9.5				10	0	0
Additional and Specialist learning	Points awarded according to qualifications taken and grades achieved						As per individual qualifications and grades		

Points awarded for GCSEs and A levels (for the purpose of calculating equivalence to Diplomas)

GCSEs

GCSE Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
New points	58	52	46	40	34	28	22	16

A levels

A-level Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E
New points	300	270	240	210	180	150

A2 Variables included in multi-level models

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 in the main report include multi-level model analysis which explored characteristics associated with:

- Diploma grade awarded to Diploma achievers
- Overall Key Stage 4 point scores, comparing Diploma participants with comparison learners
- Post-16 destinations.

A number of models were carried out to explore each of these outcomes. Multi-level modelling estimates the true relationship between each background factor and the outcome of interest, whilst taking account of other influences. Details of each model and significant variables are given in the following tables. The relevant section numbers where the models are summarised in the main report are given for reference. In most cases, the commentary appears in the main report and the table only appears below. The exceptions are models exploring Year 11 and Year 13 Diploma grades for *all* learners (including those who received a U grade and those who did not study the most prevalent Diploma level). In this case, the main report focuses on the most prevalent learners (for pre-16 this was learners who did a Higher Diploma and received a grade A*-C, for post-16 it was those who did an Advanced Diploma and received grades A*-E). Note that learners who achieved a grade A*-C (pre-16) or A*-E (post-16) are categorised as 'achievers'; those who received a U grade are categorised as 'completers'.

Section 2.2. Model 1 outcome: Year 11 Diploma Grade – Higher Level Diploma achieving A* to C grades

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	0.254
NPDidaci	Deprivation index	-0.192
Gifted	Gifted and Talented (model compares learners identified as Gifted and Talented with any who are not identified as such)	0.161
Ethnica	'Asian' ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British')	0.287
lolcon	Diploma participant who did Construction and the Built Environment (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering learners)	-0.391
lolcreat	Diploma participant who did Creative and Media (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering learners)	-0.318
Lolit	Diploma participant who did Information Technology (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering Learners)	-0.231
lolSoc	Diploma participant who did Society, Health and Development (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering learners)	-0.197
KS3_totpts	Key Stage 3 total point score	0.010
N=2653		

Section 2.2. Model 2 outcome: Year 11 Diploma Grade – Higher Level Diploma achieving A* to C grades*

*Model 2 includes interactions

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	0.254
NPDidaci	Deprivation index	-0.192
Gifted	Gifted and Talented (model compares learners identified as Gifted and Talented with any who are not identified as such)	0.161
Ethnica	'Asian' ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British')	0.287
lolcon	Diploma participant who did Construction and the Built Environment (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering learners)	-0.391
lolcreat	Diploma participant who did Creative and Media (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering learners)	-0.318
Lolit	Diploma participant who did Information Technology (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering Learners)	-0.231
lolSoc	Diploma participant who did Society, Health and Development (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering learners)	-0.197
KS3_totpts	Key Stage 3 total point score	0.010
N=2653		

Section 2.2. Model 3 outcome: Year 11 Diploma Grade – Higher Level Diploma achieving A* to C grades*

*Model 3 includes consortium variables

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	0.250
NPDidaci	Deprivation index	-0.189
Gifted	Gifted and Talented (model compares learners identified as Gifted and Talented with any who are not identified as such)	0.161
Ethnica	'Asian' ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British')	0.286
lolcon	Diploma participant who did Construction and the Built Environment (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering learners)	-0.430
lolcreat	Diploma participant who did Creative and Media (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering learners)	-0.323
Lolit	Diploma participant who did Information Technology (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering Learners)	-0.234
lolSoc	Diploma participant who did Society, Health and Development (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering learners)	-0.202
KS3_totpts	Key Stage 3 total point score	0.010
Csmall1	Small consortium (3 or fewer schools/ colleges deliver)	0.107**
N=2653		

**Significant only at 10 per cent level

Year 11 Diploma Grade – all Diploma completers

The following three models were carried out to compare the characteristics associated with Diploma grades achieved by the first cohort of *all* Diploma completers in Year 11 (including those who achieved a U grade and those studying a Foundation level Diploma). The main text in the report focuses on the most prevalent learners pre-16, namely those who achieved a Higher Diploma grades A*-C ('achievers'). The following three models (models 4, 5 and 6) have been explored in the appendix only, as some readers might find *all* Diploma completers of interest.

In each model, the Diploma learners were compared with a base case (for example females were compared with males, the different Diploma subjects were compared with Engineering, different ethnic groups were compared to the 'White British' group and foundation level Diploma learners were compared with Higher level Diploma learners). See the following three tables for details of each model.

Across the three models, compared with base case (detailed above) factors associated with achieving a **Diploma at a higher grade** included:

- Completing a Foundation level Diploma[49].

- Being female and studying a Creative and Media Diploma.

- Being female.

- Being classified as gifted and talented.

- Having a statement of special educational need. Note that this result did not apply when considering Higher Diploma achievers only, which suggests that it is a consequence of SEN pupils being more likely to take a Foundation Diploma (for which learners are more likely to achieve a higher grade for a given level of prior attainment).

- Scoring higher at Key Stage 3. However for learners on a Creative and Media Diploma, prior Key Stage 3 attainment had less influence on their Diploma grade compared to those on an Engineering Diploma.

Compared with base case (detailed above) factors associated with achieving a **lower Diploma grade** included:

- Studying Construction and the Build Environment, Creative and Media Diploma or Society, Health and Development Diplomas.

- Being in a large consortium.

- Being eligible for free school meals.

- Having English as an Additional Language.

- Being classified as from a 'Mixed' ethnic group.

- Being from a 'Black' ethnic group.

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[49] It should be noted that those participating in a Foundation Level Diploma can only achieve grades A* to B and U compared with the Higher Level Diploma where grades A* to C and U can be achieved.

Model 4 outcome: Year 11 Diploma Grade – all Diploma completers

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	0.474
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	-0.301
Sens	Statement of Special Educational Needs (model compares learners identified for Statement of Special Educational Needs with any who are not identified as such)	0.484
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	-0.314
Gifted	Gifted and Talented (model compares learners identified as Gifted and Talented with any who are not identified as such)	0.223
ethnicb	'Black' ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British)	-0.422
Ethnicm	'Mixed' (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British)	-0.403
lolcon	Diploma participant who did Construction and the Built Environment (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering learners)	-1.059
lolcreat	Diploma participant who did Creative and Media (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering learners)	-0.599
lolSoc	Diploma participant who did Society, Health and Development (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering learners)	-0.347
DipLevelf	Diploma Level (model compared learners who participated in a Foundation Level Diploma with those who participated in a Higher Level Diploma)	0.323
KS3_totpts	Key Stage 3 total point score	0.016
N=3297		

**Significant only at 10 per cent level

Model 5 outcome: Year 11 Diploma Grade – all Diploma completers*

*Model 5 includes interactions between variables

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	0.206
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	-0.299
Sens	Statement of Special Educational Needs (model compares learners identified for Action/Action Plus with any who are not identified as such)	0.473
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	-0.318
Gifted	Gifted and Talented (model compares learners identified as Gifted and Talented with any who are not identified as such)	0.237
ethnicm	'Mixed' ethnic group (including other and Chinese) (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British' ethnic group)	-0.423
ethnicb	'Black' ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British' ethnic group)	-0.428
lolcon	Diploma participant who did Construction and the Built Environment (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering learners)	-1.028
lolcreat	Diploma participant who did Creative and Media (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering learners)	-0.706
diplevelf	Diploma participant who did Foundation Level (model compared learners who participated in a Foundation Level Diploma with those who participated in a Higher Level Diploma)	0.379
KS3_totpts	Key Stage 3 total point score	0.022
fem_creat	Interaction between being female and doing Creative and Media	0.442
ks3_creat	Interaction between key stage 3 prior attainment and Creative and Media	-0.013
Ks3_it	Interaction between key stage 3 prior attainment and Information Technology	-.008**
N=3297		

**Significant only at 10 per cent level

Model 6 outcome: Year 11 Diploma Grade – all Diploma completers*

*Model 6 includes consortium variables

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	0.491
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	-0.275
Sens	Statement of Special Educational Needs (model compares learners identified for Action/Action Plus with any who are not identified as such)	0.465**
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	-0.336
Gifted	Gifted and Talented (model compares learners identified as Gifted and Talented with any who are not identified as such)	0.217
ethnicm	'Mixed' ethnic group (including other and Chinese) (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British' ethnic group)	-0.361
ethnicb	'Black' ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British' ethnic group)	-0.460
lolcon	Diploma participant who did Construction and the Built Environment (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering learners)	-1.078
lolcreat	Diploma participant who did Creative and Media (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering learners)	-0.622
lolSoc	Diploma participant who did Society, Health and Development (model compared learners who participated in this subject with Engineering learners)	-0.321
diplevelf	Diploma participant who did Foundation Level (model compared learners who participated in a Foundation Level Diploma with those who participated in a Higher Level Diploma)	0.320
KS3_totpts	Key Stage 3 total point score	0.017
CBig2	Large Consortium (over 160 learners) (model compared learners from large consortium with those from a medium-sized consortium)	-0.335
N=3117		

**Significant only at 10 per cent level

Section 2.3 model 7 outcome: Overall Key Stage 4 point scores, Diploma participants compared with comparison learners

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	24.206
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	-22.875
Sennp	Special Educational Needs Early Years Action/Action Plus (model compares learners identified for Action/Action Plus with any who are not identified as such)	-55.856
Sens	Statement of Special Educational Needs (model compares learners with a Statement of SEN with those without a Statement)	-59.217
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	-30.785
Gifted	Gifted and Talented (model compares learners identified as Gifted and Talented with any who are not identified as such)	53.565
Idaci	Deprivation index	-63.450
ethnica	'Asian' ethnic group (including other and Chinese) (model compares learners identified as such with any in other ethnic groups)	21.331
ethnicb	'Black' ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with any in other ethnic groups)	25.286
ethnicoth	'White other' ethnic group (including Gypsy/Roma) (model compares learners identified as such with any in other ethnic groups)	23.731
ethnicr	Ethnic group refused or missing (model compares learners identified as such with any in other ethnic groups)	-8.103
KS3_totpts	Key Stage 3 total point score	3.665
lolcon	Diploma participant who did Construction and the Built Environment (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	63.630
lolcreat	Diploma participant who did Creative and Media (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	74.269
loleng	Diploma participant who did Engineering (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	111.567
lolit	Diploma participant who did Information Technology (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	94.315
lolsoc	Diploma participant who did Society, Health and Development (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	87.972
diplevelf	Diploma participant who did Foundation Level (model compared learners who participated in this level with all learners)	-140.038
N=96119		

Section 2.3 model 8 outcome: Overall Key Stage 4 point scores, Diploma participants compared with comparison learners*

*Model 8 includes interactions between variables

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	23.566
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	-22.965
Sennp	Special Educational Needs Early Years Action/Action Plus (model compares learners identified for Action/Action Plus with any who are not identified as such)	-55.863
Sens	Statement of Special Educational Needs (model compares learners with a Statement of SEN with those without a Statement)	-59.765
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	-30.563
Gifted	Gifted and Talented (model compares learners identified as Gifted and Talented with any who are not identified as such)	53.341
Idaci	Deprivation index	-63.445
ethnica	'Asian' ethnic group (including other and Chinese) (model compares learners identified as such with any in other ethnic groups)	21.632
ethnicb	'Black' ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with any in other ethnic groups)	25.504
ethnicoth	'White other' ethnic group (including Gypsy/Roma) (model compares learners identified as such with any in other ethnic groups)	23.785
ethnicr	Ethnic group refused or missing (model compares learners identified as such with any in other ethnic groups)	-8.087
KS3_totpts	Key Stage 3 total point score	3.651
lolcon	Diploma participant who did Construction and the Built Environment (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	56.088
lolcreat	Diploma participant who did Creative and Media (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	54.594
loleng	Diploma participant who did Engineering (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	105.613
lolit	Diploma participant who did Information Technology (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	91.117
lolsoc	Diploma participant who did Society, Health and Development (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	90.180

diplevelf	Diploma participant who did Foundation Level (model compared learners who participated in this level with all learners)	-146.023
fem_cons	Interaction between being female and doing Construction and the Built Environment	48.634
fem_creat	Interaction between being female and doing Creative and Media	27.524
Ks3_creat	Interaction between key stage 3 prior attainment and Creative and Media	.391
ks3_eng	Interaction between key stage 3 prior attainment and Engineering	1.461
ks3_soc	Interaction between key stage 3 prior attainment and Society, Health and Development	1.299
Ks3_foundation	Interaction between key stage 3 prior attainment and doing a Foundation level Diploma	-1.119
N=96119		

Section 2.3 model 9 outcome: Overall Key Stage 4 point scores, Diploma participants compared with comparison learners*

*Model 9 includes consortium-level variables

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	24.213
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	-22.872
Sennp	Special Educational Needs Early Years Action/Action Plus (model compares learners identified for Action/Action Plus with any who are not identified as such)	-55.842
Sens	Statement of Special Educational Needs (model compares learners with a Statement of SEN with any who do not have a Statement)	-59.207
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	-30.814
Gifted	Gifted and Talented (model compares learners identified as Gifted and Talented with any who are not identified as such)	53.576
Idaci	Deprivation index	-63.354
ethnica	'Asian' ethnic group (including other and Chinese) (model compares learners identified as such with any in other ethnic groups)	21.344
ethnicb	'Black' ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with any in other ethnic groups)	25.364
ethnicoth	'White other' ethnic group (including Gypsy/Roma) (model compares learners identified as such with any in other ethnic groups)	23.780
ethnicr	Ethnic group refused or missing (model compares learners identified as such with any in other ethnic groups)	-8.071
KS3_totpts	Key Stage 3 total point score	3.665
lolcon	Diploma participant who did Construction and the Built Environment (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	63.601
lolcreat	Diploma participant who did Creative and Media (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	74.262
loleng	Diploma participant who did Engineering (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	111.578
Lolit	Diploma participant who did Information Technology (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	94.381

lolsoc	Diploma participant who did Society, Health and Development (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	87.963
diplevelf	Diploma participant who did Foundation Level (model compared learners who participated in this level with all learners)	-140.038
Cbig1	Large diploma consortium (with seven or more schools/colleges delivering diplomas)	18.372
CcrossLA	Diploma consortium crosses local authority boundary	-13.684
Cnonsupp	Consortium-lead received inadequate support from local authority/the then DCSF, QCA and/or other	15.919
N=96119		

Section 2.3 model 10 outcome: Overall Key Stage 4 point scores, Diploma participants compared with comparison learners who responded to the learner survey*

*Model 10 is based on the 705 Year 11 **survey respondents only**, compared with the comparison group

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects**
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	17.070
Sennp	Special Educational Needs Early Years Action/Action Plus (model compares learners identified for Action/Action Plus with any who are not identified as such)	-19.735
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	-34.280
Gifted	Gifted and Talented (model compares learners identified as Gifted and Talented with any who are not identified as such)	30.235
ethnicoth	'White other' ethnic group (including Gypsy/Roma) (model compares learners identified as such with any in other ethnic groups)	36.206
KS3_totpts	Key Stage 3 total point score	3.986
lolcreat	Diploma participant who did Creative and Media (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	119.385
loleng	Diploma participant who did Engineering (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	139.005
lolit	Diploma participant who did Information Technology (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	106.140
lolsoc	Diploma participant who did Society, Health and Development (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	105.624
diplevelf	Diploma participant who did Foundation Level (model compared learners who participated in this level with all learners)	-143.796
Q5mix	Diploma lessons at a mixture of home institutions and other locations	-60.442
Q5other	Diploma lessons at 'other' locations	-32.623
Q6aNone	No participation in work experience	25.304
EnjoySat	Satisfied with Diploma	14.896
Commit	Commitment to learning	16.431
N=705		

**All variables are significant only at 10 per cent level

Section 2.3 model 11 outcome: Overall Key Stage 4 point scores Diploma participants compared with comparison learners who responded to the learner survey*

*Model 11 includes interactions between variables, but is based on 705 Year 11 **survey respondents only**, compared with the comparison group

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects**
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	-45.987
Gifted	Gifted and Talented (model compares learners identified as Gifted and Talented with any who are not identified as such)	31.006
KS3_totpts	Key Stage 3 total point score	4.403
lolcon	Diploma participant who did Construction and the Built Environment (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	
lolcreat	Diploma participant who did Creative and Media (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	82.446
loleng	Diploma participant who did Engineering (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	111.899
lolit	Diploma participant who did Information Technology (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	118.575
lolsoc	Diploma participant who did Society, Health and Development (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	239.475
diplevelf	Diploma participant who did Foundation Level (model compared learners who participated in this level with all learners)	-144.076
fem_soc	Interaction between being female and doing Society, Health and Development	-127.970
fem_creat	Interaction between being female and doing Creative and Media	77.266
Ks3_creat	Interaction between key stage 3 prior attainment and Creative and Media	-1.880
ks3_eng	Interaction between key stage 3 prior attainment and Engineering	2.001
Ks3_it	Interaction between key stage 3 prior attainment and Information Technology	-1.771
ks3_cons	Interaction between key stage 3 prior attainment and Construction and the Built Environment	-3.154
Q5mix	Diploma lessons at a mixture of home institutions and other locations	-65.365
Q5other	Diploma lessons at 'other' locations	-39.342
Q6aNone	No participation in work experience	26.448
EnjoySat	Satisfied with Diploma	13.648
Commit	Commitment to learning	16.883
N=705		

**All variables are significant only at 10 per cent level

Section 2.3 model 12 outcome: Overall Key Stage 4 point scores, Diploma participants compared with comparison learners who responded to the learner survey*

*Point score model 12 includes consortium-level variables, but is based on 705 Year 11 **survey respondents only**, compared with the comparison group

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects**
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	18.091
Sennp	Special Educational Needs Early Years Action/Action Plus (model compares learners identified for Action/Action Plus with any who are not identified as such)	-20.722
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	-35.156
Gifted	Gifted and Talented (model compares learners identified as Gifted and Talented with any who are not identified as such)	29.547
ethnicoth	'White other' ethnic group (including Gypsy/Roma) (model compares learners identified as such with any in other ethnic groups)	38.062
KS3_totpts	Key Stage 3 total point score	3.965
lolcreat	Diploma participant who did Creative and Media (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	117.508
loleng	Diploma participant who did Engineering (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	139.420
Lolit	Diploma participant who did Information Technology (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	105.652
lolsoc	Diploma participant who did Society, Health and Development (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	100.999
diplevelf	Diploma participant who did Foundation Level (model compared learners who participated in this level with all learners)	-143.441
Cbig1	Large diploma consortium (with seven or more schools/colleges delivering diplomas)	74.072
Cchallng	Particular challenges in setting up consortia	-44.656
Cnocon	No concerns about preparedness for Diploma delivery	69.181
Clotscon	Concerned in lots of areas about preparedness for Diploma delivery	79.620
Q5mix	Diploma lessons at a mixture of home institutions and other locations	-61.041
Q5other	Diploma lessons at 'other' locations	-32.842
Q6aNone	No participation in work experience	27.341
EnjoySat	Satisfied with Diploma	15.146
Commit	Commitment to learning	16.191
N=705		

**All variables are significant only at 10 per cent level

Section 3.2 Model 13 outcome: Year 13 Diploma grade, all Advanced level Diploma achievers with grades A* to E

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	0.235
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	-0.395
Ethnicoth	'Other' ethnic group (model compared learners in this ethnic group with 'White British' group)	-0.555
KS4_totpts	Key Stage 4 total point score	0.004
N = 391		

Section 3.2 Model 14 outcome: Year 13 Diploma grade, all Advanced level Diploma achievers with grades A* to E*

*Includes interactions

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	-0.407
ethnicoth	'Other' Ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British' group)	-0.498**
lolCon	Diploma participant who did Construction and the Built Environment (model compared learners who participated in this subject with those who participated in Engineering)	-0.462**
lolCreat	Diploma participant who did Creative and Media (model compared learners who participated in this subject with those who participated in Engineering)	-0.256**
lolit	Diploma participant who did information Technology (model compared learners who participated in this subject with those who participated in Engineering)	-0.592
KS4_totpts	Key Stage 4 total point score	0.004
Fem_IT	Interaction between being female and doing Information technology	0.594
N = 391		

** significant only at 10 per cent level

Section 3.2 Model 15 outcome: Year 13 Diploma grade, all Advanced level Diploma achievers with grades A* to E*

*includes consortium level variables

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	0.277
Sexmiss	Gender missing (model compares to male learners)	0.611**
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	-0.414
ethnicoth	'Other' Ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British' group)	-0.547
lolCreat	Diploma participant who did Creative and Media (model compared learners who participated in this subject with those who participated in Engineering)	-0.264**
lolIit	Diploma participant who did information Technology (model compared learners who participated in this subject with those who participated in Engineering)	-0.382
KS4_totpts	Key Stage 4 total point score	0.003
Clotscon	Consortium concerned in lots of areas regarding preparedness for Diplomas	0.442
Cchallenge	Consortium with particular challenges in setting up the consortium	-0.293**
N = 378		

** significant only at 10 per cent level

Year 13 Diploma grade – all Diploma completers

The following three models were carried out to compare the characteristics associated with Diploma grades achieved by the first cohort of *all* Diploma completers in Year 13 (including those completers who achieved a U grade and those studying a Foundation level Diploma). The main text in the report focuses on the most prevalent learners pre-16, namely those who achieved an Advanced Diploma grades A*-E ('achievers'). The following three models (models 16, 17 and 18) have been explored in the appendix only, as some readers might find *all* Diploma '*completers'* of interest.

In each model, the Diploma Learners were compared with a base case (for example females were compared with males, the different Diploma subjects were compared with Engineering, different ethnic groups were compared to the 'White British' group and Foundation, Higher and Progression level Diploma learners were compared with Advanced level Diploma learners). See the tables below for details of each model. See tables below for the details of each model.

Compared with base case (detailed above) factors associated with achieving a **Diploma at a higher grade** included:

- **Level of Diploma[50].** Completing a Foundation level Diploma or a Higher level Diploma was associated with a higher Diploma grade.

- **Gender.** Females achieved higher grades than males overall.

- **Prior attainment at Key Stage 4**. Higher scores at Key Stage 4 were associated with higher Diploma grades overall. There was a stronger relationship between prior attainment at Key Stage 4 and those studying Society, Health and Development Diploma learners in particular. However, Key Stage 4 attainment had a weaker influence on the Diploma grade of Foundation and Higher level Diploma learners.

Compared with base case (detailed above) factors associated with achieving a **lower Diploma grade** included:

- **Consortium characteristics.** Learners who belonged to a consortium who had experienced challenges in setting up their consortium achieved a lower Diploma grade.

- **Level of Diploma**. Progression level Diploma learners achieved a lower Diploma grade compared with Advanced level Diploma learners.

- **Measures of deprivation**. Learners who were eligible to free school meals achieved a lower Diploma grade compared to those who were not.

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[50] It should be noted that those participating in a Foundation level Diploma can only achieve grades A* to B and U, those participating in a Higher level Diploma can achieve grades A* to C and U, whereas those participating in an Advanced level Diploma can achieve grades A* to E and U grades.

Interestingly, there were no significant differences between the Diploma grades achieved by learners on different Diploma subjects.

Model 16 outcome: Diploma Grade, All year 13 Diploma completers

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	0.397
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	-0.385
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	0.348**
ethnicb	'Black' ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British)	-0.541**
ethnicr	'Refused' ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British' group)	0.876
lolcon	Diploma participant who did Construction and the Built Environment (model compared learners who participated in this subject with those who participated in Engineering)	-0.423**
lolcreat	Diploma participant who did Creative and Media (model compared learners who participated in this subject with those who participated in Engineering)	-0.298**
lolit	Diploma participant who did Information Technology (model compared learners who participated in this subject with those who participated in Engineering)	-0.301**
DipLevelf	Diploma Level (model compared learners who participated in a Foundation level Diploma with those who participated in an Advance level Diploma)	2.916
DipLevelH	Diploma Level (model compared learners who participated in a Higher level Diploma with those who participated in an Advance level Diploma)	0.868
DipLevelP	Diploma Level (model compared learners who participated in a Progression level Diploma with those who participated in an Advance level Diploma)	-0.536
KS4_totpts	Key Stage 4 total point score	0.004
N=607		

** significant only at 10 per cent level

Model 17 outcome: Diploma Grade, All year 13 Diploma completers

*Includes interactions

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	0.244**
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	-0.387
Sens	Statement of Special Educational Needs (model compares learners with a Statement of SEN with any who do not have a Statement)	-0.753**
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	0.353**
ethnicb	'Black' ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British)	-0.522**
ethnicr	Ethnic group refused or missing (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British' group)	0.869
lolcon	Diploma participant who did Construction and the Built Environment (model compared learners who participated in this subject with those who participated in Engineering)	-0.443**
lolcreat	Diploma participant who did Creative and Media (model compared learners who participated in this subject with those who participated in Engineering)	-0.319
loli	Diploma participant who did Information Technology (model compared learners who participated in this subject with those who participated in Engineering)	-0.575
DipLevelf	Diploma Level (model compared learners who participated in a Foundation level Diploma with those who participated in an Advance level Diploma)	2.215
DipLevelH	Diploma Level (model compared learners who participated in a Higher level Diploma with those who participated in an Advance level Diploma)	0.557
DipLevelP	Diploma Level (model compared learners who participated in a Progression level Diploma with those who participated in an Advance level Diploma)	-0.539
KS4_totpts	Key Stage 4 total point score	0.004
Fem_IT	Interaction between being female and doing Information Technology	0.572**
Ks4_soc	Interaction between key stage 4 prior attainment and Society, Health and Development	0.003
Ks4_found	Interaction between key stage 4 prior attainment and Foundation level Diplomas	-0.006
ks4_higher	Interaction between key stage 4 prior attainment and higher level Diplomas	-0.005
N=607		

** significant only at 10 per cent level

Model 18 outcome: Diploma Grade, All year 13 Diploma completers*

*includes consortium level variables

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	0.517
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	-0.385
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	0.455
ethnicb	'Black' ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British' group)	-0.709
ethnicr	Ethnic group refused or missing (model compares learners identified as such with any 'White British' group)	0.956
DipLevelf	Diploma Level (model compared learners who participated in a Foundation level Diploma with those who participated in an Advanced level Diploma)	2.925
DipLevelH	Diploma Level (model compared learners who participated in a Higher level Diploma with those who participated in an Advanced level Diploma)	0.873
DipLevelP	Diploma Level (model compared learners who participated in a Progression level Diploma with those who participated in an Advanced level Diploma)	-0.518
KS4_totpts	Key Stage 4 total point score	0.004
CSmall1	Small consortium (3 or fewer schools/ colleges delivering)	-0.415**
CSmall2	Small consortium (up to 60 learners)	0.523**
Cchallenge	Consortium with particular challenges in setting up the consortium	-0.367
N=592		

** significant only at 10 per cent level

Section 4.3 model 19: Post-16 destinations

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	0.158
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	-0.128
Sennp	Special Educational Needs Early Years Action/Action Plus (model compares learners identified for Action/Action Plus with any who are not identified as such)	-0.382
Sens	Statement of Special Educational Needs (model compares learners with a Statement of SEN with those without a Statement)	0.195
IDACIc	Deprivation index	-0.760
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	-0.287
Gifted	Gifted and Talented (model compares learners identified as Gifted and Talented with any who are not identified as such)	0.515
KS3_totpts	Key Stage 3 total point score	0.018
Mixed	Mixed ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British)	0.164
Asian	Asian (including other and Chinese) ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British)	0.401
Black	Black ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British)	0.718
White other	White other ethnic group	0.269
loleng	Diploma participant who did Engineering (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	-0.145**
Lolit	Diploma participant who did Information Technology (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	0.221**
N = 100318		

** significant only at 10 per cent level

Section 4.3 model 20: Post-16 destinations

*Post-16 destinations model 20 includes interactions between variables

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	0.155
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	-0.128
IDACIc	Deprivation index	-0.757
Sennp	Special Educational Needs Early Years Action/Action Plus (model compares learners identified for Action/Action Plus with any who are not identified as such)	-0.380
Sens	Statement of Special Educational Needs (model compares learners with a Statement of SEN with those without a Statement)	0.202
Mixed	Mixed ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British)	0.158
Asian	Asian (including other and Chinese) ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British)	0.396
Black	Black ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British)	0.715
White other	White other ethnic group	0.266
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	-0.289
Gifted	Gifted and Talented (model compares learners identified as Gifted and Talented with any who are not identified as such)	0.518
KS3_totpts	Key Stage 3 total point score	0.018
Ioleng	Diploma participant who did Engineering (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	-0.213
Ks3_creat	Interaction between key stage 3 prior attainment and Creative and Media	-0.005
ks3_eng	Interaction between key stage 3 prior attainment and Engineering	-0.007
N = 100318		

Section 4.3 model 21: Post-16 destinations

*Post-16 destinations model 21 includes variables consortium-level variables

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	0.163
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	-0.119
IDACIc	Deprivation index	-0.793
Sens	Statement of Special Educational Needs (model compares learners with a Statement of SEN with those without a Statement)	0.170
Sennp	Special Educational Needs Early Years Action/Action Plus (model compares learners identified for Action/Action Plus with any who are not identified as such)	-0.392
Mixed	Mixed ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British)	0.171
Asian	Asian (including other and Chinese) ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British)	0.420
Black	Black ethnic group (model compares learners identified as such with 'White British)	0.722
White other	White other ethnic group	0.293
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	-0.286
Gifted	Gifted and Talented (model compares learners identified as Gifted and Talented with any who are not identified as such)	0.559
KS3_totpts	Key Stage 3 total point score	0.018
loleng	Diploma participant who did Engineering (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	-0.164
Lolit	Diploma participant who did Information Technology (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	0.223
Clotscon	Concerned in lots of areas about preparedness for Diploma delivery	-0.147
N = 96201		