



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority

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# **Case Study Schools' Seminar**

*22 May 2008*

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## Introduction

The following report is based on the outcomes of a seminar held by the Post 14 Curriculum team in May 2008.

All 46 case study schools were invited to send delegates to attend this seminar held in London. They were updated on current developments in the 14-19 curriculum and were asked to consider questions and issues in the following categories:

- Discuss issues emerging from revised GCSE criteria, including likely combinations of English (Lang, Lit, Functional Skills) and management of controlled assessment at centre level
- Comment on draft guidance for the Extended Project (level 3) and Project (level 1 and 2)
- Share information about the current provision for Entry level and Level 1 learners and what centres are currently offering young people and to find out what people want to get out of FLT
- Receive an update on plans for Diploma implementation in 2008/09/10 and beyond

**Please note that this report represents the view of conference delegates and not those of QCA and other partners.**

**QCA will be examining all of the issues and taking appropriate action.**

## Revised GCSE criteria

***Discuss issues emerging from revised GCSE criteria, including likely combinations of English (Lang, Lit, Functional Skills) and management of controlled assessment at centre level***

### **Controlled Assessment**

The two groups were split in their opinions towards controlled assessment. Generally feelings were mixed. In theory the concept of controlled assessment within science is not something particularly new. Schools would need to ensure slightly stricter controls on assessment but coursework has always taken place in the classroom, so is under similar conditions. The other side of the debate was that so far there has been little to no support offered to centres regarding controlled assessment. Training around controlled assessment needs to be offered so that teachers feel confident in the delivery. There would be less concern about controlled assessment if there was more guidance developed for centres to rely on.

The main issue for centres is how they plan and support their students through this process. An example of this is with the new science GCSEs and attempting to fit science controlled assessment into the timetable. Some felt this is proving tricky and others are finding it provides more flexibility as it can be spread out. One area that teachers felt could be explored is the idea of having controlled assessment in year 10 rather than adding to the already heavy burden of assessment in their final school year. Teachers want to make sure that none of their students are disadvantaged.

Trying to ensure controlled assessment in science, and indeed other subjects, doesn't have a negative knock on effect with the rest of the timetable is important. Teachers do not want other subjects to suffer. Potentially controlled assessment does have advantages. In particular teachers feel that students may have more flexibility in their timetables and spreading the assessment will take pressure off students. There were questions raised that need to be addressed along with any guidance material. Teachers wanted to know whether students can retake controlled assessment. If they can it may mean that this becomes too similar to coursework and the same problems persist, such as teachers being too lenient with the number of chances students get to draft and redraft.

## **GCSE English**

It was clear that there was some confusion over the 3 different GCSEs; English, English Language and English Literature and the potential combinations that centres and students could choose from. It was explained that the proposal is to develop a GCSE in English that covers the key stage 4 programme of study for English; a GCSE in English Language and a GCSE in English Literature. Students will take either GCSE English or GCSE English Language and GCSE English Literature. Functional skills will be embedded in these new programmes of study from 2010. There will also be an option to take functional skills as a separate qualification.

There appeared to be some early miscommunication about functional skills which caused concern and confusion between teachers. Centres were concerned about how this may affect league tables and also whether they will be penalised if students are taking functional skills in maths rather than a maths GCSE. Teachers requested an assurance that functional skills could be gained by all students. Overall the group needed to know that if they entered a student for English language and literature would they need to sit a separate functional skills exam as well.

Centres feel that due to the size of the Diploma and it reducing core time, it may be the case that students have little choice but to do GCSE English. However centres were concerned that this may not be accepted by some universities if it didn't cover as much as doing GCSE English language and GCSE English literature as separate subjects. A consequence of this may also be that GCSE English is associated with under achieving young people and may automatically suffer from these connotations when choices are being made.

Though centres identified a certain complexity, there is potential for there being greater flexibility for their students. If they decide to do GCSE English, time may be freed up in their timetable to take on another qualification.

## **ICT GCSE**

One school felt that the functional skills qualification in ICT does not meet the needs of students and staff do not see the benefits of offering this.

## Action

- Centres have requested guidance on the amount of core hours for each controlled assessment. They do not want to be in a position where they are disadvantaging students. There should be an established standard for all centres to follow.
- A request was made for guidance to be produced. Teachers are also asking for training in controlled assessment.
- Clarification of where separate functional skills qualifications fit into the equation.

## **Extended Project and Project**

### ***Comment on draft guidance for the Extended Project (level 3) and project (level 1 and 2)***

The overall outcome from the discussion session on the guidance on the Extended Project and Project was positive about the introduction of these courses. The majority of delegates felt that the Extended Project would be a popular option. They also felt that this could be a good way of accrediting activities already being done by students. For example the Gold Duke of Edinburgh award could be done as an Extended Project. The bronze and silver may be done as the project at level 1 or 2. There is growing enthusiasm for the project, as this shows young people that there is value in extra curricular activities and encourages them to do more.

There was also an air of uncertainty about the introduction of these qualifications. Some delegates felt that the Project element would be great for the Diploma; however, they were unsure whether this would fit into the rest of the curriculum. One delegate felt that this may be a heavy burden of work added to the student's already heavy workload. Whether or not the Project or Extended Project will be encouraged would depend on what the students were already studying. For example if they were completing a BTEC, there is already a heavy portfolio building process in place and another project may overload students. Planning will be fundamental to making such decisions. At the moment there is a concern that the Project is not currently structured and there is no formal programme to follow. Students do not know how much work to expect and therefore cannot plan. It was an assumption that it would be the year 10 and 11 gifted and talented students that would be encouraged to take this as an option because they may be in a stronger position to incorporate another course into their timetable.

Some of the delegates felt that the guidance was condescending. It was felt that teachers already have a vast amount of knowledge and this guidance "talked down" to teachers. The benefits of projects for learners, teachers and centres needed to be broken down as that particular section of the guidance was too lengthy. Assessment information is also rather generalised and wondered how it was going to be broken down and what the weighting would be. More detail is required on the assessment requirements, such as the structure.

Biddenham School will be introducing the Extended Project as a free standing qualification in September 2008. Dave Appleby gave some more detail about the introduction of this qualification. Twelve students have applied to do this. They want to

offer students a truly personalised learning experience. It is also an opportunity to accredit learning that is already being done. If this is a positive experience and the school can cope with the capacity, it will be opened up to all students. One lesson a week will be dedicated to the Extended Project. At the moment one teacher has been designated six projects and will offer guidance to students. There is flexibility to assign more staff if students need more one to one time.

The way the Extended Project is structured at Biddenham School is likely to involve somewhere between half a term and a whole term developing project skills then students will go on to explore areas of interest. After Christmas the Extended Project will be carried out. This work will be done closely with a tutor so progress can be tracked. This is going to be done in year 13 when one AS level is usually dropped. After looking at examples of Extended Projects from AQA, this school were surprised at how poor the standard of the Projects appear. The information and guidance given was also minimal and did not give detail about the expectations. For example, 'teaching project skills' did not go any further to give a definition of what these skills are.



## Entry level and Level 1 learners

### ***Share information about the current provision for Entry Level and level 1 learners and what centres are currently offering young people and to find out what people want to get out of FLT***

Overall it was questioned as to how 'contextual value added' (CVA) would operate with the Foundation Learning Tier (FLT) as the correct provisions would need to be made. For example, Broad Oak High School currently offers the NVQ, hairdressing course as a level 1 ASDAN qualification where they have focused on CVA points.

Some students fail at GCSE level and need to find a qualification at level 2 that is appropriate for them to undertake. This cohort of students then take qualifications other than GCSE that are built towards the level 2 threshold, and come out with a raft of qualifications. At the same time these students do not wish to undertake an entry level qualification and so are not being targeted correctly. It was felt that the qualifications currently on offer to the students, meet their needs and they would not feel successful having completed an entry level qualification. Another problem with students taking entry level or a level one qualification is that they often end up taking a series of them rather than actually progressing and not being pushed. The Diploma at level 1 may mean that there is still no possibility of progressing up to the next level, and that a programme of enhancement will be required. Some students were dropping the entry level 3 qualification and deciding to do the ASDAN qualification instead as it offers a broader context and more opportunity for progression.

The addition of Section 96 means that students can look for qualifications that meet their needs, and can then progress onto the next level. However it was felt the options for learning would become limited within the FLT and the opportunity to be able to "mix and match" qualifications would decrease. This may be a case of ensuring information and guidance is available to teachers with progression routes and options clearly illustrated.

One potential barrier to the FLT is that timetables are proving problematic. Courses can not be fit in to existing timetable structures. In particular the level 1 courses are only delivered on a certain day, and to get a balance across the board, as well as accommodating students, was proving difficult.

On the whole the response to the FLT suggests some concerns, particularly about parity of esteem in relation to the FLT as compared with the current situation in centres.

Delegates were dubious about its potential but appropriate targeting and guidance may be what is required.

## **Diploma implementation 2008/09/10 and beyond**

### ***Receive an update on plans for Diploma implementation in 2008/09/10 and beyond***

Delegates agreed that there is still work to be done in the planning stages of Diploma implementation. There was a clear request for more guidance, especially at local authority level. Very little help has been given to help staff plan strategies for Diploma development. Most delegates felt that they haven't had the appropriate information to enable them to talk to students and their parents about the Diploma. The support marketplace is over crowded, and there needs to be a clear strategy to help plan the Diploma which at the moment is not in place and practitioners are simply confused. This will ultimately help the marketing process that is proving difficult. Teachers do not feel able to convince students to do the Diploma when they do not have full knowledge about the qualification.

Broad Oak High School has had a positive experience so far in their planning process. They have had some success ironing out a number of the logistical issues that other delegates have mentioned, through the use of their strong IFP. For example they have good transport, and health and safety policies as well as a clear misbehaviour policy. They also have quite a mature consortia base model at the moment and this has made for strong gateway bids.

Southfield Technology College in particular, noted that there is still a lot of work to do in preparation for implementation and there are a lot of questions in respect of how best to implement the Diploma. IFP is still being used in this area although the Diploma moves away from a single centre base and this is where difficulties are anticipated. At present there has been little work done in terms of structural planning and how the logistics of collaboration might work. Initially it is likely that there will be one fixed day a week on the timetable where learners will move around the consortia. There is also the possibility of using video conferencing to ease the problems inherent in moving around a lot of pupils, although there is some concern about how to fund the IT infrastructure required for this.

The issue of pastoral responsibility for learners is also a concern. Southfield Technology College raised the issue and this was backed up by the majority of the group. It was felt that there were no systems currently in place to deal with such issues as bad behaviour and accidents etc if they happen when the learner is away from the home site. There were questions raised around who takes responsibility for dealing with these issues and

in particular who takes responsibility if falling standards in other schools impact on the home school.

There appeared to be some anxiety about the fact that Diplomas are being developed by practitioners with little background in the education sector. Southfield Technology College stated that within their consortia there is a local authority representative, though Diploma implementation is mainly led through the LSC where there is no educational background. Given the level of impact the Diploma will have on pre-16 education there needs to be a mechanism for questioning LSC decisions as at present it is not clear who the LSC report to. Furthermore The Community College Chulmleigh noted that where education has been subsumed into social services as part of the local authority (and the lead is social services based) it has led to problems with the level of educational leadership within the authority. The Canterbury High School felt that building on current good practice within schools is fundamental to developing qualifications. It would be useful for further qualifications development to take a good look at what is currently working in schools in order to build this in. There is no evidence of this at the moment. The Diploma development is coming from outside the education community.

Moving students around the local area to schools where their line of learning is being taught does raise problems. The Canterbury High School had considered the possibility of moving staff rather than learners, however, this may not work for the cohort of disaffected students who do better outside the school system. Broad Oak High School has noticed that parents are a bit worried about sending their kids to schools that they didn't necessarily choose. Also, in order to accommodate Diploma learning the school have had to rework some of their hours for Diploma learners. This means that a shorter day has been introduced on a Tuesday and an early evening session on Thursdays. However because of these changes they are concerned that pupils won't opt for this. In terms of recruitment to the engineering Diploma for first teaching 2008, they have noted problems in getting the numbers required.

The recruitment of the Diploma is a huge issue for all schools. There were positive aspects of this process reported to the group. For example, Blue Coat C of E School reported that there was a huge marketing exercise in their school for 2008. The response showed that the students were genuinely excited about the Diploma and therefore the event was successful. At the moment students from 4 schools are signed on to the Creative and Media Diploma, with approximately 50 in total. Other members of the group felt that this was a really successful level of recruitment.

There was also an element of scepticism about recruitment echoed throughout the groups. Bitterne Park's delegate felt that curriculum advisers will not promote all 14 lines of learning. The issue of entitlement puts pressure on schools to 'sell' lines of learning to students that are just not relevant. This has a real knock on effect with marketing the Diploma, it is not worthwhile promoting a line of learning purely for the sake of it. Fulston Manor's delegate noted that they will lead on Creative and Media from 2010 as they currently have a lot of students taking BTEC Media. The delegate stated that the cost of supporting the implementation of the Diploma (including the appointment of a designated teaching assistant) is £75K and it is a worry that the school will not see a return on this investment.

Sydenham School advised there is a challenge of ensuring there was buy-in from parents. Some parents simply do not want their children to go offsite for teaching and learning due to real or perceived psychological and cultural barriers. Several other members of the group agreed that this is a major issue. All acknowledged that this is not the right attitude to have, but it is one that must be addressed for successful delivery of the Diplomas. The majority of delegates felt this was a considerable issue and barrier to overcome. Parents are more likely to encourage the Diploma that is being taught in the home school to avoid having their children move around too much.

Cramlington Community High School feels there is a certain expectation of what they will offer as part of the Diploma and, particularly at advanced level, the offer will have major staffing implications. Offering a Diploma at level three may mean that the school has to stop offering another successful level three course – essentially to offer a course that no one is sure about yet and that many may choose not to take. This has some quite serious implications for the availability of funding and jobs within schools. Broad Oak High School has noted that the numbers of students in a given year are dropping and therefore having an impact on the level of funding received and the number of teachers that can be employed. Schools in the Bury Partnership area are therefore somewhat concerned about allowing students to go to other institutions as this will leave them with smaller / non viable year groups, which potentially means having to make members of staff redundant.

There is a concern that schools will develop and staff the Diploma but learners will still not choose it. This will then create problems if they choose other qualifications and these have not been staffed in the same way. The Canterbury High School has noted that a local consortium has seen the numbers for the Diploma drop. The numbers of students that may drop the Diploma is also a cause for concern.

Funding was raised as an issue. Greenshaw High school felt that planning for the Diploma would essentially mean developing a parallel curriculum alongside the more traditional one, along with all the associated workforce development and training that will be needed. This will require more staff and resources although there does not seem to be the funding for this. The recruitment for the creative and media Diploma which was due to start teaching this year has not been particularly successful and the numbers are not high enough to provide a viable group, primarily due to the lack of advertising, funding and training in consortia. First teaching has been put off until 2009.

There were a number of issues raised regarding issues of foundation and higher learning within the Diploma. Biddenham School felt that the discrepancy in guided learning hours between the two levels and the fact that the potential for an extra half an hour to be added to the school day for Level two students does make the prospect of co-teaching tricky. Blue Coat C of E School and Birchwood High School reported that they plan to run Levels one and two together for the first cohort at least – they will do this by giving Level one the same teaching time as Level two.

Wolfreton School expressed a concern that they currently offer BTECs at Level two to students who are really at Level one and the delegate is worried that there will not be that flexibility within the Diploma. Therefore teachers will be inclined to simply not guide these students to a Foundation Diploma. This sentiment was echoed by others. For example the students at Fulston Manor are registered for BTEC certificates and then promoted later if it looks like they will achieve at Level two. It was concern as to whether this could happen between the Diploma levels. It was raised that perhaps teachers could use the student induction period to get a feel of the correct level for students.

General feedback from the group is that BTECs are held in high regard. The group was split between those who feel that a lot of schools would prefer to offer just BTECs and not the Diploma, whilst others in the room feel that schools would be happy for them to be able to run side-by-side.

Broad Oak High School discussed the Diploma in respect of the functional skills and PLTS raised a number of issues in respect of guided learning hours (GLH) etc. Some guidance was requested on whether the number of GLH recommended for PLTS etc are realistic as this is likely to have some impact on the timetabling of the teaching and learning. Functional skills in this particular school are likely to be taught within the individual subjects (something that seems to be reflected elsewhere).

The school is currently running a new structure whereby students choose their options earlier in the year (January) and then start teaching key stage 4 in June rather than September. The whole school basically moves up a year for seven weeks at the end of the summer term – allowing learners to get a jump start on their key stage 4 learning.

Greenshaw School will be delivering PLTS within the core curriculum (alongside many other of the more generic Diploma elements) so that learners do not become segregated and to limit the number of new structures that need to be set up.

The Canterbury High School has given consideration to functional skills being taught in year nine or doing the level two Diploma in one year pre 16. The school has concerns how learners will be entered for assessment at their home school when they may be doing their actual assessment elsewhere, and also concerns in respect of how the PLTS may be assessed, particularly as similar initiatives have fallen by the wayside in the past.

Greenshaw High School has given some thought to the Diploma post 16. The school plans to offer the higher Diploma post 16 for one year for those learners who have not previously reached the level two threshold. This will help diversify the offering and give these learners something new to do. The Castle School is also actively thinking about learners who might choose to do a higher Diploma in one year post 16 there were some queries about what these learners might do if they have already achieved the functional skills elements and potentially some lower grade GCSEs. Simply doing more of the same would not be helpful – perhaps they could do some elements of levels two and three.