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## Evaluation of the Implementation and Impact of the Diplomas: Cohort 3 Report *Findings from the 2010 Consortium Lead and Pupil Surveys*

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Gill Featherstone, Clare Southcott and Sarah Lynch (National Foundation for Educational Research)

### Background

The Diplomas for 14-19 year olds are offered at three levels and across 14 subjects which were introduced in three phases (September 2008, 2009, and 2010). Following the establishment of the Coalition government in May 2010, a number of changes to the Diploma programme were subsequently announced in July 2010. While these were unknown at the time of undertaking the research summarised in this report, it should be read with these in mind. The changes include:

- Withdrawal of the three proposed 'academic' Diploma subjects (science, humanities and languages) originally planned for 2011 in order to focus on further developing and improving the qualifications already on offer in these areas;
- Termination of the requirement to make every Diploma subject available to all pupils (previously known as the 'Diploma entitlement');
- No requirement to obtain approval from the DfE before delivering new Diploma subjects (and hence no further Gateway rounds);
- Relaxing the requirement to offer the Diploma collaboratively through consortia; and,
- The centrally funded 14-19 workforce support programme would cease in its current form in August 2010.

Responses from Consortium Leads (interviewed in November and December 2009) may well have been different had the research activities taken place following the changing context of government policy relating to Diplomas listed above. For example, plans for Diploma delivery *might* have been different following the removal of the Diploma entitlement that often brought with it the need for institutions to collaborate. Moreover, the motivations for delivering Diplomas also *might* have been different. It should also be considered that pupils had yet to make their choices for Key Stage 4 and post-16. Therefore, the findings in this summary and the main report should be considered as valid prior to changes in policy. The changing nature of Diploma delivery following policy changes will be explored during future phases of the evaluation. Updates on the Diploma reform can be found at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/qualifications/diploma/a0064056/diploma-announcements>

### Methodology

This summary presents the findings from a telephone survey conducted with 224 Consortium Leads of consortia that were approved to commence delivering Diplomas, or approved to deliver additional subjects, from September 2010. The interviews with Consortium Leads were

conducted in November and December 2009 with the primary aim of identifying key features of consortia to enable a sample to be identified for the subsequent surveys and case-study visits. The survey gathered evidence on the consortia's preparation and planning for Diploma delivery from September 2010. While some consortia were planning for delivery for the first time from 2010, others had previous experience of delivery from 2008 or 2009.

The summary also includes findings from a survey of 741 Year 9 and 556 Year 11 pupils. The pupil surveys were carried out between March and May 2010 and explored young people's choice to take a Diploma, or not, from September 2010, and the Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) in place to support decision-making.

### **Key Findings**

- The main motivation for delivering Diplomas in September 2010, cited at the time of the interviews (November to December 2009), was the need to prepare for the 14-19 entitlement. Other reasons included demand for the subject (and associated skills in the market place) and having the relevant expertise at consortium level.
- The Diploma level most commonly on offer was Level 2 and, out of the final four Diploma subjects on offer, the one most widely offered was Sport and Active Leisure. Shared delivery between a school and Further Education (FE) college or training provider (TP) was still the main method of delivery. Delivery solely in schools was less common but appeared to be increasing slightly compared to previous years.
- The proportion of Year 9 pupils surveyed who planned to take a Diploma in the following academic year had doubled since Diplomas commenced in 2008. In 2010, Year 11 pupils were less likely than pupils in Year 9 to opt to take a Diploma (as had been the case in 2008) and were no more likely to choose to do a Diploma than they had been in 2008. Additionally, those with higher prior attainment were less likely to take a Diploma.
- Of those planning to take a Diploma, most thought it would give them useful skills, help them get a job and give them a well-recognised qualification they could use in the future. The main reasons for choosing *not* to take a Diploma were a preference for other qualifications or a lack of interest in the subject area.
- A minority of pupils felt they knew a lot about Diplomas, and overall they wanted more information, advice and guidance on progression routes, who teaches the Diploma, qualifications they can take alongside the Diploma and assessment.
- Written materials, events and talking to others, particularly those perceived to be knowledgeable about Diplomas (for example pupils already doing a Diploma) seemed to be important to young people in terms of feeling informed about Diplomas but also in helping to *understand* the Diploma.
- In terms of preparedness for delivery, Consortium Leads were most confident with regard to staffing levels and expertise, availability of facilities, equipment and resources and involvement of employers. Lessons learned from previous years identified the need to start planning and preparation as early as possible, in particular in terms of improving IAG. Areas of concern included: funding arrangements, the development of the Additional and Specialist Learning (ASL) component, IT and administration issues and transport plans.

### **Why were consortia delivering Diplomas?**

The consortia that had been established to deliver Diplomas through previous Gateways were generally stable in their membership. Two-thirds of these consortia had experienced no changes to the membership of their consortium for September 2010 delivery. Where changes had occurred, these usually related to new partners joining the consortium. New consortia approved through the third Gateway process tended to be built on existing local partnerships, as

was the case in previous Gateways, and few challenges were noted in establishing the consortia.

The main motivation for delivering Diplomas cited at the time of the interviews was the need to prepare for the 14-19 entitlement. In addition, existing staff and consortia expertise and the demand for the subject and for the associated skills in the labour market were also motivations for the majority of consortia.

### **What did they intend to offer?**

As was the case in previous years, the most commonly offered Diploma level was Level 2 which 96 per cent of consortia intended to offer. Level 1 and Level 3 were less widely offered as 62 per cent of consortia planned to offer each of these levels. Most (79 per cent) of the consortia surveyed planned to offer at least one of the final four Diploma subjects (Public Services, Retail Business, Sport and Active Leisure and Travel and Tourism) and the most widely offered (by 67 per cent of consortia) was Sport and Active Leisure.

The majority (91 per cent) of consortia planned to offer at least one subject through shared delivery between a school and FE college or TP. Delivery solely in schools either shared (36 per cent) or within one school (21 per cent) was less common but appeared to be increasing slightly compared to previous years.

### **What was the estimated take-up of Diplomas for 2010?**

The majority (77 per cent) of Consortium Leads estimated that the number of pupils starting a Diploma, pre-16 in September 2010 would be 300 or fewer. There was less certainty around post-16 take-up, but 63 per cent thought 300 or fewer pupils would start on a Diploma in 2010.

The proportion of Year 9 pupils surveyed who planned to take a Diploma in the following academic year had increased since Diplomas commenced in 2008 (30 per cent compared with 14 per cent). In 2010, Year 11 pupils were less likely than pupils in Year 9 to opt to take a Diploma, as had been the case in 2008. Year 11 pupils were no more likely to choose to do a Diploma than they had been in 2008 (14 per cent in 2010). It did not appear to be the case that the Diploma subjects introduced in earlier phases were more popular than those introduced in 2009 or 2010. As might be expected, a Higher Diploma (Level 2) was the most popular choice for study pre-16, whereas the Advanced/Progression Diploma (Level 3) was most often chosen for post-16 study. A minority were planning to take Level 1. A total of 36 per cent of Year 9 pupils and 26 per cent of Year 11 pupils did not know what level they would be taking.

Of those planning to take a Diploma, most thought it would give them useful skills, help them get a job and give them a well-recognised qualification they could use in the future. The main reasons for choosing *not* to take a Diploma were a preference for other qualifications or a lack of interest in the subject area.

Those with higher prior attainment were less likely to take a Diploma. Year 11 pupils who planned to stay in education until after taking a course at university were less likely to plan to take a Diploma. Those who were more likely to report bad behaviour and attendance had a higher probability of taking a Diploma.

### **What IAG was in place to support the decision to take a Diploma or not from 2010?**

The proportion of surveyed pupils who said they knew a lot about Diplomas had increased over time, but they were still in a minority (30 per cent of Year 9 and 19 per cent of Year 11 in 2010). Since 2008, more pupils reported that information on Diplomas was helpful, but pupils in Year 11 were less likely than those in Year 9 to think this was the case (68 per cent of Year 9 and 44

per cent of Year 11 in 2010). Overall, pupils wanted more information on progression routes, who teaches the Diploma, qualifications they can take alongside the Diploma and assessment.

Written materials were still the most common and useful source of information on Diplomas. Events were ranked highly in terms of usefulness, but under half of pupils had accessed events. Additionally, talking to others, particularly parents/carers/family, subject teachers, Connexions advisers and pupils who are already doing a Diploma seemed to be important in terms of feeling informed about Diplomas but also in helping to *understand* the Diploma.

Pupils were asked a question which tested their knowledge of Diplomas; a score was derived for each young person from the number of correct answers given to the items in the question. The proportion of pupils in both year groups who answered each item correctly had increased between 2008 and 2010, although there was still some uncertainty about some aspects of Diplomas.

### **How prepared were consortia for Diploma delivery?**

The most commonly identified aspects of preparing for Diploma delivery that were causing minor or major concern among Consortium Leads were:

- Funding arrangements (38 per cent said this was causing a minor or major concern);
- Understanding of assessment (30 per cent);
- Developing the ASL component (29 per cent);
- IT and administration issues (28 per cent); and,
- Transport plans (26 per cent).

They were most confident about their preparedness in terms of staffing levels (89 per cent were well or fairly well prepared), staff expertise (89 per cent), availability of facilities, equipment and resources (87 per cent) and involvement of employers (87 per cent).

Consortium Leads had learned lessons from previous phases of Diploma delivery, either within their consortium or from other consortia that assisted them in planning for 2010 delivery. They identified the need to start planning and preparation as early as possible, including introducing IAG for potential Diploma pupils at as early a stage as possible, and to improve IAG for parents/carers and pupils in general, through for example taster sessions. In addition, they noted the need to establish protocols and infrastructure to support delivery and to ensure that roles and responsibilities within the partnership were clearly defined.

### **Conclusion**

The surveys summarised in this report were carried out prior to changes in government policy relating to Diplomas and reforms in 14-19 education. Therefore, the views of Consortium Leads and pupils *might* have been different subsequent to those changes and thus the findings should be considered in this context.

At the time of the Consortium Lead survey (November to December 2009), the demand for the subjects, and consideration of the skills required in the labour market, were considerations for the majority of consortia. This suggests the Diploma *may* continue to be chosen by providers and pupils where it fulfils such a need. This impetus now replaces the requirement to prepare for the 14-19 entitlement.

The collaborative approach to Diploma implementation enabled schools and colleges to make new subjects available to their pupils, and this factor *may* continue to drive collaborative Diploma provision despite the recent removal of this requirement. However, it must be noted

that there were indications of a slight increase in models which were within one institution and did not require pupils to travel to learn. Given the complexity of collaborative delivery, it may be that schools will continue to work collaboratively where it provides access to the facilities and expertise necessary to deliver new qualifications and subject areas. However, for pragmatic reasons they are likely to favour in-house delivery where possible.

It was evident that, at the time of the surveys, the proportion of Year 9 pupils planning to take a Diploma had increased since 2008, as Diplomas had become more established. However, this was not the case for Year 11 pupils. Moreover, those in Year 11 were less likely to have received information on Diplomas than pupils in Year 9, and they were less knowledgeable about the qualification.

There is therefore scope for more IAG to support pupils (particularly those in Year 11) when making choices about which courses to take. The findings show that particular groups of people (namely parents/carers/family, subject teachers, Connexions advisers and pupils already doing a Diploma) are likely to be useful in supporting young people's decision-making, which emphasises the importance of these people being fully informed and able to offer such assistance.

### **Additional Information**

The full report can be accessed at <http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/>  
Further information about this research can be obtained from Nicola Mackenzie,  
Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT.  
[Nicola.MACKENZIE@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Nicola.MACKENZIE@education.gsi.gov.uk)

This research report was commissioned before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the DFE.