National evaluation of Diplomas: cohort 1 - the second year

Sarah Golden, Tami McCrone, Pauline Wade, Gill Featherstone, Clare Southcott, Kelly Evans

(National Foundation for Educational Research)

and Gill Haynes (University of Exeter)

Department for Education

Contents

Executive summary

The introduction of Diplomas for 14-19 year olds represented a major innovation in educational opportunity for young people in England. The Diplomas are being offered at three levels and across 14 subjects and have been implemented in three phases (from September 2008, 2009 and 2010). 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[1] that development of new Diplomas in science, humanities and languages, 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 Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)) had previously submitted an application to the Department for Education (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. Updates on the Diploma reform can be found at:
http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/qualifications/diploma/a0064056/diploma-announcements

This summary reports the findings of research as carried out in the spring 2010, which explored experiences of the second year of delivery of the first cohort of Diploma learners (who started their Diploma in September 2008) who were able to study any of the first five subjects: Construction and the Built Environment; Creative and Media; Engineering; Information Technology; and Society, Health and Development. It presents the findings from surveys of pre- and post-16 Diploma and comparison learners, a survey of Diploma teachers and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders and Diploma learners in a sub-sample of 15 case-study consortia.

Key Findings

- Young people considered that they were progressing well with their Diploma and many were satisfied with their learning experience. Learners had gained subject-specific knowledge, developed their independent learning, personal and social skills and had benefited from the broader horizons they had gained through exposure to the world of work.

- Learners were not always clear about course content and the component parts, the style of learning or the balance of practical and applied approaches.

- The majority of learners who had taken a Diploma in Years 12 and 13 intended to progress to higher education and, of those who had applied, the majority had been offered places.

- Consortia were moving more towards an in-house only Diploma delivery model in order to overcome the logistical challenges of collaborative working, although there were examples of the value of the partnership approach.

---

[1] Update from DfE on Diplomas and other qualifications relevant to 14-19 year olds: July 2010

- Employers were widely used to support delivery of the Diploma typically by hosting visits, providing speakers and providing work experience placements. This experience was generally valued, but there was a view amongst learners that they would have liked more contact with employers.

- Young people had generally noted the difference in their Diploma lessons; teachers placed greater emphasis on applying the subject matter to industry or a work-related area, acted more as a facilitator or guide to the learning process and encouraged students to adopt a more independent learning approach. Teachers faced some challenges in developing independent learning skills amongst some learners and found it challenging to complete the course in the guided learning hours.

- There had been some progress with assessment, including the establishment of domain and lead assessors and in teachers' understanding of the assessment process, yet there was still scope to enhance teachers' understanding of the evidence required for assessment.

- Functional skills emerged as the component of the Diploma that had been most problematic; some learners did not think they were progressing well, particularly in mathematics. The potential for personalised learning through Additional and Specialist Learning (ASL) had yet to be fully realised largely due to the challenge of providing a full range of ASL opportunities within an institution and the constraints of providing consortium-wide ASL resulting from timetabling and logistical challenges.

What has been the impact of the Diplomas?

The young people in Years 11 and 13 generally considered that they were progressing well with their Diploma and their teachers agreed with this. There is also evidence of many young people being satisfied with their experience of taking a Diploma. Diploma learners who were interviewed noted having a more independent style of learning, taking more responsibility for their learning, and appreciating that the course was more closely related to the workplace and had involved employers. Smaller classes were felt to give them greater access to teachers and a more relaxed learning environment. Teachers noted that learners had gained subject-specific knowledge, developed their independent learning, personal and social skills and had benefited from the broader horizons they had gained through exposure to the world of work.

It is evident that where learners had engaged in work experience, were aware of the ASL components in their Diploma and felt that they were progressing well in their principal learning, they were more satisfied with the experience. Moreover, a positive learning experience seemed related less to the specific Diploma subject, or the consortium where they were studying, but more to the organisation and preparedness for teaching at the individual course level.

In terms of future progression, the majority of learners who had taken a Diploma in Years 12 and 13 intended to progress to higher education and, of those who had applied, the majority had been offered places. The majority of Diploma students in Year 11 planned to remain in learning, including through work-based routes such as an Apprenticeship or job with training. While some of those in Year 11 anticipated that their future progression would be related to their Diploma subject area, as many said that they would pursue an alternative subject in future. This indicated that young people's take up of a Diploma at 14 had not constrained their future subject choices.

To maximise impact, the options for future progression need to be provided to learners, and as the Diplomas become more established such information can be increasingly based on evidence and examples from Diploma learners who progressed through a variety of routes.

Those surveyed in Year 13 were more likely to be satisfied and were more content with their Diploma than those in Year 11. Amongst both year groups, a notable minority were less satisfied with their Diploma experience, most often because:

- their expectations were not met particularly in terms of the amount of practical work and work-related learning
- the functional skills component which some had found difficult to pass
- the amount and challenging nature of the course content
- the teaching and management of the Diploma could have been better, particularly in terms of the pacing of work across the two years.

To maximise success and impact of the Diploma, it is clear that learners need to be clear about course content and the component parts (and the effect of not achieving these components), style of learning (particularly the need to work independently) and the balance of practical and applied approaches through the provision of IAG and an informed selection process. Throughout the two years of the evaluation, IAG has emerged as a key influential factor on the success of the Diplomas. Good teaching and management are also important to maximise impact of the Diploma.

How is the management of Diplomas progressing?

Consortium membership had remained stable across the two years of delivery and there were indications that approaches and procedures such as those relating to quality assurance, IAG, assessment and timetabling, were becoming more established. Nevertheless, it is apparent that Diploma delivery in the first two years entailed complex delivery models in some areas with associated challenges in acknowledging institutional independence, while seeking a collaborative approach. The removal of the requirement for the Diploma entitlement, which was one of the main factors leading to a collaborative, consortium approach, accords with the developments in practice among consortia which were moving more to an in-house only delivery model where possible, as this minimised the challenges of learners travelling to learn, timetabling and assuring quality across institutions. However, the evaluation has also shown that some institutions value working in partnership with other providers and that there is clearly demand from learners for Diploma subjects. Institutions will therefore need to explore how best to continue to offer choice to learners, particularly where within an institution there may be a lack of specialist facilities and expertise, or insufficient numbers to constitute a viable course.

Funding for Diploma development was considered to have been effective in providing the right conditions for establishing the first five Diploma subjects, but there was widespread concern from consortium leads and institutional managers that future funding was uncertain, and that this could affect sustainability of current provision.

In terms of preparation for the Diploma entitlement, which was then a requirement but has now been rescinded, while all but two consortia said that they were planning to provide this in 2013, there were a number of barriers to achieving this including lack of demand, facilities and commitment.

How is Diploma teaching and assessment progressing?

Teachers had generally adapted their **teaching** style at least to some extent in order to deliver Diploma qualifications. Such changes included a greater emphasis on applying the subject matter to industry or a work-related area, acting more as a facilitator or guide to the learning process and encouraging students to adopt a more independent learning approach. They generally welcomed the opportunity to teach 'holistically' by working across units. Young people had generally noted the difference in their Diploma lessons and felt that the classes were smaller and, although the workload was greater than other qualifications, they were gaining more skills and experience.

To provide this learning experience, teachers had encountered some challenges in terms of developing the independent learning skills of students, maintaining their motivation and engagement, for example where the course did not meet their expectations, and maintaining their subject knowledge. This again emphasises the need to identify the most appropriate learners to participate in a Diploma. Teachers also reported challenges in achieving the workload in the guided learning hours. Teachers had sometimes been quite creative in terms of delivery in order to cover the components within the correct guided learning hours (for example, using the students 'best subject' as their ASL and encouraging students to use their part-time jobs to evidence work experience). They also noted the challenge, albeit sometimes a positive challenge, of working collaboratively with colleagues within and outside their institution and the challenge of keeping up to date with relevant industrial developments to inform delivery of the principal learning.

Establishing a strategy and procedure for monitoring and assuring quality of teaching when Diplomas were being delivered in partnership between institutions had been a key concern for consortia in the first year of delivery and, in the second year, they appeared to have made progress. There was evidence of consortia-wide procedures, such as agreed protocols, standardisation meetings and observations of teaching taking place in the majority of consortia visited. Consortia were working through a number of challenges to institute these procedures such as ensuring observation procedures complied with existing agreements and practice and exploring how best to minimise discrepancies in the implementation of procedures between institutions.

Teachers' understanding of, and readiness for, the **assessment** of Diplomas has been a key issue through the evaluation of the first two years of Diploma delivery, with concerns about the level of preparedness prior to delivery and assessment continuing to be an area for development (for example, there remains scope for improving levels of staff understanding and confidence particularly in relation to controlled assessment requirements and the type of evidence required from learners for the principal learning and project). Some teachers reported that assessment was not aligned closely enough with the applied nature of the Diploma. However, in the second year it was apparent that there had been some progress, including the establishment of domain and lead assessors and in teachers' understanding of the assessment process. Key contributions to this were training from awarding bodies, meetings with suitable time allocations and experienced staff fulfilling the assessors' role. Nevertheless, there remains scope, particularly in light of the reduction in the central support for the assessment of Diplomas, to enhance teachers' understanding of the evidence required for assessment. Awarding bodies need to play an increased role in the provision of more focused support and guidance relating to the assessment requirements, including provision of a range of exemplars that are more closely aligned with the assessment criteria.

How well were the different components of the Diploma delivered?

Functional skills emerged as the component of the Diploma that had been most problematic in terms of delivery and assessment in the first cohort. While it was apparent that some Diploma learners felt that they were progressing well in this component, others were not and this was particularly the case for mathematics. Teachers were also concerned about delivery of functional skills and the impact of not achieving it at the right level on achievement of the overall Diploma qualification. In contrast to the original intention that functional skills would be embedded in principal learning, delivery tended to be discrete and this was driven mainly by the need to ensure that learners achieved the component, and the need for specialist staff to teach it. The Diploma reforms could usefully examine the role of functional skills.

The delivery of Diplomas in the first cohort had yet to fully maximise the potential of the **ASL** component. Staff interviewed felt that the potential for personalised learning through ASL had yet to be fully realised largely due to the challenge of providing a full range of ASL opportunities within an institution and the constraints of providing consortium-wide ASL resulting from timetabling and logistical challenges. It also emerged that a notable proportion of young people were not aware of any ASL component in their Diploma. Those who were aware were more satisfied with their Diploma experience.

For those taking a Level 3 Diploma, ASL has a particular purpose in either assisting, or potentially inhibiting, a learner's progression to higher education. It was apparent that learners who are not aware of specific subject requirements for entry to a particular HEI course, and who therefore did not take this for their ASL, could subsequently find they cannot progress onto their preferred course. This highlights the importance of seeking information on HEIs' requirements for entry, taking these into consideration, and ensuring that learners are guided to take an appropriate course for their ASL.

Personal, learning and thinking skills were widely welcomed by staff who reported that there had been few difficulties in incorporating them within the Diploma, although approaches to assessing PLTS were inconsistent.

The evidence suggests that the **project** element of the Diploma can provide an important opportunity for personalised and independent learning where it is well managed and it was generally well-received as a Diploma component. However, it was evident that some teachers felt the time allocated for the project was under-estimated.

It was more likely for learners to have undertaken some form of activity with an employer, such as a visit, attending a talk or undertaking a project, than having undertaken a **work placement**. While this employer experience was generally valued, the prevailing view among Diploma learners who were interviewed was that they would have liked more contact with employers as part of their Diploma course. The involvement of employers in the Diploma was a key element associated with learners' satisfaction with the course. Those that had taken part in work experience were significantly more satisfied with their Diploma course. Continuing to build on relationships with employers at a local level is central to the future success of the Diploma.

Policy implications

- **Maximising the impact of Diplomas:** The Diploma reforms may wish to take into account how to minimise the impact of the functional skills on Diploma progress and achievement while considering how best to prepare young people for the world of work with the generic skills and attributes that will assist them in gaining employment. It is evident that young people who take Diplomas are as likely to intend to progress to higher education as their peers and as likely to have been accepted for a place. There would be value in disseminating this evidence more widely to address any perceptions that a Diploma is not appropriate for progression to higher education.

- **Management:** Given the removal of the entitlement, and the need to collaborate, it would be worth exploring ways to encourage the continuation of communication across all institutions (and hubs where they exist) within a consortium and across consortia, while at the same time simplifying management structures. This will facilitate rapid decision-making and the sharing of lessons learnt (for example in terms of IAG, training, employer engagement and best ways to deliver Diploma components).

- **Collaboration:** While many institutions recognised the benefits of collaboration, institutions have been adopting an increasingly pragmatic approach to collaboration and shared delivery models, based on cost-effectiveness and student demand. The removal of the requirement for consortium collaboration and hence the freedom for institutions to decide which Diploma subjects to offer and the best manner of doing so fits well with the approach which institutions favour.

- **Diploma components**: It may be worth investigating further how far the ASL currently adds value to the overall Diploma qualification. Awarding bodies could usefully review the wording and presentation of Functional Skills examination questions. In addition, there may be value in reviewing the Guided Learning Hours that are required to adequately prepare Diploma learners for the assessments.

- **Teaching**: It is evident that the Diploma approach was viewed as entailing more work for teachers than other qualifications in terms of preparation and delivery. It may be worth reviewing how far this is an issue of commencing delivery of a new and unfamiliar qualification or whether it is inherent to the Diploma approach. The Diploma was also considered to entail a higher workload for students in terms of achieving the requirements within the expected guided learning hours. There may be value in reviewing the guided learning hours to ensure they are sufficient as part of the review leading to a more streamlined Diploma.

- **Assessment**: In view of the change of policy with regard to the withdrawal of the entitlement requirement (and associated lack of need to collaborate) there may be a need to review the lead assessor's role. It is possible that, as more institutions offer Diplomas in-house, the need for consistency of assessment standards across Diploma subjects may be more challenging and therefore more time-consuming. The evidence also suggests that there is a need for earlier and more comprehensive support from awarding bodies, as well as consistent guidance and communication to all institutions across a consortium, in order to promote widespread confidence with regard to assessment. It may be useful to consider ways in which to ensure that all learners receive clear and consistent

information about expectations and processes required in order to successfully complete the qualification.

- **IAG**: There is a clear need for young people to be well informed about the Diploma in order to ensure that the course meets their expectations, and that they are able to cope with the demands of the course.

Background

The two main aims of the national evaluation of Diplomas are:

- 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 young people – in terms of their participation in education and training; attainment of qualifications; and progression to further and higher education, training and employment.

This summary is based on the findings from the second year of Diploma delivery for cohort 1 learners who embarked on one of the first five Diploma subjects in Year 10 and Year 12 in 2008. It draws on data collected in the spring 2010 from the following sources:

- Surveys of 477 Diploma learners in Year 11 and 86 Diploma learners in Year 13
- A survey of 86 teachers of Diplomas
- Case-study visits to 15 consortia where interviews were conducted with consortium leads, Diploma subject leads, senior managers in pre-16 and post-16 institutions, IAG coordinators, teachers of Diplomas in pre-16 and post-16 institutions and learners in Years 11 and 13 who were taking Diplomas.

1   Introduction

1.1   Background

The introduction of Diplomas for 14-19 year olds was seen as a central part of the Labour government's reform of 14-19 education and represented a major innovation in educational opportunity for young people in England. 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[2] that development of new Diplomas in science, humanities and languages, 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 Department for Education (DfE)[3] 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 want to work collaboratively to provide Diploma provision. Updates on the Diploma reform can be found at: http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/qualifications/diploma/a00 64056/diploma-announcements

On 25 November 2010, ministers announced plans to reform the Diploma to make it easier to teach and award. This will bring the Diploma into line with other vocational qualifications. Final decisions about the way the Diploma will be reformed will follow Professor Wolf's review of vocational education, which reported in March 2011.

The Diploma qualifications are offered at three levels (Level 1 (foundation), Level 2 (higher) and Level 3 (advanced) across 14 subjects, and have been implemented in three phases, as Table 1.1 illustrates:

---

[2] Update from DfE on Diplomas and other qualifications relevant to 14-19 year olds: July 2010
[3] Formerly known as the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

Table 1.1   Diploma subjects

Phase 1 subjects Construction and the Built Environment Engineering Information Technology Creative and Media Society, Health and Development	Introduced in September 2008
Phase 2 subjects Business, Administration and Finance Hair and Beauty Studies Hospitality Environmental and Land-Based Studies Manufacturing and Product Design	Introduced in September 2009
Phase 3 subjects Public Services Retail Business Sport and Active Leisure Travel and Tourism	Introduced in September 2010

The Diploma consists of three main components:

Principal learning[4] – sector-related knowledge and underpinning skills needed to progress in relevant sectors.

Generic learning – Functional Skills in English, mathematics and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), development of personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS), and a project or extended project.

Additional/specialist learning – additional subjects that offer the opportunity to study a particular topic in more depth, or to study something different that widens the learner experience such as another language, for example. Additional and specialist learning aims to broaden horizons and help to open up lots of different opportunities in future study and employment.

Diplomas also include learning in the workplace (a minimum of ten days work experience), and learning through realistic work environments, to enable the development of practical skills and work-related application of learning.

The Diploma components have been designed with the aim of preparing learners for employment or further study through incorporating elements that aim to develop learners' life skills, problem-solving and creative thinking, as well as their Functional Skills in mathematics, English and ICT and subject-specific knowledge. The introduction of the Diploma also aims to benefit employers by enabling young people to enter the workforce with more relevant skills and an understanding of work.

---

[4] It should be noted that research findings summarised throughout this report refer to the Diploma Principal Learning component unless it is stated that they refer to other components.

In January 2008, the DfE commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and the University of Exeter to conduct the national evaluation of the implementation and impact of Diplomas, over the period 2008-2013. This report presents the findings from the second year of delivery of the first five Diploma subjects introduced in September 2008.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The purpose of the national evaluation is to provide policy makers and practitioners with systematic and robust evidence which will 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 are:

- 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 young people – in terms of their participation in education and training; attainment of qualifications; and progression to further and higher education, training and employment.

The evaluation will also gather the perceptions and experiences of the Diplomas from a range of stakeholders which includes young people, parents, teachers, employers and higher education (HE) staff.

1.3 Research methods

The overall research design for the evaluation provides a complementary mixed-method approach to address the complex range of issues and aims associated with the implementation of the Diplomas. The study has 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 external datasets. More details can be found in Appendix A.

This report examines how implementation has developed in the second year of Diploma delivery. The sections presented below provide details about each element of the data collection.

1.3.1 Selection of the survey sample

Information provided by the DfE about all consortia involved in the first Diploma cohort (including information about institutions within consortia) was supplemented with data collected from a telephone survey of the first cohort of consortium leads, in order to sample 30 consortia to be involved in the survey strand of the evaluation.

The questionnaires were also made available on paper and online. Appendix B provides details of the sample criteria, the profile of the sample drawn as well as

information about the representativeness of the sample (in comparison with all Cohort 1 consortia). In summary, the sample was representative in terms of government office region (GOR), and free school meal (FSM) eligibility at consortium level, and was representative in terms of school type and achievement at school level.

1.3.2 Survey of learners

This report presents findings of a survey of Diploma and comparison learners in Year 11 and Year 13 in the sample of 30 cohort 1 consortia, undertaken between February and April 2010 (when Diploma learners were in the second year of their course pre- and post-16). All institutions within this sample who were known to be involved in Diplomas in cohort 1 were invited to take part in the survey – 139 in total. Further details on the survey process can be found in Appendix A.

A total of 477 Year 11 and 86 Year 13 Diploma questionnaires were returned[5]; representing approximately five per cent of the 11,326 learners who started on Diplomas in 2008/9. As might be expected, given take-up of Diplomas nationally (according to information on the take-up of Diplomas in Cohort 1/2008-09 recorded on the DAS in April 2009)[6], responding learners in Year 11 were most often taking a Level 2 Diploma, and nearly all of those in Year 13 were taking Level 3 (see Appendix C for details). Overall, the greatest proportion of the response came from Year 11 learners taking Level 2 Diplomas (again reflecting take-up nationally) and, therefore, most of the data presented in this report will be based on experiences of Diplomas at Level 2 pre-16.

In order to gather the views of young people who had not chosen to take a Diploma, but who would have had the opportunity to do so because they attended the same schools as Diploma learners, a 'comparison group' survey was conducted. Staff in each Diploma institution were asked to distribute questionnaires to a Year 11 or Year 13 class of students who were not pursuing a Diploma. Questionnaires were received from 680 Year 11 and 131 Year 13 comparison learners.

As can be seen in Appendix C the responding comparison group was not fully representative of all non-Diploma learners in their institutions and so the Year 11 survey data was weighted by gender and attainment to achieve representativeness in these respects. In the Year 13 sample, weighting by attainment was not possible because of the low match rate to the National Pupil Database (NPD), and so weighting has only been applied by gender.

It is worth noting that, in the multi-level modelling that was undertaken for most of the comparisons between the Year 11 Diploma and comparison groups in this report, differences between the characteristics of the two groups are taken account of statistically, in order to compare on a 'like with like' basis. Hence, if there is a difference between the groups, we can be sure it is not related to one group having higher prior attainment, for example, but rather is related to being in the Diploma or non-Diploma group.

---

[5] As many institutions did not provide the number of Diploma learners (see Appendix A), the total number in the target population was not known, meaning it is not possible to calculate response rates.
[6] http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/d000967/index.shtml

As noted above, the survey responses were weighted to ensure that the responding samples were representative of Diploma and comparison learners in England. As a result, percentages quoted in text and tables are based on weighted numbers (see Appendix A for further details on weighting).

Overall, responses were received from 71 institutions across 28 consortia (although it should be noted that the number of responses received ranged across each consortium and institution). Learner responses were received from 61 institutions in 28 consortia, teachers from 49 institutions in 27 consortia.

Information on gender and date of birth provided by learners on the questionnaires was then matched to background information held on the NPD, where possible, to explore differences in responses in relation to their background characteristics.[7]

Details of the responding sample of learners are presented in Appendix C.

In considering the findings to the surveys of learners and of teachers (detailed below), while all Diploma learners and teachers within an institution were invited to complete a questionnaire and share their experience of teaching and learning the Diploma, not all of those who could have done so, responded. Consequently, as is often the case with questionnaire surveys, there is a risk of some self-selection or non-response bias in the data. As far as possible, we have sought to minimise this impact in the analysis through weighting the data by two variables – attainment and gender – for the Year 11 sample which are likely to be influential on young people's experience and attitudes, and by gender for the Year 13 sample. The findings from the survey evidence generally corresponded with the experiences of those who were interviewed and with evidence from other research relating to experience of non-GCSE courses. Consequently, the evidence from the surveys appears to represent the views of Diploma learners more generally.

1.3.3   Survey of Diploma teachers

Each of the 139 institutions were sent five questionnaires for Diploma teachers. Those involved in delivering any of the Diploma components could have completed the questionnaire. A total of 86 were received from 49 institutions (35 per cent of institutions) across 27 of the 30 consortia (90 per cent of consortia), although the number of responses ranged across each consortium and institution.

1.3.4   Selection of the case-study sample

From the survey sample of 30 consortia, a sub-sample of 15 consortia were selected for more in-depth case-study work. Details of the sample criteria and the profile of the case-study consortia can be found in Appendix D. In summary, the sample included consortia in all nine GOR and a mixture of urban and rural areas and types of local authority (LA). All the Diploma subjects were represented across the consortia, with three consortia offering all five Diploma subjects, two offering one, and the remaining eight offering between two and four Diploma subjects. It is worth noting that two of the consortia had been involved in the Diploma Pathfinder Programme.

---

[7] A total of 892 (77 per cent) of the 1160 Year 11 Diploma and comparison respondents were matched to NPD. Across the 228 responding Year 13 learners, a total of 92 (40 per cent) were matched to NPD. The low match was due to learners' transition between institutions at age 16 (which occurred between the two survey time points).

1.3.5 Case-study activities

Case-study visits to the sub-sample of 15 Cohort 1 consortia were conducted in the spring term 2010 (Lynch *et al.*, 2010). These visits explored how implementation had developed since the first year of delivery and to identify the perceived successes and challenges of the first phase. In total, 40 institutions were involved in the case-study research (further details can be found in Appendix D). In-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with interviewees (see Table 1.2 for a summary of the number of interviews achieved across the consortia). Numbers of interviews, with employers and HEIs in particular, were lower than planned, as fieldwork was required to finish early due to Purdah.[8]

Table 1.2   Numbers of interviews achieved

Type of interviewee[9]	Number of interviews completed
Consortium leads/strategic managers	15
Diploma subject leads	33*
Senior institution managers	34
Diploma teachers	44
Information, advice and guidance (IAG) coordinators	14
Employers	5**
HEIs	3**
Year 11 Diploma learners	131
Year 13 Diploma learners	57

*More detail, such as information Diploma subject, is given in Appendix D
**As previously noted, numbers of employers and HEIs in particular were lower than planned as fieldwork was finished early due to Purdah.

It should be noted that, where consortia were involved in delivering more than two Diploma subjects, two subjects were 'selected' for the focus of the teacher and learner interviews (to minimise the burden on consortia and institutions, but also to ensure, where possible, that views on all subjects were captured across the sample).

Where possible, the number of consortia where a view was expressed is given. This is to provide some guidance on the extent of an experience or approach within the 15 case-study consortia. However, as interviewees are not always asked identical questions during a qualitative interview, the views expressed reflect the issues, priorities, concerns and context perceived to be important for each interviewee.

It should be noted that research findings from surveys and case-study interviews summarised throughout this report refer to the Diploma Principal Learning component of the Diploma, unless it is stated that they refer to other components.

---

[8] Purdah is a pre-election period during which the collection of data relating to policy decisions is postponed or cancelled.
[9] Please note that some staff may have dual roles so these categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

1.4 Analysis of data

As noted above, the survey responses were weighted to ensure that the responding samples were representative of Diploma and comparison learners in England (Appendix A provides further details on weighting).

The analysis of the survey data included:

- descriptive statistics of the responses to the teacher and learner surveys

- comparative analysis, to explore, for example, the extent of differences or similarities between the responses of: pre-16 and post-16 teachers; teachers of different levels and Diploma subjects; and Diploma and comparison learners

- cross tabulations, exploring the relationship between a number of variables (for example, Diploma subject and learner satisfaction)

- factor analysis to aggregate variables from the Year 11 and 13 learner questionnaires, in order to produce more robust measures than a consideration of the individual items on the questionnaire alone

- multi-level modelling to explore the relationship between Year 11 learner background factors and outcomes, whilst taking account of other influences.[10]

Appendix A provides further details about the analysis.

1.5 Structure of the report

Chapter 2 explores the strategic and operational management of consortia, including any changes that might have taken place since the first year of delivery, and discusses the impact Diploma delivery has had on institutions. Chapter 3 examines the structural models of Diploma delivery, levels of collaboration and details plans for the future development of Diploma delivery across consortia. Chapter 4 discusses delivery of the different Diploma components, including the views held by teachers and learners. It also examines the challenges of delivery. The role of providers (employers, training providers and HEIs) in Diploma planning and delivery is also discussed. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the different teaching and learning approaches used across consortia and the ways in which teaching and learning are monitored. Students' attitudes towards learning in general are also examined.

Assessment is explored in Chapter 6. Following on from this, Chapter 7 examines IAG and learner satisfaction with the Diploma course. Chapter 8 considers the perceived progress made by learners in the second year of Diploma delivery. Chapter 9 details the structures in place to support Diploma learners, and the extent to which they feel supported. Training, support and continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities available to staff and outstanding development needs are also examined. Chapter 10 explores learners' future progression plans. Finally, the main conclusions and recommendations are presented in Chapter 11.

---

[10] Multilevel modelling was not carried out for the analysis of the Year 13 learner surveys, as the number of responding learners was too small.

2.   Consortium management

Key findings

Consortium management

- There had been little change in the over-arching management structures of the 15 case-study consortia by the second year of delivery, although six new consortium leads had been appointed.

- Consortium membership had not changed greatly, with only one or two institutions joining or leaving reported in three consortia.

- Consortium leads were confident that the funding they had received had been distributed fairly and that the formula applied had been based on agreement from partner institutions.

- Funding for Diploma development was considered to have been effective in providing the right conditions for establishing the first five Diploma subjects, but there was widespread concern from consortium leads and institutional managers that future funding was uncertain, and that this could affect sustainability of current provision.

- All but two consortia had consortium-wide aligned timetables, although there were still challenges in terms of the perception of the Diploma as dictating a school's timetable and accommodating additional factors such as holiday dates, work experience periods and staff training days.

Consortium effectiveness

- With the experience of nearly two years of Diploma delivery, interviewees in eight consortia considered that that there were areas for improvement with management structure. These included better communication between strategic and operational levels, the need for more rapid decision-making and the need to streamline some unwieldy management structures.

- Institutional managers gave practical advice on management priorities, such as the need to agree an aligned timetable as soon as possible, keeping travel-to-learn to a minimum and having a consortium-level strategic approach to employer contacts.

Implications for policy and practice summary
• Removal of entitlement, and the need to collaborate, is likely to have an impact on consortium management. It would be worth exploring ways to encourage the continuation of communication across all institutions (and hubs where they exist) within a consortium and across consortia, while at the same time simplifying management structures. This will facilitate rapid decision-making and the sharing of lessons learnt (for example in terms of IAG, training, employer engagement and best ways to deliver Diploma components).

This chapter considers the development of strategic and operational management of the consortia that began delivery of Diplomas in 2008, focusing on:

- any major changes that have taken place since the first year of delivery
- the views of those at consortium and institution level of the funding arrangements for Diplomas
- the impact of Diplomas on institutional timetabling
- interviewee perceptions of the effectiveness of consortium management
- the impact of the Diploma qualification on institutions and practitioners.

2.1 Strategic and operational management

2.1.1 Changes in consortium membership and management

The baseline case-study visits undertaken in the summer term of 2008 and reported in January 2009 (O'Donnell *et al.*, 2009), identified a model of consortium management with a broad division between strategic and operational levels, and with the consortium lead overseeing both, often within the context of wider 14-19 Partnership work. Consortium-level subject leads had an important role; managing the development of a Diploma subject across the consortium, ensuring staff had adequate support and that the delivery models adopted operated successfully. They were also often the conduit for passing information from strategic to operational level and *vice versa*.

The visits to cohort 1 consortia in their first year of delivery, and the baseline visits to cohort 2 consortia (undertaken in the spring and summer terms in 2009), confirmed this over-arching management structure, but also indicated a move towards partnerships based on districts or 'hubs' in large city consortia and in extensive rural areas. The 2009 visits also emphasised the importance of good communication between layers of management and the need to avoid delays in decision-making at strategic level, which could cause uncertainty at operational level – this was particularly relevant to consortia where subject leads did not participate in strategic decision-making. In the second year of Diploma delivery, there had been staffing

changes at strategic level, as more than a third of the 15 case-study consortia (six consortia) had new consortium leads.

Overall, management structures had largely stayed the same, with notable changes only reported in two consortia. In one, a new strategic group had been established to oversee IAG for post-key stage 3 courses, including Diplomas, and in another, the LA had undergone major restructuring. Although the consortium lead in this area considered that this reorganisation had improved decision-making and communication, the subject leads interviewed thought that the level of support for the Diploma, for example in arranging employer engagement, learner visits and transport, was no longer in place to the same extent.

In the majority of case-study consortia (twelve), consortium membership had remained unchanged. Where changes were reported (in three consortia), these had usually been that one or more institutions had decided to end their involvement with Diplomas, or that new institutions had become involved.

The reasons for institutions ending their involvement included moving into another consortium because the geographical area was more appropriate, ceasing Diploma delivery after a one year post-16 course, or ending delivery because of internal institutional change or concern about learner progress. Reasons for new institutions joining the consortium tended to be for geographical reasons, or because they wished to be involved in cohort 2 Diploma subjects. As these changes in institutional involvement were not on a large scale and they were not usually a cause for concern, but in two consortia, the impact of such change was regarded as more significant. In one case, this was because the institution that was no longer involved was a training provider, who had withdrawn because of economic conditions. In the other case, three new schools had moved across from another consortium, but were perceived by the consortium lead as not having much commitment to Diploma delivery.

Looking ahead, in seven consortia, consortium leads thought it likely there would be some change in the level of institutional involvement after 2010, because one or more institutions had not recruited learners in 2009 onto existing Diploma subjects.

Baseline visits to cohort 2 consortia (McCrone *et al*., 2010) had indicated a move towards the development of partnerships delivering Diplomas that were district or 'hub' based, and this had also become a clearer development in five cohort 1 consortia by the second year of delivery. It appeared mainly to be a response to the increasing complexity of providing more Diploma subjects and managing this within areas where travel-to-learn could present challenges. For example, in one large city consortium, there were four clusters or hubs, each with several institutions, and the institution with the greatest commitment to a particular Diploma subject took the lead within the hub. It had been developed in a similar way in another metropolitan area, although the subject leads there were at consortium rather than hub level, and elements of this approach in terms of small group partnerships were also evident in other consortia. Although the disadvantage of this hub development was that it might result in restricted choice for learners, depending on where they were located, as a practical method for management in a large city or widespread rural area, it was seen as having advantages.

2.1.2 Funding arrangements

In general, consortium leads were confident that the funding they had received had been distributed fairly and that the formula applied had been based on agreement from partner institutions.

Funding for Diploma development was considered to have been very effective in providing the necessary conditions for establishing the first five Diploma subjects, having been used particularly for resources and staff training. This was confirmed by some of the institution senior managers, who referred to good resourcing; one, for example, noted the new media centre which the school had been able to build.

However, during the visits in January to March 2010, there was also widespread concern (from ten consortium leads) that future funding was uncertain and that this would have implications for the continuing development of Diplomas. This too was echoed frequently in the comments of senior managers; for example, by a deputy head teacher who considered that:

> *the funding in the pilot years has been good, so we have been able to run it with low numbers, but once that funding stops, sustainability will be an issue (C10. Inst 1)*

The mechanism for distributing funding within consortia was described by nine consortium leads as the money following the learner for the principal learning and project. However, the details varied and there were different perceptions of how complicated the arrangements were. For example one consortium lead stated that there was a clear system, which he described as:

> '*a clearly defined method for devolving funding to schools*'.

However, another described the system as being linked to a complicated formula. Usually funding was allocated to institutions on the basis of which components they were delivering, so that those that were only involved with functional skills and additional and specialist learning (ASL), received less than those delivering principal learning and the project. In order to simplify the process, in five consortia, a system described as 'paper transfer' had been adopted. This meant that no money changed hands, but a consortium level account was kept of how many learners were in each institution and what was delivered, and how much was owed to or by each institution.

There were differences of opinion within consortia as to how far funding covered delivery costs, and at least one institution in seven consortia considered that the Diploma funding did not do so. In one institution, this financial loss was accepted as what the senior manager described as a '*necessary evil*', but others claimed that they were subsidising the Diploma. Generally, consortium leads thought that institutions with Diploma learners were not financially disadvantaged, as their costs for delivery were covered and the consortium kept a reserve for expenses such as transport and quality assurance procedures. One consortium lead said that schools were subsidised to the extent that they only paid 25 per cent of the total cost, and another explained that as the schools were funded according to what they were delivering, and the consortium support grant was used for central costs and publicity events, the schools effectively made no contribution.

Despite the consortium lead view that institutions were not disadvantaged by the funding system, there was a perception among some interviewees of inequality in

funding mechanisms between schools and colleges. In three consortia, senior managers in Further Education (FE) colleges felt that overall costs for colleges were higher, so Diploma funding should reflect this, as this interviewee explained:

> '*Staff here think the college should get more than the schools as our resources are more expensive, and so we are subsidising the Diploma'.*

A few institutions felt that the Diploma was an expensive qualification compared to others and believed they would not be able to continue to subsidise the course in the future.

2.1.3   Timetabling

In the second year of Diploma delivery, the benefits of aligned timetables were still reported by the majority of case-study consortia. Two consortia had not adopted aligned timetables. In one, not all schools would accept it, including a case-study school, where the senior manager explained that there was no intention of aligning when the school delivered in-house to a small number of students. Not only did this make collaboration within the consortium difficult, it did not necessarily avoid other problems. For example, the senior manager in another school explained that as there was no 'Diploma day', if Diploma learners were out of school on a visit, they missed other lessons, which impacted on them and on staff. In the other, the timetable was not mandatory, so not all schools adopted it and its complexity also meant that even those schools (including a case-study school) that had tried to work with it had not been able to keep all their core teaching out of the Diploma days.

Where consortia did have aligned timetabling, there had been challenges whichever system was adopted. Timetabling half days for Diploma delivery had been abandoned in the two consortia that had tried it, because travel time reduced teaching and learning time considerably.

For consortia (five) that were using a one Diploma day system, this put less pressure on their institution's timetable, but it was generally perceived by those using it as most suitable with in-house models of delivery, because of the restriction on learner time. If students also had to travel, the lack of sufficient time could cause problems, as this senior manager explained:

> *The lesson learnt is that five hours of a school day is not enough time. Staff feel they need more time, and the issue of students crossing the city means that to fit them in for another hour somewhere, they would have to miss something else. Now schools are starting early or going on for another hour at the end of the Diploma day to fit it all in'.*

The more common pattern of alignment was to have two Diploma days. This provided more time for learners, particularly if they were travelling to learn, but it impacted on institutional timetables, and this was pointed out in six consortia, where the consensus was: '*The Diploma drives the timetable rather than just slotting into it. The Diploma has to go in first and everything else is built around it'.* A senior manager described how other option subjects then need '*to have triple slots on the same day, which is not ideal'.*

Institutions in three consortia had found that despite an aligned timetable, there were occasions when students missed Diploma classes because different schools had different periods of work experience or staff training days, and this resulted in them

not keeping up with principal learning. Where Academies were involved in shared delivery, the situation was complicated still further by different holiday dates.

Overall therefore, the challenges that need to be addressed at consortium level are:

- gaining the agreement of all institutions to an aligned timetable
- finding a formula which allows flexibility for learners without impacting too heavily on a school's other timetabling requirements
- accommodating additional factors such as different holiday dates, staff training days and student work experience periods.

2.2 Consortium effectiveness

When the baseline visits to consortia preparing for 2008 delivery were undertaken in the summer of that year, there was a very positive view of the effectiveness of management structures among interviewees at consortium and institution level. Effectiveness was measured in particular by:

- the progress consortia had made towards the first delivery of Diplomas
- the extent of joint planning and preparation
- agreement on aligned timetables and
- establishment of a management structure that worked efficiently and effectively for all consortium members.

Views from the cohort 2 case studies as they were preparing for 2009 delivery were very similar (McCrone *et al.*, 2010). They identified the management structure, with good communication between the various layers, and strong, but flexible leadership at the top, as most important for achieving effectiveness.

When the cohort 1 consortia were visited in the second year of delivery (spring term 2010), the perception of consortium effectiveness was more measured, with interviewees in eight consortia indicating that there were areas for improvement within their management structure. This change in perceptions of effectiveness was not surprising, as consortium level interviewees had by now had nearly two years to reflect on the realities of managing the complexities of Diploma delivery.

The view from subject leads was sometimes different to that of consortium leads, which was not unexpected, as they were more immersed in the day-to-day management of a Diploma subject. There was also variation between subjects within the same consortium, which probably reflected particular issues within some subjects.

The main areas highlighted for development in management systems were:

- poor communication, particularly between strategic and operational levels
- a strategic level that was more reactive than proactive
- the need for further streamlining of an unwieldy management structure
- the need for a more positive strategic attitude to encouraging collaboration and involving new institutions

- more rapid decision-making.

2.3 Impact on institutions and practitioners

From the institutional perspective, some interviewees gave recommendations on what they considered to be priorities for effective management, both at consortium and institution level. The suggestions included the following:

- agree the timetabling strategy as early as possible and do not timetable half days for delivery
- keep travel-to-learn to a minimum, particularly in rural or semi-rural areas
- appoint a full-time Diploma coordinator within each institution, whose other commitments are kept to a minimum
- have administrative support in place for assessment procedures, as the Diploma was viewed as more complex than other courses
- have a consortium-level strategic approach to employer contacts, for example, through a local Education Business Partnership (EBP), or an employer engagement officer
- ensure good communications with partnership institutions, both at senior management and practitioner level.

Furthermore the teacher survey data, as can be seen in Table 2.1, revealed that teachers were more likely to perceive that the Diploma had resulted in an impact on developing links with providers and employers (50 per cent and 43 per cent) than on the curriculum, or their teaching practices (40 per cent and 34 per cent).

Table 2.1 Impact of the Diploma on institutions

The Diploma...	Strongly agree	Agree	No strong opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
is helping to build more effective partnerships between providers	10	40	19	17	3	10	100
has led me to change how I teach other qualifications	7	27	26	28	3	9	100
is helping to build more effective partnerships with employers	8	35	26	19	3	9	100
has enriched the curriculum	13	27	35	10	5	10	100

N = 86

A series of single response questions.
Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100.
A total of 78 respondents gave at least one response to these questions.
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Teacher Survey, 2010.

2.4 Summary

Apart from the appointment of a number of new consortium leads, there had not been any major changes in the management structures, or the composition of the cohort 1 consortia by the second year of delivery.

Funding for Diploma development was perceived to have been adequate for establishing Diplomas in the initial phase, but there was widespread uncertainty about levels of future funding and an assumption that institutions would have to recruit sufficient learners in future, in order to run Diploma courses as an economically viable option.

Most consortia had adopted some form of aligned timetable for Diploma delivery, and although this was accepted by staff in institutions as necessary for any type of partnership working, it was considered by some to have placed restrictions on how they operated.

Areas for improvement with management structure included better communication between strategic and operational levels, the need for more rapid decision-making and the need to streamline some unwieldy management structures.

3   Models of delivery and collaboration

Key Findings

- Consistent with findings from the first year of Diploma delivery, 'in-house' models of delivery (where learners undertook all their Diploma studies in their home institution) were the most prevalent both for pre-16 and post-16 learners in the second year, with shared delivery between a school and FE college or training provider as the next most popular mode of delivery across the case-study consortia.

- Case-study visits identified three levels of strategic collaborative development across consortia:

    ➢ a loose partnership arrangement with limited drive for collaboration;
    ➢ stronger partnership arrangements and the encouragement of collaborative models (most consortia fell into this category)
    ➢ a strong collaborative ethos with key underlying elements in place

- Collaborative models were seen as working successfully *if* there was a collective will to overcome challenges and perceived mutual benefit, but imposing partnership working on reluctant institutions was considered counter-productive.

- Despite the adoption of various models of shared delivery in most consortia, the challenges were considered to have encouraged a move towards in-house delivery.

- Where there was effective collaboration, it tended to be within smaller partnerships, or hubs, which were restricted to a particular area.

- In terms of future developments, interviewees felt that increasing the numbers of Diploma learners and improving IAG were most important.

This chapter explores management views on delivery and collaboration models and plans, in the spring term of 2010, for future developments. It examines:

- major changes in the structural models of delivery and the views of interviewees on the success of the models in operation and their sustainability

- collaboration and partnership working and the extent to which interviewees considered their consortium to be collaborative

- progress toward full entitlement (views on this have been included out of interest, even though the entitlement has been removed)

- future plans with regard to Diploma development.

3.1   Structural models of delivery

The evaluation of Diplomas (O'Donnell *et al*., 2009) identified the main models of delivery adopted for the first five Diploma subjects (see Table 3.1), and, in the first year of delivery these were confirmed as the main intended models for the second five subjects (McCrone *et al*., 2010). Table 3.1 also shows the range of use of these delivery models across the 15 consortia during the first two years of Diploma delivery. The extent to which these delivery models changed between the first and second year of delivery was minimal - reported in only one consortium, where instead of a teacher travelling between two schools to deliver principal learning, all the learners were now taught in one school, so one group of students travelled to learn.

Table 3.1   Models of delivery

Models	Number of consortia pre-16	Number of consortia post-16
Model A Learners travel between their own school and an FE college or training provider for some aspects of their Diploma learning; delivery of principal learning/project occurs in both locations	9	3
Model B Learners study all their principal learning/project in an FE college or training provider (outside their 'home' institution; applies pre-16 or to learners travelling outside their sixth form)	3	-
Model C All Diploma learning takes place within the learners' own school (pre-16, or school sixth form post-16)	10	5
Model D All Diploma principal learning/project takes place in a partner 'host' school (either pre-16, or a host school sixth form post-16)	2	1
Model E Learners travel between their own school and another/ other school(s) for their principal learning/ project. Delivery occurs in both/all locations	6	1
Model F All Diploma learning takes place within the learners' own FE college (post-16 only)	N/A	10

As can be seen from Table 3.1 above, the 'in-house' models (models C and F, where learners undertook all their Diploma studies in their home institution) were the most prevalent both for pre-16 and post-16 learners, with shared delivery between a school and FE college or training provider (model A) as the next most popular mode of delivery across the case-study consortia.

This was also indicated by the student survey, which showed that a majority of Year 11 and Year 13 learners stayed in their own school for Diploma classes.

Table 3.2   Where Diploma lessons take place

	Year 11 Diploma learners %	Year 13 Diploma learners %
At my own school (or FE college for Year 13s)	59	90
At another school (or FE colleges for Year 13s)	31	18
At a FE college (Year 11 only)	21	-
At a training provider (Year 11 only)	11	-
At an employer	0	4
At a HEI	1	1
Somewhere else	3	7
No response	5	1
N =	477	86

More than one answer could be given so percentages may sum to more than 100.
The percentages in this table are weighted.
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Surveys, 2010

The teacher survey also indicated a high take-up of delivery model A - 48 per cent of respondents were using this for pre-16 delivery and 40 per cent for post-16. The relatively high use of model A as a shared delivery model probably reflected the need for schools to access specialist facilities and teaching for certain elements of some Diploma subjects. Institutions may also have built on the pre-existing links that they had from previous partnerships, such as through the Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP).

3.1.1   Sustainability

In considering the sustainability of the models for Diploma delivery in future, institutions using in-house models, or sending their students to another institution for all their principal learning, were less concerned about sustainability issues, but referred to funding levels and the likely number of learners recruited as the criteria on which decisions would be based.

Of the three rural consortia, one was using entirely in-house models and all the institutions hoped to sustain delivery for as long as they had sufficient numbers of learners. However, in the other two consortia, where there was some element of learner travel, this was viewed as having an impact on long-term sustainability. In one consortium, the senior managers in two institutions said that the costs and complications of transport meant that Engineering was likely to be the only Diploma subject where shared delivery would be maintained (the facilities required for Engineering made it more difficult to deliver in-house). In the other, one case-study

school was delivering in-house for two Diploma subjects, and would continue to do so for the subject that would continue (the other would not be offered after the first cohort had finished). The senior manager commented that '*in-house delivery is the only sensible model as the other schools are too far away'.*

However, it was not only in rural consortia that the sustainability of travel-to-learn models was raised as an issue. In one urban consortium, a senior manager commented: '*I'm unsure whether the cost can be sustained over time – transport is a major issue.'* His views were endorsed by another senior manager in the same consortium, who pointed out that the costs of travel were currently being paid by the LA, but this was unlikely in the future. Similar views were also expressed in another four consortia. For example, one interviewee referred to pre-16 learners who were attending the FE college for some of their principal learning and were benefiting from this, but he added: '*without additional funding we just can't sustain that'.*

Table 3.3 shows Year 11 Diploma students' responses to a survey question on how they travelled to other Diploma learning destinations. It indicates that nearly half used public transport and nearly a third depended on school-provided transport.

Table 3.3   Travel to other locations for Diploma lessons

How do you travel to the other location?	Diploma Year 11 students %
By public transport	49
Minibus provided school bus	32
Taxi	7
By car	14
Walk/bicycle	17
Other	1
No response	3
N =	260

More than one answer could be given so percentages may sum to more than 100.
The percentages in this table are weighted.
A filter question: learners doing some or all of their Diploma lessons outside their own school
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Survey, 2010

Half (50 per cent) of Year 11 students who travelled to learn felt that they had experienced problems with travel. Most of these (44 per cent) felt that they could manage these problems, while six per cent experienced 'big problems' with their travel.

By the second year of delivery therefore, it was clear that transport costs and logistics were considered to be a major factor in the sustainability of delivery models, and that this was the case for all types of consortia. The other issue that was raised, by at least one case-study institution in all consortia that commented on sustainability and often by all of them, was the need to recruit enough learners to make Diploma courses viable. This was the case for institutions delivering in-house, as well as those

using shared delivery models and was associated with uncertainty over future funding (see section 2.1.2 for further detail).

Additionally, there was a general perception among institutional senior managers that for pragmatic reasons, in-house delivery was likely to become more widespread after the first cohort had finished in 2010, and this would have an impact on institutions that relied on attracting learners from elsewhere. A senior manager from a school delivering Engineering explained:

> *Schools are increasingly reluctant to send students off-site – schools in National Challenge; Ofsted; safeguarding of students; school finances, - all these factors are making the days of big off-site programmes something that is being questioned by some schools, so it's not getting any easier.*

Even in-house models of delivery were not exempt from uncertainty over numbers and costs. A school senior manager said that although he felt their model would be sustainable because it was embedded in the staffing allocation within future planning, he felt: *'if level 2 take-up drops off, we will not continue to deliver, because it would not be cost effective'.*

Since these interviews were undertaken, the removal of the Diploma entitlement, and the change to allowing institutions to decide which Diploma subjects to offer and how, is likely to give further impetus to the move towards in-house delivery. As a result, it is likely that schools and colleges will offer those Diploma subjects which promise the best rates of take-up from students, and will provide them according to the most suitable model for their circumstances.

3.1.2   Satisfaction with delivery models

- The teacher survey showed a high level of satisfaction for the model where students studied all their principal learning at an FE college or training provider, with 47 per cent responding that this model was working *very well*

- A third of teachers (33 per cent) said the in-house model, where they taught only their own students, was working *very well*

- The majority (73 per cent) thought that shared delivery between a school and college worked *quite* or *very well*, but 25 per cent said *not very* or *not at all well*

- Models involving a teacher travelling to another school to teach Diploma students was considered by the majority (75 per cent) to work *quite* or *very well*

Case-study interviews with teachers and senior managers provided more detail on satisfaction with different types of Diploma delivery. Satisfaction with in-house delivery was not surprising, given the advantages of this model, in terms of it being the most straightforward to operate and involving the least disruption for students and the school. Its main disadvantage was that for some Diploma subjects, such as Engineering, and Construction and the Built Environment, it could be difficult for schools to deliver on their own, if they did not have the necessary facilities or staff expertise.

There were predominantly positive views of shared delivery in four consortia:

- Two had particularly successful examples of HEI involvement in delivery of principal learning (both Engineering) at Level 3.

- In one there was a direct exchange of students, but for the entire principal learning of two different Diploma subjects (Engineering and Creative and Media). Due to the close proximity of the schools, and their individual specialisms, this had worked well.

- In the fourth, there was a partnership between two schools and an FE college, with shared delivery of principal learning (for Level 2 Engineering) between all three, and this was perceived by interviewees to have been successful because of each institution having strengths in different units of the principal learning.

However, interviewees in nine other case-study consortia were disillusioned with their experience of shared delivery. The main reasons identified were:

- a lack of trust and accountability between institutions, for example:

  ➢ the senior manager from one institution described 'a lack of accountability and responsibility', which had resulted in learners at another institution, not having had sufficient functional skills lessons and so not passing assessments

  ➢ in another institution, the decision had been taken not to deliver to pre-16 students in future because of problems with behaviour and a perception that the schools involved had not selected the right learners for the Diploma.

- logistical difficulties, for example:

  ➢ a school senior manager described the inter-institutional timetable as a '*nightmare*' and thought that '*the pupils get confused as to where they're at and what they're doing for whom*'

  ➢ the cost and complications of travel were seen as outweighing any advantages of shared delivery

- difficulty overcoming barriers, for example:

  ➢ incidents of bad behaviour between students from different schools when they were brought together

  ➢ disagreements between staff over the marking of assignments.

Therefore, for many institutions, they had tried a shared delivery model, (either because they thought it was the way forward, or because they felt it was expected of them) but the challenges involved had led them to reconsider this approach in the future, particularly if cost effectiveness was also a consideration.

3.2   Collaboration and partnership working

At the time of their preparation for first delivery in 2008, case-study interviewees had often been cautious about the extent to which their consortium was working

collectively with common priorities and joint planning and the extent to which collaboration would flourish. As the evaluation found (O'Donnell *et al*.,2009), this caution was not surprising, as there was recognition that collaboration would require different working practices and an attitude of trust and shared objectives. Nevertheless, there was also a spirit of optimism among many interviewees that there would be a growth of trust and an increasing willingness to make the compromises necessary for successful collaboration, once Diploma delivery had begun.

With the first cohort of learners well into their second year, those involved in Diploma delivery reflected on the extent of collaborative working in their consortium, and how they perceived the strength of this in their consortium.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the main collaborative models that appear to have developed during the first two years of Diploma delivery. The three strategic levels indicate the range from a loose partnership with voluntary cooperation, but no collaborative drive, to consortia with a strong collaborative ethos. In the middle are the consortia with a collaborative will, where some, but not all, key elements of strategic collaboration are in place.

Figure 3.1   Diploma Collaboration

Strategic level

Level 1: loose partnership arrangement with limited drive for collaboration on key elements Level 2: collaboration encouraged and some key elements in place Level 3: strong collaborative ethos and most key elements in place	Key elements across consortium required for Level 3: • Aligned timetable • Inter-institutions teaching and learning quality assurance • IAG agreements • Standardised assessment procedures • Joint planning • Training and support • Effective communication channels

Operational level

A. Limited collaborative delivery	
e.g.	Characteristics
	Mainly in-house delivery
	YP do not travel to learn
	Limited choice of Diploma subjects for YP
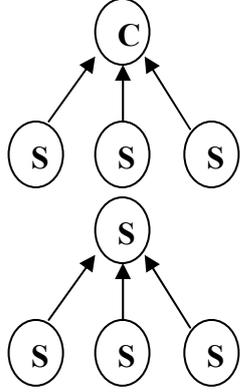
B. Simple collaborative delivery	
e.g.	Characteristics
	Schools 'export' YP to a college or another school
	Some travel to learn
	Some choice of Diploma subjects for YP

C. Considerable collaborative delivery	
e.g.	Characteristics
	More than one Delivery model in place, largely based on geographical convenience (in both rural and urban areas)
	Institutions import and/or export learners
	Contained travel to learn
	Wide choice of Diploma subjects for learners
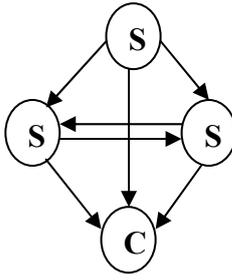
D. Complex collaborative delivery	
e.g.	Characteristics
	Learners typically moving between 3 institutions for shared delivery
	Extensive travel-to-learn
	Wide choice of Diploma subjects for learners
	Institutions import and/or export learners

S = School, C = FE college/training provider

Operational collaboration, at institutional level, ranges from limited to complex, with the latter involving movement of students between institutions for shared delivery of principal learning. Examples of institutional types are illustrative only; they are not always exactly as depicted in Figure 3.1. As would be expected, most institutions and their strategic framework occupied a middle ground, where collaborative models tended to be based on small partnership groups, and shared delivery often involved pre-16 learners attending a college or training provider for all their principal learning – a model which some schools had been able to build on from their experience with the IFP. Thus it could be co-located delivery, but did not necessarily involve teachers from different institutions sharing delivery. Most models of Diploma delivery at operational level can work with varying levels of consortium-wide strategic management, although complex collaborative delivery would be difficult to achieve with Level 1 strategic-level support.

For consortia to be at strategic Level 3 and for institutions within those consortia to be committed to working collaboratively to deliver Diplomas ('complex collaborative delivery'), was considered by some interviewees as the goal to aspire to. This was the vision held by interviewees who were enthusiastic about Diplomas, when they spoke during the 2008 visits about institutions moving away from working in isolation and working collectively for the common good. The evidence from the 15 Cohort 1 consortia by the second year of delivery appears to be that progress towards that goal has been uneven and that in some consortia there is, or will be, a move away from shared delivery and towards in-house delivery as the favoured method. As reported in section 3.1.2, the challenges that had been faced by many institutions with shared delivery models, in addition to concerns about future funding levels, was influencing a movement towards the most easily managed delivery models. As a pragmatic approach to delivery is now encouraged by the new policy focus, this is no longer a concern and is likely to be regarded as a sensible way forward in those institutions that were not enthusiastic about collaborative delivery.

The research in the first year of delivery (Lynch *et al*., 2010) identified Information Technology and Creative and Media as the two Diploma subjects where institutions were most likely to deliver in-house, because they felt that they had the right staff and facilities to do so. The report also identified Engineering and Construction and the Built Environment as those subjects least likely to be delivered in-house, due to considerations of staffing and facilities. From a practical perspective therefore, many schools would probably only offer these Diploma subjects if principal learning was shared between a school and a college or training provider, or when learners went to a partner institution for all their principal learning. As institutions reflect on the first two years of delivery, it is also possible that schools may in future only offer those subjects which they feel can be successfully delivered in-house, or use in-house models for some subjects and shared delivery for others, if they feel sufficiently confident about them.

The benefits of collaboration had been recognised by institutions in approximately half of the case-study consortia. Institutions across seven of the case-study consortia believed that there had been increased collaboration and cooperation between institutions. This had helped institutions learn from each other and share best practice. The benefits of this improved collaboration were seen to impact more widely than just on the Diploma courses, as the comments from senior managers below indicate:

> [We have had a] *good experience going into different institutions, looking at their quality assurance mechanisms and sharing best practice …schools coming here or us going there to see how Level 2 students are doing.* [The] *links are very strong with consortium partners.*
>
> *We are working much more closely with other schools. We can see other courses they are running and they can give feedback and we can see their curriculum models so the benefits are wider than Diplomas.*

During the case-study visits in 2008, interviewees at both consortium and institution level had pointed out that collaboration would have to grow naturally because it had to be based on the development of trust and shared vision. Even where institutions did not consider collaboration was necessary for successful Diploma delivery, it was still possible for there to be strategic levels of cooperation, for example on employer engagement, or on joint events for Diploma learners. Even if this was not the Diploma ethos as it was originally envisaged, partnership working freely entered into and collaborative ways of working based on mutual advantage could provide the extension to the curriculum that many institutions saw the Diploma as providing.

3.3   Future developments

3.3.1   Consortium-wide developments

At the time of the interviews, it was still planned that learners would have access to the full entitlement of Diplomas by 2013, however, this need to provide full entitlement was subsequently removed by the DfE in 2010. This section summarises the progress the case-study consortia had made towards full entitlement, and while no longer directly relevant, highlights the progress consortia were making at the time of the interview.

The majority of consortium leads (nine) believed they were making good progress towards full entitlement by 2013, however, this positive view was not necessarily held by all staff in the consortia. Consortia typically had a large number of the Diploma subjects either already running or had been approved for delivery and were in the planning stages. Many had an individual plan as to how they would reach the full entitlement as the comment of one consortium lead in a larger LA reflects:

> *We're progressing very well and should have all 14 Diploma subjects, so better placed than most. Our learners can go to neighbouring local authorities and others can come to us. Small LAs can't offer all 14, so we can extend our offer to others.*

Two consortia did not feel they would be able to achieve the full entitlement and did not have any plans to do so. In one of these areas this was because of an imminent restructure with the 14-19 Partnerships in the area, in the other area they believed they would not have the specialist facilities to deliver all the subjects, in particular Manufacturing and Product Design and Level 3 Engineering.

Across the case-study areas, consortium leads reported that the main facilitators for progress towards full entitlement were:

- good communication (two consortia)

- enthusiasm and commitment of consortium Diploma subject leads and teachers (two consortia)

- good infrastructure (two consortia)

- full commitment from partners involved, including schools, colleges and the LA (one consortium).

Consortium leads in eight consortia also identified a number of barriers to full entitlement. These were:

- not having the demand or facilities for a particular Diploma subject, such as Environmental and Land-based Studies within an inner city area (three consortia)

- lack of take-up of subjects (two consortia). However in one area, they were continuing to run small classes and considering this as an opportunity for CPD for staff

- lack of commitment from providers in the consortium (two consortia)

- competition between courses (two consortia)

- financial constraints and budget reductions (one consortium)

- timetabling a large number of qualifications across an area and transporting young people between different centres on a large scale (one consortium).

The majority of institutions across the case-study areas generally agreed with the consortium leads in terms of the plans for progress towards full entitlement; however they were typically less likely to believe that it would be achievable and manageable. Senior managers believed that not all schools would allow all learners to travel to others and some commented that their own learners would not be offered the Diplomas taught in other schools. This view is highlighted in the comment below:

> *'As long as schools are accountable, they will keep their best pupils and you're naïve if you think otherwise.'*

3.3.2 Institutional developments

Overall, most teaching staff interviewed expected to continue to deliver their Diploma subject from September 2010 and were already delivering to a new cohort of students who had started in 2009. Where this was not the case, a decision had been made at a strategic level to discontinue that subject. For example, in four consortia, one subject was not continuing due to logistical problems such as timetabling pressures. One teacher commented:

> *The decision has been made that we are not delivering the Society, Health and Development Diploma next year because of the logistical problems and the huge effort involved. The project is most difficult to fit in and the young people do not really have a free choice of extra subjects.*

Across a small number of consortia (three) some Diploma subjects were not going to run from 2010 because there had been no take-up by learners.

The majority of institutions across all the case-study areas reported that their future plans regarding Diploma development centred on increasing numbers and promotion of the Diploma, changes to the curriculum, improving IAG and targeting students, and developing new Diploma subjects.

Marketing strategies included the promotion of Diplomas to atypical learners and developing a strategy for promotion, as illustrated by the following comments:

> *The inclusion of girls – I would feel more successful if we recruited a number of girls.*

> *We're convinced the course is an excellent course, we just want to get out there and take every opportunity we can to market it.*

A small number of schools also highlighted future curriculum developments for the Diploma. These included reducing the amount of work and avoiding repetition of elements within the course, changing the teaching so that units are delivered holistically with a project running through all units and beginning the project in year one of delivery.

3.4   Summary

The six main models of delivery indicated during the baseline visits in 2008 had largely remained in operation for the first cohort of Diploma learners. There were examples of successful shared delivery and collaboration, but partnership working had faced challenges in most consortia. Practical considerations, particularly the logistics and cost of travelling to learn, and concern about keeping costs of delivery down were encouraging a move away from shared delivery and towards in-house models.

Interviewees in seven case-study consortia recognised that there were benefits associated with collaborative ways of working. There was recognition that small partnership groups, with institutions in close proximity, were the most likely to establish themselves successfully as forms of partnership working, and that many institutions would in future keep delivery in-house. However, there was also recognition of the advantages of partnership working, if it brought benefits for students.

Although partnership working, a consortium-wide Diploma offer for all suitable learners, and progress towards the full Diploma entitlement was still the goal at the time the case-studies were undertaken, there was also recognition that pragmatic considerations would probably take precedence in future development.

In terms of future developments, at the time of the case-study visits (spring 2010), interviewees felt that increasing the numbers of Diploma learners and improving IAG were key priorities for future planning for Diplomas.

4 Delivery of Diploma Components

Key findings

Additional and specialist learning (ASL)

- Due to the challenges associated with providing a full range of ASL opportunities, staff across ten consortia felt that the potential for personalised learning through this component had not yet been fully realised.

- Sixty per cent of Year 11 Diploma learners were aware of taking other qualifications that contributed to their Diploma, while 35 per cent were not. Students interviewed across ten consortia were unaware of what constituted ASL and that it may count towards their Diploma.

- Where learners in Year 11 were aware of their ASL most (63 per cent) said it linked well with their Diploma, while 31 per cent said it did not.

Functional skills

- Functional skills continued to be identified as a significant issue for many students interviewed, in particular the time spent re-taking the assessments. Despite this, students across eight consortia reported that they could see some benefit in studying functional skills.

- Although many staff realised that teaching functional skills discretely was not in keeping with the ethos of the Diploma it was the most common approach adopted given the constraints of time and pressure of exams.

The project

- Overall, staff felt that the project had been well received by students and saw it as a valuable opportunity for personalised and student-led learning.

Personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS)

- Teachers across nine consortia were positive about PLTS and their benefits including developing their skills in independent learning and self-reflection, which it was felt would benefit them in their further learning in future, such as higher education.

- Staff across seven consortia stated that they were satisfied with the approach they had taken to PLTS and reported no problems in terms of incorporating them. However, there were inconsistencies in the approaches to assessing PLTS.

Employer contact and work experience

- Employer involvement was widespread among Diploma learners in Year 11. Two-thirds (66 per cent) of Year 11 Diploma learners had been on a work placement as part of their Diploma course and 85 per cent had engaged in another employer-related activity such as visiting a workplace or attending a talk.

- Among Year 13 Diploma learners, 85 per cent had engaged in some employer activity and 57 per cent had undertaken a work placement.

- About two-thirds of case-study Diploma students would have liked more contact with employers. Those studying for a Diploma at institutions without a post-16 curriculum had experienced less employer contact than those studying in a school with a sixth form or FE college (irrespective of age group).

- Teachers across ten consortia were either *satisfied* or *very satisfied* with the quality of work placements that Diploma students had accessed.

- The use of training providers and HEIs to support delivery of Diplomas was not widespread but where such organisations were used, this had remained largely stable.

- Employers were widely used to support delivery of the Diploma typically by hosting visits, providing speakers and providing work experience placements. While it was challenging to engage employers in a difficult economic climate and where they did not have a detailed understanding of the Diploma, consortia staff identified building and maintaining positive relationships, communicating effectively with employers and using a third party such as an EBP to broker relationships, as factors facilitating their involvement.

Implications for policy and practice

- The use of ASL as part of the Diploma is not necessarily understood by learners or made most effective use of by teaching staff. Although most learners who were aware of their ASL component considered that it linked well with their Diploma, a notable minority did not feel this was the case. It may be worth investigating further the extent to which the ASL currently adds value to the overall Diploma qualification.

- In order to ensure that the different components of the Diploma complement and do not duplicate each other, there is scope for further enhancement of communication between teachers of each component, in particular where they are located in different institutions, in order to provide learners with a coherent overall learning experience in working towards their Diploma.

- Functional skills have emerged throughout the delivery of the first Diplomas in 2008/2009 as a considerable challenge in terms of their content, their level and the assessments. Awarding bodies could usefully review the wording and presentation of functional skills examination questions. In addition, there may be value in reviewing the Guided Learning Hours that are required to adequately prepare Diploma learners for the assessments.

- While PLTS was generally regarded as a valuable component in the Diploma, the research revealed some variation in the approaches to delivering and assessing this component. There would be value, therefore, in identifying and disseminating best practice in relation to PLTS and methods for building students' skills in self-reflection.

This chapter explores the delivery of each of the main component parts of the Diploma. It explores from the perspective of teachers and learners:

- the ASL component and how this relates to the overall Diploma
- the role of functional skills
- the project
- PLTS
- work experience and work-related learning
- the role of training providers, employers and HEIs in supporting delivery of the Diploma.

4.1 ASL

4.1.1 Delivery of ASL

Staff across nine case-study consortia reported that the Diploma students had been able to openly access ASL options from their home institution's existing curriculum. Learners across three consortia were reported to have had their additional learning assigned by staff. In terms of specialist learning, staff across seven consortia reported that qualifications (or units of qualifications) such as BTECs and City and Guilds were being accessed. However, often due to timetabling constraints or the small size of the cohort, learners tended to have little choice over their specialist learning and were studying the same course as one another. Across 11 consortia, staff clearly indicated that ASL options were not accessible to their students in other institutions across the consortia; only staff in one consortium explicitly stated that this had been made possible.

This variation in the extent to which young people had a choice in their ASL was reflected in the survey findings. As can be seen in Table 4.1, Diploma learners do not have a common experience of the extent of choice in their ASL. While most had at least some choice, a notable minority in Year 11 felt that they had no choice.

Table 4.1   **Extent to which Year 11 and Year 13 learners considered they had a choice in their ASL**

	Year 11 %	Year 13 %*
I had lots of choice	16	18
I had some choice	45	61
I had no choice	23	14
I don't know / cannot remember	14	7
No response	2	-
N=	284	44

A filter question: all those who were aware of taking ASL
Weighted data
*based on low number of responses, percentages provided for illustration only
A single response question
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Surveys, 2010.

These findings are reflected in the observations of staff interviewed across ten consortia, who felt that the potential for personalised learning had not been realised by ASL. In addition to the lack of access to ASL in other institutions, staff highlighted the challenge of finding suitable courses which fit within the set number of guided learning hours.

As was the case when these case-study consortia were visited in 2009, some staff said they hoped to make more options available in the future once they had become more familiar and experienced at mapping Diploma provision. However, it would seem that an aligned timetable of adequate length will also be necessary to broaden the ASL offer.

4.1.2 Learners' views on ASL

Sixty per cent of Diploma learners in Year 11[11] who were surveyed said that they were taking other qualifications, with the exception of functional skills, that count towards their Diploma while 52 per cent of the Year 13 learners said this was the case. It appears therefore, that a notable minority of learners (35 per cent in Year 11 and 47 per cent in Year 13) did not recognise that they were taking ASL as part of their Diploma. This apparent absence of integration of ASL in the Diploma, from the perspective of learners, is further illustrated in the finding that among those who were taking ASL, although a minority, 31 per cent in Year 11 felt it did not link well with their Diploma subject (and a further six per cent were unsure) and 24 per cent of those in Year 13 felt it did not link well[12]. While it is acknowledged by a minority that ASL may not link directly to the Diploma, nevertheless, for most young people, their ASL component was felt to link well with their Diploma (63 per cent in Year 11 and 77 per cent in Year 13) indicating that this can be achieved and there may be practice that can be shared to address this.

Awareness of ASL was also not widespread among learners interviewed as part of the case-studies. A minority of interviewees across five consortia knew which additional qualifications they were studying counted towards their Diploma (although they were not always familiar with the term ASL). In addition, in one consortium, students were informed that the GCSE or A-level in which they achieved their highest grade would be identified as ASL at the end of the course, essentially identifying ASL retrospectively.

4.2 Functional skills

4.2.1 Delivery of functional skills

Interview responses suggested that consortia were most likely to be delivering functional skills in the home institution outside the principal Diploma units, either as discrete classes or as part of the GCSE course. Supporting this finding, 83 per cent of staff surveyed said that specialist staff were teaching functional skills, while only 19 per cent reported that principal learning teachers had that role. Survey responses also revealed variations in how functional skills were being covered throughout the course:

- Just under two-thirds (60 per cent) of teachers agreed to a great or to some extent that principal learning teachers make explicit reference between functional skills and principal learning

- Just over a third (35 per cent) of teachers agreed to a great or to some extent that functional skills teachers make explicit links between functional skills and principal learning. However, almost a quarter did not agree at all with the statement and another quarter were not sure if this was the case

- Just under two-fifths (37 per cent) of teachers did not agree that functional skills teachers have sector specific knowledge related to Diploma subjects, while around a quarter agreed to some extent that they did

---

[11] 477 Year 11 learners and 86 Year 13 learners responded to the survey.
[12] Based on 284 Year 11 learners and 44 Year 13 learners.

- Almost three-quarters (72 per cent) of teachers agreed to a great or to some extent that the learners they teach are progressing well with functional skills.

Interviews with staff provided further insights into the approach to teaching functional skills. Staff across seven consortia reported that functional skills had been embedded in the principal learning to some extent, but clarified that this was often unplanned in nature, was distinct from systematic, and it was mostly in tandem with discrete class time for functional skills. It appears from the observations of teaching staff that functional skills were more easily covered in the principal learning of some Diploma subjects than others (for example in Engineering rather than Society, Health and Development). For many, the lack of embedding of functional skills was not felt to be in keeping with the ethos of the Diploma but was the preferred approach given the constraints of time and the need to prepare learners for functional skills assessments.

There were contrasting views on the benefits of functional skills. Strategic consortium staff (for example, consortium leads and subject leads) identified the benefits of functional skills as raising and updating skills levels, providing young people with relevant skills for the work place and promoting independent learning skills. However, across six consortia interviewees explicitly said that they were unable to identify any benefits of the functional skills component (in the context of the Diploma), indicating that, for some, the challenges in relation to delivering functional skills ultimately outweighed the benefits.

More specifically, staff highlighted the main issues as follows:

- the failure of a number of students to pass their functional skills exams throughout the course. This had prompted institutions across seven consortia to adapt their approach to functional skills delivery; putting on additional examination-driven study sessions for learners and absorbing the costs of doing so

- the suitability of the level which was felt to be too high (teachers across four consortia), given that learners who struggled with functional skills were reported to be doing comparatively well in their principal learning units

- the time required to deliver functional skills and the need to embed them in the principal learning. This prompted staff across six consortia to note that insufficient time was available for functional skills in the course. Additionally, staff across five consortia (including three of the six mentioned) felt that functional skills had detracted from the main focus of the principal learning

- a lack of coordination and communication with respect to functional skills delivery at both consortium and institution level (identified across six consortia)

- the wording of the assessment questions (staff across four consortia); some felt extra time was needed to prepare young people to interpret and respond to the questions

- the timing of the publication of the results of functional skills assessments. Some results were not due to be published prior to the next opportunity to enter the examination and interviewees emphasised the impact of this on adding to the workload of both staff and students.

4.2.2 Learners' views on functional skills

Learners who were interviewed expressed mixed views on functional skills. Across nine consortia learners reported that they had experienced some difficulty with functional skills and were most likely to report particular difficulty with mathematics functional skills. As will be discussed in Chapter 8, this was the element of the Diploma which was causing students most concern in respect to their progress on the course. Many of these young people reported that, in response to the difficulties faced, they had been given additional lessons either in place of other lessons or outside of the normal school day. Echoing the observations of their teachers, learners across five consortia felt that functional skills assessment questions were not clear in their wording, typified in the comment of one student taking a Level 3 Creative and Media Diploma who said:

> *It takes longer to read the question than to give the answer.*

Despite the challenge posed by functional skills, students across eight consortia could see some benefit in studying this component of the Diploma. They highlighted the relevance of these skills to the work place and thus their future. One student taking the IT Diploma at Level 1 said,

> *Functional skills are challenging but when you look at what you get out of it, it helps a lot.*

This was particularly true for students in one consortium who, although not fully successful in their functional skills exams, remained positive about the need to gain these skills. They were perhaps influenced by the delivery model (in this case embedded in the principal learning and GCSE classes) and it is possible that staff across the consortium were spreading a clear and consistently positive message to students about the benefits of functional skills.

Learners across eight consortia indicated that they were demotivated by the fact they were working towards, or had already achieved, similar qualifications (i.e. mathematics and English) at Level 2. This was a particular problem for students in one consortium who were largely negative about functional skills – this was the only consortium in which all students commented that they felt the functional skills were not relevant to their Diplomas and had not felt well prepared for the exams. Staff in this consortium felt that communication between the college and their school could have been better to ensure functional skills were integrated into the principal learning and covered fully throughout the course. One school teacher in this consortium highlighted this need for a more integrated approach saying:

> *Students should see functional skills as part of the parcel of what they do, not as an add-on. There isn't an integrated approach from Diploma and specialist teaching staff. Too many of us live in small boxes. It needs to change, but you need someone to coordinate and enforce that – from SMT.*

Within a consortium, successful implementation of the functional skills component appears to rely on a demonstrable rationale for their inclusion which is consistently communicated to both staff and students, the provision of any necessary support to enable the most effective delivery model across the consortium and clear communication between providers.

4.3 The project

Overall staff felt that the project had been well received by students and saw it as a valuable opportunity for personalised learning. For example, an Engineering teacher stated that

> *Learners can be creative – in how they approach it and how they do it and it's an opportunity to be inspirational and explore something of interest to them.*

Some interviewees felt that the opportunity for personalised learning had been curtailed slightly by the learners' lack of skills and experience in managing their own work. Furthermore, the need to allocate sufficient time emerged as a key issue, particularly as some staff had chosen to address the project in the second year of delivery (two institutions said that the project had not been started yet which was causing them some concern).

It was evident that a balance between providing students with an opportunity to lead their project and learn independently, and retaining control over the project as a teacher, was required. While a few teachers reflected that they had perhaps allowed their students too much independence, others had recognised the need to provide some structure through, for example, setting timescales for each work task such as planning, research and analysis or introducing some limitations to the project in terms of its style or scope, for example favouring '*a theoretical, dissertation style approach to the project'* or limiting the topics for study. For example, one institution delivering the Engineering Diploma had given the theme of 'technological change over time', leaving the specific topic within this theme open to students' discretion.

Others had adopted a more practical approach; for example, one institution teaching the Engineering Diploma had set students a brief to design and produce a prototype. Another delivering the Creative and Media Diploma had encouraged students to pursue an area of interest resulting in a range of creative outputs such as designing a website or recording and publicising a music CD. Practical projects were least likely to have been adopted by those delivering the Society, Health and Development Diploma and these students were more likely than those on any other subject to have undertaken an essay-based approach. Teachers in one consortium felt strongly that this subject did not lend itself so well to practical projects as working directly with vulnerable people, for example, is precluded by health and safety considerations.

In two institutions, students had engaged in a 'real-life' project with real application. For example, one school gave each Diploma student an individual role on a building scheme at the school while another recruited Diploma students to behind-the-scenes roles in the school drama production. The teachers observed that this approach gave learners experience of real timeframes and the opportunity to see the actual impact of their work.

The evidence suggests that the project element of the Diploma can provide an important opportunity for personalised learning but needs to be well managed and directed. Teaching staff commencing delivery of Diplomas in future could benefit from the lessons learned by those engaged in the first two years by ensuring that they are aware of the need to manage the project component closely, alongside methods and ideas for delivery which do not limit the opportunity for personalised learning. It may also be necessary to highlight with staff, the importance of spending additional time

at the start of the project identifying key project management skills and processes with the young people and the skills required to learn independently.

4.4   PLTS

Teachers across nine consortia were positive about the PLTS component of the Diploma. Indeed, some institutions had started to use PLTS in other courses because they believed it would benefit all their learners. Where they noted the benefits of PLTS, they regarded it as a valuable opportunity for learners to develop skills of independent enquiry, to reflect on and articulate what they had learnt, to identify their preferred learning style and to recognise their achievements, thus raising their confidence and, in turn, ambition. It was also highlighted by some staff that these skills would serve learners well in the future, either at university or in employment. Staff across seven consortia stated that they were satisfied with the approach they had taken to PLTS and reported that they had encountered no challenges incorporating them.

Given the flexibility around PLTS implementation, there were some interesting differences in their delivery and, in turn, assessment of this component. For example, while staff across 12 consortia reported that the PLTS were incorporated into the Diploma principal learning, staff held different views on:

- the extent to which the PLTS needed to be made apparent to the students (in contrast to being implicitly covered by the Diploma content),

- the extent to which they should adapt their teaching style and the activities delivered in order to promote PLTS,

- the amount of self-reflection that should be expected of the learners.

Strategic and operational staff across five consortia observed that this component had unnecessarily complicated the Diploma. They felt that evidencing and highlighting PLTS in the principal learning had been an additional burden on both learners and teachers, or that learners did not have the necessary skills of self-reflection to assess their own progress. These teachers were most likely to assess and evidence learners' progress in PLTS themselves, and adopted what many of them termed a 'tick box' approach. However, this challenge of providing evidence of PLTS, while continuing to prioritise learning over evidencing, is illustrated in the comment of one school manager who said that requiring learners to fill in sheets:

> *...is overload, just paperwork to be filled in. The students are doing the team-working and being reflective learners. There comes a point when you haven't got time to do the doing because you've got to do the evidence for the doing.*

Others agreed that learners had not yet developed these skills, but felt that guiding the learners through self-reflection was part of the challenge as a teacher and in keeping with the ethos and learning aims of the Diploma. These teachers were more likely to overtly discuss progress made on PLTS as a class and encourage learners to develop their own evidence in the form of worksheets completed at the end of each unit. This approach is summarised by one subject lead for the Society, Health and Development Diploma who said:

> *You have to bring it in gradually, raise their confidence and get them familiar with the terminology, so discussing it in class in a reflective way enabled us to*

do that....you have to draw it out of them and it becomes more like a game...if practitioners think they have covered them because they have covered the principal learning units then they are wrong because it relates to the way it was delivered, the activities you do...in the learning style.

In some instances, staff had found a way to make the collection of evidence more active in order to widen the appeal of self-reflection and make it seem more relevant to the course and the students' future. Staff in one institution, for example had encouraged students to interview one another as if in a job interview and film this for evidence. Another had teamed up with an employer to map the PLTS onto work skills (such as leadership); they then developed web-based software which enabled the students to record their performance online.

4.5 Employer contact and work experience

4.5.1 Employer contact

The majority of young people surveyed had engaged in some employer-related activities during their Diploma course. Eighty-five per cent of learners in Year 11, and the same proportion in Year 13, had undertaken some employer-related activities. Furthermore, 66 per cent of those in Year 11, and 57 per cent of Year 13s had spent time on a work placement. Table 4.2 provides further details of the type of activities undertaken by Year 11 learners.

Table 4.2   Employer-related activities undertaken by Year 11 learners

Activity	Yes %	No %	No response %
Someone from the world of work visited my school to talk to us	69	18	13
I visited a workplace with other students	67	20	13
I had advice / help from someone from the world of work (e.g. a mentor)	55	29	16
I have undertaken projects or challenges with someone from the world of work	54	29	17
Someone from the world of work teaches me Diploma lessons	37	44	19
N=477			

Weighted data
A series of single response questions
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Survey, 2010

It is evident that it was slightly more common to experience group events, either visiting a workplace or attending a talk, than individual advice or learning experiences such as undertaking a project or being taught by an employer. Among post-16 learners, the pattern was similar with visits from employers most commonly reported (67 per cent), and being taught least common (40 per cent).

The interviews with learners as part of the case-studies suggested a slightly lower level of employer engagement. Just over half of case-study learners felt that they had

experienced *little* employer contact over the two years of their Diploma course. Just under a quarter felt they had had *a lot*. Learners tended to report that contact with employers had taken place in the first year and had been reduced throughout the second to allow for assessment and principal learning commitments. Two institutions had not provided their Diploma learners with any employer contact other than their work experience.

Overall, students had enjoyed the contact with employers as it gave them the opportunity to see the working environment, the types of jobs available in the sector and the skills they would need in the future. Additionally, others felt that it brought their principal learning units to life and allowed them to ask employers questions directly. Some felt this was more effective than being told about work and careers by their teachers.

Employer-related experience was also widely valued by survey respondents, as shown in Table 4.3. The findings indicate that learners were more likely to find that they did worthwhile activities and learned about the types of jobs they might get in future (67 per cent and 65 per cent respectively) but were slightly more circumspect about its value in making their Diploma course interesting (43 per cent) and understanding their Diploma course better (49 per cent). This suggests that there could be scope for further enhancing the link between the work experience and employer engagement aspects of the Diploma and the learning element. Indeed, a number of staff interviewed in case-study consortia, who had not been involved in organising this element of the Diploma and who were predominantly from FE colleges, were not aware of the work experience the young people had undertaken or how it had been organised, which suggests that in those cases, work experience had not been linked back to the principal learning units.

Table 4.3:   Year 11 Diploma learners' views on their experience with an employer

	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Does not apply to me	No response
	%	%	%	%	%	%
It was useful because I did worthwhile tasks and activities	15	52	14	7	1	2	8
It was helpful for me in deciding what job I might do in the future	15	38	18	16	4	1	8
It has helped me to understand my Diploma course better	10	39	20	16	6	1	8
I did not enjoy my experience	4	11	13	33	27	4	8
It allowed me to use the skills I am learning on my Diploma course	12	43	16	13	5	1	10
It helped me to learn about the types of jobs I could get after finishing my Diploma	17	48	12	8	4	1	9
It has made my Diploma course more interesting	13	30	20	16	10	1	10
I did not see the link between this experience and my Diploma course	6	13	20	31	18	3	8
It has helped me learn how businesses work	13	43	19	8	5	2	9
It was with an employer relevant to my Diploma subject	14	39	24	8	4	2	9

N = 429

A filter question, all those who had experienced a work placement or other employer-related activity
Weighted data
A series of single response questions
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Survey, 2010

Given the finding that employer contact was an element of the course that learners particularly liked, it is perhaps unsurprising that about two-thirds of the Diploma students interviewed would have liked more contact with employers. This was not only related to the amount of contact but also the range of activities. Others felt that IAG received prior to the course had misled them about the amount of employer contact they could expect, which they had expected to be greater than transpired.

Those undertaking the Construction and Built Environment and the Engineering Diplomas were least likely among those interviewed to feel that they had experienced

a lot of contact with employers, while IT and Society, Health and Development students were most positive about the amount of employer contact they had received. Teachers delivering the Society, Health and Development Diploma in one consortium explained that they had gone to extra lengths to invite speakers in to counter the perceived 'dryness' of the course and the lack of opportunity for practical activity.

Those studying for a Diploma at institutions with a post-16 curriculum (i.e. FE colleges, sixth form colleges, or schools with sixth forms) were also more likely to report a lot of employer contact, irrespective of their age group. This may suggest differences in the strength and extent of existing links between post-16 institutions (compared with pre-16 institutions) and the world of work.

4.5.2 Work experience

Organising work experience

The survey findings revealed that 66 per cent of Year 11 learners, and 57 per cent of those in Year 13, had undertaken work placements. Similarly, staff interviewed during case-study visits reported that the majority of students had or were due to complete the ten days Diploma entitlement for work experience. Institutions were most likely to have organised work placements themselves (usually coordinated by a specialist member of staff) while three consortia reported the use of external organisations such as Trident and EBPs, with differing levels of success (in one consortium an external organisation had said that they were unable to assist 'because it's a rural area and they said it was too difficult'). Only two institutions had expected learners to find their own placements independently.

Schools that no longer offered all of Year 10 the opportunity to do a block placement felt their schools were less able to support them in setting up placements. One of these institutions, along with another in the same consortium (which felt it lacked employer contacts) was planning to use work-related learning days (i.e. visits to theatres and festivals) in place of work experience.

The quality of work experience

While it was generally acknowledged that it had been challenging to find work placements for Diploma learners (with Society, Health and Development creating the biggest challenge for staff as similarly reported in 2009) teachers across ten consortia were either very satisfied or satisfied with the quality of work placements that Diploma students had accessed. However, some were disappointed that, despite their best efforts they had been unable to source work placements of direct relevance to the Diploma for all students. The economic climate was cited by a number of staff as having a direct impact on the number of companies willing to take part, and three institutions across two consortia had experienced existing contacts withdrawing from involvement for this reason. Others felt competition for placements, especially where block placements were scheduled to coincide with Year 10 work experience had further impeded the availability of quality work experience opportunities.

Three institutions (across three consortia) were encouraging learners to use the hours they worked in part time jobs as evidence of work experience completed. This 'retro-fitting' of tasks completed outside of the course to fulfil the guided learning hours of Diplomas was also reported in relation to ASL to some extent (see section 4.1.2). One institution had taken this approach to both ASL and work experience and

this illustrates how institutions are seeking creative solutions to the need to cover all the Diploma components.

Learners' views on work experience

The majority of learners interviewed as part of case-study visits said that they had completed the required ten days of work experience. They were largely enthusiastic about their experience and its relevance to their course. Furthermore, some reported that they had learnt communication or practical skills. Of the minority who had not enjoyed their work placement, they felt that the experience had helped to narrow or focus their career choices in other areas.

Of those Year 11 young people surveyed who had experienced a work experience placement, this was most frequently undertaken as a block placement of one or two weeks duration (63 per cent) while one day placements were less widely reported (19 per cent), as were ongoing placements, such as one day a week (ten per cent). Among the 47 post-16 survey respondents who had undertaken a work placement, a similar pattern emerged with 79 per cent engaged in a block placement, although ongoing placements were more common (36 per cent).

Completing the work experience over a two-week block was also most common among the learners interviewed, followed by completion over two one-week blocks. The minority had completed their work experience in a series of day visits on an ongoing basis. Splitting the work placement clearly gave learners the opportunity to experience different employers and working environments. However, those who did a two-week block placement were more likely to report that they had learnt a skill over their extended experience. Those working towards the Engineering Diploma were most likely to report that they had learnt a practical skill on their work experience.

Despite some of the challenges associated with work experience, it was clearly a valued component of the Diploma and worth overcoming the challenge of engaging employers in order to provide learners with this experience. Indeed, Staff in some institutions felt that the Diploma had raised the profile of industry and applied learning and helped them develop links with employers. For example, one senior manager commented:

> *The main benefit is opening people's eyes on curriculum development and applying knowledge and the connections to the industrial sectors. More staff here are now aware of the gap between the curriculum and what employers need and want.*

4.6 Involvement of training providers, HEIs and employers in delivery

In order to deliver the Diploma components, some consortia had engaged the support of training providers, HEIs and employers in the strategic planning and the delivery of Diplomas. This is discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

4.6.1 Training providers

The previous evaluation report (O'Donnell et al., 2009) identified nine consortia where there was some involvement from training providers, including three where there was shared teaching of principal learning between schools or colleges and training provider staff. In six, the involvement of training providers remained the same during the second year of delivery, while in two it had decreased and in one,

increased. Evidence from the second year of delivery suggests, for all subjects other than Engineering, that training provider involvement has not expanded. In one consortium, the level of involvement had increased as learners taking the Engineering Diploma were now working directly with the training provider rather than the college.

4.6.2 HEIs

The 2009 visits had revealed the varied nature of HEI involvement in the 15 case-study consortia, and this continued to be the general picture. There were five consortia where no HEI involvement was reported and two where there was direct involvement in Diploma delivery. In the others, there was involvement at strategic level through inclusion on Partnership Boards, and practical involvement included provision of facilities, assistance with course development and links related to provision of teacher training courses. Two consortium leads referred to a general increase in interest in the Diploma from their local HEI, but that this had not yet translated into any specific involvement.

In 2010, three interviews were conducted with HEI representatives[13]. In two consortia, interviews were conducted with representatives of HEIs engaged in teaching the Diploma, and in another with a HEI-based representative of Aimhigher, who was engaged in supporting the Society, Health and Development Diploma throughout the area. Her focus was the content and delivery of the principal learning units and employer engagement, and she believed that learners had benefited from the activities and visits that they had undertaken as a result of employer contacts.

The other two interviewees were both from HEIs involved in teaching units of the Level 3 Engineering Diploma. In one, staff from the school and university had worked closely together on planning and delivering the units and involvement was perceived to be mutually advantageous to both partners. Furthermore, the learners were perceived to have benefited because of access to the facilities and specialist teaching the university could provide. Although financially their involvement placed a disadvantage on the HEI, Diploma involvement was regarded as a 'community activity', and there were benefits, as he explained in the form of '*good students who apply for our courses and are already familiar with the university'.*

This interviewee considered that attitudes to the Diploma had become more positive in his own institution and more widely:

> *There's been a lot of confusion about what it stood for, but the engineering fraternity has taken it on board because of the practical project-based approach.*

For the second institution, their involvement in delivery had started later in the course, but the interviewee was also generally positive about the contribution the university was making to the experience of the students.

4.6.3 Employers

The teacher survey indicated that, for pre- and post-16 delivery, employer involvement had most often been hosting visits for learners. Table 4.4 also shows

---

[13] As part of the case-study visits, three interviews were completed before 5th May 2010.

that providing work experience and visiting speakers had been an important employer contribution.

Table 4.4   **Employers' contribution to Diploma delivery**

Employers' contribution pre-16	Yes %	No %	No response %
Hosting one-off visits	75	12	13
Providing visiting speakers	70	15	15
Providing work experience	66	19	15
Providing projects/challenges	43	43	13
Mentoring or providing work placements for teaching staff	22	63	15
Delivery of principal learning units and assessment	16	67	16
Mentoring young people	13	70	16
Other	3	10	87
N = 67			

A series of single response questions.
Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100.
A filter question: all those involved in teaching Diplomas to pre-16 learners.`
A total of 59 respondents gave at least one response to these questions.
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Teacher Survey, 2010.

In the case of post-16 Diploma delivery, the majority of the 25 teacher survey respondents felt that employers or people from the world of work had contributed to Diploma delivery in the following ways:

- hosting one-off visits for learners (20 respondents)
- providing work experience placements for learners (19 respondents)
- providing visiting speakers (18 respondents).

There appeared to be less engagement in terms of more involved contribution such as:

- providing projects/challenges for young people to complete (11 respondents)
- mentoring or providing work placements for teaching staff (seven respondents)
- delivery of principal learning units and assessment (six respondents)
- mentoring young people (five respondents).

The types of employer involvement indicated by the surveys were also those referred to by case-study interviewees and by learners who responded to the survey, reported earlier in this chapter, and overall there were eight consortia where employer involvement was considered to be good or improving. Reasons for this positive employer involvement were linked to:

- effective communication. For example an area-wide Diploma subject network was perceived to be valuable by one interviewee. Additionally, one consortium lead emphasised the importance of good communications, '*both in terms of making it clear how the employer can help and giving* [them] *detailed information'*

- building and maintaining good relationships, between employers and Diploma providers

- where appropriate the involvement of a third party, for example a consultant or EBP representative who could dedicate time to building relationships with employers.

It was also observed that there was a growing awareness of Diplomas in the business community and that this could lead to further employer involvement in the future.

The key challenges to employer engagement in Diplomas were identified by employers interviewed and by case-study interviewees as:

- the economic situation and the limited number of suitable employers available; one consortium lead for example, referred to local employers '*laying off substantial numbers of their workforce'*

- poor communication was seen to be a challenge to more extensive employer involvement, to some extent by all employer interviewees. For example, one employer who had initially worked with a college to deliver the Construction and the Built Environment Diploma described how involvement had declined in the second year because of what the interviewee described as a '*breakdown of communication'*. Others had felt that they could have been better informed by school staff about what was required of them, or been given details about the students who were visiting them. This illustrates again how successful employer involvement can often be dependent on effective communication, and that this, in turn, can sometimes depend on individual contacts. It also indicates the difficulties that school staff may have in finding the time to deal effectively with employers, as this consortium lead reflected:

    One of the difficulties has been finding the teachers' time to sit down with an employer and focus on what the unit needs in terms of specific employer input.

- there was a general view among consortium leads that it was important to raise the profile of the Diploma as many employers lacked understanding of Diplomas and this was viewed as disadvantageous to furthering employer involvement.

The evidence from the interviews with employers shows that they are willing to become involved in Diplomas because they can see the benefits of this both for young people and for their own organisations. However, in order to assist this process, they need good communication with the institutions that are delivering Diplomas and a clear understanding of what contribution they can make and how this can be achieved. It would seem too that employers are often not aware of the nature of Diplomas as a qualification, or the part played by employers in their design and that this would benefit from being disseminated more widely.

4.7　Challenges with Delivery

In response to an open-ended question in the survey of teachers, a fifth of staff surveyed identified assessment or support in relation to assessment as one of the challenges of the Diploma delivery (making it the most common issue amongst staff).

A tenth of staff surveyed identified communications with partner institutions as a challenge of Diploma delivery. This was also an issue for case-study staff across six consortia. A tenth of staff surveyed explained that time had been an issue. Case-study responses illuminated this further, with staff across seven consortia explaining that timetabling the Diploma had been a challenge, or that time was needed for effective communications between partner institutions (staff in six consortia), that coverage of all Diploma components had been a time pressure (staff in six consortia), and that planning and the administration of the course had been hard work and demanded a lot of staff time (staff in five consortia).

Case-study interviewees (across seven consortia) were also concerned that a lack of understanding amongst non-Diploma teaching staff, parents and students had hampered take-up and commitment to the course, which staff across four consortia attributed to uncertainty over the validity of the course (in the view of HEIs and employers), and was felt in some cases to have affected the viability of the course. A lack of practical learning was seen as a challenge of delivery by eight per cent of staff surveyed.

4.8　Summary

Overall, staff were generally positive about the benefits of each Diploma component (with the exception of functional skills) but acknowledged that they had found the Diploma complex to deliver. Teachers had sometimes been quite creative in terms of delivery in order to cover the components within the correct guided learning hours. In some cases this has led to inconsistencies which could be argued to divert from the objectives and ethos of the Diploma; for example, using the students 'best subject' as their ASL, encouraging students to use their part-time jobs to evidence work experience, or avoiding learner self-evaluation to evidence PLTS. On the other hand, some staff had used their creativity to take a more 'holistic' approach to delivery which was serving to promote the ethos and learning aims of the Diploma; such as using appropriate activities that covered principal learning content but also incorporated PLTS – for example, asking students to present their project idea to an employer.

This type of approach will become more of a reality as staff grow more familiar with the content and requirements of the Diploma. Staff recognise an additional hindrance to full coverage of the components relates to a lack of communication on their part across the consortium and it has become clear throughout this evaluation that they need time to ensure that ideas and information are shared and that content is mapped appropriately.

While training providers and HEIs had not been widely used to support delivery, there was widespread use of employers, in particular to provide speakers, host visits and provide work experience. Although staff acknowledged the challenge of overcoming the economic climate, employers understanding of the Diploma in engaging with employers, building good relationships, ensuring good communication and involving a third party as a broker were all seen as facilitating factors in engaging with employers.

5   Teaching and Learning

Key Findings

- Teachers considered that teaching the Diploma was different compared to other qualifications and the majority (85 per cent) had changed their teaching approach at least to some extent to teach the qualification. Learners' experience indicated that they were more likely than their peers to have engaged in problem-solving, group work, giving presentations and recording their progress, across their courses, and less likely to have used worksheets and textbooks.

- Key differences in the teaching approach, identified by teachers, were applying the subject matter to the workplace or real world, acting more as a facilitator or guide to the learners and encouraging independent learning, taking a more holistic approach (working across units) and working collaboratively with colleagues.

- Aligned to this, there was evidence that teachers felt that learners benefitted from a more applied approach that was relevant to the world of work and that they had benefitted professionally from reinvigorating their teaching, expanding the variety of their experience, working collaboratively and taking a more facilitative approach to teaching.

- There were challenges associated with teaching the Diploma, which were principally related to the higher workload for staff and students compared with other qualifications, and to the assessment process. Some teachers reported that assessment was not aligned closely enough with the applied nature of the Diploma and had not been sufficiently supported by the awarding bodies. Other challenges included maintaining the motivation and engagement of learners, working collaboratively with colleagues and employers, and keeping knowledge of the sector up to date.

- Procedures for assuring quality of teaching across consortia had developed since the first year of delivery and there was evidence in most consortia of quality protocols, standardisation meetings and/or observations. It was apparent that the latter was the most challenging and consortia staff noted issues surrounding agreeing criteria and accommodating the requirements around observations of teachers.

- Diploma learners surveyed indicated that their Diploma learning experience entailed more work and smaller classes and felt that they were gaining more skills and experience compared to their other qualifications. However, they generally did not consider it to be more practical.

- Generally, the learners interviewed observed that their Diploma course involved more independent learning and taking more responsibility and was more applied and relevant to the workplace. They noted the more relaxed environment and smaller classes which was associated with a higher level of support from teachers.

- The evidence from teachers and learners suggests that Diploma students benefitted from the development of team-working, researching and communication skills and most learners said that they felt more confident as a learner overall.

Implications for policy and practice
• It is evident that the Diploma approach was viewed as entailing more work for teachers than other qualifications in terms of preparation and delivery. It may be worth reviewing with teachers of Diplomas how far this is an issue of commencing delivery of a new and unfamiliar qualification or whether it is inherent to the Diploma approach.
• The Diploma was also considered to entail a higher workload for students in terms of achieving the requirements within the expected guided learning hours. There may be value in reviewing the guided learning hours to ensure they are sufficient as part of the review leading to a more streamlined Diploma.

This chapter explores the experience of teaching the Diplomas in the first two years, from the perspective of the teaching staff, and the learners' views on the learning experience. It examines:

- the teaching approaches adopted and the extent to which these differed for Diploma delivery
- the advice teachers would give to others embarking on teaching a Diploma
- the monitoring and quality assurance procedures adopted by consortia
- learners' attitudes towards learning and the Diploma
- the impact of the Diploma on learners' development.

5.1   Teaching approaches

The evaluation of Diplomas carried out during the first year of delivery (Lynch *et al*., 2010) revealed that most teachers considered that Diplomas provided a different teaching and learning experience. They welcomed the link between theory and the real world practice of industry, business and the professions.

Teachers were positive about the encouragement of independent learning, the opportunity to teach in a more 'holistic' way, and the greater use of interactive teaching techniques, such as group work and role play. Diploma learners identified the benefits of the 'real world' context of their programme and its development of their independent learning skills.

5.1.1   Diploma teaching approaches

The Diploma provided an opportunity to adapt teaching approaches and to learn in a more independent and applied way. To explore how far the learning experience had differed for Diploma learners and comparison learners who were not taking a Diploma, the survey explored the extent to which they had undertaken a range of learning activities. This revealed that, while the Diploma learners in Years 11 and 13, and their peers, both experienced a range of activities in at least some lessons, a

higher proportion of those who were taking a Diploma reported undertaking problem-solving and group work activities, and giving presentations and recording their own progress, more frequently (in all or most lessons) than the comparison groups, as illustrated in Table 5.1. Moreover, the Diploma learners were less likely to report working from textbooks and worksheets.

Table 5.1   Diploma and comparison learners' experience of a range of learning activities in all or most lessons

Activity	Year 11 Diploma %	Year 11 comparison %	Year 13 Diploma %	Year 13 comparison %
Contribute to a class discussion	64	59	66	70
Problem-solving activities	51	40	54	40
Group work	50	39	57	43
Give presentations	24	12	38	15
Work alone	71	73	67	71
Practical activities	33	30	44	34
Work from textbooks or worksheets	60	68	37	53
Record your own progress or achievements	35	19	39	26
N=	477	680	86	131

A series of single response items – responses 'all lessons' or 'most lessons' only presented, therefore percentages do not sum to 100.
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Surveys, 2010

Although the Diploma is an applied qualification, the experience of practical activities did not differ markedly between those taking the Diploma in Year 11 and their peers who were not taking this qualification. However, among Year 13 respondents, there was evidence of a greater proportion of Diploma learners engaging in practical activities in all or most of their lessons.

As in the first year of delivery, and concurring with these indications from the learner surveys, in the second year of delivery, teachers who were surveyed, case-study consortium -and institutional-level staff and learners largely perceived Diplomas to be delivered using a different approach to other qualifications

The interviews with teachers revealed that they were most positive about the benefits of the Diplomas where there was evidence they had embraced the change in teaching style that Diplomas offered and were enthusiastic about teaching Diplomas. This was the case in five consortia and is illustrated by one teacher who stated:

> *In my twilight years as a teacher, I've found the enthusiasm that I used to have* [when I was starting out on my career] *…it's doing stuff with the kids, they're enjoying their learning*

The majority of teachers surveyed said they had changed their teaching approach in order to deliver the Diploma (23 per cent did this *to a great extent* and 62 per cent *to some extent*). Those teachers who had changed their teaching approach were asked the extent to which they agreed that Diploma students have more opportunity to undertake the activities listed in Table 5.2 below. It is evident that the two aspects

that teachers considered Diploma learners had more opportunity to experience were independent learning and ICT-supported activities.

In the case of most activities, a notable majority of teachers felt that Diploma students had more opportunity to carry out the activities in contrast to students taking other qualifications. The exceptions were:

- a smaller proportion of teachers felt that Diploma students had more opportunities to benefit from teacher presentation to the whole class (ten per cent *strongly agreed* and 33 per cent *agreed*)

- only half of teachers believed (19 per cent *strongly agreed* and 33 per cent *agreed*) that Diploma students had more opportunity to benefit from greater employer involvement.

Table 5.2   Teachers' views on the learning opportunities experienced by Diploma learners

Diploma students have more opportunities to…	Strongly agree %	Agree %	No strong opinion %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	No response %
carry out independent research work	34	38	13	2	0	13
undertake ICT-supported activities	35	33	13	7	0	13
participate in class discussions	17	49	10	8	2	13
use real role play/real-life scenarios	16	45	20	5	1	13
make presentations	16	44	15	12	0	13
undertake practical activities	24	35	13	10	2	15
undertake problem-solving activities	22	37	20	8	0	13
undertake group work activities	27	30	17	12	1	13
benefit from greater employer involvement	19	33	23	8	5	13
benefit from teacher presentation to the whole class	10	33	30	13	1	13

N = 86

A series of single response questions
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Teacher Survey, 2010

Additionally, the survey revealed that pre-16 Diploma learners were most often given the opportunity to apply their principal learning theoretical knowledge during classroom activities or tasks, as shown in Table 5.3, and were less frequently applying their knowledge in a workplace setting or with professionals from the sector.

Table 5.3   Teachers' views on how frequently Diploma learners had the opportunity to apply their knowledge

Pre-16 Diploma learners are given the opportunity to-	Often %	Sometimes %	Rarely %	Never %	No response %
apply their Diploma principal learning knowledge during classroom activities/tasks	54	33	4	1	7
apply their Diploma principal learning knowledge in a real work-related context	13	36	37	3	10
apply their Diploma theoretical knowledge through working with professionals from their Diploma sector	9	36	33	9	13
demonstrate functional skills within their Diploma principal learning	21	51	18	1	9
reflect on their PLTS within their Diploma principal learning	24	46	19	0	10

N = 67

A series of single response questions
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Teacher Survey, 2010

The majority of the teachers (17 out of 27 respondents) involved in teaching Diplomas to post-16 learners felt that the learners were given the opportunity to apply their Diploma principal learning knowledge during classroom activities/tasks. Additional applications included opportunities to:

- reflect on their PLTS within their Diploma principal learning (11 respondents)

- apply their Diploma principal learning knowledge in a real work-related context (eight respondents)

- apply their Diploma theoretical knowledge through working with professionals from their Diploma sector (seven respondents)

- demonstrate functional skills within their Diploma principal learning (six respondents).

It should be noted that these survey findings are based on small numbers (67 respondents teaching pre-16 Diplomas and 25 teaching post-16 learners), but they suggest that the application of Diploma learning to work-related settings occurred mainly in a classroom setting (for example, in a realistic work environment).

Different pedagogical approaches to teaching Diplomas were examined in more detail in the case-studies and several key differences compared to teaching other courses were identified. These included:

- **an emphasis on applying the subject matter to industry or a work-related area**. Although the survey findings suggest that Diplomas were delivered largely

in classroom-based settings, the interviews revealed that, nevertheless, this comprised applying knowledge to the workplace. Staff from across 12 consortia felt that this represented a different approach to that employed for other qualifications. This focus on an applied approach was reported to have offered the opportunity to use a broader range of techniques and to make learning more exciting for the learners, as described by one subject lead:

> *we have had to adapt how we teach, liaising with business, making the learning more relevant, placing it in context – that's all made it more exciting for the learners.*

Examples of the way in which Diploma learning was reported to have been applied to work-related contexts included the following:

➢ On the IT Diploma, learners in one consortium were reported to be doing a multi-media task where they were creating a story book for pupils in a local school, who would then provide feedback to the Diploma students. Additionally, they visited a workplace to see how the car industry used technology

➢ On the Creative and Media Diploma learners in a second consortium were reported to have promoted their own exhibitions, using skills they had developed doing graphics, for example promoting gallery spaces. They visited a photography studio and learnt about lighting, then used that skill in their project work. Additionally they carried out a workshop with a freelance film editor and used professional editing software which they then went on to use in their projects

➢ On the Society, Health and Development Diploma, one teacher described how they had visited the Houses of Parliament in order to examine how decisions and laws are made. They had also visited magistrates' courts to let the learners see that lay magistrates do not initially have the skills and knowledge necessary to carry out their work but that they develop them as, for example, nurses do

➢ A teacher on the IT Diploma explained how a Level 2 group of learners had examined energy efficiency in their own school. They were reported to have worked with the school's technicians and the facilities manager and an energy company. They conducted an energy audit of equipment and produced graphs and charts of their research data and presented to the senior management team their proposals to reduce the school's electricity bill by 50 per cent. If it is adopted the school may win an eco award

➢ A teacher on the Creative and Media Diploma had structured the learners' working week to replicate the working environment. He explained how he starts each week with a meeting and students all take minutes. They discuss progress and action plans and contribute with presentations. He tried to structure the work as if they were a small company and each week they had specific tasks. He believed the structure had worked well and students were reported to have enjoyed it.

- **The opportunity to teach more as a 'facilitator' or guide to the learning experience** where teachers could encourage learners to adopt a more

> *It is more about getting the students to be more independent enquirers, it is very much "go out and find out then come back and we'll talk about it".*

However, as pointed out by one subject lead, some students needed more direction than others:

> *If you have a good student it* [independent learning] *works but poor students need much more direction.*

- **Teaching in a more 'holistic' manner**. This holistic approach (noted in six consortia), was appreciated, as learners could work on more than one unit at any one time, which meant that teachers could consider a topic in its entirety, as described by one teacher:

    > *I feel this is one of the most positive changes I have seen in education for a long time...the course is not restrictive, for example when discussing the development of a housing estate it can also include the social impact on crime and the environment.*

- **The opportunity to work more collaboratively with colleagues**. Staff from three consortia believed the need to work with colleagues, from different departments or institutions, encompassed the need to work in a different way from other courses, although there was recognition that this was not always happening, as one consortium lead observed: *'collaborative delivery is when it* [Diploma delivery] *works best, but this is still not the norm'.*

Fully embracing these different ways of teaching the Diploma has presented benefits to learners and teachers and these are explored in more detail in section 5.1.3.

5.1.2   Co-teaching Levels 1 and 2

Two-thirds (67 per cent) of teachers surveyed said they did not co-teach Level 1 and Level 2 learners as one group. Of the 18 respondents (21 per cent) who did co-teach, ten felt it worked *very* or *quite well*, partly because it enabled Level 1 students to achieve above expectations, as they were for example, also taught Level 2 skills and Level 2 students were reported to pull Level 1 students up to Level 2 standards.

Five survey respondents considered that co-teaching did not work well in practice. One case-study Creative and Media subject lead offered an explanation of why such co-teaching was not reported to work well. He believed that the inherent difficulty was that the units and tasks at each level are different. Furthermore he felt it could be better to have differentiation by outcome. He highlighted in particular the logistical challenge of ensuring that the students in the group on the different levels accumulated all the required evidence.

5.1.3   Benefits of different approaches

Reflecting the observations from learners about the key differences between teaching for Diplomas in contrast to other subjects (see section 5.6 below), consortium and institutional level staff believed the main benefits of the different

approach Diplomas represented lay in learners taking more responsibility for their own learning (five consortia) and learning being more related to industry (four consortia). For example, one consortium lead commented on how the scope for young people to acquire credit for independent enquiry was *'a real benefit'*, while a subject lead linked increased confidence with the greater focus on independent learning.

Many teachers were positive about the new opportunities for embracing different teaching approaches that the Diploma offered (outlined in section 5.1.1 above) and expanded on why these different approaches were beneficial, for example:

- the applied nature of the qualification meant teachers could relate learning to the world of work more readily. Teachers from six consortia described how they were enjoying the focus on an applied and active way of learning

- the more innovative ways of teaching meant that teachers (from six consortia) felt that teaching on the Diploma had reinvigorated their teaching, for example one teacher said that *'it's given me new direction with my teaching'*

- the Diploma course facilitated a greater focus on guiding or mentoring learners in contrast to traditional teaching. As the Diploma encouraged more independent enquiry, teachers from three consortia felt their role was often more about facilitating learning than for example, didactic teaching

- the greater variety of teaching methods and content meant that teachers (from four consortia) could expand the diversity and range of their teaching, for example one reported that he liked the variety of disciplines within the subjects

- teachers could work collaboratively with colleagues from within the home institution, and external organisations (observed by staff in four consortia).

Clearly, the evidence suggests that there are distinctive benefits associated with the different approaches taken to teaching Diplomas from both learners' and staff perspectives.

5.1.4   Challenges of different approaches

In the first year of Diploma delivery, the main challenges of Diploma teaching from the practitioner perspective were perceived to be a lack of time, functional skills, support from the awarding bodies and, where relevant, the unfamiliarity with teaching a particular age group. In this second year of delivery there was evidence that some of these issues continued to present challenges as Diploma teachers highlighted lack of time, the assessment process and the awarding bodies as key challenges. Teachers from across seven consortia had continued to find the workload challenging in terms of finding the time to plan and deliver all the units within the timescales (for example, submissions of work by May) and within the guided learning hours.

Assessment had proved to be a considerable challenge in this second year of delivery, teachers from seven consortia noted that assessment and the awarding bodies had represented the key challenge to them (see Chapter 6). More specifically, the perceived lack of support from awarding bodies was cause for concern, for example one teacher said that a *'big barrier'* to his Diploma teaching had been *'non-existent'* support from the exam board. Another felt there was not enough credit for *'doing',* even though it was supposed to be an applied qualification. There was also a

perceived tension between the recommended holistic teaching approach and the assessment structure, as expressed by a subject lead for Society, Health and Development who said '*the assessment was opposite and contrary to what the Diploma is about'*.

Furthermore a few teachers felt that their ability to teach innovatively (and fully embrace the applied nature of the qualification) had been restricted by the assessment requirements. For example, one teacher observed that:

> *None of the exam boards had exemplar materials....and when the specifications came out they were very restrictive. The Diploma should be 50 per cent applied learning, but there's very little applied learning in any of the assessments.*

Additional main challenges to Diploma teachers in this second year of delivery were:

- keeping young people motivated and organised so they could work independently. This was recognised as a challenge by teachers from seven consortia who observed that learners found the independent style of learning difficult, especially at Level 2. Comments such as '*independent learning has been the biggest hurdle',* '[the learners] *would rather be told what to do'* and, '*they're not ready for it',* were typical responses

- keeping young people engaged was an issue mainly because the course was not as the students expected. This was generally either because it was not as practical as they had been led to believe, or because the course was not appropriate for them. Teachers from eight consortia identified this issue, for example they observed that it was important that students had a suitable level of competence, such as grade C or above in English GCSE for the Level 3 Diploma, so that they would be able to cope with the amount of written work

- collaborative ways of working with colleagues in the same institution, in different institutions, and with employers. In terms of challenges for teaching, collaboration was highlighted by teachers from across six consortia as problematic in the sense that firstly, teachers had to accommodate colleagues' different teaching approaches. For example, one teacher explained this aspect to be '*the most challenging thing I have ever done – but rewarding at the same time'*. Also, in terms of the amount of time involved, as reflected in the comment of one teacher who said '*developing and nurturing employers is very time consuming'*. The complexities and subtleties of collaboration were seen to be particularly challenging, as one college tutor expressed in connection with one strand of collaboration:

> *The idea of collaborating with schools is a nice model in theory, but schools don't have the understanding at Level 3, so we don't have the support. Lots of teachers bury their heads in the sand and don't know what it [the Diploma] is because it affects their delivery models and sixth form options. They see it as a very minor drop in the ocean in terms of qualifications available'*.

- maintaining their knowledge of current developments in the relevant industry area in order to teach the applied element.

It is likely that some of these challenges will be resolved with time and experience from lessons learned. For example, the current perception of the higher workload associated with preparing and delivering Diplomas than teachers' experience for

other qualifications should be eased in time, as staff become more familiar with the qualification, as should the selection of appropriate young people and their engagement in a more independent way of working. However, challenges with regard to assessment will require further discussions with awarding bodies and collaborative approaches to teaching will need more dialogue in order to develop.

5.2 E-learning and use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs)

The majority of teachers surveyed agreed (35 per cent *strongly agreed* and 33 per cent *agreed*) that, in comparison to other qualifications they deliver, Diploma students had more opportunities to undertake ICT-supported activities. Use of e-learning in the first year of Diploma delivery was in early stages of development in some consortia, and better-established in others (Lynch *et al*., 2010). Although progress had clearly been made in terms of the use of e-learning and VLEs, this difference was similarly apparent in the second year of Diploma delivery.

There was some evidence, across six consortia that consortium-wide VLEs to support Diploma delivery were either partly in place or planned, although none appeared to be fully operational across the consortium. In two of these cases a *'local authority VLE'* was described as available to all institutions. In the other case it was at present used minimally for Diplomas due to the low numbers of students. Plans for developing a consortium-wide Diploma VLE included one LA where Diploma grant funding was being used to develop a learning platform (which will use a 'data-save system', where resources will be uploaded but will not be interactive) and another LA which currently had a learning platform (with no learner access) and hoped to secure funding to progress to a fully operational consortium-wide VLE.

The use of institutional VLEs was widespread (albeit to varying degrees) in all but one consortium. Reflecting the different stages in advancement of consortium-wide VLEs, institutions both within and across consortia were similarly at different stages of development in their e-learning in terms of in-house use of VLEs. The number of different VLEs and stages of development represented a challenge in terms of the ideal of having consortium-wide VLEs to support the delivery of Diplomas. For example one consortium lead commented:

> *We probably have too many VLEs rather than a common system. We didn't start at square one with this - schools and colleges tend to use the systems they prefer. The notion of having the one system is not as simple as it sounds*

Another described a similar situation in which there were '[a] *patchwork of VLEs rather than a consortium-wide one'*.

Advantages of a consortium-wide VLE, if used effectively, were:

- the sharing/uploading of resources, notes and timetables; students uploading assignments and the reduction in the use of paper
- the widespread availability of exam board exemplars and information
- the widespread availability of exemplars and information from other consortia.

Staff at consortium and institutional levels identified barriers to consortium-wide Diploma VLEs to be:

- the time needed to devote to the proactive use (by staff and learners) and updating of VLEs, for example one tutor described it as *'another thing to do'*

- the need to have someone to administer and manage it

- addressing issues about confidentiality and data protection

- whether there was a need for one if there was limited collaboration between institutions

- concerns as to whether it would be able to cope with the potential number of young people using it

- the concern that VLEs are perceived to be 'superfluous' by young people who prefer to use social networking sites, such as Facebook, YouTube, blogging or more '*current appropriate technology*'. In one instance, for example, learners had stored a video clip on YouTube, as it was easier to access than the school VLE.

Many young people reported using a VLE to support their Diploma learning and those in seven consortia described VLEs as useful, for example they observed 'it*'s easier to use from home than email, the work is just there'* and '*it's easier to find resources'*.

Reasons for those who were at institutions where VLEs were available, but were not using them, included lack of perceived need to use the VLE as teachers provided paper resources or because of technological problems, as the following comments from learners reveal:

> *PowerPoint's and essays are put up on the VLE, but I don't really use it* [the VLE] *as I pick them up from college and just keep them in a folder.*

> *I haven't been able to access it from home*.

It was slightly more common for case-study learners to report that they did *not* use a VLE for their Diploma work in contrast to those who said they did. A few learners across four consortia said they had not heard of a VLE and others viewed the use of a memory stick to be easier. Where VLEs were believed to be of limited use, learners reported using for example email, mobile phones, and social network sites such as Facebook and MSN to keep in contact with their peers or tutors.

5.3   Advice for teachers

Teachers experienced in teaching Diplomas outlined their advice to those starting to deliver Diploma courses in an open question in the survey. They commonly emphasised the need to allow sufficient time to plan and prepare in addition to comments relating to the practical and logistical considerations, the teaching approach, staff development and the identification of students, outlined below.

- **Practical and logistical considerations**: teachers noted the need to ensure that relevant resources were available, to consider the travel-to-learn implications and ensure that relevant policies and procedures are in place before delivery commenced. The need to allow sufficient time to plan and prepare for the course, including engaging employers, was identified. In these early stages, there were some indications that the Diploma was seen by some staff as a time consuming qualification to manage and deliver.

- **Consideration of the teaching and learning approach**: teachers noted the need to take a more facilitative approach and to explore innovative ways of working. They highlighted the need to ensure the course was related to the working world and suggested providing business challenges and treating young people as though they were industry professionals. Advice on teaching included: breaking down the schemes of work into manageable parts, spreading the practical elements throughout the course, taking a holistic approach as distinct from a unit by unit approach and not sharing delivery of individual units. The need to incorporate the functional skills element wherever possible was mentioned in addition to ensuring the delivery of this component was monitored. Teachers also noted the value in linking the learning objectives clearly to tasks, to assist the learners in understanding the expectations, and providing examples and clear assessment dates.

- **Staff development**: ensuring that staff delivering the Diploma were well trained, knowledgeable and committed was a key piece of advice provided by teachers. To assist in building the knowledge of staff, respondents' suggestions included visiting a centre with experience of delivering the Diploma subject and sharing resources between teaching staff.

- **Selection of students**: a key piece of advice from existing Diploma teachers was to ensure that the appropriate students were identified to undertake a Diploma. In particular, they highlighted the need to ensure that young people received effective IAG and were advised appropriately including, in the view of some respondents, identifying whether A Levels would be a more appropriate route for a student considering higher education, or if an alternative qualification would be more appropriate if a learner wanted a practical course.

5.4 Monitoring the quality of teaching and learning

Evaluation of the first year of delivery of the Diplomas (Lynch *et al*., 2010) revealed a mixed picture of how quality assurance (QA) of Diploma teaching and learning was developing. In most consortia, to a large extent, QA was undertaken by individual institutions. Consortium-wide QA procedures are a particular issue in Diploma delivery because of the instances where learners from one institution are travelling to learn in another institution, and the need for senior staff at the home institution to be confident of the quality of the provision experienced by their learners elsewhere.

5.4.1 QA procedures

In the second year of delivery progress had been made towards more consortium-wide monitoring of quality of teaching and learning, as there was some evidence of common QA procedures being applied (either at strategic and/ or operational levels) in 11 case-study consortia. One further consortium had QA systems under development. In the remaining three consortia, the quality of teaching and learning was reported to be internally monitored successfully within institutions, as explained by one subject lead who said:

> *We rely on internal* [QA] *systems and because of Ofsted it means systems usually work well.*

The main QA procedures identified in the case-study consortia included agreed protocols or quality toolkits, standardisation meetings, and observations. Each of these is outlined below:

- Agreed protocols or quality toolkits

There was evidence in seven consortia of consortium-wide QA procedures and guidelines to not only monitor teaching and learning, but also more widely to evaluate Diploma delivery by means of tracking documents, listening to teachers and the learner voice. One consortium lead, of a consortium where delivery was mainly in-house, outlined the QA protocol as '*rigorous*' (see the example below). Her views were endorsed by institutional staff.

<div style="border: 2px solid #1F6FB2; padding: 1em;">

Example of QA protocol

There is a set format for the process of QA: talking to the subject and the lead practitioner and members of the delivery team; undertaking observations; listening to the student voice and talking to exam officers; looking at employer engagement. If the QA flags up issues, there's also an entitlement to support for the staff.

The consortium lead, the Deputy Partnership manager and a consultant undertake the lesson observations and senior staff and lead practitioners from other institutions also carry out observations. For example, lesson observations at the FE college, as part of QA of the Hair and Beauty Diploma, were conducted by the Deputy headteacher from one school, and the Deputy Partnership Manager.

They had agreement to this process from the teachers' professional associations. The consortium lead explained: *'We have been clear that it's not about performance management, that it's developmental, that we need to find out what makes the Diploma work We're aware that it is a complex qualification, that we're on a journey and that we need to celebrate and spread best practice'.*

</div>

Although the protocols or agreements described by consortium- and institutional-level staff varied in style or content, what they appeared to have in common was buy-in, to differing degrees, from institutions delivering Diplomas.

- Standardisation meetings

Regular meetings across consortia were described by interviewees across five consortia as an important element of standardising QA procedures and a key contributor of progress checks.

- Observations

In seven consortia some form of shared or joint lesson observations were reported to have taken place in order to monitor the quality of teaching and learning across institutions delivering Diplomas within consortia. In some cases these were carried out by staff within for example, two institutions delivering Diplomas, in others observations were conducted by the consortium lead or, in one case by a consultant. The consultant post had been temporary but was to be permanent from September 2010 for three days a week. His independent role was largely well-received by institutional and consortium- level staff. His role included that of Lead Assessor; he was responsible for QA across the consortium and was reported to have visited

schools, observed lessons, met individual staff, collected the student voice, and reported to all headteachers of institutions who had young people taking a Diploma.

5.4.2   Outstanding challenges

Staff at consortium- or institutional-level across nine consortia identified the main challenge to QA systems to be related to the carrying out of observations. At consortium-level, barriers to consortia-wide Diploma-related observations included:

• agreeing observation criteria across different types of institutions

• practitioner concerns with regard to being observed

• the recognised maximum number of observations that can take place in an academic year

• union agreements that observation findings are confidential between a teacher and their line manager

• the need for sensitivity with regard to an institution's own QA system

• concern as to whether the consortium lead has the expertise to observe.

In addition, practitioners expressed concern both about being observed by a teacher from another institution and the manner in which feedback might be given. However consortia were working towards resolving these issues and one subject lead, for example, observed:

> *Some staff in schools felt threatened by it* [being observed] *initially but now accept it is meant to be supportive, not judgemental. At the end of the year a report is produced but this does not break down the findings by school - no naming and shaming. However if problems are identified through the QA process, support will be offered to the school/teachers concerned.*

Other challenges to QA identified by consortia and institutional staff included:

• how QA discrepancies between different institutions can be resolved

• the high turnover of Diploma staff, both at consortium and institutional levels

• the importance of the domain and lead assessors having a thorough understanding of their roles and the context in which the institutions are working.

Some suggestions for future facilitation of QA systems across consortia were more extensive use of VLEs to monitor students' work, more central guidance, for example in terms of QA templates to prevent each consortium creating their own versions, institutions working more closely together and more comprehensive support from the awarding bodies.

5.5   Learners' attitudes towards learning in general

It is evident that teachers considered that the Diploma required a different teaching approach and were adapting their style accordingly. The following sections explore the learners' attitudes towards learning and their views of learning as part of undertaking a Diploma.

The surveys of Year 11 Diploma learners and the comparison group included questions to explore their attitudes to learning and their preferred learning style. By asking both groups of young people the same questions, it is possible to compare the views of each. A range of survey questions which explored attitudes or learner preferences were grouped together using factor analysis, which consolidates the data in order to produce more robust measures than a single question would do. The following factors were produced[14]

- Commitment to learning (**Factor 4**)
- Positive attitude to learning (**Factor 3**)
- Preference for teamwork and practical learning (**Factor 5)**

These factors were then included as variables, along with others, in multi-level modelling analysis (see Appendix A), which takes into account a range of influential variables, to assess whether young people who take Diplomas differ from their peers in their views and attitudes. The models explored whether Diploma learners differed from similar students in their attitudes and whether Diploma learners taking each subject differed from their similar peers not taking a Diploma.

The findings from the multi-level modelling analysis revealed that there was no significant difference between the Diploma and comparison cohorts in terms of having a positive attitude to learning or a preference for teamwork and practical learning. However, the modelling revealed that Diploma learners were significantly less committed to learning than the comparison group who were not taking a Diploma.

Multi-level modelling analysis revealed some differences between learners taking different Diploma subjects. Young people taking the Creative and Media Diploma were significantly less committed to learning compared with the comparison group who were not taking a Diploma, while those taking a Construction Diploma scored significantly higher in their commitment to learning. In addition, those taking Society, Health and Development Diplomas were significantly more likely to have a preference for teamwork and a practical approach to learning than those not taking a Diploma and Diploma students taking other subjects.[15]

Overall, this analysis has shown that the young people surveyed who take Diplomas do not differ significantly from their peers in the comparison group in terms of their attitudes to learning, but that there were some differences between the different subjects. There may be value in exploring whether there is any underlying factor that leads young people who take the Creative and Media Diploma to have less commitment to learning and whether this can be addressed. Furthermore, there may be merit in seeking to ensure that young people who take Society, Health and Development have sufficient practical work in their Diploma to meet their needs where this is their preferred learning style.

Analysis of the responses of the same young people to the survey in 2009 and 2010 showed that those currently studying on Diploma courses were now significantly more likely to agree that they like working independently (in all subject lessons) compared with last year. This may relate, in part, to the finding that independent

---

[14] Full details of the factors are provided in Appendix A3.3
[15] It is worth noting that, due to the correlation between gender and individual subjects, it is possible that the effect of the subject and the effect of gender are being confounded. Appendix A gives full details of the multi-level modelling.

learning has been a key element of the Diploma, as noted previously in this chapter and has had a positive impact on learners' satisfaction with the course (see Chapter 7).

5.6   Learners' attitudes towards Diploma Teaching

The majority of learners felt that their experience of learning on their Diploma course differed from their wider educational experience in some respects. As Table 5.4 illustrates, the majority felt that it involved more work than their other courses, was in smaller classes, and was giving them more skills and experience. However, they were less certain that the course would be more useful for their future than other courses and a notable minority said that it was less interesting than other courses. Reflecting the findings in Table 5.1, where Year 11 Diploma learners were found not to differ notably from their peers in the extent to which they had undertaken practical activities, around a third (34 per cent) of learners did not think that their Diploma course was more practical, while a further 17 per cent were unsure.

Table 5.4   Year 11 Diploma learners' views of how their Diploma course differed from other courses

Compared to all of the other subjects you are taking now…	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
	%	%	%	%	%	%
My Diploma course is more practical	14	31	17	23	11	5
My Diploma course involves more work	37	42	11	4	1	5
My Diploma course is less interesting	13	24	24	27	7	5
The classes in my Diploma course have fewer people	35	40	10	8	2	5
I find it harder to learn on my Diploma course	6	18	22	41	9	5
My Diploma will be more useful for my future	20	32	28	12	4	5
My Diploma course is giving me more skills/experience	26	41	17	8	3	5

N = 477

An series of single response questions
Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100.
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Survey, 2010.

Case-study learners reflected the views of the teachers in many respects in the ways in which they considered the Diploma to be taught in a different way. Key differences included:

- **a more independent style and structure of learning** where the learner has to take more responsibility for their own learning. Many learners from 12 consortia felt that their Diploma course required them to organise their own time to a greater extent than for other subjects. Learners commented '*I have to think for myself*' and '*you get more control of what you're doing….you get a brief then you can go about it any way you think is best*'.

On the whole learners appeared to view the more independent way of working positively, for example one learner enthused:

> *It is so much better, so much better……with the Diploma they [the teachers] tell you how to do it, then they tell you to get on with it and you find your own way round it.*

However, it was apparent that a few learners, from across four consortia, were not benefitting from the more self-directed style of learning. For example, two learners from one consortium commented that:

> *We're not sure what we're doing*' and '*I don't feel as if I have more control over my learning because I don't know what is expected of me.*

This highlights the importance for clear guidance and direction from teachers in order for young people to be able to work independently

- **learning that was more 'applied to the workplace'** in nature, where there was more employer involvement and more about developing skills for work. There was a widespread view among learners from across 11 consortia that Diplomas were different from other qualifications because learning was more linked to the workplace and skills needed for work. The comment of one learner, who appreciated the more applied nature of the course, reflects this wider view:

> *The course is very hands-on. It's not really learning, it's just developing skills.*

Other learners liked the contact with the world of work, and in some cases appeared to respond well to the work environment, for example one learner explained that they had bid for a large contract with one employer to make a video to promote a new software product for schools. They competed against six companies and reflected on this difference from other educational experience by saying:

> *We didn't win, but we came second……just think, you could never have that opportunity sitting in a normal classroom.*

- **a more relaxed learning environment**. Learners from across seven consortia felt that the Diploma was a more informal course. This was often linked with other aspects of the course, such as the perception that learners were treated more like adults, the different structure of the qualification and the subject matter. The comments of two learners illustrate how this approach contrasted with their wider educational experience:

I prefer it to the way I have been taught before probably because I like the work and am interested in it. It's a more relaxed atmosphere and I just work – I get the work done.
We can have a laugh while we're doing the work. We can talk through it as well. In other subjects it's just "copy out of the book".

The link that learners have made between the Diploma and a more informal way of teaching and learning, and being treated more like an adult, reflects the style of teaching associated with colleges where, in all but one of the consortia, the more informal teaching and learning was reported. This is summed up in the observation of one learner:

College is a more adult environment. If you don't do the work teachers won't chase you – either you do the work or you won't pass. It makes you realise you've got to do it, whereas in school if you didn't do it you got detention.

- **smaller classes and more teacher input**. For some learners in seven consortia, one of the notable differences between their Diploma lessons and other lessons was the size of the class, reflecting the findings in Table 5.4. This smaller class, often the case in the first cohort of Diploma delivery, meant that there was better perceived access to teachers. The young people valued the greater support and guidance from their teachers that smaller classes offered. This aspect should be considered as uptake of the Diploma increases and class sizes expand.

- to a lesser extent, some learners felt that **Diplomas were more theoretical than other subjects** experienced. A minority of learners from six consortia felt that the Diploma was less practical than other subjects. For example, one learner observed that the Engineering Diploma was less practical than the Engineering GCSE. Another learner described Diploma learning as more focused on practical examples rather than '*hands-on'* learning.

These observations from young people in the first cohort to have experienced Diploma teaching clearly demonstrate the need to have the right type of learner taking the Diploma. The evidence suggests that learners who respond well to taking responsibility for their own learning, who are able to respond to teachers who act more as facilitators than teachers, and who can perform as an active partner in their learning experience may be more suited to taking a Diploma. Additionally, the maturity and ability to recognise the importance of being able to grasp the underlying theory and then applying it to a work context is important.

5.7   Impact on Diploma learners

In assessing the impact of this Diploma learning experience on their development to date, the Year 11 learners' responses (see Table 5.5) indicated that the most common aspects of their development that they felt the Diploma had contributed to, related to some of the core generic skills of team-working, researching, communication and using their initiative, in addition to becoming a more confident learner overall. Respondents to the survey were least likely to report that taking a Diploma had helped them with the specifics of their future plans such as deciding where to study next or the job they might like. A higher proportion considered that taking a Diploma had helped them prepare for the world of work, higher education and to identify which qualification to pursue next.

Table 5.5   Year 11 learners' views of the impact of taking a Diploma

The Diploma overall has helped me to…	Very well	Quite well	Not very well	Not at all well	Not sure	Does not apply to me	No response
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Improve my team-working skills	26	53	8	3	3	2	5
Become a more confident learner	25	47	13	4	4	2	5
Become more motivated to learn	18	41	19	8	6	2	6
Develop researching skills	29	43	12	4	4	1	6
Evaluate my own work/projects	22	48	16	3	4	1	5
Develop problem-solving skills	19	46	17	5	6	1	5
Improve my communication skills	28	44	12	4	5	2	5
Develop ICT skills	26	41	15	5	6	2	5
Use my initiative	22	50	14	3	3	1	6
Be prepared for adult life and the world of work	23	39	15	8	8	1	6
Be prepared for higher education	22	39	17	7	7	2	6
Choose what qualifications to study next	23	38	18	8	5	1	7
Decide where to study next	22	30	22	11	8	1	6
Decide what job I would like to do	25	30	21	7	10	2	6

N = 477

A series of single response questions
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
Weighted data
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Survey, 2010

The responses from learners in Year 13 also revealed that the most common aspects that they considered had been helped by their Diploma learning experience were their researching, team-working and communication skills (84 per cent, 83 per cent and 82 per cent respectively) and using their initiative (83 per cent). However, they also commonly identified evaluating their own work as a further skill that the Diploma had helped to develop. In addition, while 57 per cent said the Diploma had helped

them decide where to study next, in line with the responses among Year 11s, a greater proportion of those in Year 13 said that the Diploma had helped them to decide what job they would like to do (70 per cent). This may be due to being closer to entering the labour market than was the case for Year 11 students.

The views of learners were supported by the evidence from teachers who generally felt Diplomas had a positive impact on learners and helped them develop a range of skills and competencies. In particular, teachers reported that Diplomas helped learners to improve their communication, researching, ICT and team-working skills, as shown in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6   Teachers' views of the impact of the Diploma on learners' development

	Agree	No strong opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
	%	%	%	%	%
Improve their team-working skills	20	48	19	7	0	7
Become more confident learners	16	51	19	6	1	7
Become more motivated to learn	9	30	36	13	5	7
Develop researching skills	16	55	15	7	0	7
Evaluate their own work	9	47	22	15	0	7
Develop problem-solving skills	14	35	35	9	0	7
Improve communication skills	20	51	16	6	0	7
Develop ICT skills	20	49	19	6	0	7
Use their initiative	10	47	27	9	0	7
Access higher education	9	22	48	8	5	8

N = 86

A series of single response questions.
Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100.
A total of 80 respondents gave at least one response to these questions.
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Teacher Survey, 2010.

As indicated in Table 5.6, teachers were less likely to *agree* to some extent that the Diploma encouraged learners to become more motivated to learn (40 per cent). Furthermore, they were less likely to *agree* that the Diploma has enabled learners to access higher education (31 per cent). This lack of certainty may have an impact on the advice teachers give to learners and therefore their future progression choices. This is further discussed in Chapter 10.

Teachers interviewed as part of the case-studies gave further insights into the types of benefits learners had gained from studying for a Diploma. Overall, tutors felt the Diploma provided educational benefits to the learners in terms of greater subject knowledge. Many teachers also believed the learners would achieve a great deal by passing their Diploma. For example teachers in two different consortia commented:

> *Don't let anyone say Diplomas are an easy option. The Diploma is the gold standard of education. Students who pass have really earned that; more so than a GCSE.*

> *If the students pass who I expect to – they will achieve significantly more than if they'd taken an alternative.*

Teachers also believed learners had developed strong independent learning skills and personal and social skills. They felt the PLTS in particular had helped with the development of these skills. One teacher commented:

> *I think every single one of them has benefited – I think the delivery of the PLTS is quite effective and they are all quite independent learners now, so I think it has prepared them for college life, whether it is in engineering or not and higher education as well. I think they are lifelong skills we have delivered.*

Some teachers reported that the interaction with employers had positively impacted on the learners. For example, it was felt this interaction improved learners' communication skills and in particular, their confidence.

Other benefits included opening up learners' horizons, helping to improve maturity and preparing them for future courses, including higher education and improved researching skills as the following comments from teachers illustrate:

> *They've benefitted from the variety the Diploma has to offer; it gives them a much bigger view of the world of work, opens their eyes to many more opportunities.*

> *They are better prepared for Level 3 courses because they have done a lot of independent learning. They have had to manage their time and meet deadlines, so they are better prepared than having only done GCSEs.*

Overall, it is evident from the professional judgement of the teachers interviewed that one of the key outcomes of the Diploma approach was its contribution to enhancing young people's independent learning skills.

Some teachers were less positive about the benefits of Diplomas for learners, however this tended to be a minority view. Teachers in six institutions believed the Diploma would not prepare the learner for higher education compared with other courses, while, in one institution the learners were entered for the Level 1 Diploma

instead of the originally intended Level 2, due to the Diploma being more challenging and requiring more independent learning than had been anticipated.

5.8   Summary

Overall, the evidence from the surveys and case-studies suggests that teaching and learning of the Diploma are different compared to undertaking other types of qualifications, in terms of the extent of independent learning expected, the application of knowledge to the workplace and real world settings. In general, learners and their teachers considered that they were benefitting from improved team-working, researching and communication skills, in addition to developing subject knowledge. However, the Diploma in its first two years of delivery had entailed a higher workload than other qualifications for teachers, particularly in relation to planning, preparing and working collaboratively. Increased workload was also an issue for learners who, though they felt that they were gaining more skills and experience, considered that the qualification entailed more work than their other courses. This reflected the challenge identified by some teachers of achieving all aspects within the expected guided learning hours.

6   Assessment

Key Findings

- In the majority (12) of case-study consortia domain assessors were in place in the spring term of 2010. Additionally, on the whole, the domain assessor's role was reported to be working well, although it was observed to be a time-consuming and demanding role.

- Eight out of 15 consortia had appointed lead assessors. In the spring term of 2010 it was apparent that consortium leads and lead assessors, while clear about the role in terms of standardising assessment across all Diploma subjects in a consortia, were still clarifying other aspects of the scope of the role, for example how the position operated alongside the domain assessor role.

- In seven consortia views were generally positive about understanding of, and confidence with, the evidence required for assessment. Reasons for concern about assessment evidence included: lack of clarity and information from awarding bodies, lack of guidance and exemplar materials, insufficient staff training and the difficulty associated with matching assessments to awarding body requirements.

- Although there was evidence of understanding with regard to controlled assessment in seven consortia, strategic staff in approximately half of the consortia reported a lack of confidence about the extent to which procedures were being followed correctly.

- Most Diploma learners across 14 consortia appeared to have a limited broad level of understanding about assessment, although in the majority of cases they held little specific understanding.

Implications for policy and practice

- In view of the change of policy with regard to the withdrawal of the entitlement requirement (and associated lack of need to collaborate) there may be a need to review the lead assessor's role. It is possible that, as more institutions offer Diplomas in-house, the need for consistency of assessment standards across Diploma subjects may be more challenging and therefore more time-consuming.

- The evidence suggests that there is a need for earlier and more comprehensive support from awarding bodies, as well as consistent guidance and communication to all institutions across a consortium, in order to promote widespread confidence with regard to assessment. It is vital that learners are clearly informed about the expectations and processes required in order to successfully complete the qualification. It may therefore be useful to consider ways in which to ensure that all learners receive clear and consistent information about such requirements.

This chapter examines the method of assessment used for Diplomas. It considers:

- the approach to managing assessment, including the role of assessors
- staff and learners' understanding of assessment requirements.

6.1　Consortium-wide procedures

Case-study visits undertaken during the first year of delivery had revealed a widespread perception amongst subject leads and practitioners that assessment procedures were still at a formative stage and that there was scope for development of standardisation of assessment. The report (Lynch *et al*., 2010) noted, however, that the issue of standardisation was already being tackled by the appointment of domain assessors, and lead assessors across consortia. In the spring term of 2009, this procedure was just beginning, so the extent to which this consortium-wide process had progressed was examined during the second year of delivery.

Findings from the second year of delivery revealed that in nine case-study consortia, consortium-wide approaches to assessment were in place to some degree. In the remaining consortia the evidence suggests that there were limited consortium-wide assessment procedures in place, for example in two consortia, where in-house delivery predominated, senior institution staff reported that no consortium-wide procedures were in place, rather in-house procedures were used which included holding meetings to discuss assessment.

6.2　Domain assessors

The Diploma qualification requires the appointment of a domain assessor who has overall responsibility for quality assurance and standardisation of internal assessment within a particular Diploma subject (including principal learning and the project)[16].

The follow-up visits in the spring term 2010 revealed that there were just three consortia that did not have all their domain assessors in place (in one consortium, an appointment had been made but the role had not yet been taken up). In two consortia, the required number of domain assessors had only been achieved very recently, and in another two, although the consortium leads reported that the posts were in place, the relevant subject leads did not know who their domain assessors were. This finding is perhaps an indication of the challenges associated with communication amongst staff.

The majority of domain assessors were also subject leads, although a few were teachers from delivery centres. In one consortium, the domain assessor role for Engineering was reported to be shared between the lead teacher in each institution that was delivering that subject, while in another, domain assessors were hub-based, rather than consortium-wide.

---

[16] Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) Diploma assessment - Domain assessor resources [Online]. Available: http://www.qcda.gov.uk/resources/884.aspx

In the majority of consortia, the domain assessor's role was reported to be working well, and was generally defined as providing support to delivery staff, ensuring that marking deadlines were met, moderation procedures were carried out effectively and standardisation was achieved across the Diploma subject. A subject lead who was also the domain assessor for Engineering, described the process in this way:

> *Before a unit is delivered, the three institutions get together and mark exemplar material, which is designed to help them come to a consensus. Each of the institutions marks the learners' work for each unit completed, then the domain assessor takes a sample of this work and marks it independently. The marks are then looked at and the differences between marks looked at and discrepancies discussed. Agreement is then reached as to the actual mark awarded and the work is then sent off to the external moderator.*

The amount of time required to carry out the domain assessor role varied according to the number of learners involved, but was described by interviewees in three consortia as a major challenge. The subject lead in a further consortium had relinquished the role and the consortium had then been engaged in a search for a successor, as explained by the consortium lead:

> *It's such a massive job, it was impossible for the Diploma subject lead to do the domain assessor job too – it's too large and too time consuming. We had to appoint from outside the existing Diploma pool and we looked everywhere. Eventually we found a retired member of staff. It has been a very big problem.*

6.3   Lead assessors

Support for consortia is also provided through the appointment of a lead assessor. Their role is to QA the internal assessment process across all Diploma subjects offered in the consortium in order to ensure that a consistent approach is used[17].

At the time of the case-study visits:

- Eight consortia had appointed lead assessors. These were most commonly external consultants, but one was also the consortium lead

- Four had yet to appoint a lead assessor

- One did not intend to appoint separate lead assessors but had made a strategic decision for the function of the lead assessor to be carried out by subject leads and examination officers

- Two consortia did not have information on lead assessors

- Funding for the lead assessor post was generally described as having come from the LA or 14-19 Partnership, and sometimes more specifically from the Diploma Development Grant. Interviewees in seven consortia stated that the post would only be sustainable if the same level of external funding continued.

The Lead Assessor role in standardising assessment across all Diploma subjects within a consortium was reported as working well in four consortia. One consortium

---

[17] Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors (CIAG) Lead and Domain Assessor training and support guide. [Online]. Available: http://www.ciea.org.uk/upload/ciea_diploma_assessment/new%20diploma%20assessment%20brochure.pdf

lead for example, considered the role was crucial in implementing assessment procedures and dealing with any issues that arose. However, in two consortia there appeared to be confusion as to how the role operated alongside the domain assessor role, and in another, the subject leads did not feel that it was working satisfactorily and described feeling '*unsupported*'.

6.4 Assessment evidence

Preparedness for assessment was a concern amongst some case-study consortia prior to delivery (McCrone et al., 2010). This section will explore how staff were progressing with regard to their confidence of the evidence required for assessment.

In seven consortia, views amongst consortium leads and subject leads were generally positive about how well they and their delivery staff understood and were confident about the evidence required for assessment (although there was some variation within and between consortia, particularly in relation to different Diploma subjects). The facilitating factors were considered to be:

- training provided by awarding bodies and other external organisations
- meetings for discussion and moderation and giving staff time to attend these
- where the lead assessor had been in place for some time and had been involved in developing procedures and addressing issues
- where Diploma teachers had experience of assessment and were confident in adapting to new requirements.
- Although a small number of institutional level staff in three consortia believed that they held a good level of understanding of assessment requirements, other staff believed that assessment was both a time consuming and challenging process. The comment of one senior institution manager reflected the issue of the level of work involved for staff:

   ...the amount of paperwork is just crazy. We have had two teachers struggling with just four or five students.

Amongst consortia where there was some level of concern about assessment evidence, reasons included:

- lack of clarity and information from awarding bodies; a finding which was also identified amongst institution-level staff. One teacher for example, explained that, while he was clear about the assessment objectives, uncertainty remained over the quality expected by awarding bodies to achieve a particular level. Another interviewee highlighted the need to clearly distinguish between the specifications and the marking grids
- lack of guidance and exemplar materials. One consortium lead for example, considered that the guidance from the awarding body '*had been far too vague and exemplars were very poor'*
- insufficient training for those staff who lacked experience of assessment or did not have time to attend meetings and access development opportunities
- the difficulty associated with matching assessments to awarding body requirements. While the writing of unit assignments was an area where experienced staff had an advantage, there were instances of staff reporting that

they had found it a challenge. This was attributed to a lack of good exemplar material, or the difficulty adjusting to their teaching and learning expectations to what the awarding body required.

- These findings, alongside evidence from approximately half of institution staff across 11 consortia indicates that there is scope for improvement with regard to increasing staff confidence in their understanding of what evidence students were required to provide.

In terms of the quality of learners' work for assessment, staff in five consortia held the view that there were few problems, or if there had been previously, subsequent progress had been achieved. Amongst the nine consortia where it was perceived to be a concern, reasons were consistent with those previously discussed – the lack of good exemplar material, feedback and clarity from awarding bodies. In four consortia, subject leads commented on the difficulty for teachers in terms of knowing 'what good looks like', because the examples received had not helped them identify good practice.

Although assessment was clearly still a cause for concern in a number of consortia, there was an overall perception at consortium level that progress was being made both in terms of understanding what was required and in having implemented robust procedures. The main challenges were where there was a combination of perceived lack of support and guidance from awarding bodies, and delivery staff who lacked assessment experience.

6.5 Controlled assessment requirements

Controlled assessment is defined as:

> *…a form of internal assessment where the control levels are set for each stage of the assessment process: task setting, task taking and task marking. Each stage has a level of control (high, medium or limited) to ensure reliability and authenticity and to make assessments more manageable for teachers/tutors and learners[18].*

Reflecting on their experience to date, controlled assessment did not appear to be a major concern for consortium-level staff in seven consortia. There was a perception that progress had been made since the previous year, which was largely attributable to the advice and training provided by awarding bodies, lead assessors and subject leads. In two consortia, reference was made to the valuable assistance provided by examination officers.

In five out of the eight consortia where concerns had been expressed, both the consortium leads and some subject leads reported a lack of confidence about the extent to which procedures were being followed correctly. For example, one consortium lead explained:

> *I'm not confident that everyone is following the procedure and I will need to constantly monitor this through the domain and lead assessors.*

---

[18] AQA and City and Guilds. Diploma Controlled Assessment: FAQs. [Online]. Available: http://www.diplomainfo.org.uk/documents/AQA_CG_Control_Assess_FAQs_-WR.pdf

In another, the consortium lead said that there was now a robust procedure in place, but that staff were *'still developing their skills'*, while a subject lead commented that *'institutions are not adhering to the rules'*.

The 2010 teacher survey provided further information on practitioner views of controlled assessment. Approximately half of survey teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the level of difficulty of the controlled assessments was appropriate to the level of the Diploma and that the requirements for the controlled assessments were clear in the specifications. Furthermore, around three-fifths (59 per cent) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had confidence in the consistency of controlled assessment marking.

Despite this, a considerable proportion of survey respondents reported that they disagreed or were unsure with the statements, particularly in relation to the level of difficulty and the requirements for controlled assessment (42 per cent in both cases). Some of the case-study consortia illustrated reasons for limited confidence amongst staff including a lack of guidance and support from awarding bodies. For example, one Information Technology teacher remarked:

> *The guidance from QCDA and from the awarding bodies was not always clear on how centres should implement full control. For example, internet regulation management has been an issue and there were questions over how the 30 hour full assessment should be done.*

Another interviewee felt there had been a lack of training and discussion across the consortium. The teacher remarked:

> *Some people [in other institutions] didn't know they had to do controlled assessment – as a consortium I don't think we've addressed it.*

Findings from the teacher survey and case-study interviews suggest that there is a need for earlier and more comprehensive support from awarding bodies as well as consistent guidance and communication to all institutions across a consortium. These consortia were the first to deliver the Diploma to learners and therefore engage with the assessment approach, therefore, it is possible that those who began to deliver from 2009 will already be learning from these challenges.

6.6 Learner understanding

Most Diploma learners across 14 consortia appeared to have a limited broad level of understanding about assessment (although few provided details). For example, over a third of interviewees made reference to the grading criteria which outlined what they had to do to obtain a particular mark. In a small number of cases across five consortia it was also reported that teachers provided feedback to learners on what they needed to do in order to improve their grades.

Moreover, a small number of learners across five consortia reported some level of awareness regarding the assessment process, noting that, for example, each unit was marked internally and then sent off to the exam board to be externally assessed, as the following comment illustrates:

> *We know that the teachers have marked them [and] then they need someone else to mark them to make sure there has been no favouritism or something*

and then it goes to the examiner. Before that happens we just get points. And we are told that can change. So it could all vary at that stage.

Others reported an awareness of the need to pass particular components of the Diploma (for example, functional skills and the project) in order to successfully complete the qualification overall.

Despite this, around a quarter of those commenting in nine consortia appeared to lack understanding of how assessment of the Diploma is carried out. There were cases where learners for example, said that they were aware that the criteria was different from the traditional GCSE but knew nothing more, as in the case of one who commented that: 'we've got the grading criteria but it's complicated'. Interestingly, the majority of learners from one institution in one consortium explained that while they were unaware of the assessment requirements, they understood that they would gain a pass, merit or distinction upon completing the course; a finding which highlights that, in this instance, the assessment criteria had not been accurately explained as the young people had a misconception.

6.7   Challenges and further development needs

It is worth noting that the learners who are the focus of this report are the first cohort of learners who have embarked on the Diploma qualification, similarly it is the first cohort that strategic staff and teaching staff have guided through the Diploma course. While the consortia had made progress, for example the appointments of domain and lead assessors, challenges remained. Senior institution staff identified a number of issues in relation to consortium-wide procedures for monitoring the quality of assessment including:

- the need for time to ensure that all units are ready for moderation when required and to monitor the quality of assessment
- the need for further support from awarding bodies in terms of guidance on assessment and exemplar materials
- understanding the required standards in order to obtain a particular level.

The main challenges about the assessment system expressed by institution level teaching staff were:

- time – in terms of, for example, the time required to process assessments
- the standard of work required for each level of the Diploma
- a lack of support and guidance from awarding bodies in terms of how to convert the marking criteria into grades, although it was felt that they did not always necessarily have the knowledge and understanding required to answer questions
- a lack of assessment examples (an area where case-study interviewees in the first year of delivery felt more clarification was required (Lynch *et al.*, 2010), reflected in the comment that '*it's hard to judge the levels because there's nothing to compare it to*'
- the concern that learners would not pass the functional skills component and therefore not achieve the Diploma qualification overall.

A few concerns related to specific Diploma subjects. These included:

- ensuring patient confidentiality (mentioned by a Society, Health and Development teacher)

- producing evidence solely through a written format - one Creative and Media teacher had intended students to record their ideas using media such as DVD commentaries or websites, but this was not possible because paper copies were required for moderation. He believed that assessment was less *'authentic in the context of the Creative and Media Diploma than it could have been'*. Moreover, an Information Technology teacher reported that written assessment was inappropriate for some units of work. The interviewee expressed concern upon completing a visit to a further education college as part of a networking unit which involved 'real learning':

  > *…they were opening up cables, wiring them all up, setting up their own network in the room and then able to play online games in a network they had produced themselves; they absolutely loved it; they've done it, but now I'm wondering what we have to do to get all the assessment evidence.*

6.8   Summary

The evidence suggests that most consortia had made good progress in terms of the appointment of domain and lead assessors to support the assessment procedures. However, as was the case when interviews were conducted in the first year, there was still scope for improvement with regard to increasing staff understanding and confidence about the assessment process including, for example, controlled assessment requirements and the evidence that learners have to produce. This therefore suggests a need for ongoing training and support from awarding bodies that is consistent amongst consortia, particularly in relation to clarity of expectations and additional exemplar materials.

Given the lack of confidence and understanding amongst some consortium- and institution-level staff about assessment, it is perhaps not surprising that most learners appeared to have a limited broad level of awareness of the way in which the Diploma is assessed. It is essential that learners are clearly informed about the expectations and processes required in order to successfully complete the qualification. It may therefore be useful to consider ways of ensuring that all learners receive clear and consistent information about such requirements.

7   IAG and learners' satisfaction with the Diploma

Key Findings

- The consistency of IAG provided within consortia was still felt to be variable by consortia staff and not all consortia had chosen to adopt a consortium-wide strategy for IAG. In particular, IAG for those in Year 9 was variable and schools were not always considered to provide impartial IAG.

- Six consortia had instituted strategies to ensure equality of opportunity by targeting 'atypical' learners for individual subjects, including incorporating Diplomas into wider LA strategies for encouraging, for example, women into engineering. Although on the whole these strategies had yet to have an appreciable effect, there were indications of increases in atypical learners participating in two consortia.

- Although most young people who had taken a Diploma were satisfied, there was a notable minority (36 per cent) of those surveyed in Year 11 who were not satisfied. This was the case more so for Year 11, than among Year 13 learners where, nevertheless, 22 per cent said that they were not satisfied. Moreover, the proportion who were satisfied in Year 11 had declined since their responses in Year 10.

- Multi-level modelling revealed that learners in Year 11 were more satisfied with the Diploma where they had undertaken some work experience, believed that they were progressing well in their Principal Learning and were aware of the ASL component of their Diploma.

- Where learners were dissatisfied, it was related to the course not meeting their expectations, including being less practical than expected, the amount and challenging nature of the work and the lack of organisation and management of the course.

- Where learners who were interviewed indicated that they would not take the course again, this was the case across all but one of the consortia visited. Satisfaction or dissatisfaction was not related to the consortium or to the Diploma subject, but more to the individual experience of learning.

- While about a quarter of Year 11 learners would not recommend the Diploma to another student, those that would highlighted the need for students to be well informed, prepared to work hard, have a strong interest in the subject and be capable of working independently.

Implications for policy and practice

- There was a clear minority of young people in Year 11 who were not satisfied with their experience of the Diploma. The experience of working towards a Diploma was found to vary within consortia as well as across consortia. There would be value in disseminating evidence of good practice in Diploma delivery and supporting teachers to learn from experience as they continue to develop their teaching of the qualifications. There is also a clear need for young people to be well informed about the Diploma in order to ensure that the course meets their expectations, and that they are able to cope with the demands of the course. There is evidence that young people were satisfied where they had work experience, were progressing well in their principal learning and were aware of the ASL component.

- The evaluation found that there are young people who take the Diploma expecting a more practical qualification than is the case for other courses they pursue. The review of the Diploma to create a more streamlined qualification should consider therefore how to retain, or even enhance further, the practical elements of the course in order to meet the needs of learners.

This chapter examines the extent to which learners were satisfied with their Diploma course in the second year of participation. As the evaluation has previously found a close association between the extent to which learners are satisfied, and how well informed they were about the Diploma, this chapter first discusses the IAG received. In summary, it examines:

- developments in the approaches to IAG adopted by consortia including encouraging atypical learners to take a Diploma subject

- the awareness of Diplomas among those who influence young people in their choices – teachers and parents.

- learners' satisfaction with the Diploma course and the factors associated with this.

7.1   IAG developments in consortia

7.1.1   Quality and consistency of IAG

The case-study visits reviewed the IAG strategies adopted for the second cohort of learners embarking on Diplomas in 2009. Overall, there was an increase in the number of consortia that were implementing consortium-wide strategies for IAG compared to the previous year. Four consortia had either recently set up or were in the process of developing strategies. As one school senior manager, with consortium-wide responsibility for IAG commented:

> *It's improving slowly and there's a major conference on it locally this week. We're working on a strategy that should be in place from March* [2010] *onwards.*

However, many of these systems were in development and, at the time of the interviews, ten of the consortium leads believed the quality and consistency of IAG was variable across institutions. Overall, more consortium leads (seven) were satisfied with the consistency of IAG for learners in Year 13, when they were leaving school or college, than were content with IAG for those in Year 9 who were choosing key stage 4 options (three interviewees). Only two consortium leads were satisfied with the quality of IAG in all three years: 9, 11 and 13. However, subject leads and institution representatives in these two consortia did not share this satisfaction. Instead they believed the consortium-level strategy was having little impact at the institution level.

Consortium leads were conscious of institutions taking different approaches to IAG and felt this was an issue in Year 9 in particular, where some were concerned that institutions were not giving impartial IAG about Diplomas. As was the case in the first year of delivery, it appears that the issue of consistency and impartiality of IAG was greater in relation to Year 9 than Years 11 and 13 (Lynch *et al*., 2010).

Consortium-level involvement in IAG mainly consisted of consortium-wide IAG groups or meetings and the provision of materials to institutions. Staff from the Connexions Service generally worked closely with institutions and they tended to provide IAG support to staff and learners directly. However, the need to ensure that the most appropriate professional provided advice and guidance to learners was reflected in the observation in two consortia that school or college staff were often better informed regarding Diplomas than those from Connexions.

In seven consortia, systems for assessing the quality of IAG were said to have been established, while in a further three, such processes were under development at the time of the visits. However in one area, the consortium lead reported that they would not be putting procedures in place as institutions were resistant to such monitoring.

Within institutions, IAG for Diplomas had, for the most part, been incorporated into general IAG activities. However, institutions in one consortium had held particular events focused on Diplomas while in other areas some institutions had re-developed their IAG to account for Diplomas. Examples included developing new options booklets and option evenings themed around the new 14-19 pathways. One school senior manager commented:

> [We] *changed the style of the options evenings for parents. In the past it had always been subject-based, around the GCSEs. This year the theme was pathways to learning with an emphasis on choosing options which would suit the way in which a student learns best.*

Although a consortium-wide IAG strategy was generally not in place, staff across consortia generally believed that their learners were well informed about Diplomas. However, there were indications that this was more the case among learners who had chosen to study for a Diploma and were therefore more aware of Diplomas because they had actively sought information on them, whereas those who had not, were less knowledgeable. Some felt that this lack of understanding among the student population may account for lower than expected take-up, as noted by one teacher who said:

> *The reason people aren't taking Diplomas is because they don't understand them. You would get a better intake of Diploma students if people were aware of and understood what it's about.*

7.1.2 Relationship between Diplomas and restrictions in choice

Reflecting on their experience of managing Diploma implementation and providing IAG, it was apparent that there was some debate over how far taking a Diploma restricted young people's choices and options. Some institution staff in 11 of the 15 consortia believed that the Diploma restricted learner's choice at key stage 4 to some degree. In the majority of cases this was not regarded as a positive position for learners, which may have implications for the impartiality of IAG provided by staff. For example, one IAG teacher stated:

> *I don't know how I can honestly recommend the Diploma as a good course for somebody … I would always recommend that they keep their options as broad for as long as they can. It still limits their knowledge I think, it is only for those people who are desperate to do that topic … You may end up limiting your progression options.*

In part, teachers who held this view related the issue to the size of the Diploma, as their perception was that learners choosing this course were limited in the other choices they had available. This view was particularly noted in a specialist school where as a result of taking the Diploma, students could not also choose to take one of the school's specialist subjects as would be expected.

An alternative view was put forward by a minority of interviewees. A small number of those interviewed from two consortia believed that the Diploma did not restrict learner choice at key stage 4. As one teacher commented:

> *It doesn't restrict them - it's time to move on from that mindset. Some young people are climbing the walls and to ask them to stay on at school is just not acceptable.*

Some interviewees believed that having limited choice was not necessarily a negative outcome. For example, where the learner had made an informed choice or they knew what they wanted to do in the future, as it would not impact on them where they were clear about their future plans.

Overall, there was not a consensus among teaching staff regarding this issue and the introduction of a more streamlined Diploma in future may reduce the concern among those who feel it restricts choice.

7.1.3　Teachers' views of the characteristics of learners suited to Diplomas

There was little consensus among teaching staff interviewed regarding the type of learner who was more receptive to studying a Diploma. Some interviewees in two of the consortia reported that the higher ability learners were more receptive to the Level 2 Diploma than lower ability learners. For example, one teacher commented that this was because they:

> *Saw it as something new and an umbrella qualification to cover all their interests.*

Conversely, interviewees in two other consortia believed the Diploma was most suited to lower ability or less '*academic*' learners. Representatives from institutions in two further consortia felt both low and high ability students were receptive to the Diploma. One area of agreement across five consortia was that learners who chose the Diploma tended to have a very strong interest in the subject area, or had already chosen their career path in the future. This reflects the findings from the first year of delivery in which it was found that learners were more likely to choose a Diploma because it was related to a career interest (Lynch *et al*., 2010).

Overall, consortium leads believed institutions were not targeting specific learners in terms of their interest or characteristics to choose a Diploma. Instead, the majority of consortium leads and institution representatives reported that they were more concerned with ensuring the learners who took the Diploma were of appropriate ability.

7.1.4　Encouraging atypical learners

The term 'atypical learners' in relation to the Diploma, refers to learners who have chosen to take a subject that is not traditionally chosen by learners of their gender. For example, girls taking Engineering and Construction and the Built Environment, and boys taking Society, Health and Development, can be classed as 'atypical', as a clear majority of learners taking these Diplomas nationally are the opposite gender. Original guidelines from the government stated that Diploma providers should be aiming for equal gender balance in all Diploma subjects in the long term and encouraged the development of gender equality strategies to help work towards this (DCSF 2009).

In the case-study areas, six of the consortia had specific consortium-wide strategies for recruiting atypical learners, which they had used to recruit learners in 2009 or were currently implementing to recruit learners in 2010. These included ensuring no gender bias in course materials and brochures, use of atypical students as ambassadors and linking Diplomas with LA-wide strategies such as 'Girls into Engineering'. However, just one consortium lead felt their strategy was improving the numbers of atypical learners on courses. In this instance, four girls had chosen an Engineering Diploma, which compared with none in the previous year, after the LA ran a 'Girls into Engineering' programme.

Institutions had developed their own strategies in five consortia (in some cases these were in addition to the consortium-wide strategies reported above). These included

showcasing current atypical learners in newsletters and posters, promoting particular elements of the course (for example, social justice in the Society, Health and Development Diploma to male students) and encouraging atypical learners to attend taster days. Again, only one of these institutions believed their strategy had been successful. At this institution, a third of the new cohort for Society, Health and Development Diploma was male after the institution had promoted particular elements of the course towards the male students.

This suggests that action is being taken to address gender equality in Diploma courses and there is limited evidence that it has been successful in some cases. However, it should be noted that these strategies did not apply to the 2008 cohort, which is the main focus of this report.

7.1.5   Awareness of Diplomas amongst non-Diploma staff

Young people seek advice from a range of people when deciding what qualifications and courses to pursue, including their parents and teachers who may not be specialist Diploma teachers. This section examines how far the consortia had sought to inform parents and non-Diploma teachers.

Around half of IAG specialist staff interviewed (eight out of 15, across seven consortia) felt well informed about Diplomas. The majority of the remaining IAG staff, however, felt that they needed further information about Diplomas. The information that was considered most useful by those who felt well informed varied and included training at a regional and national level, an INSET day on 14-19 reform, and the provision of a '14-19 toolkit'.

Senior managers (and in two cases, IAG staff) across institutions from two-thirds of case-study consortia generally reported poor or limited knowledge amongst staff not teaching Diplomas. For example, in two cases it was reported that staff's knowledge was limited to being aware of the qualification, the GCSE equivalence and how they fit into the curriculum. A few interviewees reasoned that there was only a need for staff to be knowledgeable about the Diploma if they were directly involved in delivery.

While plans to raise awareness further amongst non-Diploma staff were not common among consortia, several interviewees discussed plans to do so through staff INSET and curriculum managers' meetings. Furthermore, one IAG interviewee highlighted the importance of ensuring that *all* staff receive thorough training:

> *I'm well informed, but I know a lot of teachers who aren't and that's the issue with our students not picking Diplomas, because they don't know [about them].*

In those cases (in seven institutions across six consortia) where non-Diploma staff were said to be more knowledgeable about Diplomas, on the whole this had been achieved through whole staff INSET sessions improving internal communication channels and team meetings.

7.1.6   Awareness amongst parents

Approximately two-thirds of case-study IAG staff indicated that there was considerable scope for improvement with regard to increasing parental awareness of Diplomas. The complexity of the qualification inhibiting understanding, and

scepticism towards a new qualification, were examples of reasons why parents were believed to be not very well informed.

In some instances it was evident that while parents had received information through various means such as parents evening, options evenings and leaflets, there was still uncertainty amongst interviewees about the extent to which parents were informed. One interviewee remarked: *'...there's a variety of things, but it's only as good as the information we have'*. Where parents were considered to be *well informed* (in four institutions in four consortia), this was largely attributed to the information provided through options evenings, and options booklets. One strategy for example, involved the IAG coordinator carrying out a short survey with parents to gauge their understanding of courses and careers information. This was then used to inform the content of the options evening and booklets.

7.2   Learners' satisfaction with the Diploma

Learners who had been advised and had chosen to take Diplomas had experienced around five terms of the course at the time of the survey and interviews. At this stage in the evaluation, it is not yet possible to explore the outcomes of the Diploma for learners in terms of their achievement of the qualification. However, their level of satisfaction with the course, and the factors associated with this, can be examined and is discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Table 7.1   Diploma learners' satisfaction with their Diploma course

Level of satisfaction	Year 11 Diploma learners	Y13 Diploma learners
	%	%
Very satisfied	16	22
Quite satisfied	40	52
Not very satisfied	22	21
Not at all satisfied	14	1
Not sure	2	3
No response	5	1
N=	477	86

A single response question.
Weighted data
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Surveys, 2010

Table 7.1 shows that, while in both year groups most Diploma learners were at least *quite satisfied* with their Diploma course (56 per cent and 74 per cent), it is notable that Year 11 learners were more likely to express dissatisfaction compared to their Year 13 peers (36 per cent compared with 22 per cent) and that this is particularly the case for those who were *not at all satisfied*. Respondents to the survey provided their views on the reasons for satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the Diploma in an open response question.

Reasons for satisfaction among Diploma learners included:

- that they had learnt a lot (21 per cent of Year 11s and 35 per cent of Year 13s)

- that it was interesting, fun and enjoyable (15 per cent of Year 11s and 24 per cent of Year 13s)
- that it would help their future careers (nine per cent of Year 11s)
- that it would help to gain a place in university (17 per cent of Year 13s)
- it was equivalent to a number of GCSEs (eight per cent of Year 11s)
- it provided an opportunity to gain experience in the sector (seven per cent of Year 11s)
- it involved travelling to different locations (five per cent of Year 11s).

Conversely, the main reasons for being dissatisfied included:

- that it did not match their expectation (36 per cent of Year 11s and 30 per cent of Year 13s)
- the amount of work involved (14 per cent of Year 11s)
- that the work was too challenging (12 per cent of Year 11s and five per cent of Year 13s)
- that it was disorganised and not well planned (ten per cent of Year 11s and eight per cent of Year 13s).

Tables 7.2 and 7.3 provide some further insight into the elements of the Diploma course that were positive experiences for learners and those that were less positive and reflect the open comments. In particular, for Year 11s (Table 7.2), it is apparent that a majority (74 per cent) expected the course to be more practical than transpired and that a notable minority were not finding the Diploma interesting (28 per cent), not enjoying the course (28 per cent), would have liked to spend less time on their Diploma (35 per cent) and did not believe that they made the right choice in taking a Diploma (27 per cent).

Table 7.2   Year 11 learners' views of their Diploma course

Views on the Diploma	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
	%	%	%	%	%	%
I am enjoying my Diploma course	15	41	12	18	10	5
The work I do in lessons is interesting	9	41	18	19	9	5
I find the course challenging	19	50	16	8	3	5
I thought there would be more practical work	44	30	11	9	1	5
I would like to spend less time on my Diploma course	16	19	25	28	8	4
I am learning useful skills on my Diploma course	22	46	16	10	2	4
I can cope with the amount of work	15	39	20	18	5	5
I expect to leave my Diploma course before it is finished	3	6	21	32	33	5
My Diploma will help me to get a job in the future	21	37	28	5	4	5
My Diploma will help me get into college in the future	22	45	20	4	3	5
My Diploma will help me get into university	18	34	33	7	3	5
I made the right choice to do a Diploma course	16	30	21	12	15	5

N = 477

A series of single response questions
Weighted data
Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Survey, 2010

While the number of respondents in Year 13 is small, their responses provide an indication of their views of the Diploma (Table 7.3). Reflecting their overall higher levels of satisfaction, the Year 13 learners are generally satisfied, for example, most were enjoying their course (70 per cent), found it interesting (81 per cent), were learning useful skills (77 per cent) and felt that they had made the right choice of course (57 per cent). Nevertheless, reflecting the views of Year 11 learners, most (63 per cent) said that they expected there to be more practical work.

Table 7.3   Year 13 learners' views of the Diploma course

Views on the Diploma	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
	%	%	%	%	%	%
I am enjoying my Diploma course	16	54	15	10	4	1
The work I do in lessons is interesting	5	76	10	9	0	1
I find the course challenging	18	51	18	11	0	1
I thought there would be more practical work	29	34	12	22	2	1
I would like to spend less time on my Diploma course	2	22	24	46	5	1
I am learning useful skills on my Diploma course	17	60	19	2	0	2
I can cope with the amount of work	9	59	20	10	1	1
I expect to leave my Diploma course before it is finished	1	11	14	37	35	1
My Diploma will help me to get a job in the future	25	37	28	5	3	1
My Diploma will help me to get into university	32	55	10	2	0	1
I made the right choice to do a Diploma course	25	32	30	8	3	1

N = 86

A series of single response questions
Weighted data
Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Survey, 2010

To explore the satisfaction with Diplomas further, and identify the factors associated with being satisfied or dissatisfied with the Diploma course, a range of survey questions were grouped together using factor analysis, which consolidates the data in order to produce more robust measures than a single question would do. The learners' responses to the survey were grouped into two measures[19]:

- satisfaction with Diplomas (**From a direct survey question**)
- enjoyment and satisfaction with the course (**Factor 1**)

These measures were then included as variables, along with others, in multi-level modelling analysis (see Appendix A) which was undertaken to examine the

---

[19] See Appendix A3.3 for further details.

characteristics of learners and their experiences of the Diploma course that were associated with being more or less satisfied with the course. This revealed that Diploma learners were significantly more satisfied with the course than their Diploma student peers who were similar in other respects, where they:

- had experienced a work placement as part of their Diploma course
- were aware that they were taking other qualifications as part of their Diploma course (ASL)
- felt that they were progressing well in the principal learning component
- had a positive attitude to learning
- were taking a Diploma in IT.

Those who were learning in a mix of locations (not only away from school but both away from school and in school) were significantly less satisfied than their similar peers who were learning in school.

Similarly, young people gained a higher score in their enjoyment and satisfaction with the course where they[20]:

- had experienced a work placement as part of their Diploma course
- felt that they were progressing well in the principal learning component
- had a positive attitude to learning
- were more committed to learning than similar students.

Young people gained a significantly lower score in their enjoyment and satisfaction with their Diploma course than their peers where they were taking:

- a Diploma in Engineering
- a Diploma in Society, Health and Development.

While the reasons for this are not clear from the models[21], the qualitative interviews, discussed later in this chapter, reveal that Engineering students in particular were disappointed by the lower than expected level of practical learning which may explain their lower level of overall satisfaction and enjoyment of the course.

When the responses of the same students in 2009 and 2010 are compared (see Table 7.4) it appears that satisfaction of Year 11 students with the Diploma has declined over the two years of the course; 82 per cent of learners surveyed in 2009 were satisfied compared to 63 per cent in 2010. This finding is also reflected in the case-study interviews, discussed below.

---

[20] See Appendix A for a full explanation of the multi-level modelling.
[21] It is worth noting that, due to the correlation between gender and individual subjects, it is possible that the effect of the subject and the effect of gender are being confounded.

Table 7.4   Learners' satisfaction with the course in 2009 and 2010 (matched sample)

Level of satisfaction	2009 Year 10 %	2010 Year 11 %
Satisfied	82	63
Not sure	3	3
Not satisfied	16	33
N=	314	311

A single response question
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Surveys, 2009 and 2010

The interviews with young people provide some insight into the possible reasons for this change in view. Just over half of students interviewed (across all consortia apart from one) said that they would have made the same decision to take the Diploma again while just under two-fifths (again, across 14 consortia) would not.

Unsurprisingly, those who were most satisfied with the course had fewer regrets, but there were a proportion of young people, who although quite satisfied with the course, would rather have chosen something else. Some student interviewees across all consortia gave common reasons for students wishing they had not chosen the Diploma. These were:

- feeling that they were misled about the content of the course

- feeling that the workload was greater than they anticipated and greater than other courses

- the management and delivery of the course being disorganised

- some level of concern that the Diploma would not be recognised by employers and HEIs.

A small number of students felt that the Diploma had not fully met their expectations and that they may have been in a better position had they chosen other qualifications. Additionally, they felt that this would have offered a broader curriculum.

To some extent, young people's satisfaction with their experience of the Diploma course is reflected in whether they would recommend it to another student. In Year 11, 82 per cent of Diploma learners who were satisfied with their course would recommend it to a friend; 12 per cent of those who were not satisfied would not recommend it to a friend. In Year 13, 90 per cent of those who were satisfied with their course would recommend it to a friend; 26 per cent of those not satisfied would do so. While, overall, many young people in each year group would recommend the course, those in Year 11 were noticeably more likely to say that they would definitely not recommend it than their peers in Year 13 (see Table 7.5).

Table 7.5   Whether learners would recommend the Diploma to others

Would you recommend your Diploma course to a friend?	Year 11 %	Year 13 %
Definitely	22	25
Maybe	27	39
Probably not	17	16
Definitely not	25	6
Not sure yet	1	4
No response	7	10
N =	477	86

The percentages in this table are weighted.
Weighted data
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Surveys, 2010

Young people who were interviewed as part of the case studies were slightly more likely to recommend the course than those surveyed, as approximately two-thirds of case-study students said that they would recommend the course to a friend. However, they made this recommendation with some caveats, including that students:

- were well-informed about the course

- were prepared to work hard

- had a strong interest in the sector

- were capable of independent working.

7.3   Learners' views on the Diploma course

In assessing their satisfaction with the learning experience, case-study interviewees' comments related to three broad themes:

- the learning experience

- the course content

- management of the course.

These are discussed in more detail below. In considering these, it is worth noting that their levels of satisfaction, and the reasons cited, tended to be related to the course they had attended, rather than the Diploma subject or the institution or consortium as a whole. This suggests that satisfaction with a course is not necessarily determined by the subject matter, or the consortium, but rather by the engagement and delivery of individual teachers.

The learning experience

The most common reasons for satisfaction with the Diploma given by learners who were interviewed related to the learning experience[22]. Within this theme, it was common for young people to report that they had valued:

- the opportunity for independent learning

- the fact that the course was delivered in an enjoyable way

- that they had liked working in teams

- and that they had experienced practical (or '*hands-on*') learning.

One consortium emerged as having been particularly successful at providing independent learning opportunities in the view of learners, as was evident in the positive references made by learners across courses. This consortium had organised the Creative and Media students into a 'production company' to deliver the annual school play. This had covered elements of the principal learning, the project and PLTS. One Year 13 student on this course said about the approach,

> *It's the way it's taught. The teachers put us in charge. It helps people to work as a team. If every subject were taught in the same way, students would be much happier about coming to school.*

The most common reasons for *dissatisfaction* with the Diploma also related to the learning experience. Reflecting the survey findings, a third of all students across all 15 consortia would have preferred the course to have been more practical or active, with learners from 12 consortia explaining that a challenging workload and the large amount of written work had contributed to their dissatisfaction. More specifically, some considered that much of the written work required was repetitive evidencing of learning and that a large proportion of their time was spent on the computer. This was often exacerbated by spending a whole day on Diploma learning. One Year 13 student taking the Engineering Diploma which was based at an FE college said:

> *It's just paperwork, writing stuff, assignments…when you think you're going to get a break, they load you with another assignment. Every assignment is written.*

Another student on the Engineering course in Year 11 said;

> *The paperwork is frustrating because I wanted more activity.*

The lack of practical learning opportunities was most often mentioned by those taking an Engineering Diploma. This possibly relates to their expectations of the course and is some explanation for the lower levels of satisfaction amongst learners on this course.

It must be noted, of course, that learners' expectations will have directly influenced their experience and levels of satisfaction. Indeed, students across eleven consortia had felt either misguided by IAG or felt that they had lacked information about the

---

[22] See Chapter 5 on teaching and learning for more on learners views of this aspect

course, as illustrated by the comment of one Year 13 student on the Engineering Diploma at an FE college who said:

> *We picked this course as a practical course [having done a National Diploma before] but it's turned out to be more academic. The course isn't what they told us it would be.*

Another learner on an Engineering Diploma in Year 11 said:

> *I thought it would be different. It's not the course that was at fault but we were told things would be delivered which didn't happen, like more workplace visits.*

Satisfaction with the content of the Diploma course

Students from eight consortia identified the variety and breadth of the Diploma as a reason for their satisfaction with the course. For example, a Year 13 learner on the Creative and Media Diploma said,

> *…it has broadened out everything; it opens your eyes to all the things you can do, broadens your horizons. I've learned so much, I can't believe how much we've learned, and how much we've done already.*

However, students from eight consortia felt dissatisfied with one or more units of the principal learning, indicating that the breadth of the course was not right for some. Some explained that they had been attracted to the Diploma by the opportunity to study an area of interest which was not catered for by the existing curriculum. This finding demonstrates that learners need to be made fully aware of the time that will be spent on their main area of interest and that they will be expected to study a broad curriculum within the sector. Students across eight consortia felt the course had been harder work in the second year.

Further to this, students across six consortia felt that the content of the Diploma had included useful skills that were relevant to their future. The relevance of Diploma content to future career aspirations was most likely to be cited by those studying for a Society, Health and Development Diploma. This might seem unsurprising given that previous research found they were most likely to have originally chosen the course for this reason (Lynch et al., 2010). The chance to learn about the world of work through work experience or trips was a reason for satisfaction amongst learners across 12 consortia. It is evident, therefore, that the link with the world of work and the applied nature of the Diploma course had wide appeal amongst Diploma students.

Satisfaction with the management of the Diploma course

Many of the students who felt that the workload was greater than for other courses believed that their teachers had prioritised work-related learning and practical activity in the first year and that the units had been delivered at a slower pace at this stage. This meant that some students were now working on more than one unit at a time or felt they were completing assignments and units in less time than they required. In addition, they were working on these alongside completing the project and sometimes re-taking functional skills assessments before the end of term. The apparent disorganisation of the Diploma course in some consortia may have contributed to this issue and may explain to some extent the decline in satisfaction over the two years of the course.

Disorganisation was cited as a reason for dissatisfaction by learners across seven consortia and was identified by more Year 13 students (proportionally) than those in Year 11. In addition to this, students across eight consortia were dissatisfied that either they or their teachers had not understood the assessment criteria properly. In many cases work had to be repeated and this contributed to the overall workload. While students accepted that the Diploma was in its first year of delivery, some felt that more time should have been spent organising the course before it commenced and that teachers in separate institutions across the consortia could have communicated more effectively. One Year 11 boy doing the Society, Health and Development Diploma for example, said,

> *It took us almost a school year to complete unit one because they didn't know what they were doing… they should have known what they were doing before they started the course. We could have finished the Diploma by now if they'd known what they were doing. They did say that to us as well. It's not really their fault it's probably something higher up, they needed a few more years to get it all sorted before they started.*

Another Year 11 on this course in another consortium concurred commenting:

> *They [the teachers] should take more time and think about it more - then it might be better.*

Students from eight consortia explained how their satisfaction level was linked to the atmosphere or environment in which they had been taught and students across six consortia had appreciated the opportunity to meet new people. Small class sizes and longer lessons (common to many Diploma courses) were seen by many to have promoted good relationships between both students and teachers. However, ten students in one consortium stated that issues around travel-to-learn had not been resolved adequately and also that they had not been treated well by their host institution. The survey responses revealed that individuals who studied the Diploma away from their home institution were less likely in 2010 than in 2009 to agree that they were treated more like an adult, or that they liked the atmosphere on the Diploma course. It may well be that some aspects of learning in a new environment decline over time.

7.4   Summary

Given these findings, it appears that the Diploma can be a very positive and engaging learning experience for students as long as they are given accurate information about the course, that the course then meets their expectations, that delivery and the workload is well managed and that learning and teaching are well developed. The lack of consistency in terms of satisfaction in relation to these issues across each consortium would suggest that strategic staff such as subject leads and consortium leads could have a key role to contribute to ensuring consistent quality of provision.

Moreover, while there was evidence of development in IAG strategies within consortia, there was still scope for development in terms of ensuring that all learners accessed the same quality of IAG. The evidence from the learners who participated in the first cohort of the Diplomas, some of whom felt misinformed and that the course did not meet their expectations and was less practical than they had

anticipated, emphasises the importance of ensuring that IAG for a new qualification such as the Diploma is of high quality and is consistently provided.

8   Learner progress on the Diploma

Key Findings

- While most learners felt that they were progressing well in their Diploma learning, it was evident that there was a more polarised position regarding functional skills. A notable minority felt that this was not the case and this was particularly the case with regard to mathematics.

- The majority of young people had received feedback from teachers, internal assessment marks and examination grades that helped them to assess how they were progressing. In the few cases where case-study interviewees had not received feedback, this concerned them.

- Teachers also generally felt that learners were progressing well and identified the main inhibitors as the motivation of learners and the ability of those taking the Diploma.

- The main factors inhibiting progress on their Diploma in the view of learners interviewed were the difficulty of functional skills, the pace and increased level of difficulty in the second year of delivery and teachers' apparent lack of familiarity with the Diploma and preparedness to teach the qualification.

- To ensure that learners progressed, two priorities for teachers appeared to be ensuring young people passed their functional skills and ensuring that learners participated in the requisite guided learning hours.

Implications for policy and practice

- The functional skills component, while apparently achievable for many young people, was nevertheless, a key concern for a minority of learners. The review to streamline the Diploma may wish to take into account how to minimise the impact of the functional skills on Diploma progress and achievement while considering how best to prepare young people for the world of work with the generic skills and attributes that will assist them in gaining employment.

- The pace and level of difficulty of the Diplomas was an issue for some learners. While the streamlining review of the Diploma may address this, it also highlights the need for consortia to be advised to select potential Diploma learners appropriately in terms of their ability, commitment and motivation to participate and to provide effective IAG.

In the first year of the delivery of Diplomas, the evaluation found that most learners believed they were making satisfactory progress on their Diploma programme. At the time of the surveys and case-study visits, the first cohort of Diploma learners had studied their Diploma for around five terms. This chapter examines their progress at that stage including:

- learners' and teachers' assessment of their progress to date
- the factors that had assisted them in assessing their progress
- the factors that had inhibited their progress
- the extent to which young people had discontinued before the end of their course.

8.1   Learners' views of their progress

Learners in Years 11 and 13 who responded to the survey provided an assessment of how well they felt that they were progressing in the components of their Diploma. Year 11 learners' responses, shown in Table 8.1, reveal that most young people felt that they were progressing at least *quite well* in each element of the Diploma, however, they were more polarised in terms of the functional skills components than other parts of the Diploma. While around one third of learners felt that they were doing very well in each of the three functional skills, and these were the components where the largest proportions of learners felt they were progressing very well, they were also the components (with the exception of the project) where the largest proportion felt that they were progressing *not very well* or *not at all well*. Among the functional skills, it is notable that a higher proportion of learners felt that they were progressing well with English than felt this of mathematics. This may reflect the evidence from the first year where teaching staff highlighted their concerns with the mathematics functional skills assessments in particular.

Overall, learners were more confident of their progress in the principal learning (73 per cent felt that they were progressing *very* or *quite well*). Perhaps reflecting the finding reported in Chapter 4, that a notable minority of learners were not aware of other courses they were taking as part of ASL, there was a higher level of uncertainty about their progress in this component of the Diploma.

Table 8.1   Year 11 Diploma learners' assessment of their progress

How well do you feel you are you progressing in…	Very well %	Quite well %	Not very well %	Not at all well %	Not sure %	No response %
The Diploma units that relate to my Diploma subject	16	57	10	4	7	6
Functional skills in maths	34	28	20	9	4	5
Functional skills in ICT	35	34	15	6	5	6
Functional skills in English	31	40	13	4	7	5
The Diploma project	20	44	15	7	8	6
The other courses I am taking that count towards the Diploma	17	43	10	3	20	9

N = 477

A series of single response questions
Weighted data
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Survey, 2010.

The responses from the Year 13 learners (see Table 8.2) were similar to their Year 11 peers with a higher proportion confident of their progress in the principal learning. A notable minority felt that they were not progressing well in their mathematics and ICT functional skills. Although this is based on a small number of respondents, and should be viewed as indicative, the similarity with the Year 11 responses suggests it reflects a wider experience.

Table 8.2   Year 13 Diploma learners' assessment of their progress

How well do you feel you are progressing in…	Very well %	Quite well %	Not very well %	Not at all well %	Not sure %	No response %
The Diploma units that relate to my Diploma subject	18	58	10	1	5	8
Functional skills in maths	32	32	3	13	7	13
Functional skills in ICT	36	24	13	5	8	13
Functional skills in English	37	36	6	3	4	13
The project	15	50	11	4	5	16
The other courses I am taking that count towards the Diploma	20	45	4	0	14	16

N = 86

A series of single response questions. Weighted data. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Survey, 2010.

8.1.1 How learners assessed their progress

Learners had generally received feedback on which to base their self-assessment of their progress to date. Most learners in Year 11 who were surveyed had received feedback from their tutor (71 per cent), received internal assessment marks (74 per cent) and received marks for examinations or mock examinations (68 per cent). In addition, 65 per cent reported that they had reflected on the skills and knowledge that they had developed.

Among those in Year 13 (albeit a small sample), higher proportions indicated that they had received feedback from their tutor (89 per cent), received results from examinations (76 per cent) and received internal assessment or coursework marks (74 per cent). Furthermore, 82 per cent said that they had reflected on the skills and knowledge they had developed. The interviews with young people revealed a number of factors, including these, that had helped them to understand how they were progressing on their Diploma course. These were:

- receiving updates on their progress

- receiving grades or marks back on completed aspects of the course

- having access to the mark scheme.

These are discussed further below.

Most pre- and post-16 learners said they were given regular updates on their progress and had received some marked assignments. As would be expected, the learners had a clearer idea of their progress compared to last year. The majority of learners had also taken their functional skills examinations. Of these, many already knew their results but others had yet to receive these. Almost a quarter of Year 11 and Year 13 learners interviewed had failed at least one of their functional skills examinations. This reflects the survey findings that a notable minority were not progressing well in the functional skills component.

In a number of schools, learners had received predicted grades a few weeks prior to the interview and these were in line with what learners believed they would achieve. Some learners reported that their grades had improved from last year. For example one learner commented:

> [I am] *getting B's and C's in assignments. Last year [I was] getting E's so this year is much better.*

Some of the learners reported having seen the mark scheme so that they were aware of what they needed to do in order to get good grades. This was felt to be particularly useful when they were being assessed through coursework. One Year 13 learner commented:

> *Most of it is coursework, which gets marked, so you know where you're at. I like that because you just follow the marking scheme and work your way through it.*

In comparison to last year, a small group of learners acknowledged that they were no longer having difficulties with the independent learning, which may imply a development in these skills.

8.1.2   Factors that inhibited progress

Reflecting their comments on the teaching and learning experience (Chapter 5) and the components of the Diploma (Chapter 4) in discussing their progress, interviewees revealed a number of factors that they felt had inhibited their progress on their Diploma course. These related to:

- functional skills
- the pace and the amount of work required in the second year
- the difficulty of the course increasing in the second year
- receiving little feedback or direction from teachers
- poor motivation.

Ten learners interviewed in Year 11 were concerned that they would not be able to pass their functional skills examinations and therefore would not complete their Diploma. Comments included:

> *It worries you a bit when you keep failing functional skills, though it gives you the motivation to push it a bit more.*

> *If you don't get the functional skills, you don't get the Diploma – it makes it really stressful*

Learners were also worried about the increase in pace of work compared with the first year of the Diploma. They also commented that the amount of work and the difficulty of the theoretical side of the course were particularly challenging. While, in the majority of cases, this is what would be expected from the final year of a course, a small number of learners found this to be an issue only associated with the Diploma. For example, one learner commented:

> *We have about 5 weeks left in school, and have about 4 units left to finish. We have to come in during study leave to finish them.*

Another learner commented:

> *If you get behind, it's really hard to get yourself back on track.*

This suggests that, as this was a new qualification, teachers may still be developing their experience of the qualification in order to judge the pace of the work. Alternatively it may be that the Diploma requirements were too great for the number of assigned guided learning hours.

A small number of Year 11 learners also believed that the level of the work required for Diploma coursework was harder than for their other subjects. Young people described the functional skills examinations as particularly difficult. Others identified specific units and the project as areas of difficulty. Year 13 learners were also concerned about the difficulty of the theory and written work.

Learners in three consortia had received very little, if any, feedback or grades and therefore were not aware of how they were progressing. One learner commented:

> It's alarming that we haven't got the other grades back yet, so we are just scared for when they come back.

In one case-study area, all Year 11 learners were concerned about not completing their Diploma. These learners reported a lack of understanding over what was expected of them and a belief that their teachers were not sufficiently familiar with the qualification, as one learner commented:

> I'm going to fail because the teachers don't know what they're doing. I have discussed this with teachers and I'm just told to get on with it.'

This may imply a lack of effective communication from teachers, which was impacting on the learners' belief in their ability to achieve their full Diploma.

A minority of learners in Year 11 reported that it was increasingly difficult to keep motivation in their second year of the Diploma. They believed this was because of the delivery structure of the Diploma, whereby they were studying one subject for a complete day. After two years, the learners were beginning to find this delivery model de-motivating.

8.2   Teachers' views of learners' progress

Teachers who responded to the survey generally felt learners were making good progress on their Diploma course. As Table 8.3 shows, 75 per cent of teachers agreed to some extent that the learners they taught were making good progress on the course.

Table 8.3 Teachers' views of learners' progress

The Diploma learners I teach are-	Strongly agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Making good progress	16	59	6	13	0	6
Motivated to learn	10	49	7	26	1	7
Of appropriate ability for the course	6	47	7	28	3	9
Likely to achieve the overall Diploma	7	50	20	13	3	7

N = 86

A series of single response questions.
Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100.
A total of 81 respondents gave at least one response to these questions.
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Teacher Survey, 2010.

While they generally felt learners were making good progress, there were issues over learners' motivation to learn (27 per cent *disagreed*) and the ability of the learners on the course (31 per cent *disagreed*). There was also some uncertainty over whether learners would achieve their Diploma (16 per cent *disagreed*).

This is further highlighted in the 15 case-study consortia. At both the consortium- and institution-level, the concern over learners not completing the Diploma related particularly to the difficulty of functional skills. The extent of this issue was such that staff in at least one institution in all consortia believed that some learners would not be able to achieve the overall Diploma because they would not pass the functional skills examinations.

One of the barriers to learners progressing well in their Diploma course was ensuring that they completed the required guided learning hours. This was a particular problem for Diplomas, as principal learning tended to occur in a block over one or two days a week and, therefore, if a learner missed one day they could miss a week's worth of lessons. This issue was further complicated due to the learners often travelling from different schools. For example, while schools tended to have aligned timetables for Diplomas, this alignment did not extend to other areas such as INSET days or class or year group trips, and such students from one particular school could be absent from a week's lesson because they were on a trip, for example.

8.2.1 Learner discontinuation

Overall consortium leads reported low numbers of learners discontinuing the Diploma course. Numbers discontinuing generally ranged from one to five learners on a subject. The majority were said by subject leads and institutional managers to have left the course because of personal and behavioural reasons. Pre-16 learners who left the course generally did so early in the first year of delivery, which allowed them to move onto a different course.

In a few instances senior managers reported that learners had discontinued because they had failed their functional skills examinations or because the learners believed they would not have been able to complete the course. In two consortia, learners had left the IT Diploma course as the course was not what they expected.

In two consortia a higher than average proportion of learners had dropped out of the course. In one of these areas a school had withdrawn all their Engineering learners due to dissatisfaction with the college delivering the course. In another area, the consortium had made the decision to change the pre-16 Level 1 Engineering Diploma course to a BTEC course. This was because they were uncertain over grade equivalencies and future progression.

8.3 Summary

In summary, while on the whole learners appeared to be progressing well on their Diploma course, it was clear that this was not the case for all. It was evident that a notable minority did not feel that they were progressing well in their functional skills and there were concerns among teaching staff that learners may not achieve the full Diploma because of this. Diploma learners were helped by receiving feedback and grades and where this was missing this concerned them. It is apparent that the pacing of the work across the two years, as noted in Chapter 5, is an area for further development for teaching staff as they become more familiar with the Diploma qualification.

9   Support

Key findings

- The majority of case-study learners felt they were well-supported, although some who studied away from their home institution had experienced a lack of support. Reasons given by the minority of learners who were dissatisfied with the level of support received were: lack of information on assessment and lack of consistent access to staff.

- Most teachers felt that they had been given sufficient opportunities to attend training at a national or local level and to network with other Diploma teachers. However it was considered important that training reflected up-to-date experiences of Diploma delivery and was tailored appropriately to those attending. Fewer teachers felt that they had been given opportunities to receive advice from consultants. Strategic interviewees felt that the training and support most valued by staff included training provided by awarding bodies and informal networking.

- Practitioners would welcome further training and support in relation to assessment, experience of sector-related working environments, functional skills, planning Diploma teaching, teaching in an applied way and Diploma administration. Assessment was also identified as an outstanding staff development area by consortium leads and subject leads.

Implications for policy and practice

- In the future, if Diploma delivery is to be provided at institutions other than the home school, it is advisable to ensure learning and pastoral support are available across all delivering institutions and consistent staffing and good communication channels are also achieved across institutions.

- In light of reduced financial support from the government from September 2011, ways to support informal networking and peer learning (in order to benefit from lessons learnt and identify effective practice, for example with regard to assessment) should be planned and disseminated.

This chapter details the structures in place to support Diploma learners. It explores:

- learners' views of the extent to which they feel supported
- the training, support and CPD opportunities available to staff
- any outstanding development needs.

9.1 Support for learners

The teacher survey examined the different structures put in place to support learners on their Diploma course. Nearly half of practitioners teaching pre-16 students reported that individual learning support structures were in place (49 per cent), while pastoral support was mentioned by a quarter (25 per cent) of respondents. In contrast, the most common support structure mentioned by practitioners teaching post-16 students was pastoral support (64 per cent). Nevertheless, nearly as many respondents mentioned learning support (60 per cent). However, given the low number of post-16 respondents (27 teachers), these findings should be treated with caution.

Most case-study Diploma learners felt that they were receiving enough support (with their learning and practicalities). Some particularly valued the advice and feedback on how they could improve their work. A few interviewees also explained that the smaller class size (a common characteristic of Diploma courses started in September 2008) meant that they were able to access support more easily when required

There were however, a small minority of learners in one consortium who felt that, while they had access to sufficient support at the home institution, this was not the case at the other delivery school. One learner taking IT for example, held the perception that learners from the host school were treated more favourably because they had access to better equipment, as illustrated by the following comment:

> *The other school kids have better computers which we aren't allowed to have – we had small notebooks which weren't that good. When we asked for better ones, we were told that we were pushing our luck.*

Further to this, interviewees in another consortium said that they received more support from the home institution. One learner attributed this variation to already having an established relationship with the Diploma teacher at the home institution who was aware of the areas where she required additional support.

In those cases where learners were not satisfied with the support received, reasons varied and most commonly included:

- lack of support around assessment, including the requirements that need to be met in order to successfully complete the course
- staffing issues, including not being able to access support from staff when required because they were not based at the home institution, lack of teachers to effectively support learners and staff turnover which raised issues with consistency of delivery and a feeling amongst learners that staff were more supportive in the previous year.

9.2 Support for staff

The views of training and support received amongst staff involved in the delivery of the first cohort of Diploma students were explored in the case-study visits.

9.2.1 Support and training recommended to other consortium leads

Consortium leads identified the main aspects of training and support that they would recommend to other consortium leads. Support most valued, and of particular relevance in light of reduced funding from September 2011, included:

- informal networking (mentioned by three consortia) which provides the opportunity to share knowledge and experience. As one consortium lead observed:

  Talk to people already doing it. This consortium has been pro-active in setting up visits. The national organisations have a huge personnel turnover and this affects their capability and too much of the support is uncoordinated. Informal networking can work better. Organisations have been funded for Diploma development support, but often it's not needed.

- peer learning through, for example, working with neighbouring authorities or shadowing a consortium lead previously in post (mentioned by two consortia).

Other support included:

- support and training received from national bodies, mentioned by three consortia, including for example, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service and the DfE (in one instance, delivered at a regional level)

- support received from awarding bodies, mentioned by two consortia. One consortium lead, for example, said that they had helped to provide clarity on the content of Diplomas when they were developing their application to deliver Diplomas.

9.2.2 CPD strategies

There did not appear to be common formal mechanisms in place to identify CPD opportunities for Diploma staff. Across five consortia, no formal mechanisms appeared to be in place; rather, consortium leads would pass on information or direct staff to what was available. One interviewee remarked: *'I can give guidance, but they have to make their own decisions'.* Across a further three consortia, information was not directed through the consortium lead; responsibility was held by another member of staff. For example, in one consortium a Diploma coordinator was responsible for identifying training opportunities and disseminating the information at steering group meetings.

Where formal mechanisms were in place, these varied and included an in-house training programme devised by the LA, a workforce development plan developed through the 14-19 Partnership and a Diploma network comprising groups of teachers across different consortia.

9.2.3 Access to training, support and CPD opportunities

The teacher survey explored the extent to which staff agreed with a series of statements about access to a range of CPD opportunities. As Table 9.1 illustrates, most teachers felt they had been given sufficient opportunities to attend training courses at a national or local level, and network with other Diploma staff. Just under two-fifths of survey respondents (39 per cent) agreed that they have been given sufficient opportunities to get advice from consultants.

Table 9.1   Attitude towards access to CPD opportunities

I have been given sufficient opportunities to:	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not needed %	No response %
attend national training courses	20	41	13	14	1	12
attend local training courses	24	38	10	15	2	9
network with other Diploma staff	24	41	10	12	1	12
get advice from consultants	12	26	34	14	5	10

N = 86

A series of single response questions.
Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100.
A total of 78 respondents gave at least one response to these questions.
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Teacher Survey, 2010.

From the case studies it was evident that the views held by senior institutional managers were largely positive, with most interviewees (20 out of 31) commenting that staff were able to access appropriate CPD to help them deliver the course successfully (although CPD was considered of mixed quality in a few cases). A minority of interviewees did suggest however, that strategic staff might not be fully aware of the opportunities available to staff. In addition, two interviewees, while satisfied overall with the access for staff, identified areas for further development which included the creation of a consortium-wide approach to promoting good practice and support to increase awareness of sector developments.

In those cases where staff were considered to have appropriate access, this was said to be facilitated by having access to a regular programme of courses and training organised by the consortium.

Reasons more frequently reported amongst interviewees who felt that staff did not have access to appropriate CPD included:

- lack of time or workload pressures.

- training not being tailored appropriately at those attending. For example, one interviewee said that while a lot of training opportunities had been made available, in some cases, staff were better informed than those who were delivering the course. The senior institution manager explained that '*much [training] has not been appropriate because the staff are ahead of the deliverers'*.

The latter response was also identified amongst strategic consortium staff in the first year of delivery and highlights the importance of tailoring support to the needs of individuals.

Despite a generally positive view towards training opportunities amongst teaching staff and those at a more strategic level, the majority of IAG staff expressing an opinion (eight out of 12 interviewees across six consortia] said that they felt there were limited or no opportunities to network locally. Reasons provided included lack of time and the difficulty associated with getting cover to attend such events.

Strategic consortium interviewees (such as consortium leads or subject leads) had differing views about the training and support best received by staff. Amongst those who expressed an opinion, interviewees across five consortia felt staff had found support and training provided by awarding bodies particularly useful. For example, one subject lead said, *'the exam board have been absolutely fantastic'*. Moreover, informal networking was considered of particular value by staff across four consortia. One Engineering subject lead said that the role could feel quite isolated and therefore he valued being able to talk and share experiences with others.

The survey showed that just over half of Diploma teachers (52 per cent) *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that the training and support received so far had helped them to prepare for Diploma delivery. Conversely, 33 per cent of survey respondents *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* with this statement; a finding which could be attributed to the need to tailor training and support to the needs of individuals.

9.2.4   Outstanding staff development needs

Table 9.2 illustrates the areas where teachers felt they would benefit from training and support. Assessment of Diplomas was the most commonly reported priority training and support need (31 per cent) amongst survey respondents. Furthermore, a similar proportion felt that training and support on assessment would be helpful (30 per cent). This was also identified as an outstanding staff development need by case-study strategic consortium staff and reflects an area in which subject leads considered there to be outstanding issues with a lack of knowledge in the first year of delivery (Lynch *et al*., 2010). One Society, Health and Development subject lead for example, described her unease about understanding the requirements that need to be met for assignments in order for learners to achieve a particular grade. This finding does, therefore, suggest the need for better access to, and promotion of, support and training for assessment.

Nearly half of survey respondents (48 per cent) felt that training and support in relation to experience of a sector-related working environment would be helpful. Moreover, around two-fifths of survey respondents also noted that it would be helpful to have training and support in relation to functional skills, planning Diploma teaching, teaching in an applied way and Diploma administration. However, over half of teachers (55 per cent) reported that they did not need training and support focused on behaviour management with a young age group of learners. These respondents may well be based at further education institutions rather than schools.

Table 9.2   Training and support needs

Training and support needs	This is a priority %	This would be helpful %	I don't need this %	Already had training %	No response %
Experience of a sector-related working environment	15	48	16	1	20
Assessment of Diplomas	31	30	13	8	17
Functional Skills	12	42	26	6	15
Planning Diploma teaching	10	40	22	7	21
Teaching in an applied way	9	43	28	2	17
Behaviour management with a younger age group of learners	7	13	55	6	20
IAG	5	37	33	6	20
Diploma administration	14	43	23	3	16
Other	1	2	3	0	93

N = 86

A series of single response questions.
Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100.
A total of 77 respondents gave at least one response to these questions.
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Teacher Survey, 2010

Further outstanding development needs were identified amongst consortium-level interviewees (in response to an open question), however, in some cases, perceptions differed amongst staff in the same consortia in terms of outstanding needs. Responses included the following:

- ongoing training for staff new to teaching Diplomas - mentioned by consortium leads across four consortia

- support to deliver specific components of the Diploma (including functional skills and embedding PLTS) – mentioned by consortium leads across three consortia

- exemplar materials to support effective delivery - suggested by subject leads (and in one case, a consortium lead) in three consortia.

In addition, a few school staff referred to the technical difficulties they were experiencing with computers.

9.2.5   Resources

Just over half of interviewees across 12 consortia felt they had access to adequate resources (such as funding, facilities and equipment). However, comments more frequently reported amongst those who considered they did **not** have sufficient access included:

- lack of materials/exemplar work, particularly amongst the Society, Health and Development sector. Furthermore, one Society, Health and Development teacher remarked that, while she had been given a range of resources, they were not

necessarily appropriate to the units she was teaching. She welcomed resources which were specific to the units being covered

- lack of facilities (an issue also mentioned by interviewees during the first year of delivery (Lynch *et al.*, 2010), although one interviewee did note that they were waiting for facilities to be completed.

Moreover, in two cases, interviewees requested additional equipment. For example, one Society, Health and Development teacher sought a new type of camera which would enable video clips to be quickly uploaded onto the computer.

9.3 Summary

The findings have shown that the majority of Diploma learners were satisfied with the level of support received, although some who studied away from their home institution identified a lack of support from the host institution they visited. Moreover, evidence did suggest that overall staff had access to sufficient CPD opportunities; however, there were some interviewees who felt that the training was not necessarily closely meeting the needs of those attending.

Despite a largely positive view about the training and support received, various outstanding staff development needs were identified amongst practitioners and strategic staff, particularly in terms of assessment, which reflects findings from the first year of delivery. This suggests that offering an ongoing training programme is important to ensure that all staff have access to a range of courses at the appropriate level, in order to promote confidence and the necessary knowledge to deliver all aspects of the Diploma effectively.

10   Learners' future destinations

Key Findings

- The majority of learners in Year 11 intended to remain in learning post-16 including through the work-based route. Eleven per cent of Diploma learners said that they planned to progress onto an Apprenticeship and this was particularly the case among those who had studied Engineering and Construction and the Built Environment. Learners who had studied IT were most likely to plan to get a job with training.

- While there was some commitment to continue the subject studied as a Diploma for 38 per cent of young people, it was equally likely for learners to plan to pursue a different subject area in future (34 per cent). This suggests that their choice was not constrained by their decision at 14.

- Twenty per cent of young people planned to take another Diploma immediately after completing Year 11. However, the proportion considering this had declined since they were in Year 10. Where they had changed their minds this was related to undertaking more detailed research, being advised not to and not enjoying their pre-16 Diploma.

- Having a good experience of a Diploma course pre-16 is related to choosing to pursue a Diploma post-16. There was a positive association between intending to take a Diploma in future and being satisfied with the Diploma pre-16, thinking their education would give them useful skills for the future and being satisfied with learning generally.

- Sixty-eight per cent of Year 13 learners intended to progress to higher education and half had applied already when surveyed. Of these, most had been offered a place and this was the case for a slightly higher proportion of Diploma learners than their peers.

- Although Diploma learners appeared to be more likely to have received advice from a careers professional, it emerged that they were generally less likely than their peers to have found advice and information provided helpful.

- It is evident that young people who take Diplomas are as likely to intend to progress to higher education as their peers and as likely to have been accepted for a place. Moreover, the subject matter chosen for a Diploma at 14 does not appear to constrain the future choices of young people as many were not intending to remain learning in the same subject in future. There would be value in disseminating this evidence more widely to address perceptions among some teaching staff and learners that a Diploma is not appropriate for progression to higher education.

- As Diploma learners were less likely to have found the IAG provided helpful, there may be value in exploring the reasons for this in more detail and establishing what alternative or additional advice, in terms of the format, delivery or content, they would find more helpful.

- In the first year of their course, most of the case-study learners in Year 10 were planning to progress onto education or training post-16, with the majority of these expecting to study in the same subject area as their Diploma course. Nearly half of the Year 10 Diploma learners wanted to study another Diploma in the future. The majority of Year 12 learners were planning to apply to university and the Diploma was generally thought to help with this progression.

This chapter will:

- discuss the intended destinations of learners in the second year of Diploma study including whether they intend to undertake a Diploma in future

- explore the influence the Diploma has had on this decision

- report the future developments planned by consortia and individual institutions.

10.1   Future progression of Year 11 learners

Learners who were taking Diplomas and their peers in Year 11 who were not taking a Diploma, were generally intending to progress into further learning. As can be seen in Table 10.1, young people were commonly planning to continue into a course at college, sixth form college or school sixth form[23]. It is notable that around one in ten in both groups planned to progress to an Apprenticeship and choosing to take a sector-related Diploma at 14 does not appear to be a predictor of preferred routes post-16.

---

[23] Respondents could give more than one intended destination.

Table 10.1   Intended destinations of Diploma learners and comparison learners after completing Year 11

What do you think you will do after finishing your Diploma/Year 11	Diploma learners %	Comparison learners %
Do a course in a school sixth form	26	36
Do a course at college/sixth form college	66	60
Do a course at a training provider	3	1
Do an Apprenticeship/Advanced Apprenticeship	11	10
Get a job with training	10	7
Get a full time job without training	2	2
Something else	2	4
Don't know yet	5	2
No response	3	1
N =	477	680

More than one answer could be given so percentages may sum to more than 100.
The percentages in this table are weighted.
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas Learners Surveys, 2010.

There were some differences in the intended destinations of young people taking different Diploma subjects. Those who had taken Construction and Built Environment or Engineering were more likely to be considering doing an Apprenticeship as one of their options (23 per cent and 18 per cent respectively) while those who had undertaken a Diploma in IT were more likely to be considering a job with training (14 per cent) than was the case among Diploma learners generally.

Some learners' commitment to their Diploma subject is reflected in the finding that 38 per cent of survey respondents were planning to follow a course post-16 that was related to their subject area. However, the Diploma subject did not appear to have constrained young people's choices as 34 per cent said that they would not pursue a course in the same subject area, while a further 18 per cent were not sure.

A fifth of survey respondents who had taken a Diploma in Year 11, planned to take another Diploma immediately after Year 11, as shown in Table 10.2. Among the comparison group, learners were less likely to indicate that they would take a Diploma in future but it is notable that there was a higher level of uncertainty among comparison learners while a slightly greater proportion of learners who had already taken a Diploma said that they would definitely not take another one in future. While this may indicate dissatisfaction with their experience of taking a Diploma qualification, it is also possible that they have pursued the Diploma, or the subject area, as far as they chose to.

Table 10.2   Learners' intention to progress onto a Diploma in future

Would you consider doing another Diploma in the future	Diploma learners %	Comparison learners %
Yes, I plan to take a/another Diploma immediately	20	13
I may take a/another Diploma at some time in the future	16	19
Probably not	23	31
Definitely not	24	17
Not sure yet	10	19
No response	6	2
N =	477	591

The percentages in this table are weighted.
Comparison learners based on all those who had heard of Diplomas
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Surveys, 2010

The attributes that were associated with considering taking a Diploma post-16 were explored using a multi-level modelling analysis. This analysis takes into account a range of potentially influential variables and identifies those that are associated with an increased likelihood of intending to pursue a Diploma post-16. Similar analyses were undertaken for Year 11 students taking a Diploma and the comparison group of their peers who had not taken a Diploma pre-16. This analysis revealed that, among students who had taken a Diploma pre-16 there was a significant positive association between intending to take a Diploma post-16 and:

- being more satisfied with the Diploma course pre-16

- considering their education would provide them with useful skills for the future (**Factor 2**)[24]

- enjoying and being satisfied with learning pre-16.

This suggests that a positive experience of learning and of the Diploma, specifically pre-16, leads young people to choose to continue with this course over and above any other potentially influential factors. There were no significant differences between young people taking each Diploma subject.

Among the comparison group of learners, there was a significant positive association between the likelihood of choosing to pursue a Diploma post-16 and:[25]

- attainment at key stage 3 – the probability increases as attainment declines

- having a positive attitude to learning.

---

[24] See Appendix A3.3 for more details on Factor 2
[25] See Appendix A for full details of the multi-level modelling.

In addition, there was a relationship between having a lower commitment to learning and an increased likelihood of planning to take a Diploma.

The evidence suggests a decline in the proportion of young people who intend to take a Diploma in future. Year-on-year comparison[26] of Diploma learners' responses, who responded to the surveys in both years, shows that a significantly smaller proportion planned in Year 11 to take another Diploma post-16 than they had when they were in Year 10 (41 per cent and 51 per cent respectively). Conversely, a significantly higher proportion were not considering studying a Diploma in the future in Year 11 than was the case when they were in Year 10 (50 per cent compared with 25 per cent). As perhaps would be expected, a much smaller proportion of learners were unsure about whether they would study a Diploma in the future this year in comparison to last year (ten per cent and 25 per cent). As will be discussed below, the interviews with young people suggested three main reasons why young people may have changed their mind. Firstly, as they approach the end of their course they had undertaken more detailed research into their future plans and refined their thoughts, secondly they had been advised not to take a Diploma post-16 and thirdly their experience of the Diploma had not been positive pre-16.

Of those who intended to take a Diploma in future, it was most common for them to intend to pursue a Level 3 Diploma (72 per cent) while 18 per cent planned to take a Level 2 Diploma. As might be expected, given that these young people had already taken a Diploma pre-16, it was least common for young people to intend to take a Level 1Diploma (five per cent) (the remaining 11 per cent either did not know or did not respond).

Key factors, as highlighted by the case-study interviews, which influenced the learners' decisions on whether to study another Diploma, were the Diploma's currency as an entry qualification into higher education and their current enjoyment and achievement of the Diploma. These views appear to vary by consortia rather than Diploma subject. For example, in two consortia nearly all learners were planning to study a Diploma in the future or were positive about the possibility of doing so, with many Year 11 learners aiming to progress to higher education, as the following learners' comments illustrate:

> *I just want to get the Diploma at the highest level I can. It's a good course and you can do extra work experience at the hospital and I know that's what I want to do.*

> *I hope to go onto Engineering Level 3, I want to carry on the qualification and then go to university and get a PhD…. I have done some research already and know to get to Cambridge you can do Engineering* [Diploma at] *Level 3 and you need physics and maths A Levels, and I've spoken to my teachers and they think it is alright to do that.*

In six consortia, learners said that they would not study another Diploma in the future because they believed there was too much uncertainty surrounding the course and other courses were more recognised as progression routes to higher education. Some learners stated that because they wanted to go to university they would be taking A Levels. In two of these, learners had applied for the Level 3 Diploma but had

---

[26]Comparison is made possible as the same question was asked of respondents in phases one and two of the survey.

now been told by their school or college to choose other courses if they wanted to progress to higher education. One learner commented:

> *I tried to get on a Level 3 at college, but the college said they didn't think universities would recognise a Level 3 Diploma so they put me on the BTEC National Diploma instead.*

This implies schools and colleges in some areas may be giving inaccurate advice to learners with regards to the acceptance of the Diploma in higher education. This may be because teachers are uncertain about Diplomas and want to advise learners on what they feel is the 'safest' route into higher education. However, as the 2009 survey of higher education institutions undertaken for the evaluation found, there is widespread acceptance of the Diploma as an appropriate and acceptable qualification for entry into higher education. Furthermore, Diploma learners in the case-study consortia had applied to and been offered places on undergraduate programmes at a range of HEIs.

Some learners would not choose a Diploma in the future because they had not enjoyed their current course. In one consortium, all learners stated that they would not choose another Diploma in future because the pre-16 course had not been as expected.

> *The school didn't tell us that we had to do functional skills in the options booklet. They told us we would have to do one exam – we didn't know we had to do another exam until after we had started- we had three.*

In the case-study consortia, there was little difference between learners taking different Diploma subjects in their view of whether they would choose to study a Diploma in the future, reflecting the analysis of the surveys discussed above. The exception was IT, in which learners were generally choosing other courses, such as BTECs or A levels rather than a Level 3 Diploma. Learners typically commented that they had not enjoyed the IT Diploma as it was not what they expected it to be and did not want to continue with IT in the future, as this comment illustrates.

> *It had helped me decide what not to do. I know that the Diploma is not all about IT and computing. Only one of the units has been about computers. The title is misleading. It isn't what you expect when you hear the words IT.*

It was evident that learners' experience of their Diploma had helped to inform their decision of what to progress onto after completing Year 11. Around three-quarters of those surveyed (74 per cent) said their Diploma had helped them make a decision, comprising 32 per cent who said it had helped a lot and 42 per cent who felt it had helped a little. Although 19 per cent did not feel it had helped, it appears that, overall, taking a Diploma is a further influential factor in young people's decision-making at 16. Indeed, regardless of whether the learner had chosen to study a Diploma in the future, students in the case-study consortia typically believed that the Diploma had influenced their future choices. As found in the first year of delivery (Lynch *et al., 2010)*, learners believed the Diploma had influenced their choices through their current enjoyment, or lack of enjoyment, of the course and subject matter, confirming future plans they had already made and providing an insight into future career pathways. Comments included:

> *Definitely – because I didn't know what path to take to get into structural engineering but now I am clear.*

It has given me a wide view of possibilities.

10.2   Future progression of Year 13 learners

As shown in Table 10.3, the intended plans of Diploma learners in many respects reflected those of their peers, with the majority planning to progress to university. Young people's continued interest in their Diploma subject is reflected in the finding that 63 per cent said that their next destination in employment or learning would be related to their Diploma course.

Nearly all of the comparison group of learners had heard of Diplomas (96 per cent) and 24 per cent felt that they knew a lot about them. However, as might be expected given that the majority of the comparison group had taken a Level 3 qualification in Year 13, few (six per cent) thought that they might take a Diploma immediately after Year 13, although 22 per cent said that they would consider taking one in the future.

Table 10.3   Intended destinations of Diploma learners and comparison learners after Year 13

Plans after Year 13	Diploma learners %	Comparison learners %
Do a course at college	10	*
Do a course at a training provider	1	4
Do an Apprenticeship	11	11
Get a job with training	14	11
Get a full time job without training	9	6
Do a course at a University/HEI	68	79
Something else	4	5
Don't know yet	10	5
No response	2	1
N =	86	131

*question not asked
More than one answer could be given so percentages may sum to more than 100.
The percentages in this table are weighted.
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Surveys, 2010

Around half of Diploma learners (48 per cent) had already applied for a university place while a greater proportion of the comparison group had done so (60 per cent). Of these, Diploma learners were slightly more likely to have been offered a place (86 per cent) than comparison learners (76 per cent). Although these findings are based on small numbers, it suggests that Diploma learners who applied for university / HE were as likely as those who had not taken a Diploma to be accepted on an HE course. This reflects the evidence from UCAS, and the HEI surveys undertaken for this evaluation, which indicated that young people with Diplomas were as likely to be accepted for HE as those who applied with other qualifications.

Interviews with Year 13 learners revealed that higher education was their preferred destination after completing the Diploma. Reflecting the survey findings, a high

proportion of the learners interviewed (37 of 49) wanted to go to university. Twenty-two of these had received conditional or unconditional offers and ten were waiting to hear from universities. Five learners had not yet applied or had planned to take a gap year prior to going to university.

Very few learners had received rejections. Where this had happened, this tended to be because the learner did not have the right qualifications alongside their Diploma, such as mathematics A Level for Engineering or science A levels for midwifery. One learner commented that he had been rejected because he did not have GCSE English. He commented:

> *I was really enthusiastic about going to [university] but I was denied because I didn't have my GCSE English…but I got told that functional skills English would be accepted, but I slowly learnt that [university] doesn't accept functional skills.*

The importance of accurate and comprehensive IAG is highlighted by this case. As the survey of HEIs undertaken for the evaluation found, the UCAS website now provides extensive information on entry requirements to all undergraduate courses at HEIs across the UK and most institutions have included information on the UCAS website for Diploma applicants. However, for those commencing their Diploma in September 2008, there was much less information available at that time. HEIs were aware of this issue and some suggested that Diploma learners should contact them prior to application.

Learners were confident that the universities they had applied to would accept the Diploma. Many had, as suggested, contacted providers in advance to find out whether their Diploma would be accepted.

Interviewees studying for a Diploma in IT were less likely to report they were planning to go to university than those taking other Diploma subjects. They were more likely to intend to go onto a work-related learning route or into employment.

As was the case for the Year 11 Diploma learners, taking the qualification had helped those in Year 13 in making their decision of what route to pursue after completing it. Eighty per cent said taking their Diploma had helped in some way, comprising 33 per cent who felt it helped *a lot* and 47 who felt it helped *a bit*. Only 14 per cent said it had not helped at all.

Learners across eight of the ten case-study consortia with Year 13 learners commented that the Diploma had influenced their decisions on what to do next. Many of the learners believed that due to the broad nature of the Diploma course, covering many different areas of a sector, it had helped them find the area they were most interested in and to focus their goals on that. Others believed that the Diploma had reinforced career choices they had made prior to taking up a Diploma.

10.3   Guidance to support future progression

Teachers believed there were more support structures in place for post-16 learners to guide future progression compared with pre-16 learners. Indeed, 84 per cent (21 of 25 respondents) of post-16 teachers believed there were IAG support structures in place to guide future progression compared with 58 per cent (39 out of 67 respondents) of pre-16 teachers. To some extent this is supported by the evidence

from the surveys of young people in terms of those not taking a Diploma, as can be seen in Table 10.4. A greater proportion of young people in the comparison group in Year 13 reported that they had received guidance (82 per cent) than was the case among their younger peers (73 per cent). However, this does not appear to be the case among Diploma learners.

Table 10.4   Help and guidance received by learners with their future choices

Have you received help or guidance?	Year 11 Diploma	Year 11 Comparison	Year 13 Diploma	Year 13 Comparison
	%	%	%	%
Yes	58	73	52	82
No	24	16	21	11
Not sure	15	8	19	5
No response	3	3	8	2
N=	447	680	86	131

The percentages in this table are weighted.
A single response question
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Surveys, 2010

Table 10.4 reveals that Diploma learners in Year 11 and in Year 13 were noticeably less likely than their peers who were not taking Diplomas to report that they had received help and guidance to choose what to do after completing Year 11 or 13. The reasons why this might be the case are not clear from the survey findings, although the findings show that the Diploma learners are less certain whether they have received any support.

Of those in Year 11[27] who had received some support, Table 10.5 shows the sources of the guidance. In broad terms the main sources of guidance were the same for Diploma learners and comparison learners, with the majority mentioning teachers in their own school, their families and friends, Connexions personal advisers and careers advisers in school. The proportions receiving guidance from informal sources such as family and friends were broadly similar but a higher proportion of the Diploma learners indicated that they had received guidance from a Connexions personal adviser or a careers adviser in school and from their teachers. Moreover, perhaps reflecting the inter-institutional delivery of Diplomas, a greater proportion of Diploma learners reported that they had received guidance from teachers in another school or college than was the case among the comparison group. Overall, the survey evidence suggests that Diploma learners were less likely to have received any guidance compared to their peers, but of those that had, they were more likely to have received formal support from an advice professional.

---

[27] The numbers in Year 13 who responded to this question are too small for the figures to be meaningful.

Table 10.5   Sources of guidance for Diploma and comparison learners in Year 11

Sources of guidance	Diploma learners %	Comparison learners %
Teachers in my own school/college	72	67
Teachers in another school/college	31	20
Training provider	16	6
Someone in a higher education institution	24	21
Employers	21	9
Connexions personal adviser	54	48
Careers adviser in school	40	32
Mentor	22	10
Family	72	68
Friends	54	48
Written material/leaflets	29	*
The Internet/computer packages	33	25
TV/the media	20	10
Someone else	9	5
No response	11	10
N =	280	507

*this item was not asked
More than one answer could be given so percentages may sum to more than 100.
The percentages in this table are weighted.
A filter question: all those who said that they had received guidance
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Surveys, 2010

Diploma learners and comparison learners who had received guidance were similar in their views on the helpfulness of this guidance in relation to:

- their teachers (88 per cent of Diploma learners and 89 per cent of comparison learners found them *very* or *quite helpful*)

- their family (90 per cent of Diploma learners and 90 per cent of comparison learners found them *very* or *quite helpful*)

- their friends (83 per cent of Diploma learners and 83 per cent of comparison learners found them *very* or *quite helpful*).

However, Diploma learners were less likely to report that they had found the guidance provided by a careers adviser in school had been helpful (76 per cent of Diploma learners and 86 per cent of comparison learners) or guidance from a Connexions personal adviser (74 per cent of Diploma learners and 87 per cent of comparison learners). In general, Diploma learners were less likely to indicate that they had found any of the sources of guidance helpful. This suggests that there may

be a need to explore further with these learners their reasons for not finding the support provided helpful and identifying the aspects that could be improved to more closely meet their needs.

10.4 Summary

Overall, it appears the young people who took Diplomas either in Years 10 and 11 or in Years 12 and 13 planned to continue in learning, mainly in further or higher education, or in the work-based route through an apprenticeship or a job with training. While for some in Year 11, their future progression would be in a sector or subject linked to their Diploma, it was equally likely that they would choose a different, unrelated subject to pursue suggesting that the choice of a Diploma at 14 had not constrained their later choices. The majority of young people in Year 13 planned to progress to higher education, in common with their peers who did not take a Diploma and, where they had already applied for an HE place, they had generally been accepted. It was evident that good advice and guidance, and clear information from HEIs remained critical to ensure that learners had the appropriate ASL, and English and mathematics qualifications to pursue their preferred route post-18.

11   Conclusions

11.1   What has been the impact of the Diplomas?

The evidence from the surveys and case-study interviews with young people who were in the first cohort of learners to take Diplomas, and their teachers, reveal a varied picture in terms of the impact of the Diplomas. The young people in Years 11 and 13 generally considered that they were progressing well with their Diploma and their teachers agreed with this. There is also evidence of many young people being satisfied with their experience of taking a Diploma and of learners and staff noting the impact of the Diploma on the development of team-working, research and communication skills in addition to the development of subject knowledge. It is evident that where learners had engaged in work experience, were aware of the ASL components in their Diploma and felt that they were progressing well in their principal learning, they were more satisfied with the experience. Moreover, the findings indicated that the extent to which young people had a positive learning experience while taking a Diploma, was related less to the specific Diploma subject that they were taking, or the consortium where they were studying, but more to the organisation and preparedness for teaching at the individual course level.

In terms of future progression, the majority of learners who had taken a Diploma in Years 12 and 13 intended to progress to higher education and, of those who had applied, the majority had been offered places. The majority of Diploma students in Year 11 planned to remain in learning, including through work-based routes such as an Apprenticeship or job with training. While some of those in Year 11 anticipated that their future progression would be related to their Diploma subject area, as many said that they would pursue an alternative subject in future. This indicated that young people's take up of a Diploma at 14 had not constrained their future subject choices.

While there was evidence of the Diploma having been a positive learning experience for some learners, there was a notable minority who were less positive. This was more apparent among the Year 11 cohort than those in Year 13 and was evident from those who said that they were not satisfied, wished that they had made an alternative choice and would not recommend taking a Diploma.

The focus of this research on the Diploma allows for an assessment of young people's views and a similar assessment is not available for a standard GCSE or A Level subject. Nevertheless, the interviews and surveys suggested that there were some specific aspects that relate to Diplomas that were associated with this dissatisfaction. The fact that this research is based on evidence from the first cohort taking a new qualification should also be taken into consideration.

In terms of the Diploma itself, the key issues for learners who were dissatisfied were as follows:

- their expectations were not met particularly in terms of the amount of practical work and work-related learning
- the functional skills component which some had found difficult to pass
- the amount and challenging nature of the course content.

It is clear that one mechanism for addressing this is to ensure that the learners who embark on a Diploma are clear about the course content, style of learning and the balance of practical and applied approaches through the provision of IAG and an informed selection process for matching students to courses. Good management and teaching are also key components in ensuring that the Diploma meets the needs of learners.

The evidence from learners who were dissatisfied with their experience of the course, revealed that they perceived that the teaching and management of the Diploma could have been better, in particular in terms of the pacing of the work across the two years. The learners themselves are, nevertheless, a key contributor to their own experience and it was evident that teachers considered that developing independent learning skills required for the Diploma had been challenging in some instances. Learners also recognised this, when those who would recommend taking a Diploma, emphasised the need for a potential Diploma learner to be well informed, have a strong interest in the Diploma subject, be prepared to work hard and be capable of independent learning.

Some of these issues could be said to relate to the implementation and teaching of any new qualification and may be resolved in time, as teachers receive further guidance and become more familiar with the requirements and the teaching of the Diploma. Furthermore, changes to the teaching of the Diploma, to ensure that it includes a substantial work-related element for example, would potentially increase satisfaction levels among learners and can be achieved at a local level by teaching and support staff in individual institutions. Other issues, such as the role of functional skills, the disparity between the Diploma content and what some young people are seeking and the amount of work required within the guided learning hours, are more related to the qualification itself and could usefully be reviewed as part of the Diploma reforms.

Overall, the evaluation of the first cohort to date has revealed a varied experience of Diplomas and the analysis of the attainment outcomes, to be undertaken in 2011, will explore further how far learners' assessment of progress, and their satisfaction with the course, is related to achieving the Diploma qualification.

11.2   How is the implementation of Diplomas progressing?

All of the implementation processes to deliver the Diploma are aiming to ensure that learners have a choice of provision, that they have a positive learning experience and achieve an outcome commensurate with their abilities that contributes to their future. As the evidence outlined above and in this report indicates a varied experience of undertaking a Diploma, it is evident that the implementation varied across and within the consortia.

Management
Consortium membership had remained stable across the two years of delivery and there were indications that approaches and procedures such as those relating to QA, IAG, assessment and timetabling were becoming more established. Nevertheless, it is apparent that Diploma delivery in the first two years entailed complex delivery models in some areas with associated challenges in acknowledging institutional independence, while seeking a collaborative approach. The removal of the requirement for the Diploma entitlement, which was one of the main factors leading

to a collaborative, consortium approach, accords with the developments in practice among consortia which were moving more to an in-house only delivery model where possible, as this minimised the challenges of learners travelling to learn, timetabling and assuring quality across institutions. However, the evaluation has also shown that some institutions value working in partnership with other providers. There is clearly demand from learners for Diploma subjects and indeed, for the applied learning style and work-related elements encompassed by the qualification. Institutions will need to explore how best to continue to offer choice to learners, particularly where within an institution there may be a lack of specialist facilities and expertise, or insufficient numbers to constitute a viable course.

IAG

In the second year of delivery, it was evident that, where learners were dissatisfied, this was because the course had not met their expectation and they felt they had been misinformed. Throughout the two years of the evaluation, IAG has emerged as a key theme and as a key influential factor on the success of the Diplomas. It appears, therefore, that ineffective IAG two years previously continued to influence learners' experience towards the end of the course. It is worth noting that this cohort were the first to undertake a new qualification and that teachers and careers advisers who contributed to young people choosing the course may have been less familiar with the content, the level of ability required and the nature of the delivery than might be the case with more established qualifications. This first cohort effect occurred in the delivery of the IFP and it may be the case that, as with IFP, with more experience teachers will be better placed to identify the most appropriate participants in the Diploma.

The evaluation has shown the key components of IAG that are required in order that learners make an informed decision about taking a Diploma. The IAG needs to comprise details of the component parts, in particular the role and purpose of functional skills, and the effect of not achieving these components, and the role and value of ASL and how it relates to the Diploma as a whole. Potential Diploma students should also be aware of the course content, including the extent to which 'applied' translates into 'practical' and the overall balance between practical, work-related elements and more theoretical aspects. Learners need to be informed of the learning style required, in particular the need to learn independently. The options for future progression need to be provided, and as the Diplomas become more established such information can be increasingly based on evidence and examples from Diploma learners who progressed through a variety of routes.   Finally, any logistical issues such as travelling to learn should be made clear.

Teaching

Teachers had generally adapted their teaching style at least to some extent in order to deliver Diploma qualifications and generally welcomed the opportunity to teach 'holistically' by working across units, to act more as a facilitator, to encourage young people's independent learning skills and to make links between what young people were learning and the working world. Young people had generally noted the difference in their Diploma lessons and felt that the classes were smaller and, although the workload was greater than other qualifications, they were gaining more skills and experience.

To provide this learning experience, teachers had encountered some challenges in terms of developing the independent learning skills of students, maintaining their motivation and engagement, for example where the course did not meet their

expectations, and maintaining their subject knowledge. This again emphasises the need to identify the most appropriate learners to participate in a Diploma.

Teachers' understanding of, and readiness for, the assessment of Diplomas has been a key issue through the evaluation of the first two years of Diploma delivery, with concerns about the level of preparedness prior to delivery and assessment continuing to be an area for development. However, in the second year it was apparent that there had been some progress, including the establishment of domain and lead assessors and in teachers' understanding of the assessment process. Key contributions to this were training from awarding bodies, meetings with suitable time allocations and experienced staff fulfilling the assessors' role. Nevertheless, there remains scope, particularly in light of the reduction in the central support for the assessment of Diplomas, to enhance teachers' understanding of the evidence required for assessment. Awarding bodies need to play an increased role in the provision of more focused support and guidance relating to the assessment requirements, including provision of a range of exemplars that are more closely aligned with the assessment criteria.

Delivery of components

Functional skills emerged as the component of the Diploma that had been most problematic in terms of delivery and assessment in the first cohort. While it was apparent that some Diploma learners felt that they were progressing well in this component, others were not and this was particularly the case for mathematics. Teachers were also concerned about delivery of functional skills and the impact of not achieving it at the right level on achievement of the overall Diploma qualification. In contrast to the original intention that functional skills would be embedded in principal learning, delivery tended to be discrete and this was driven mainly by the need to ensure that learners achieved the component, and the need for specialist staff to teach it.

The Diploma reforms could usefully examine the role of functional skills. This could include, for example, consideration of whether there are aspects of equipping young people for working life with functional English, mathematics and IT that could be retained, while ensuring that any assessment is more closely aligned to the Diploma content and approach. Another consideration would be to minimise or remove the impact of non-achievement of functional skills on the achievement of the qualification as a whole.

The delivery of Diplomas in the first cohort had yet to fully maximise the potential of the ASL component and it emerged that a notable proportion of young people were not aware of any ASL component in their Diploma. As it was evident that young people who were aware of an ASL component were more satisfied with their Diploma experience, there may be value in exploring further in reviewing the qualification, the role and value of ASL from the perspective of learners.

For those taking a Level 3 Diploma, ASL has a particular purpose in either assisting, or potentially inhibiting, a learners' progression to higher education. It was apparent that learners who are not aware of specific subject requirements for entry to a particular HEI course, and who therefore did not take this for their ASL, could subsequently find they cannot progress onto their preferred course. This highlights the importance of seeking information on HEIs' requirements for entry, taking these into consideration, and ensuring that learners are guided to take an appropriate course for their ASL.

Employers

The involvement of employers in the Diploma was a key element associated with learners' satisfaction with the course. Those that had taken part in work experience were significantly more satisfied with their Diploma course. There is evidence that the majority of young people had at least some involvement with employers, and the majority of teachers reported that employers had contributed to the Diploma. Their contribution to delivery through hosting visits and providing speakers and work experience placements, demonstrated that there is considerable support for the Diploma from employers as well as success from teaching staff and supporting agencies in engaging them. Continuing to build on relationships with employers at a local level is central to the future success of the Diploma.

References

DCSF (2009) Gender Equality: Nuts and Bolts Series. http://www.diploma-support.org/system/files/Nuts%20and%20Bolts%20-%20Gender%20Equality_0.pdf

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. London: DCSF. [online] Available: http://www.education.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR220_FinRep.pdf

McCrone, T., Lynch, S., Wade, P., Featherstone, G., Evans, K., Golden, S. and Haynes, G. (2010). National Evaluation of Diplomas: Preparation for 2009 Delivery. London: DCSF. [online]

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. London: DCSF. [online]

Appendix A: Research Methods and Analysis

A1   Evaluation Strands

The evaluation has three main strands:

- **Surveys of a range of stakeholders** – in each phase of the evaluation (coinciding with each phase of Diploma implementation which commenced in September 2008, 2009 and 2010), these include a telephone survey of consortium leads; surveys of learners and cross-sectional surveys of teaching staff in a sample of 30 consortia; and surveys of HEIs.

- **A programme of qualitative case studies** – comprising visits to 15 consortia in each of the three phases of implementation. Within each of the consortia selected, visits to up to four institutions and interviews conducted with strategic and operational staff, learners and consortium partners.

- **Statistical analysis of external datasets** such as the Diploma Aggregation Service (DAS), the National Pupil Database (NPD) and the Individual Learner Record (ILR), to explore the outcomes and impact of the Diplomas on a larger scale than would be possible through surveys or qualitative data collection.

A2   Survey administration process

A survey of Diploma and comparison learners in **Year 11 and Year 13** in the sample of 30 Gateway 1 consortia was undertaken between February and April 2010 in 139 institutions. Each was asked to provide the number of Diploma learners in Year 11 and 13 (where relevant); where possible, this number of questionnaires was despatched in other cases, 25 questionnaires were sent for Diploma learners in each relevant year group. In all institutions, 25 questionnaires for comparison learners in each year group were provided. Each institution was also sent five questionnaires for Diploma teachers.

The main contact in each institution was asked to distribute surveys to Diploma learners. Comparison questionnaires were distributed to one tutor group in each relevant year group. For Year 11 learners, institutions were encouraged to administer questionnaires in class; Year 13 learners were given questionnaires to complete in their own time. Please see Chapter 1 for a discussion of the response, sample sizes and the appropriateness of the comparison group.

A3   Survey analysis

A3.1   Matching to National Pupil Database

Information on gender and date of birth provided by learners on the questionnaires was then matched to background information held on the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) and NPD, where possible, to explore differences in responses in relation to their background characteristics.

A3.2 Weighting

The survey responses were **weighted** to ensure that the responding samples were representative of Diploma and comparison learners in England. Population data from the DAS and background data from the NPD were used to derive the weights.

Year 11 Weighting

The samples of Year 11 Diploma and comparison learners were significantly different from their corresponding national populations in terms of gender and key stage 4 attainments. The samples were therefore weighted by these two variables, and were subsequently representative of the corresponding national populations in relation to these factors.

Year 13 Weighting

As discussed above, only 14 and 60 per cent of the Year 13 responding Diploma and comparison samples respectively were matched successfully to the NPD due to learners' transitions between institutions at age 16. As a result, attainment data from the database were missing for a large proportion of learners, and it was not, therefore, possible to weight by this variable. Weightings using alternative variables were therefore considered.

The responding samples of Year 13 Diploma learners were significantly different from all Diploma learners nationally in terms of gender. There were also some differences in terms of Diploma subject, although significance testing was not possible. The sample was therefore weighted by gender and subject. However, due to the large percentage of missing attainment data for the responding sample, it was unclear whether the sample differed from the corresponding national population in attainment or not.

The sample of Year 13 comparison learners was representative of the national population in terms of gender. The sample was therefore not weighted. However, due to the large percentage of missing attainment data for the responding sample, it was unclear whether the sample differed from the corresponding national population in attainment or not.

A3.3 Analysis undertaken

Cross-tabulations

The further analysis of the teacher and learner surveys included **cross-tabulations**, which explored the relationships between two categorical variables.

Factor analysis

Exploratory factor analyses were carried out in 2009 (in 2010 the same factors were used, after their reliabilities were checked, that is, the extent to which the questions in each factor were measuring a consistent underlying trait) to consolidate a number of individual items included in the questionnaires for Year 11 and Year 13 Diploma and comparison learners. Some questions were identical on each questionnaire, in order for comparisons to be made between the attitudes of Diploma and comparison learners. Some were specific to Diploma learners, as they asked about their

experiences of their Diploma course. Aggregated variables produce more robust measures of learners' attitudes than a consideration of the individual items on the questionnaire alone.

Factor analysis looks for variables that correlate highly with each other. The existence of such correlations between variables suggests that those variables could be measuring aspects of the same underlying issues. These underlying issues are known as factors. Thus, the aim of the factor analyses was to derive a smaller number of 'attitude' composite variables from selected questions on the questionnaire which could be used to explore the attitudes of learners in further detail. The 'factors' which are identified can also be used in more sophisticated analysis (multi-level modelling).

For **Year 11 learners**, five separate factors were identified, as follows:

- Attitude to the Diploma (Diploma learners only)

- Impact of the Diploma on my future (Diploma learners only)

- Positive attitude to learning (both groups)

- Commitment to learning (both groups)

- Preference of teamwork and practical learning (both groups)

A description of the individual items on the questionnaire that made up each factor is presented below:

Factor 1:   Attitude to the Diploma
- I am enjoying my Diploma course

- The work I do in lessons is interesting

- I would like to spend less time on my Diploma course

- I can cope with the amount of work

- My Diploma course is more practical (than other subjects)

- My Diploma course is less interesting (than other subjects)

- I find it harder to learn on my Diploma course (compared with other subjects)

Factor 2:   Impact of the Diploma on my future
- I am learning new skills on my Diploma course

- My Diploma will help me get a job in the future

- My Diploma will help me get into college in the future

- My Diploma will help me get into university/higher education if I want to go in the future

- My Diploma will be more useful for my future (than other subjects)

- My Diploma course is giving me more skills/experience (than other subjects)

Factor 3:   Positive attitude to learning
- The subjects I am doing make me want to learn

- The subjects I am doing make me feel ready for work in the future

- The subjects I am doing make me feel confident about what I can do
- The subjects I am doing are giving me useful skills
- Most of the time I like going to school
- School work is worth doing
- I enjoy learning

Factor 4: Commitment to learning
- I always do my homework/coursework
- I am well behaved in school
- The work I do in lessons is a waste of time
- I am often late for school or lessons
- I sometimes play truant/skip lessons

Factor 5: Preference of teamwork and practical learning
- I like working in a team
- I prefer practical work to lots of writing
- I learn best when I put something into practice
- I don't like lessons where we work in groups

Five separate factors were also identified for **Year 13 learners**, as follows:

- Attitude to the Diploma (Diploma learners only)
- Impact of the Diploma on my future (Diploma learners only)
- Impact of subject on motivation to learn (both groups)*
- Intrinsic motivations for learning (both groups)*
- Preference of teamwork and practical learning (both groups)

Note that although the questions relating to these factors were the same for Year 11 and 13, the items correlated with each other differently for each Year group, meaning that slightly different factors emerged for each.

A description of the individual items on the questionnaire that made up each factor is presented below:

Factor 1: Attitude to the Diploma
- I am enjoying my Diploma course
- The work I do in lessons is interesting
- I would like to spend less time on my Diploma course
- I can cope with the amount of work
- My Diploma course is more practical (than other subjects)
- My Diploma course is less interesting (than other subjects)

- I find it harder to learn on my Diploma course (compared with other subjects)

Factor 2:   Impact of the Diploma on my future
- I am learning new skills on my Diploma course

- My Diploma will help me get a job in the future

- My Diploma will help me get into university/higher education if I want to go in the future

- My Diploma will be more useful for my future (than other subjects)

- My Diploma course is giving me more skills/experience (than other subjects)

Factor 3:   Impact of subject on motivation to learn
- The subjects I am doing make me want to learn

- The subjects I am doing make me feel ready for work in the future

- The subjects I am doing make me feel confident about what I can do

- The subjects I am doing are giving me useful skills

Factor 4:   Intrinsic motivations for learning
- Most of the time I like going to school

- School work is worth doing

- I enjoy learning

- I always do my homework/coursework

- I am well behaved in school

Factor 5:   Preference of teamwork and practical learning
- I like working in a team

- I prefer practical work to lots of writing

- I learn best when I put something into practice

- I don't like lessons where we work in groups

All of the items for each factor were consolidated and scaled to provide an average score for learners overall of between zero and ten (with ten being the most positive score).

Multi-level modelling

Further exploration of the relationship between Year 11 learners' attitudes and various background attributes that might have an impact on outcomes for learners, such as satisfaction with the Diploma, was carried out using **multi-level modelling**. This estimates the true relationship between each background factor and the outcome of interest, whilst taking account of other influences. Multi-level modelling was carried out to explore the following outcomes for learners:

- Attitude to the Diploma (Diploma learners only; Factor 1 above).

- Satisfaction with Diploma course (Diploma learners only; question 11 in Year 11 Diploma learner survey).

- Possibility of doing a Diploma in the future (question 25 in Year 11 Diploma learner survey and question 12b in comparison survey); separate models for Diploma and comparison learners.

- Positive attitude to learning (two models, one comparing Diploma and comparison learners overall, and another comparing Diploma learners doing each Diploma subject and comparison learners).

- Commitment to learning (two models, one comparing Diploma and comparison learners overall, and another comparing Diploma learners doing each Diploma subject and comparison learners).

- Preference for teamwork and practical learning (two models, one comparing Diploma and comparison learners overall, and another comparing Diploma learners doing each Diploma subject and comparison learners).

Multi-level modelling was not carried out for the analysis of the Year 13 learner surveys, as the number of responding learners was too small to conduct a robust analysis.

For each of the above outcomes the model explored the influence of the following background factors:

Table A1 Variables included in the Year 11 model outcome 'attitude to the Diploma'

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects Attitude to the Diploma
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	.280
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	-.598*
SEN	Special Educational Needs (model compares learners with any SEN to learners without SEN)	.327
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	.033
KSmean	Mean point score for KS3 English, maths and science	.024
Idaci	Deprivation index	-.214
Const	Indicates whether learner is doing a Diploma in Construction and the Built Environment (model compares learners doing Construction and the Built Environment Diploma to learners doing Creative and Media Diploma)	-.039
Engin	Indicates whether learner is doing a Diploma in Engineering (model compares learners doing Engineering Diploma to learners doing Creative and Media Diploma)	-.689*
InfTech	Indicates whether learner is doing a Diploma in Information Technology (model compares learners doing Information Technology Diploma to learners doing Creative and Media Diploma)	-.029
SHD	Indicates whether learner is doing a Diploma in Society, Health and Development (model compares learners doing Society, Health and Development Diploma to learners doing Creative and Media Diploma)	-.827*
Lv1	Diploma level – Level 1 (model compares learners to those doing a Level 2 Diploma)	.669
Lvdk	Diploma level – Don't know (model compares learners to those doing a Level 2 Diploma)	.367
Q5mix	Location of learning – own school and other locations (model compares learners to those doing a Diploma in own school only)	-.457
Q5other	Location of learning – other locations only (model compares learners to those doing a Diploma in own school only)	.347
Q6a	Spent time on a work placement with employer/ someone from the world of work as part of Diploma – No or unclear (model compares learners to those with work placement experience)	-.530*
Q7	Number of Employer activities; from 0 to 5	.048
Q9a	Doing a qualification that count towards Diploma – No or unsure (model compares learners not doing a qualification that count towards their Diploma to learners doing a qualification that count towards their Diploma)	-.264
Q9b	Extent to which qualifications taken as part of Diploma link with Diploma subject; higher score = linking well	.059
Q15aDip	Learner progressing well – Diploma units; higher score = progressing better	.382*
Q15aFun	Learner progressing well – Functional skills; higher score = progressing better	.013
Q15aOth	Learner progressing well – Other elements; higher score = progressing better	.052
Factor 3	Positive attitude to learning factor score of 0 to 10	.172*
Factor 4	Commitment to learning factor score of 0 to 10	.139*
Factor 5	Preference of teamwork and practical learning factor score of 0 to 10	.013

- * indicates a significant difference at the 5% level.

Table A2   Variables included in the Year 11 model outcome 'satisfaction with Diploma course'

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects Satisfaction with Diploma course
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	.262*
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	-.205
SEN	Special Educational Needs (model compares learners with any SEN to learners without SEN)	.100
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	.064
KSmean	Mean point score for KS3 English, maths and science	.004
Idaci	Deprivation index	.307
InfTech	Indicates whether learner is doing a Diploma in Information Technology (model compares learners doing Information Technology Diploma to learners doing other Diploma courses, amongst whom no significant difference was found)	.362*
Lv1	Diploma level – Level 1 (model compares learners to those doing a Level 2 Diploma)	.217
Lvdk	Diploma level – Don't know (model compares learners to those doing a Level 2 Diploma)	.416
Q5mix	Location of learning – own school and other locations (model compares learners to those doing a Diploma in own school only)	-.498*
Q5other	Location of learning – other locations only (model compares learners to those doing a Diploma in own school only)	-.110
Q6a	Spent time on a work placement with employer/ someone from the world of work as part of Diploma – No or unclear (model compares learners to those with work placement experience)	-.341*
Q7	Number of Employer activities; from 0 to 5	.053
Q9a	Doing a qualification that count towards Diploma – No or unsure (model compares learners not doing a qualification that count towards their Diploma to learners doing a qualification that count towards their Diploma)	-.237*
Q9b	Extent to which qualifications taken as part of Diploma link with Diploma subject; higher score = linking well	.039
Q15aDip	Learner progressing well – Diploma units; higher score = progressing better	.248*
Q15aFun	Learner progressing well – Functional skills; higher score = progressing better	-.017
Q15aOth	Learner progressing well – Other elements; higher score = progressing better	.003
Factor 3	Positive attitude to learning factor score of 0 to 10	.154*
Factor 4	Commitment to learning factor score of 0 to 10	.008
Factor 5	Preference of teamwork and practical learning factor score of 0 to 10	.036

- * indicates a significant difference at the 5% level.

Table A3 Variables included in the Year 11 model outcome 'possibility of doing a Diploma in the future' (Diploma learners)

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects Possibility of doing a Diploma in the future
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	-.037
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	-.098
SEN	Special Educational Needs (model compares learners with any SEN to learners without SEN)	-.069
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	-.354
KSmean	Mean point score for KS3 English, maths and science	-.023
Idaci	Deprivation index	.028
Const	Indicates whether learner is doing a Diploma in Construction and the Built Environment (model compares learners doing Construction and the Built Environment Diploma to learners doing Creative and Media Diploma)	.154
Engin	Indicates whether learner is doing a Diploma in Engineering (model compares learners doing Engineering Diploma to learners doing Creative and Media Diploma)	.110
InfTech	Indicates whether learner is doing a Diploma in Information Technology (model compares learners doing Information Technology Diploma to learners doing Creative and Media Diploma)	.287
SHD	Indicates whether learner is doing a Diploma in Society, Health and Development (model compares learners doing Society, Health and Development Diploma to learners doing Creative and Media Diploma)	.346
Q9a	Doing a qualification that count towards Diploma – No or unsure (model compares learners not doing a qualification that count towards their Diploma to learners doing a qualification that count towards their Diploma)	.080
Q9b	Extent to which qualifications taken as part of Diploma link with Diploma subject; higher score = linking well	.120
Q15aDip	Learner progressing well – Diploma units; higher score = progressing better	-.015
Q15aFun	Learner progressing well – Functional skills; higher score = progressing better	.020
Q15aOth	Learner progressing well – Other elements; higher score = progressing better	-.037
Factor 1	Attitude to the Diploma factor score from 0 to 10	.180*
Factor 2	Impact of the Diploma on my future factor score from 0 to 10	.145*
Factor 3	Positive attitude to learning factor score of 0 to 10	-.050
Factor 4	Commitment to learning factor score of 0 to 10	.029
Factor 5	Preference of teamwork and practical learning factor score of 0 to 10	.048
Q11	Learner satisfaction with the Diploma course 5 point score; higher score = greater satisfaction.	.168*

- * indicates a significant difference at the 5% level.

Table A4 Variables included in the Year 11 model outcomes 'positive attitude to learning', 'commitment to learning' and 'preference of teamwork and practical learning' (comparing Diploma and comparison learners overall)

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects		
		Positive attitude to learning	Commit-ment to learning	Preference of teamwork and practical learning
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	.143	.334*	-.142
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	.024	-.125	-.293
SEN	Special Educational Needs (model compares learners with any SEN to learners without SEN)	.004	-.258	-.223
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	.662*	.650*	.005
KSmean	Mean point score for KS3 English, maths and science	.006	.022*	.004
Idaci	Deprivation index	-.787*	-.483	-.163
inD	Indicates whether learner is in Diploma or comparison group	-.109	-.329*	.203
pcFSM08	School-level free school meals eligibility	.018*	.011	.007

- * indicates a significant difference at the 5% level.

Table A5   Variables included in the Year 11 model outcomes 'positive attitude to learning', 'commitment to learning' and 'preference of teamwork and practical learning' (comparing Diploma learners doing each Diploma subject and comparison learners)

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects		
		Positive attitude to learning	Commitment to learning	Preference of teamwork and practical learning
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)	.081	.416*	-.199
FSM	Eligibility for free school meals (model compares learners eligible to FSM to learners not eligible to FSM)	-.001	-.123	-.316
SEN	Special Educational Needs (model compares learners with any SEN to learners without SEN)	.009	-.263	-.222
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	.649*	.684*	-.011
KSmean	Mean point score for KS3 English, maths and science	.007	.023*	.004
Idaci	Deprivation index	-.780	-.555	-.150
pcFSM08	School-level free school meals eligibility	.018*	.009	.007
Const	Indicates whether learner is doing a Diploma in Construction and the Built Environment (model compares learners doing Construction and the Built Environment Diploma to learners in the Comparison group)	-.254	.627*	.289
CreMed	Indicates whether learner is doing a Diploma in Creative and Media (model compares learners doing Creative and Media Diploma to learners in the Comparison group)	-.235	-.464*	.079
Engin	Indicates whether learner is doing a Diploma in Engineering (model compares learners doing Engineering Diploma to learners in the comparison group)	-.182	NS	.147
InfTech	Indicates whether learner is doing a Diploma in Information Technology (model compares learners doing Information Technology Diploma to learners in the comparison group)	-.267	NS	.057
SHD	Indicates whether learner is doing a Diploma in Society, Health and Development (model compares learners doing Society, Health and Development Diploma to learners in the comparison group)	.304	NS	.663*

- * indicates a significant difference at the 5% level.

- NS indicates that the outcome was not significantly different between learners doing the Diploma subject listed and learners in the comparison group and the subject variable was subsequently removed for technical reasons (to minimise multicollinearity).

Case-study Analysis

Case-study data has been analysed using computer-aided qualitative analysis software (MAXQDA), which assists researchers in undertaking systematic coding of data and facilitates analysis by sub-group and triangulation between groups.

Appendix B: The consortia sample

Using data from the consortium lead telephone survey, and information provided by DfE (then the DCSF) about the schools involved in Phase 1 consortia, a sample of 30 consortia was drawn in 2008 for involvement in the survey strand. The sample was selected according to the following criteria:

- **Diploma subjects and levels offered** – to ensure that all subjects and levels were represented in the sample

- **Number of Diploma subjects offered** – in order to maximise the number of learners and Diploma subjects represented within the sample, the sample of consortia was selected to over-represent consortia offering five Diploma subjects, or between two to four Diploma subjects, and under-represent those offering one Diploma subject

- **School characteristics** - in order to ensure that the sample could be said to be representative of Diploma learners as a whole, the sample was representative in terms of school-level variables (for example, learner achievement, free school meals eligibility and region).

Tables B1 and B2 present the key characteristics of the sample, at a consortium level, and institution level. In summary, the sample was representative in terms of:

- **Achievement** bands of schools at school level

- Schools that are **comprehensive to 16 and comprehensive to 18**

- **Government Office** Region at consortium level – this is not necessarily the case at school level but this will have been influenced by the numbers of schools in consortia in certain regions

- **FSM** eligibility at consortium level and with a slight over-representation of schools with the highest and lowest percentages of students known to be eligible for free school meals at school level.

Table B1   Representativeness of consortia in the sample

Characteristic	Sample of consortia		All Phase 1 consortia	
	Number	%	Number	%
Government Office Region				
North East	3	10	7	5
North West/Merseyside	4	13	23	16
Yorkshire & The Humber	3	10	13	9
East Midlands	5	17	18	12
West Midlands	3	10	17	12
Eastern	1	3	10	7
London	4	13	20	14
South East	5	17	26	18
South West	2	7	12	8
N=	**30**		**146**	
Learners eligible for Free School Meals in schools associated with consortium				
Less than 10	10	34	47	33
10-20	10	34	51	36
More than 20	9	31	45	31
N=	**29**		**143**	
Diploma subjects				
Engineering only	1	3	21	16
Society, Health and Development only	1	3	9	7
Information Technology only	1	3	12	9
Creative and Media only	2	7	25	19
Construction and the Built Environment only	1	3	18	13
2 to 4 Diploma subjects	20	67	40	30
All 5 Diploma subjects	4	13	9	7
N=	**30**		**134**	
Type of organisation employing Consortium lead				
FE college	2	7	25	19
School	4	14	35	27
6th form college	1	3	5	4
Training provider	0	0	1	1
Local Authority	17	59	54	41
Other	4	14	11	8
More than one organisation indicated	1	3	0	1
N=	**29**		**132**	

Pre/Post 16 Engineering				
Not planning to deliver	11	37	76	57
Planning to deliver	19	63	58	43
N=	**30**		**134**	
Pre/Post 16 Society, Health and Development				
Not planning to deliver	17	57	97	72
Planning to deliver	13	43	37	28
N=	**30**		**134**	
Pre/Post 16 Information Technology				
Not planning to deliver	16	53	94	70
Planning to deliver	14	47	40	30
N=	**30**		**134**	
Pre/Post 16 Creative and Media				
Not planning to deliver	13	43	79	59
Planning to deliver	17	57	55	41
N=	**30**		**134**	
Pre/Post 16 Construction and the Built Environment				
Not planning to deliver	18	60	94	70
Planning to deliver	12	40	40	30
N=	**30**		**134**	
Schools				
Mostly Comprehensive to 18	11	38	61	43
Other	18	62	82	57
N=	**29**		**143**	

Table B2   Representativeness of institutions in the sample consortia

Characteristic	Sample of institutions		All institutions involved in Diplomas	
	Number	%	Number	%
LEA type				
London Borough	36	14	145	15
Metropolitan Authorities	87	33	299	30
English Unitary Authorities	74	28	157	16
Counties	69	26	394	40
N=	**266**		**995**	
Government Office Region				
North East	10	4	46	5
North West/Merseyside	33	12	170	17
Yorkshire & The Humber	57	21	132	13
East Midlands	40	15	105	11
West Midlands	27	10	99	10
Eastern	6	2	73	7
London	36	14	145	15
South East	31	12	153	15
South West	26	10	72	7
	266		**995**	
Governance				
Academy	6	2	22	2
City Technology College	1	<1	1	<1
Further Education College	22	8	99	10
Community School	152	57	509	51
Community Special School	10	4	31	3
Foundation School	21	8	124	13
Foundation Special School	0	0	1	<1
Pupil Referral Unit	0	0	9	1
Voluntary Aided School	34	13	112	11
Voluntary Controlled School	5	2	20	2
Sixth Form Centre	9	3	30	3
Tertiary College	4	2	22	2
Other institutions	2	1	15	2
N=	**266**		**995**	

School type				
Secondary Modern	4	2	33	3
Comprehensive to 16	107	41	337	34
Comprehensive to 18	95	36	362	37
Grammar	4	2	14	1
Other Secondary schools	6	2	27	3
CTC schools	1	<1	1	<1
Special schools	10	4	32	3
Pupil referral units	0	0	9	1
6th Form colleges	8	3	31	3
Tertiary colleges	4	2	22	2
FE colleges	22	8	101	10
Other institutions	2	1	11	1
Coeducational schools	242	92	893	91
Boys' schools	9	3	40	4
Girls' schools	13	5	44	5
N=	**264**		**980**	
Eligible for FSM 2005				
Lowest 20	14	6	69	9
2nd lowest 20	49	22	155	20
Middle 20	47	21	194	25
2nd highest 20	46	21	205	26
Highest 20	65	29	166	21
N=	**221**		**789**	
Achievement Band (total GCSE point score 2005)				
Lowest band	66	31	204	27
2nd lowest band	44	21	175	23
Middle band	37	17	152	20
2nd highest band	36	17	138	18
Highest band	30	14	93	12
N=	**213**		**762**	

Appendix C: The responding samples

Details are given below about the characteristics of the responding samples of learners, teachers and parents.

C1   The responding learner sample

A total of 477 Year 11 and 86 Year 13 Diploma questionnaires were returned, along with 680 Year 11 and 131 Year 13 comparison questionnaires. Responses were received from 61 institutions across all 30 consortia

Tables C1 and C2 present the characteristics of the Year 11 Diploma and comparison learners who responded to the survey. Diploma respondents are compared with all Diploma Year 11 learners nationally (those registered on DAS in April 2010) and with all learners nationally. The responding comparison learners are compared with all Year 11 non-Diploma learners in all schools which have any Diploma learners, as well as all learners nationally. Tables C3 and C4 show the equivalent information for Year 13 Diploma and comparison learners.

Table C1   Background characteristics of Year 11 Diploma learners – responding learners, all Year 11 Diploma learners registered on DAS, and all Year 11 learners nationally

Characteristic	Year 11 Diploma respondents to the survey %	*All* Year 11 Diploma learners (from DAS data) %	All Year 11 learners in England %
Gender			
Male	55	64	51
Female	42	37	49
Missing	3	0	0
Eligibility for free school meals			
Not eligible	62	83	87
Eligible	13	17	13
Missing	26	0	0
Special Educational Needs			
No SEN	58	72	75
School Action/Plus	15	26	21
Statement	1	3	4
Missing	26	0	0

English as an additional language			
No EAL	62	87	87
EAL	12	8	8
Missing	26	4	5
Ethnicity			
White - British	57	78	79
White - Other	2	4	4
Gypsy/Roma	.0	0	<1
Mixed	<1	3	3
Asian - Indian	2.	2	2
Asian - Pakistani	1	3	3
Asian - Bangladeshi	<1	1	1
Asian - Other	1	<1	1
Black - Caribbean	<1	2	1
Black - African	3	2	2
Black - Other	1	<1	<1
Chinese	<1	<1	<1
Other	1	1	1
Preferred not to say	1	<1	1
Missing	26	<1	.1
Key Stage 3 Average[28]			
Below Level 2	0	1	1
Level 2	2	3	3
Level 3	4	8	7
Level 4	12	22	18
Level 5	29	40	33
Level 6	21	22	26
Level 7	4	3	9
Level 8	0	0	0
Missing	29	2	3
Total N =	**477**	**7921**	**579,155**

---

[28]Based on a truncated average National Curriculum level from Key Stage 3 SATS tests in English, Maths and Science

Table C2   **Background characteristics of Year 11 comparison learners – responding learners, all Year 11 non-Diploma learners in schools with any Diploma students, and all Year 11 learners nationally**

Characteristic	Year 11 comparison respondents to the survey %	*All* Year 11 comparison learners (in schools with any Diploma learners) %	All Year 11 learners in England %
Gender			
Male	45	50	51
Female	54	50	49
Missing	2	0	0
Eligibility for free school meals			
Not eligible	68	86	87
Eligible	11	14	13
Missing	21	0	0
Special Educational Needs			
No SEN	63	75	75
School Action/Plus	15	22	21
Statement	1	2	4
Missing	21	0	0
English as an additional language			
No EAL	69	87	87
EAL	10	8	8
Missing	21	5	5
Ethnicity			
White - British	61	80	79
White - Other	2	4	4
Gypsy/Roma	0	<1	<1
Mixed	3	3	3
Asian - Indian	3	2	2
Asian - Pakistani	2	3	3
Asian - Bangladeshi	1	1	1
Asian - Other	1	1	1
Black - Caribbean	1	1	1
Black - African	2	2	2
Black - Other	1	<1	<1
Chinese	<1	<1	<1
Other	1	1	1
Preferred not to say	1	1	1
Missing	22	1	.1

Key Stage 3 Average[29]			
Below Level 2	<1	1	1
Level 2	2	3	3
Level 3	6	8	7
Level 4	13	19	18
Level 5	26	34	33
Level 6	24	25	26
Level 7	5	7	9
Level 8	.0	0	0
Missing	22	3	3
Total N =	**680**	**303,441**	**579,155**

---

[29]Based on a truncated average National Curriculum level from Key Stage 3 SATS tests in English, Maths and Science

Table C3 Background characteristics of Year 13 Diploma learners – responding learners, all Year 13 Diploma learners registered on DAS and all Year 13 learners nationally.

Characteristic	Year 13 Diploma Respondents to the survey %	*All* Year 13 Diploma learners (from DAS data) %	*All* Year 11 learners nationally %
Gender			
Male	62	52	50
Female	37	48	50
Missing	1	0	0
Eligibility for free school meals			
Not eligible	10	81	84
Eligible	5	16	11
Missing	85	3	5
Special Educational Needs			
No SEN	10	73	78
School Action/Plus	2	14	10
Statement	2	9	7
Missing	85	5	5
English as an additional language			
No EAL	14	85	86
EAL	1	10	9
Missing	85	5	5
Ethnicity			
White British	14	74	77
White Other	0	3	2
Asian	0	7	7
Black	1	6	4
Mixed	0	3	3
Other	0	1	1
Missing	85	6	7
Key Stage 4 achievement (based on GCSE and all equivalent qualifications)			
Achieved five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A*-C	9	58	69
Achieved five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A*-G	6	38	25
Achieved at least one GCSE or equivalent at grade A*-G	0	3	4
Achieved any passes at GCSE or equivalent	0	<1	1
Achieved no passes at GCSE or equivalent	0	1	1
Missing	85	0	0
Total N =	**86**	**3,022**	**529, 337**

The missing data for the responding sample is because of a low match to NPD, caused by learners' transition between institutions at age 16.

Table C4 **Background characteristics of Year 13 comparison learners – responding learners, all Year 13 non-Diploma learners in schools with any Diploma students and all Year 13 learners nationally.**

Characteristic	Year 13 comparison Respondents to the survey %	*All* Year 13 comparison learners (in schools with any Diploma learners) %	*All* Year 13 learners nationally %
Gender			
Male	48	50	50
Female	52	50	50
Missing	0	0	0
Eligibility for free school meals			
Not eligible	53	85	84
Eligible	7	13	11
Missing	40	2	5
Special Educational Needs			
No SEN	56	78	78
School Action/Plus	4	12	10
Statement	0	7	7
Missing	40	3	6
English as an additional language			
No EAL	57	86	86
EAL	3	10	9
Missing	40	3	5
Ethnicity			
White British	56	77	77
White Other	2	3	2
Asian	2	7	7
Black	0	5	4
Mixed	0	3	3
Other	0	1	1
Missing	40	5	7
Key Stage 4 achievement (based on GCSE and all equivalent qualifications)			
Achieved five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A*-C	57	70	69
Achieved five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A*-G	3	26	25
Achieved at least one GCSE or equivalent at grade A*-G	0	4	4
Achieved any passes at GCSE or equivalent	0	<1	1
Achieved no passes at GCSE or equivalent	0	1	1
Missing	41	0	0
Total N =	131	189,654	529, 337

*The missing data for the responding sample is because of a low match to NPD, caused by learners' transition between institutions at age 16

Amongst the responding Diploma learners, all Diploma subjects were represented (see Table C5a).

Table C5a   Diploma respondents, by Diploma subject

	Year 11 %	Year 13 %
Creative and Media	28	37
Engineering	22	14
Construction and the Built Environment	8	10
Society, Health and Development	17	18
Information Technology	21	19
No response	3	2
N =	**477**	**86**

A single response item
Based on weighted data
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Surveys, 2010

As shown in Tables C5b and C5c, almost all responding learners who were taking an Engineering Diploma or a Construction and the Built Environment Diploma, pre- and post-16, were male. However, this reflects take-up of these subjects nationally, based on information on the take-up of Diplomas in Cohort 1 (2008/09) recorded on the DAS in April 2009. Response from males and females doing an Information Technology Diploma also closely reflect take-up nationally, as around three quarters of learners doing an Information Technology Diploma nationally are male. Almost all learners taking a Society, Health and Development Diploma nationally are female, pre- and post-16, and therefore the survey respondents reflect the national picture.

Table C5b   Year 11 Diploma respondents, by gender and subject

	Males %	Females %	Total N*
Creative and Media	45	55	132
Engineering	91	10	95
Construction and the Built Environment	100	0	28
Society, Health and Development	7	93	87
Information Technology	71	29	93
N = 435**			

Based on unweighted data/actual response
*Total number of learners providing information on Diploma subject
**Total number of learners providing information on both subject and gender
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Survey, 2010

Table C5c   Year 13 Diploma respondents, by gender and subject

	Males %	Females %	Total N*
Creative and Media	39	61	31
Engineering	96	5	22
Construction and the Built Environment	100	0	9
Society, Health and Development	0	100	6
Information Technology	73	27	15
N = 83**			

Based on unweighted data/actual response
*Total number of learners providing information on subject
**Total number of learners providing information on both subject and gender
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Learner Survey, 2010

C2   The responding teacher sample

A total of 86 questionnaires were received from 49 institutions (35 per cent of institutions) across 27 of the 30 consortia (90 per cent of consortia), although the number of responses ranged across each consortium and institution. Tables C7-C10 below give details of their characteristics.

Table C7   Type of institution in which teachers were normally based

	%
School (11-18)	48
School (11-16)	31
Further Education College	7
Sixth form college	13
Other	1
N = 86	

A single response item
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Teacher Survey, 2010

Threequarters of teachers (78 per cent) were involved in teaching Diplomas to pre-16 learners and 29 per cent were involved in teaching Diplomas to post-16 learners.

Table C8   Subject taught pre-16

	Level 1 N*	Level 2 N*
Creative and Media	7	15
Information Technology	5	12
Engineering	4	13
Society, Health and Development	5	17
Construction and the Built Environment	1	2
ONLY teach Level 1	41	4
No response	4	4
N = 67		

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100
A filter question: all those who taught a Diploma pre-16
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Teacher Survey, 2010
*Numbers are given instead of percentages, as the number of respondents is small

Table C9   Subject taught post-16

	Level 1 N*	Level 2 N*	Level 3 N*
Engineering	0	0	7
Creative and Media	0	0	1
Information Technology	0	1	2
Society, Health and Development	1	3	8
Construction and the Built Environment	0	0	3
Teach other levels ONLY	24	21	4
No response	0	0	0
N=25			

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100
A filter question: all those who taught a Diploma post-16
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Teacher Survey, 2010
*Numbers are given instead of percentages, as the number of respondents is small

Table C10   Elements of the Diploma taught by responding teachers

	Pre-16 N*	Post-16 N*
Principal learning	56	21
Project/Extended Project	35	14
Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills	40	14
Functional Skills	24	4
Specialist/additional Learning	18	8
No response	1	1
N =	**67**	**25**

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100
Filter questions: all those who taught a Diploma pre-16 and/or post-16
Source: NFER/Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Teacher Survey, 2010
*Numbers are given instead of percentages, as the number of respondents is small

Appendix D: Case-study Sample

D1 The case-study sample of *consortia*

A sub-sample of 15 consortia was selected in 2008 from the sample of 30 for more in-depth case-study work. The sample was selected to ensure that the following were included:

- **Diploma subjects and levels** – to ensure that all Diploma subjects, at all three levels, were represented.

- **Number of Diploma subjects** – to include consortia offering different numbers of Diploma subjects in Phase 1.

- **Geography** – to ensure a geographical spread across the GORs, including rural and urban areas.

- Different **types of institutions** involved in delivery Diplomas.

- **Partnership structure and delivery models** – to ensure that the sample included different types of institutions involved in delivery, different partnership structures and models of delivery (for example, pre-existing and new partnerships and different types of institution involved in delivery).

Further details of the characteristics of the 15 case-study consortia are provided in Table D1.

Table D1   Number of consortia represented in case study sample by criteria

Criteria	Number of consortia in sample
Government Office Region	
East	0
East Midlands	2
London	2
North East	1
North West	2
South East	2
South West	2
West Midlands	2
Yorkshire and the Humber	2
Urban/rural[30]	
Urban	10
Rural	3
Mixed	2
Subjects [note that all levels offered by consortia are represented]:	
Engineering	11
Creative and Media	10
Society, Health and Development	8
Information Technology	8
Construction and the Built Environment	6
Number of Diploma subjects:	
Five	3
Four	1
Three	4
Two	5
One	2
Type of Authority:	
Unitary	5
Metropolitan	4
County	4
London Borough	2

---

[30] Urban/rural/mixed categories were based on an analysis of census data relating to the number of homes in hamlets in an LA.

D2 The achieved sample of institutions

Across the 15 consortia, 40 institutions were included in this phase of the in-depth case-study research. Table D2 summarises the type of institution.

Table D2 Total numbers of case-study institutions

Type of institution	Number visited
School with sixth form	18
College* (including FE and sixth form colleges)	12
School without sixth form	10
Total	**40**

Includes 11 further education colleges and one sixth form college

D3 The achieved number of interviewees

Table D3 shows the number of interviewees across the 15 consortia and 40 institutions.

Table D3 Numbers of staff interviews achieved

Type of interviewee[31]	Number of interviews completed
Consortium leads/strategic managers	15
Subject leads	33
Senior institution managers	34
IAG coordinators	14
Teachers	44
Employers	5
Higher Education Institutions	3

---

[31] Consortia staff have been grouped in this way as interviewees often had dual roles.