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14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform

Final Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform

October 2004

The Rt Hon Charles Clarke MP
Department for Education and Skills
Secretary of State for Education and Skills
Room 7.53
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

Mike Tomlinson
Chairman

18 October 2004

Dear Secretary of State

It is with pleasure that I present to you the report of the Working Group set up by Ministers to advise on reform of curriculum and assessment arrangements for 14 to 19 year olds.

It is our view that the status quo is not an option. Nor do we believe further piecemeal changes are desirable. Too many young people leave education lacking basic and personal skills; our vocational provision is too fragmented; the burden of external assessment on learners, teachers and lecturers is too great; and our system is not providing the stretch and challenge needed, particularly for high attainers. The results are a low staying-on rate post-16; employers having to spend large sums of money to teach the 'basics'; HE struggling to differentiate between top performers; and young people's motivation and engagement with education reducing as they move through the system.

Our report sets out a clear vision for a unified framework of 14-19 curriculum and qualifications. We want scholarship in subjects to be given room to flourish and we want high quality vocational provision to be available from age 14. These are different, but both, in their own terms, are vital to the future wellbeing of young people and hence our country. We want to bring back a passion for learning, and enable all learners to achieve as highly as possible and for their achievements to be recognised. We must ensure rigour and that all young people are equipped with the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for HE, employment and adult life.

Despite its weaknesses, the current system has its strengths. Many elements of the reforms we propose can already be found in schools and colleges around the country and we want to build on their good practice. We also wish to retain the best features of existing qualifications and particularly the well-established GCSE and A level route. While they would not be available as separate qualifications, GCSEs and A levels and good vocational qualifications would become 'components', which form the building blocks of the new system.

Change should be a managed evolution and not a revolution. It is vital that all stakeholders are involved in the detailed work necessary and that all decisions are informed by sound evidence borne out of careful piloting and modelling. Teachers, lecturers and trainers will need support throughout and their experience drawn upon. Parents, governors and young people should be kept fully informed and the credibility of the current qualifications protected through the period of change.

I commend this report to you and in doing so wish to place on record my sincere thanks to members of the Working Group, the various sub-groups, the associate network members and officials. Their unstinting support has been key, as has the active involvement of employers, higher education, teachers, lecturers, trainers, parents and young people in our work. A particular thanks is owed to the secretariat supporting the Working Group, so ably led by Matthew White.

I believe there exists substantial consensus about the need for reform and broad proposals set out. We believe they satisfy your five tests and look forward to the Government's response in due course.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Tomlinson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Mike Tomlinson

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Executive summary and summary of recommendations

Why is reform needed?

1. This report sets out our proposals and recommendations for reforming 14-19 curriculum and qualifications, building on strengths within the current system while addressing its weaknesses, to:

- **Raise participation and achievement** – by tackling the educational causes of disengagement and underachievement and low post-16 participation.
- **Get the basics right** – ensuring that young people achieve specified levels in functional mathematics, literacy and communication and ICT, and are equipped with the knowledge, skills and attributes needed to succeed in adult life, further learning and employment.
- **Strengthen vocational routes** – improving the quality and status of vocational programmes delivered by schools, colleges and training providers, setting out the features of high quality provision and identifying a clear role for employers.
- **Provide greater stretch and challenge** – ensuring opportunities for greater breadth and depth of learning. This will help employers and universities to differentiate more effectively between top performers. Stretch and challenge at all levels will encourage young people to think for themselves and be innovative and creative about their learning.
- **Reduce the assessment burden** for learners, teachers, institutions and the system as a whole by reducing the number of times learners are examined; extending the role of teacher assessment; and changing assessment in A levels in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- **Make the system more transparent and easier to understand** by rationalising 14-19 curriculum and qualifications within a diploma framework, where progression routes and the value of qualifications are clear.

14-19

2. Every young person should be able to develop her/his full potential, and become equipped with the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for adult life. This includes preparation for work to which they are well suited, development of positive attitudes to continuing learning and active participation within the community.

3. Our proposals centre on two linked developments:

- a common format for all 14-19 learning programmes which combine the knowledge and skills everybody needs for participation in a full adult life with disciplines chosen by the learner to meet her/his own interests, aptitudes and ambitions; and
- a unified framework of diplomas which: provide a ready-made, easy to understand guarantee of the level and breadth of attainment achieved by each young person, whatever the nature of his or her programme; offer clear and transparent pathways through the 14-19 phase and progression into further and higher learning, training and employment; are valued by employers and HE; and motivate young people to stay on in learning after the age of 16.

A new framework for 14-19 learning

4. All 14-19 year olds should have access to coherent and relevant learning programmes. These should comprise:

- **core learning** which is about getting the basics right, and developing the generic knowledge, skills and attributes necessary for participation in higher education, working life and the community; and
- **main learning** – chosen by the learner to develop knowledge, skills and understanding of academic and vocational subjects and disciplines which provide a basis for work-based training, higher education and employment.

5. For 14-16 year olds, the programme will also include the Key Stage 4 statutory National Curriculum, which lays the basis for core learning and can also contribute towards main learning.

6. A major feature of our proposals is the inclusion of an **extended project** as part of core learning. Selected by the young person to pursue her/his interests and extend her/his learning in creative and innovative ways, it may take a variety of forms from an essay to a performance or artefact. Its completion will enable learners to develop and demonstrate a range of generic skills, such as problem solving, research and managing own learning.

Summary recommendations: coherent programmes

All 14-19 programmes should comprise core and main learning.

Core learning should ensure:

- specified levels of achievement in functional mathematics, functional literacy and communication, ICT;
- completion of an extended project appropriate to the level of the diploma;
- development of a range of common knowledge, skills and attributes (CKSA), such as personal awareness, problem solving, creativity, team-working and moral and ethical awareness;
- an entitlement to wider activities; and
- support for learners in planning and reviewing their learning, and guidance in making choices about further learning and careers.

All 14-16 year olds should continue to follow the statutory National Curriculum at Key Stage 4 and other statutory curriculum requirements.

7. We propose that achievement within 14-19 programmes should be certified by diplomas available at the first four levels of the National Qualifications Framework, and using a credit system compatible with that being developed by QCA for adult qualifications. Diplomas at successive levels would overlap, so that achievement at one level would provide the basis for progression to, and achievement at, the next.

8. All diplomas would be named based on the lines of learning they relate to. One line would recognise achievement in 'open' programmes, where learners can choose a mixture of subjects and/or vocational options from different lines. The remaining lines would provide more specialised named pathways, covering broad academic and vocational domains.

Summary recommendations: the diploma framework

The existing system of qualifications taken by 14-19 year olds should be replaced by a framework of diplomas at entry, foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Successful completion of a programme at a given level should lead to the award of a diploma recognising achievement across the whole programme.

There should be up to 20 'lines of learning' within the diploma framework. These must:

- reflect sector and disciplinary boundaries at the time of implementation, but be flexible and kept under review;
- cover a wide range of academic and vocational disciplines, combining them where appropriate and allowing further degrees of specialisation within individual 'lines';
- ensure relevance and lead to higher education, employment or both;
- include a line which recognises achievement in 'open' programmes, where learner choice is relatively unconstrained; and
- be transparent and readily understood by end-users.

Outline diploma framework

Diplomas		Current Qualifications	
Advanced	Core Main learning	Level 3	Advanced Extension Award; GCE and VCE AS and A level; level 3 NVQ; equivalent qualifications
Intermediate	Core Main learning	Level 2	GCSE grades at A*–C; intermediate GNVQ; level 2 NVQ; equivalent qualifications
Foundation	Core Main learning	Level 1	GCSE grades D–G; foundation GNVQ; level 1 NVQ; equivalent qualifications
Entry	Core Main learning	Entry	Entry level certificates and other work below level 1

Improved vocational programmes

9. As well as preparing individual young people for particular training and employment, vocational learning provides both an opportunity to enrich the experience of learners, and to develop the skills needed by employers and for national economic success.

10. Our proposals seek to build on the strengths of good vocational provision to raise the quality of the overall vocational offer and provide opportunities for achievement and progression in the same ways as for academic studies. This does not mean trying to fit vocational programmes into an 'academic' mould, but recognising what is distinctive and valuable about vocational learning and ensuring that it is respected and valued in its own right.

11. Improved vocational learning will be secured through:

- **better vocational programmes** of sufficient volume to combine core learning (including basic and employability skills) with a specialised vocational curriculum and assessment and relevant work placement. Vocational programmes would be designed with the involvement of employers and should be delivered only in institutions which are suitably equipped;
- **rationalised vocational pathways** capable of providing progression within the diploma framework to advanced level and beyond, and linked, where appropriate, to National Occupational Standards in order to provide avenues to employment;
- **a series of vocational options** which can be combined with general and academic subjects in mixed programmes;
- **better work-based learning** through the integration of apprenticeships and the proposed diploma framework; and
- **stronger incentives to take vocational programmes**, as the common requirements for content, volume and level of study mean that all diplomas have general currency while also signifying relevant attainment within a particular vocational area.

Summary recommendations: vocational learning

Vocational programmes should be developed with the involvement of employers, HE and other stakeholders to offer:

- coherent delivery of the knowledge and skills needed by different employment sectors; and
- relevant, structured work placements.

There should also be ongoing evaluation and improvement of the work experience delivered as part of general programmes, particularly at KS4, to ensure that it delivers benefits to learners (and employers) and adds value to the work-related components of post-14 programmes.

Vocational learning should be delivered only where there are appropriate facilities and teaching and training staff with relevant expertise.

Apprenticeships should be integrated with the diploma framework.

Assessment

12. Diplomas and components would be **assessed** in ways which support teaching and learning and greater intellectual and skills development, and are fit for purpose. Within open diplomas up to and including intermediate level, assessment of main learning and the extended project would be predominantly teacher-led. This does not mean the end of examinations and tests. Assessment should be conducted through a range of different styles including time-limited tests and examinations, set assignments, and practical and written tests and observations, some of which should be externally assessed, both to reinforce teachers' own assessments and to aid national monitoring of standards.

13. Functional mathematics, functional literacy and communication and functional ICT would be predominantly externally assessed. Common knowledge, skills and attributes (CKSA) would not be formally assessed, but their development should be attested and recorded on the transcript. At advanced level and in specialised vocational learning a balance of in-course and external examinations would remain.

Summary recommendations: assessment

At entry, foundation and intermediate levels, in place of existing GCSE-style examinations, teacher-led assessment should be the predominant mode of assessment though an element of external testing should remain. The focus of external assessment and quality control should be on ensuring that teacher-led judgements are exercised reliably and fairly for all young people, through mechanisms such as:

- inspection, monitoring and approval of institutions to carry out assessment;
- establishment of a network of Chartered Assessors to lead good assessment practice in each institution;
- teacher training and development;
- systems for monitoring, evaluation and professional development at institutional level; and
- national sampling of learners' work to ensure consistent application of standards between institutions and over time.

At advanced level, assessment should remain a balance between external examinations and in-course assessment, drawing upon the new quality assurance arrangements to place greater weight on the professional judgement of teaching staff.

Assessment of the core should combine in-course and external assessment methods.

Recognising achievement

14. Foundation, intermediate and advanced diplomas should be **graded** to provide an incentive for learners to achieve beyond the minimum pass threshold and enable employers, HEIs and others to identify learners who have excelled across their full diploma programme. Components would also be graded on one of three grading scales to give a level of differentiation appropriate to their content and level.

15. Achievement should be recorded on **transcripts** designed for use by learners in a variety of settings and to give end-users easily accessible information about the range of learners' achievements across their programmes. This includes the components and grades contributing to award of the diploma, as well as other achievements, in wider activities, for example.

Summary recommendations: recognising achievement

All diplomas at foundation, intermediate and advanced level should be graded pass, merit or distinction. Entry diplomas should not be graded.

Grades above pass should be awarded on the basis of achievement of breadth and/or depth beyond the threshold.

Each main learning component should be graded using one of three scales, based upon its content:

- fail/pass;
- fail/pass/merit/distinction; or
- fail/E/D/C/B/A/A+/A++ (some advanced level components only).

All learners should receive detailed transcripts of achievement to accompany the award of a diploma and/or to provide a record of progress at key transition points, such as moving between institutions.

The offer to learners and teachers

16. The 14-19 curriculum and qualifications outlined in our Final Report are designed to meet the needs of all 14-19 learners.

17. The offer for **learners** centres on the provision of clear and meaningful choices, which stretch and excite them, which can be tailored to their needs, interests and aspirations and which materially advance them towards their goals in adult life. In particular, the diploma would provide the opportunity for all learners to discover and enjoy the use of their particular talents, to the highest level possible, while also acquiring the basic capabilities needed for success in adult life:

- the reforms would ensure that where young people are capable of learning at a level above most of their peers, the qualifications framework encourages this. For example, a particularly gifted young person studying for an advanced diploma would

be able to include some components from higher education in her/his diploma and would get credit for these on the transcript. Excellence across the diploma, in breadth or depth, would be rewarded by a 'merit' or 'distinction';

- young people who particularly require external motivation will be able to 'bank' credits as they go along, and take tests in functional mathematics and literacy and communication as they are ready. The interlocking nature of the diploma means that as soon as a diploma is claimed, the learner automatically has some of the components to achieve the next level diploma, thus helping to bridge the pre-16/post-16 divide and providing a motivation to continue in learning and achieve qualifications which are credible with employers and others. Similarly it should be possible to use credit from some diplomas to contribute to qualifications in the adult credit framework;
- personal review, planning and guidance would be at the heart of the diploma, ensuring that young people integrate what they have learned from different parts of the diploma, including wider activities, and make well-founded choices. Young people who decide that they have chosen the wrong specialism would be able to use their core learning and possibly some specialist learning, to move across to a different diploma, without having to start again at the beginning;
- the reduction in assessment and the introduction of the extended project mean there would be more space for exploratory learning and learning tailored to particular interests. This and the other reforms should lead to improved behaviour in the classroom and a better teaching and learning environment for all.

Summary recommendations: stretch and progression

Young people should enter the diploma framework at the level appropriate to them and progress at a pace appropriate to their abilities. Learners would not be required to achieve a diploma at each level before progressing to the next, though many might do so.

Diplomas should interlock so that achievement at one level provides the basis for progression to, and achievement at, the next.

It should be possible to move from one programme to another at the same level. This would be facilitated by the transferability of relevant components, notably core components.

Greater stretch and differentiation should be introduced into advanced level programmes by the introduction of the extended project and by absorbing Advanced Extension Award type assessment of high order skills and deeper knowledge in a revised A2, and extending the grading scale to reflect this.

18. Teachers, lecturers and trainers would benefit from:

- a reduced assessment burden and enhanced professional status as assessors as well as teachers in a system where assessment is recognised as an integral part of the teaching process, and teachers' professional judgements are valued;
- more time to do what they do best – to inspire learners by delivering a varied and interesting curriculum in ways that motivate and are relevant and exciting to learners. This includes opportunities to develop locally-relevant curricula recognised within the national framework;
- the opportunity to develop and use their specialist expertise and professional judgement;
- training, guidance and support needed to make the most of this enhanced role; and
- learners who are motivated by the interesting and relevant curriculum options available to them and therefore less at risk of disengagement and/or disruptive behaviour.

Reducing the assessment burden

19. The burden of assessment on learners, teachers, lecturers and institutions and the system would be reduced by:

- cutting the number of examinations taken by learners, particularly by providing opportunities for stretch and progression which take the emphasis away from pursuing large numbers of qualifications at the same level;
- making teacher judgement the predominant method of assessment at intermediate level and below for components derived from existing GCSEs;
- reducing the number of assessment objectives in many subjects and courses; reducing substantially the amount of formal coursework; and, at advanced level, reducing the number of assessment units across AS and A2 from six to four; and
- tackling the administrative burden on institutions by modernising and streamlining examination and assessment processes.

Benefits of the diploma

20. Some of the improvements identified may be secured by reforms to the existing system and should be implemented quite quickly. These include:

- changes to the structure, content and assessment of existing qualifications to reduce the burden of assessment;
- development of components in functional mathematics, literacy and communication and ICT to be made available as stand-alone qualifications;
- development of new vocational programmes and the components within them, which meet the needs of employers and the local labour market;
- development of criteria for the extended project; and
- use of a transcript of achievement to provide more information on learners' performance to help universities in particular to distinguish between top performers.

21. However, our analysis of the aims of 14-19 learning and the weaknesses of the current system leads us to the recommendations in this report for a system of

coherent programmes. The diplomas themselves are the necessary glue which would pull together all the elements of those programmes into a single whole. The diploma would provide incentives for learners to pursue balanced programmes of study, encouraging them to greater breadth and depth of learning and experience than they would otherwise attempt. If a learner could not achieve a diploma without achieving a specified level in functional mathematics and functional literacy and communication, or a subject or area of learning in main learning, they would be better motivated to persist in studying them to reach the required level.

22. In addition, the diploma would:

- ensure that all young people develop essential knowledge, skills and attributes, including specified levels in functional mathematics, literacy and communication and ICT;
- provide learners with coherent and relevant programmes tailored to their needs, interests and aspirations and mitigate barriers to accessing them;
- ensure breadth of study, particularly through core requirements;
- enable certain features to be balanced across the whole programme – for example, use of a range of assessment methods, and development of common knowledge, skills and attributes. This would lessen the pressure on individual components;
- ensure depth of study within individual disciplines by developing main learning components which offer young people scope to pursue aspects of their subjects in depth and to draw down components from higher levels;
- offer clear progression routes in all subjects and areas of learning to advanced level within the diploma framework and into HE or other education and training and employment beyond; and
- place all learning in a single framework, which emphasises the equally valid, but different, academic and vocational learning.

Meeting the needs of end-users

23. Our proposals must meet the needs of end-users, particularly employers and HE. Their support and involvement is vital if the curriculum and qualifications advocated are to be relevant and valued.

24. We have sought to respond to the concerns of **employers** through our focus on:

- getting the basics right – all learners would be expected to achieve in functional mathematics, literacy and communication and ICT, progressing over time towards at least level 2;
- developing employability skills – specific skills and the ‘right attitude’ developed across the curriculum and through particular experiences, like wider activities;
- strengthening vocational pathways – especially through the involvement of employers in the design and delivery of programmes and raising the currency and status of apprenticeships; and
- making the system simpler and more transparent.

25. We have also listened to the needs of **HE**. Like employers, HE would benefit from

attention to the basics, and from:

- learners developing skills for independent study – particularly through the extended project, personal review, planning and guidance and wider activities;
- the opportunities for all learners to experience stretch and challenge, including higher attainers who would be stretched by an extended range of demands and grades at advanced level, and who may have undertaken level 4 components;
- ensuring breadth in advanced level programmes, through core requirements and opportunities for young people to undertake more subjects, including contrasting or complementary learning;
- bringing vocational programmes, including apprenticeships, within a common framework, providing a wider range of potential entrants; and
- making details of the extended project available to admissions officers at the earliest opportunity as a way of providing textured information to support the admissions process.

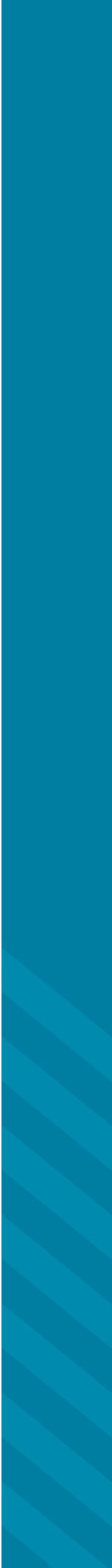
26. Both HE and employers would benefit from transcripts which would help them to differentiate between candidates by:

- making clear what level of the National Qualifications Framework had been reached;
- providing details of achievement in core and main learning components; and
- offering electronically accessible information on the full range of young people's achievements, including activities outside formal learning.

Implementing the proposals

27. Our report contains details of how the proposals could be implemented. Implementation would be driven by the need to ensure stability within the system, to maintain momentum for change over the long implementation period, to monitor the impact of the reforms to ensure that they do not disadvantage any groups of learners, and to communicate our aims and expectations clearly. It should be overseen by an independent advisory group.

28. The reforms we propose build on existing good practice within education and training. They are about evolution, rather than revolution. They will take at least 10 years to implement in full.



01 Introduction

Chapter 1 Introduction

Our vision

29. Our work is underpinned and inspired by a conviction that the 14-19 phase of learning is crucial for all young people. They deserve the best chances of success, in activities that are demonstrably worthwhile, and widely recognised to be so. We passionately believe our work must be a catalyst for a step-change in the way all qualifications are viewed, and in breadth, depth and relevance of attainment.

30. We believe that by 19 all young people should have the skills, knowledge and attributes necessary to participate fully and effectively in adult life. They should have had the opportunity to develop their individual potential to the full, whether intellectual, creative, practical, or a combination of these. They should be active citizens, equipped to contribute to the economic, social, political and cultural life of the country as well as developing an understanding of the wider international community. They should share in the cultural heritage of the country and of its many communities. They should have a passion for learning and should see it as a natural, necessary and enjoyable part of adult life.

31. To achieve this goal, 14-19 learning should be inclusive and challenging. It should cater for and excite all young people, whatever their aspirations, abilities, interests and circumstances. It should build upon learning up to 14 and provide pathways beyond 19 to further learning or employment. It should value and encourage a variety of content, styles and contexts of learning, including 'academic' and 'vocational', school-, college- and work-based. It should recognise and reward all successful learning, differentiating between individuals and celebrating outstanding achievements.

32. The system should meet the legitimate demands of learners themselves and of parents, employers, HE and other stakeholders. It should be clear and simple to understand. It should provide teachers, lecturers and trainers with the time, space and support to provide exciting and challenging learning experiences for young

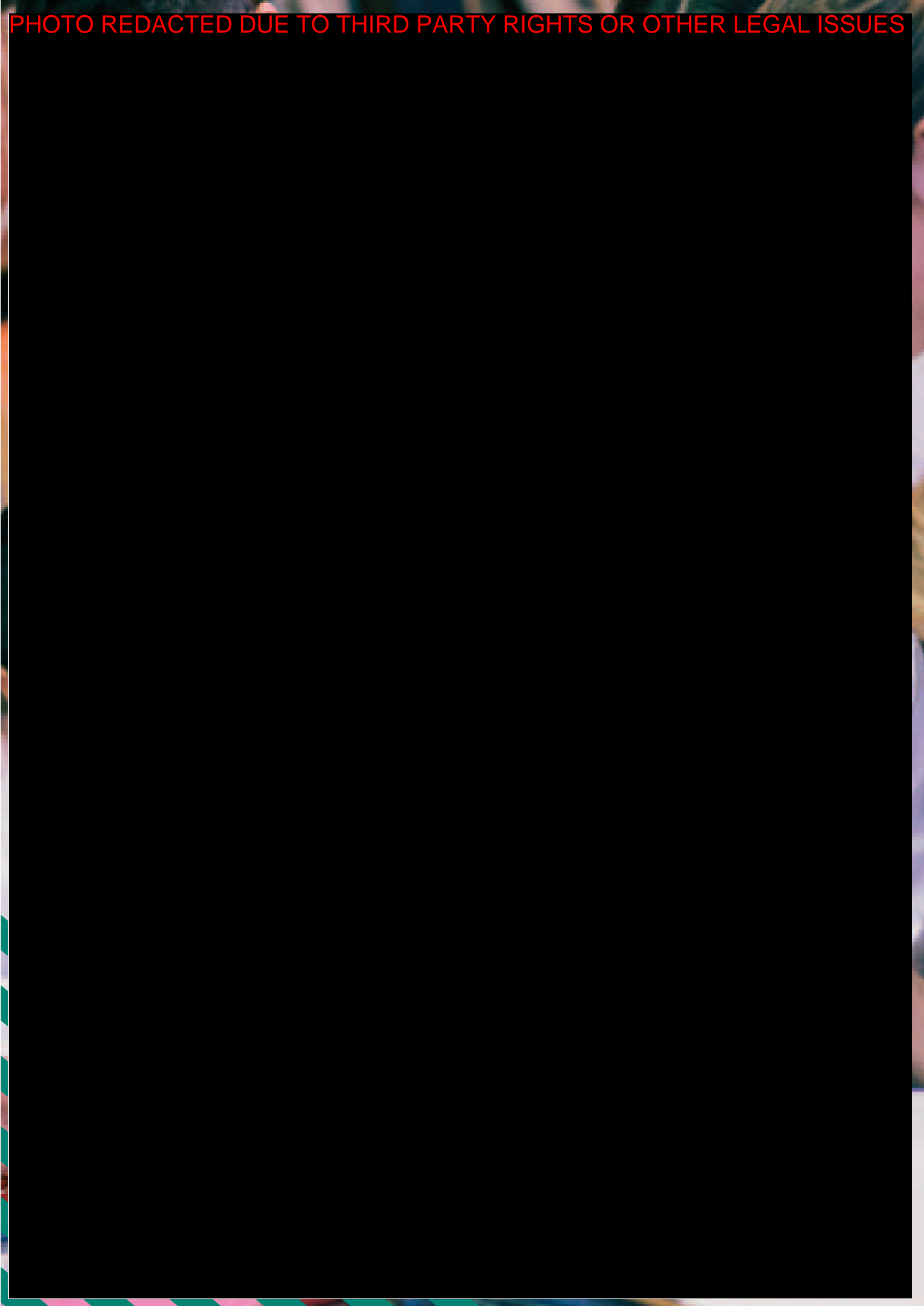


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people, where assessment is recognised as an integral part of the teaching process, and professional judgements are respected and valued.

Why reform is needed

33. The current system works well for many. We want a system that works well for all. To achieve our vision, we need to build on strengths within the current system while addressing its weaknesses, in order to:

- **Raise participation and achievement** – for participation at 17, 2002 data rank the UK 24th out of 28 OECD countries with a participation rate of 76%.¹ More than 5% of young people reach the end of compulsory schooling with no qualifications. Particular care will be needed to ensure that we raise the disproportionately low participation and attainment of some minority ethnic groups.
- **Get the core right** – the literacy and numeracy and Key Stage 3 strategies are improving basic skills among our young people, but there is still more to do to ensure that all young people have the skills needed to succeed in higher education (HE) and the workplace.
- **Strengthen vocational routes** – the existing patchwork of vocational qualifications fails to provide coherence and progression for learners. Too many are of uncertain quality and fail to provide clear progression routes to further learning and/or employment.
- **Provide greater stretch and challenge** – this year, 22.4% of A level entries achieved an A grade. Higher education admission officers and employers complain they are finding it increasingly difficult to distinguish between top flight candidates and learners themselves are being held back by the lack of opportunity to demonstrate their full potential.
- **Reduce the assessment burden** – excluding the National Curriculum and vocational qualifications other than GNVQs and VCEs, there were around 7.5 million subject entries in 2004, with 57,000 examiners. The sheer volume of assessment creates a formidable burden at all levels of the system and is only partially off-set by the benefits derived from assessment.
- **Make the system more transparent and easier to understand for learners, universities and employers** – too many learners lack a clear route map through the system, and end-users are often unclear about the relevance and value of qualifications which young people hold.

A new framework

34. The diploma framework we propose would provide a challenging educational experience for all young people. It offers breadth and the opportunity to explore academic and vocational areas in greater depth. It would respond to personal skills and qualities and foster creativity through the extended project. With guidance, progression routes lie ahead at every level for every learner. The transcript, available for admission to higher and further education, training and employment, would ensure that all achievements are recognised and rewarded.

¹ OECD, *Education at a Glance* (2004). Of those not participating, 9% are not in employment, education or training, and a further 15% are in employment without training.

The report

35. Section 2 sets out our proposals for a unified framework for 14-19 learning, including its structure, content and assessment at each level, and how it would be graded and reported. Section 3 draws out some of the key themes running through our proposals and how they would meet the five tests set by the Secretary of State in February 2004:

- Excellence – will the reformed 14-19 framework stretch the most able young people?
- Vocational – will it address the historic failure to provide a high quality vocational offer that motivates young people?
- Employability – will it prepare all young people for the world of work?
- Assessment – will it reduce the burden of assessment?
- Disengagement – will it stop the scandal of our high drop out rate at 16 and 17?

36. Section 4 outlines how our proposals could be made a reality. It identifies the mechanisms that would need to be put in place to quality assure standards in the new system, particularly the assessment regime. It highlights where the infrastructure would need to change to support the diploma framework, including collaboration, governance, funding and performance management arrangements. The final chapter sets out proposals for how reform could be implemented.

The process

37. The Working Group was established by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in February 2003 to respond to the remit contained in *14-19: Opportunity and Excellence*.² We published a progress report in July 2003. Our Interim Report in February 2004 set out proposals for the framework of diplomas described in greater detail here.

38. Many people and organisations have contributed to our deliberations, through consultations following our progress and interim reports, and involvement in the sub-groups established to support particular aspects of our work.³ We are grateful to all these people and organisations whose thoughtful insights and inputs have helped to shape the detail of this report.

What happens next?

39. It is now for the Government to decide how it wishes to take forward the proposals set out in this report. They do not provide a complete blueprint, but do set out a clear vision for a unified system of 14-19 curriculum and qualifications and how this can be achieved. It has been a privilege for us to have been asked to play a role in such a vital area of reform.

² Our terms of reference can be found at annex O.

³ Details of the consultation following publication of our Interim Report can be found at annex B, and annex N provides details of those involved in our sub-groups.

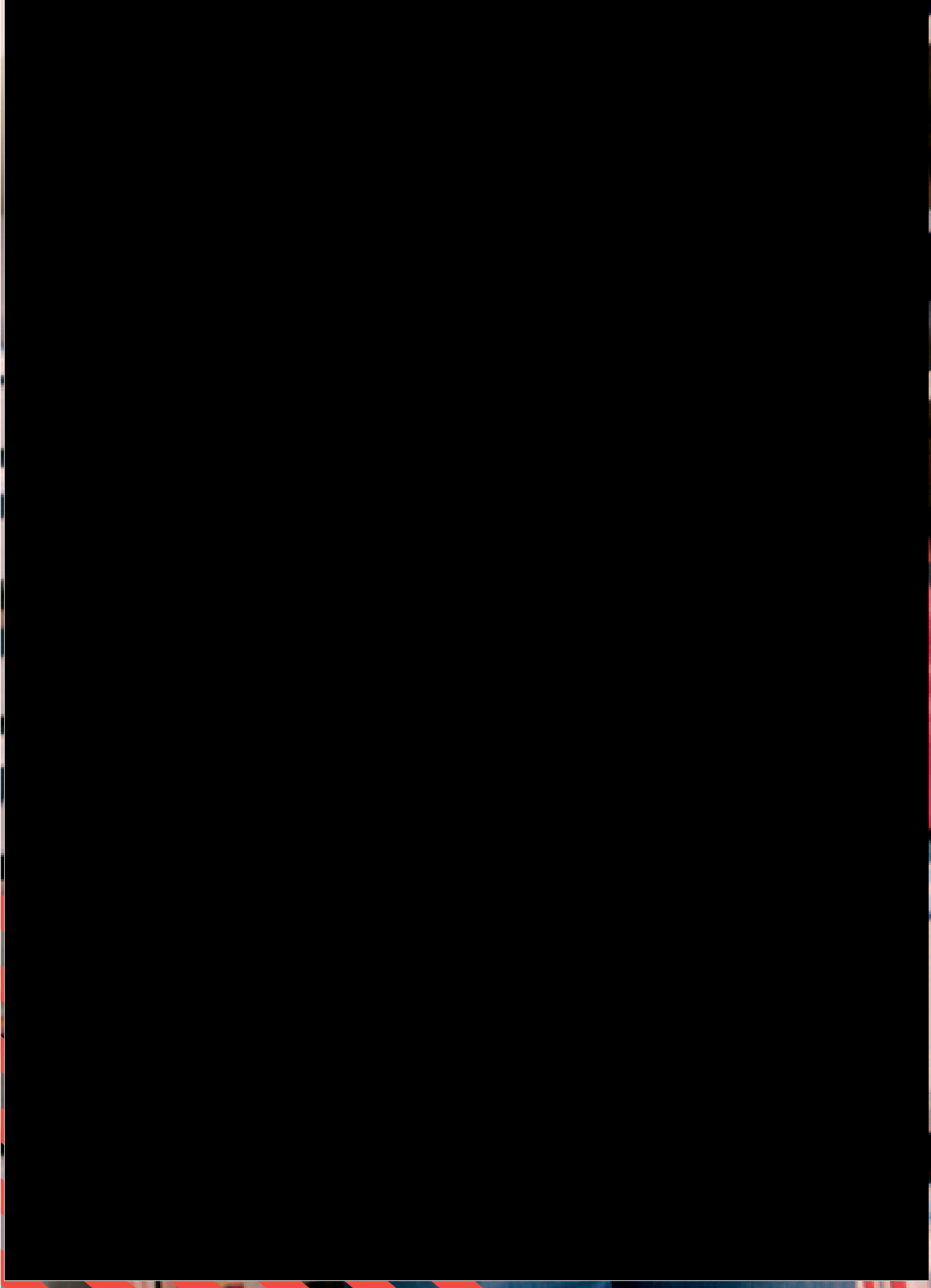
02 A unified framework for 14-19 learning

Chapter 2 Programmes and diplomas

14-19 learning is currently fragmented with a proliferation of qualifications of different types and sizes, few of which offer a balance between the knowledge and skills which everybody needs to play an active part in society and the specialised knowledge and skills for particular areas of learning and work.

This chapter provides a brief outline of the working group's proposed framework for 14-19 programmes and diplomas. We propose that:

- *all 14-19 programmes must ensure that young people acquire a range of essential skills, knowledge and understanding which they need for further learning, employment and adult life; and provide progression within the diploma framework and to destinations in learning or employment;*
- *14-19 programmes should comprise both:*
 - *a **core** of knowledge, skills and experiences common to all diplomas at a given level*
 - ***main learning** focusing on the subjects or area of learning chosen by the learner;*
- *all 14-19 programmes should be organised within a unified framework of diplomas awarded at one of four levels from entry through to advanced. Possession of a diploma should offer a readily understood guarantee about the overall breadth and level of a young person's achievement against clear national standards;*
- *within the 14-19 framework there should be up to 20 named diploma lines covering a range of vocational areas and academic disciplines. While most would show that the learner has specialised in areas of learning, an 'open' line would allow a relatively unconstrained choice of subjects, similar to the mixed A level, GCSE and equivalent vocational programmes followed by many learners at the moment; and*



- *learning programmes and diplomas for 14-16 year olds should be open, though they may incorporate components linked to specialised lines. They should also reflect the requirements of the Key Stage 4 (KS4) National Curriculum, but, as is currently the case, achievement of a diploma should not require specific levels of study or levels of achievement in compulsory KS4 National Curriculum subjects.*

All of these proposals are considered in more detail in subsequent chapters of this report.

Coherence and relevance

40. In setting up the Working Group, the Secretary of State asked us to make proposals to achieve greater coherence in learning programmes for all young people throughout the 14-19 phase. Responding to the remit, we have understood coherent programmes to mean programmes in which components combine to produce a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. They should be relevant, providing young people with:

- the specific knowledge, skills and understanding needed to progress and succeed in learning and employment pathways; and
- the ability to progress and succeed in learning, HE, employment and adult life, and to take their place as well-informed members of their community and wider society.

Balanced programmes

Recommendation 1

To provide all young people with a balance of generic and specialised learning, all 14-19 programmes should comprise:

- **Core learning**, designed to ensure that all young people develop a range of generic knowledge, skills and attributes necessary to progress and succeed, including progression over time to at least level 2 in functional mathematics, functional literacy and communication, and functional ICT; and
- **Main learning** designed to ensure achievement and progression within recognised academic and vocational disciplines which provide a basis for progression within the diploma framework and access to employment, work-based training and HE. Main learning defines the type of programme and may be chosen to reflect learners' strengths, interests and aspirations.

41. More detail on core and main learning is set out in chapter 3 and annexes C and D.

Programmes and diplomas

42. Throughout our work, we have sought to make a clear link between the programmes that young people undertake and the qualifications they gain from their learning. The link between the two is not straightforward: it is reasonable to expect all young people to follow a programme covering a defined range of learning, but it is constraining and unrealistic to demand that they demonstrate a specific level of achievement in every aspect of their learning. The content of each programme – what young people actually learn – is critical, whether or not it is all formally assessed. Nevertheless, the present qualifications system does help shape learners' choices and the overall content of their learning. Our intention is to produce a qualifications system which rewards coherence and balance.

43. Too many learners at present follow narrow programmes that do not equip them with the range of knowledge, skills and attributes they need to succeed; and too many are able to construct programmes composed of qualifications which, although credible in their own right, when taken together do not amount to a coherent, relevant programme. We have sought to address this by proposing a system of diplomas each of which covers and accredits a broad programme as a whole rather than breaking down programmes into their constituent elements and accrediting each separately.

44. Diplomas are not the same thing as programmes. Programmes are likely to be wider than the minimum threshold of breadth and level of achievement required for diplomas at any given level. There should be space within teaching and learning time for learners to pursue subjects and areas of learning in greater depth or to add additional breadth. Their achievement beyond the minimum requirements for the diploma would be recognised by a detailed transcript and by grading the diploma (see chapter 7).

Recommendation 2

The existing system of qualifications taken by 14-19 year olds should be replaced by a system of diplomas, available at entry, foundation, intermediate and advanced levels.

Each diploma should be sub-divided into separately assessed components.

A diploma should be awarded for successful completion of a coherent programme meeting threshold requirements at a particular level. Achievements in the programme beyond the threshold should be recorded on a transcript of achievement (see chapter 7).

Young people should be able to enter the framework at age 14 at the level that best meets their capabilities and complete more than one diploma as they progress through the 14-19 phase.

Existing qualifications such as GCSEs, A levels, and NVQs should cease to be free-standing qualifications in their own right but should evolve to become components of the new diplomas.

Diploma lines and programme types

45. The existing qualifications framework is fragmented with many different types of qualifications and thousands of titles. It can be confusing both to learners in choosing their pathway and to employers, HE and others who use qualifications as a basis for recruitment. We propose a rationalised, more transparent system in which all young people progress through a unified framework towards qualifications which are clearly understood and relevant to the further learning or employment to which they aspire.

46. Our Interim Report identified two broad classifications of diploma design:

- Open diplomas combining freely chosen subjects. Mixed programmes of A levels or GCSEs already have a proven track record. They prepare young people successfully for many HE courses, training and employment for which the prime requirement is a demonstrable level of general educational achievement, rather than achievement focusing on a single discipline or employment sector.
- Specialised diplomas within which content would be prescribed according to the specialism. Progression into many disciplines and employment sectors requires quite specific and specialised combinations of knowledge and skills which should be delivered and accredited through carefully designed programmes and diplomas.

47. We do not, however, propose to label any individual diploma awarded to a young person as ‘specialised’. Every diploma would either be ‘open’ or be labelled according to the area of specialisation. Naming diplomas according to subject content would provide clarity and transparency both for end-users – who would know that certain named diplomas met their needs; and for learners, who would be able to easily identify routes through the system and into the further learning or employment for which they are aiming.

48. Within the open line, young people would be able to select from a range of components designed and approved for inclusion within open diplomas at the relevant level. These would comprise both subject components similar to, and often evolved from, existing GCSEs and A levels, and components designed to provide a link with each of the specialised lines. The content of the specialised lines would be prescribed to ensure that these diplomas are relevant to, and offer a sound basis for progression within, the specialism. Specialised diplomas would therefore place greater constraints on the choice which the learner can exercise over the content of the diploma.

49. The number of lines must be kept manageable to avoid reproducing the current confusing proliferation of qualifications of different types and titles. Transparency and relevance would be secured by identifying up to 20 diploma ‘lines’. This would offer clear signposting of routes and provide a balance between clarity and choice within the new framework. These lines would have titles which reflect programmes covering specific academic and vocational disciplines.

50. In our Interim Report, we suggested that the QCA framework for sectors and subjects provided a useful starting point for identifying specialised lines of learning. However, the QCA framework (figure 2.1) is a classification of qualifications rather than a design template for a unified qualifications system, and further work is needed to ensure appropriate groupings. Given the timescale for implementation, the need for further consultation and the changes likely over that time it would be premature to attempt a definitive classification system in this report.

Figure 2.1: QCA framework for sectors and subjects

- Health, public services and care
- Science and mathematics
- Agriculture, horticulture and animal care
- Engineering manufacturing technologies
- Construction, planning and the built environment
- Information and Communication Technology
- Retail and commercial enterprise
- Leisure, travel and tourism
- Arts, media and publishing
- History, philosophy and theology
- Social sciences
- Languages, literature and culture
- Education and training
- Preparation for life and work⁴
- Business, administration and law

Recommendation 3

We propose that there should be up to 20 ‘lines of learning’ within the diploma framework.

Diplomas within each line should be named – and sometimes sub-titled – according to the content of the main learning.

One line should be open, providing a relatively unconstrained choice of subjects and diploma components, similar to the mixed programmes of A levels or GCSEs or equivalent vocational qualifications that many young people currently undertake. Learners should be able to select from a wide choice of subjects and areas of learning, including traditional academic subjects and specially-designed components distilled from the content of specialised diploma lines. In this way, young people would be able to elect to take relatively short vocational options so that they could sample, and make a start on, the content of the more substantial vocational pathways represented in the specialist lines.

The other lines should cover a wide range of employment sectors and/or academic areas of study. These lines would not normally be available to pre-16 learners.

Recommendations for integrating the diploma framework and apprenticeships are set out in chapter 8 and exemplified in annex I.

⁴ This category includes employability programmes, foundation studies, life skills, basic skills, key skills, citizenship, and return-to-work and vocational skills. These would not constitute a separate diploma ‘line’ in their own right, but would contribute to other programmes.

51. Within each specialised line, there should be options for progressively developing a particular occupational or disciplinary focus. For instance, a broad engineering line might include options to focus especially upon aeronautical engineering and motor vehicle engineering. Any further degree of specialisation should also be recognised in the title of the diploma – e.g. *Science and Mathematics (natural sciences)*. Experience from other countries and from well-established diploma-style qualifications in the UK, would suggest that perhaps 100 diploma sub-titles of this kind would offer a thorough coverage, while remaining transparent and manageable for young people and end-users alike.

52. The design of specialised diplomas should ensure that every diploma is fit for purpose as a basis for progression into relevant higher level study or vocational sectors. The design must reflect the objectives of the overall diploma framework as well as specialist requirements. Awarding bodies should lead in the development of the content and assessment for individual components and programmes meeting criteria developed by the QCA. Generally, we would expect the design of specialised diploma content to take particular account of the views of:

- employers, including relevant Sector Skills Councils who should clearly have a prominent role in specialised diplomas of a vocational nature;
- HE;
- professional and statutory bodies; and
- schools, colleges and training providers who would be delivering the diplomas.

53. Criteria for the design of specialised diplomas are set out in subsequent chapters of this report and in annex D.

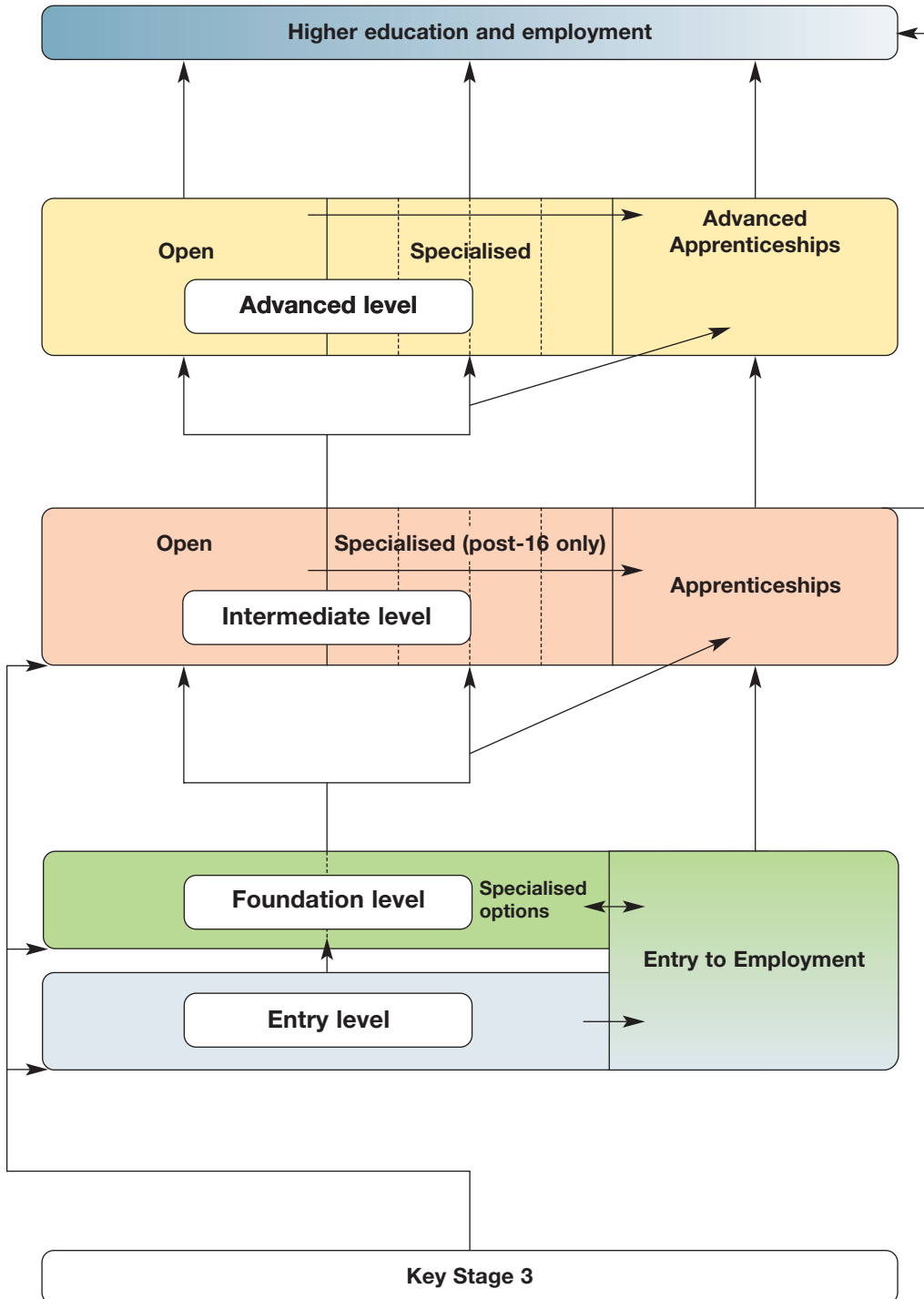
54. Learning beyond that required to attain any given diploma in a particular line would be recognised on the transcript (see chapter 7).

Recommendation 4

We recommend that drawing upon subject aggregations used successfully here and abroad, QCA works with relevant subject and sector bodies, including subject associations, HE, Sector Skills Councils, employers, and providers to develop a framework and design criteria for up to 20 named lines which:

- include a line that recognises achievement in ‘open’ programmes, where learner choice is relatively unconstrained;
- cover a wide range of options, combining them where appropriate;
- ensure that programme content is relevant to the needs of learners aspiring to particular destinations and to the needs of individual academic and employment sectors;
- allow for the development of optional areas of further specialisation;
- are flexible and kept under review; and
- are transparent and readily understood by end-users.

Figure 2.2: Main progression paths through the diploma framework



Young people would be able to follow many different routes through the diploma system. This diagram illustrates some of the most likely progression routes, though others will be possible.

Key Stage 4

55. The distinction between programmes and diplomas is particularly important at Key Stage 4. It is our belief that coherent programmes for 14-16 year olds should be 'open' and must include the statutory KS4 requirements set out in the Government's White Paper, *Opportunity and Excellence*.

56. These statutory requirements would not be included in the core, but achievement in them could contribute to the main learning requirements of diplomas at the appropriate level. In particular, we would expect the vast majority of 14-16 year olds to undertake accredited main learning components in science which meet the full National Curriculum science requirements. In addition, some subjects may be a supplementary requirement for some specialised lines taken post-16 – science for engineering or a modern foreign language for business and tourism, for example – and learners could achieve these at Key Stage 4 and carry forward the credit.

57. Retaining the National Curriculum requirements would in effect mean that diplomas achieved by young people before age 16 would be 'open' in nature. It would still be possible to ensure that 14-16 year olds could opt for vocational and practical learning, in the same way that many currently undertake a substantial element of vocational learning now, for instance through Young Apprenticeships. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

58. Significant numbers of young people are currently exempted from parts of the National Curriculum, through 'disapplication' procedures, in order that they can apply themselves to topics which are more likely to advance their interests. Our view is that the introduction of foundation diplomas, giving a positive alternative to current GCSEs, would considerably lessen the need for such disapplication. For the great majority open diplomas at foundation level would be appropriate and enable full coverage of the National Curriculum, but for a small number of young people, with careful counselling it may be sensible to embark on a more specialised programme.

Recommendation 5

All 14-16 year olds should be required to follow the statutory National Curriculum at Key Stage 4 and other statutory curriculum requirements, such as RE, as they are now. Achievement in statutory KS4 subjects, such as science, which are not part of the core, should give credit towards main learning.

Chapter 3

Core and main learning

This chapter and the supporting annexes (C and D) set out in more detail what we mean by core and main learning and the purposes of each. We propose that:

- *the core should comprise: functional mathematics; functional literacy and communication; functional ICT; and an extended project. In addition, learners should experience a range of common knowledge, skills and attributes (CKSA) which should be integrated into all 14-19 programmes but with no requirement that they are separately taught or assessed. In addition, learners should be supported in reviewing their learning, with guidance to help them make choices about further learning and careers;*
- *all 14-19 year olds should be entitled to access wider activities such as work experience, service within the community and involvement in sports, the arts or outdoor activities. Participation and (where appropriate) achievement in these should be recorded on the diploma transcript;*
- *main learning should form the bulk of most learners' programmes and achievement towards the diploma. It should comprise either the knowledge and skills required to achieve a specialised diploma at any given level; or a combination of components capable of meeting the threshold requirements for an open diploma; and*
- *components available for combination within open diplomas must be sufficiently large to maintain the coherence of the component subject and to prepare young people for further learning in that subject.*

The core

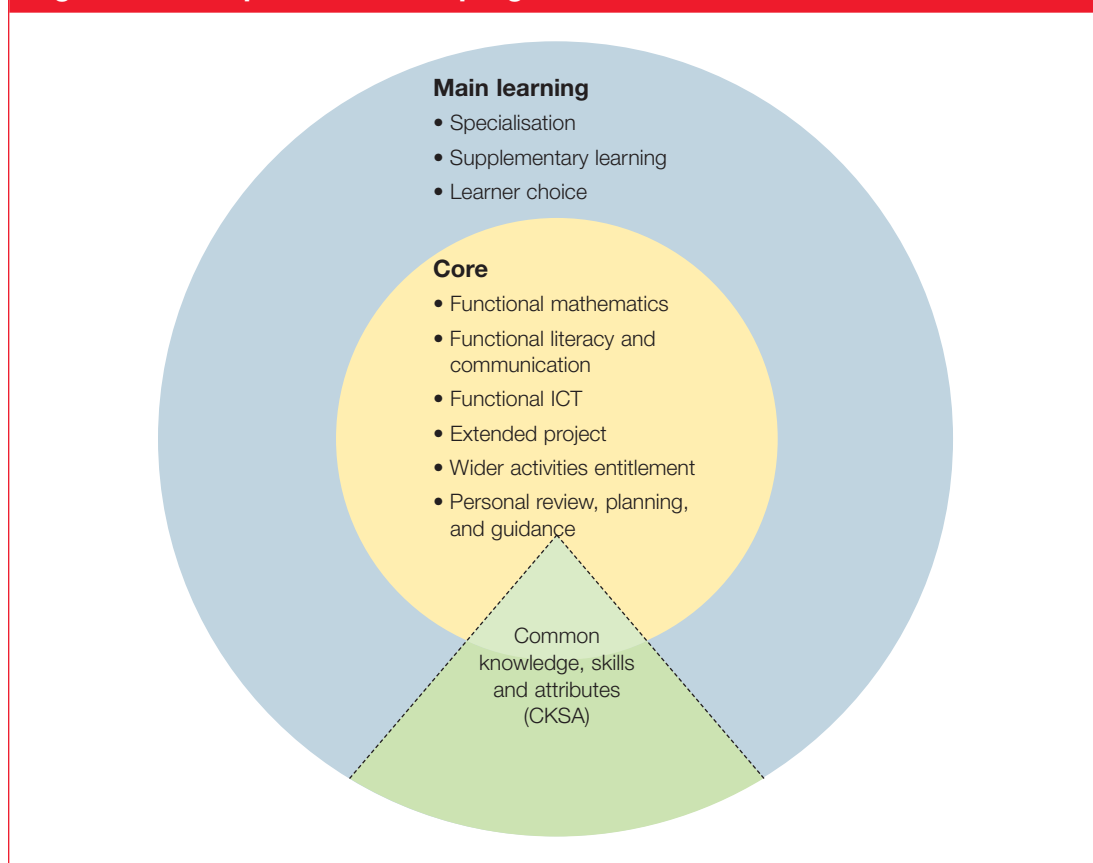
59. The core would ensure that young people acquire the functional mathematics, functional literacy and communication, functional ICT and common knowledge, skills and attributes (CKSA) they require to succeed and progress in learning, HE, employment and adult life. No young person would be able to achieve a diploma without having acquired them.

60. The core would also provide space for innovative and exploratory learning, particularly in the extended project and wider activities.

61. Underpinning their programme, all learners should receive high quality, impartial advice and guidance to help them make the most of the opportunities 14-19 learning presents.

62. The components of the core would be common to all programmes and diplomas, although there would be an element of choice for young people to pursue particular interests in the extended project and wider activities. Teaching and learning related to the core may be tailored to reflect specialisation within learners' wider programmes, while preserving the common content of knowledge and skills which the core is designed to deliver.

Figure 3.1: Template for 14-19 programmes



63. Achievement in assessed components of the core would be a requirement for the award of a diploma. But the *level* of achievement required would vary depending on diploma level. For the award of entry to intermediate diplomas, achievement in assessed components of the core should be at the level of the diploma. At advanced level, the extended project should be completed at advanced level, while the other components should be at a minimum of intermediate level.

Recommendation 6

We propose that the core, common to all programmes and diplomas, should comprise:

- functional mathematics;
- functional literacy and communication;
- functional ICT;
- an extended project;
- common knowledge, skills and attributes (CKSA);
- personal review, planning and guidance; and
- an entitlement to wider activities.

Functional mathematics, literacy and communication, and ICT

64. Components in these subjects should be accessible to all 14-19 year olds and produce the step change in achievement which is needed if young people are to be prepared effectively for later learning, employment and adult life. They must produce a significant improvement in the 42% of 16 year olds who currently achieve grade C or better in both mathematics and English GCSE. The development process must take account of the lessons from existing GCSE provision and the experience of the development and delivery of Key Skills.

65. The development of functional mathematics within the diploma must also take account of, and build on, the proposals made earlier this year by Professor Adrian Smith in his report, *Making Mathematics Count* (see paragraph 92).

66. We believe that the content of functional mathematics, literacy and communication and ICT should be based on a common understanding of what learners need to develop in each subject, including both knowledge and capacity to apply it. It must:

- equip young people with the knowledge and skills in each subject that they will need to progress and succeed in learning, HE, employment and adult life. That means that it can only be determined in consultation with end-users, including HE, employers and community groups;
- encourage progression to at least level 2, as young people move through the diploma framework, with opportunities and encouragement to progress to level 3; and
- encourage the extended study of these subjects as part of main learning (see paragraphs 91-93).

67. The content of each component would determine its size, and there is no reason why each of the three subjects should require the same volume. We would expect them to occupy between 50% and 80% of a current typical GCSE. This smaller volume of essential learning would be accompanied by assessment which ensures that in order to 'pass' the core, young people master the full range of skills covered by these components. Learners would not be able to compensate for lower performance in one area by higher performance in another (see chapter 6). Many young people would also undertake extended study of maths, English and ICT as part of their main learning (see paragraphs 91-93).

Recommendation 7

We recommend that QCA works with all stakeholders, including end-users and subject experts, to develop core components in functional mathematics, functional literacy and communication and functional ICT which:

- are based on an understanding, shared between stakeholders, about what constitute common requirements for informed citizens, effective learners and a wide range of workplaces;
- reflect the detailed criteria for these subjects in annex C and, in the case of functional mathematics, build upon the recommendations made by Professor Adrian Smith for reform of mathematics education;
- meet the needs of end-users; and
- are available at all levels within the diploma framework, from entry to advanced level.

These components should be available in advance of the introduction of the diplomas to begin meeting the needs of employers for more thorough acquisition of the relevant skills.

Until the new components are in place, all young people should continue to be encouraged to undertake the available options, such as Key Skills, in these subjects as part of their 14-19 learning programmes.

Extended project

68. The extended project is a major feature of our proposals. It is not a new idea. A personal project is a long-standing and highly-regarded feature of the International Baccalaureate. Project work already features in some vocational qualifications such as BTECs and is a significant implicit, and in some cases explicit, part of apprenticeship programmes. Many schools already offer an extended project along the lines we propose.

69. At higher levels of the diploma framework the project should take the form of a single piece of work which requires a high degree of planning, preparation, research and autonomous working. The final outcome would vary according to the nature of the project. For instance, it may be a written report, a product such as a construction or a piece of artwork, or a performance.

70. At lower levels of the framework the project may take the form of a personal challenge based on clearly defined learning objectives, agreed with a tutor – for instance, a series of linked tasks, which taken together would ensure that the learner has demonstrated the necessary range of skills at the level at which he or she is working. This approach is a feature of ASDAN awards.

71. The extended project would:

- ensure that all learners develop and demonstrate a range of generic skills, including research and analysis, problem solving, team-working, independent study, presentation and functional literacy and communication and critical thinking;

- help to reduce the assessment burden by assessing these skills, which are currently tested, in many existing schools and colleges, in numerous pieces of coursework across the curriculum, through a single task;⁵
- encourage cross-boundary and/or in-depth learning and wider application of knowledge developed through main learning. In this way the extend project would provide a means of synthesising main learning, while integrating it with the core; and
- provide a personalised ‘space’ within 14-19 programmes for young people to pursue areas of particular interest to them.

72. For some learners, especially those on specialised programmes, the extended project provides an opportunity to supplement and extend main learning.

Sir Bernard Lovell School

As part of the 14-19 Pathfinder project this school has introduced a personal challenge.

The personal challenge varies for each young person. This year the theme is work-related learning. Pupils dedicate two hours a week to their personal challenge in collaboration with ASDAN. This includes supervised time of approximately one hour, where research can be undertaken in class and feedback sought from a tutor.

Assessment consists of: a review meeting three times a year to assess progress towards targets. In term one, the research undertaken and actions plans produced by the learner form the basis of the assessment. Learners must provide an evaluation of their own performance. They must display or give a presentation on their work to governors and parents. Learners are increasingly encouraged to be aware of the criteria they are being judged on.

Staff share their judgements after the final projects are submitted and moderate them where necessary. This is done on a subject or department basis.

Common knowledge, skills and attributes (CKSA)

73. The Interim Report identified three broad strands of CKSA:

- the reflective and effective individual learner;
- the social learner; and
- the learner in society and the wider world.

74. These categories should draw upon the content of existing elements of the curriculum, such as PSHE, citizenship, religious education and work-related learning.

⁵ This means that coursework need only be used elsewhere in the curriculum to develop and demonstrate subject-specific skills and knowledge where it is an appropriate vehicle for doing so.

75. We propose that CKSA should have the following coverage:⁶

- **The reflective and effective individual learner** is someone who is personally aware, who has experienced a range of learning and teaching method and is aware of how best they learn, but who is able to apply other methods appropriately and creatively to a variety of contexts, and who shows resilience, perseverance and determination in her/his work. Such learners have the skills and attributes necessary to:
 - organise and regulate their own learning;
 - set and meet challenging, but realistic objectives;
 - manage time effectively;
 - undertake research;
 - identify and solve problems;
 - identify, analyse and evaluate relevant information derived from different sources and contexts; and
 - think and use their skills creatively.
- **The social learner** is someone who is able to learn and achieve in groups of different sizes and varying compositions, including:
 - understanding how groups work and the factors that can influence and shape group learning;
 - undertaking different roles within a group, including those of leader and team-member;
 - challenging or defending a position as appropriate;
 - compromising; and mediating and resolving conflict;
 - seeking, understanding and evaluating others' viewpoints and ideas;
 - giving and receiving support and feedback; and
 - empathising and understanding the needs of others around them, including those of employers and colleagues in a workplace.
- **The learner in society and the wider world** is aware of the multiple communities to which they belong and is able to participate constructively in them. Such learners would:
 - be aware of their rights and responsibilities;
 - have the skills and attributes necessary for active citizenship and the workplace;
 - be morally and ethically aware; and
 - know about other countries and other cultures, and understand and value ethnic, cultural and religious diversity.

⁶ These definitions have been informed by the work of an EU Member States Working Group on basic skills, foreign language teaching and entrepreneurship.

Recommendation 8

Opportunities to develop CKSA should be integrated into all 14-19 programmes through carefully managed institutional teaching and learning strategies. They need not be separately assessed, but delivering them within all programmes would mean that learners cannot achieve their diploma without developing them.

Schools, colleges and training providers should be responsible for ensuring that learners develop the CKSA across the learning programmes which they offer. Specialised diplomas should be designed from the start to recognise the full range of CKSA.

The effectiveness and quality of delivery of CKSA within individual institutions should be monitored through external inspection and centre approval arrangements.

QCA should develop guidance and exemplars setting out how CKSA can be integrated into institutions' teaching, learning and assessment. Guidance and exemplar models for effective delivery should also be developed. This should include an examination of the role to be played by personal review, planning and guidance.

Building upon existing qualifications and assessment systems which already accredit some aspects of what we have labelled CKSA, such as the wider Key Skills, diploma components should be available for those who wish some formal accreditation of their attainment within the core and personal development.

Personal review, planning and guidance

76. Personal review, planning and guidance is crucial to underpin the proposed programme and diploma framework, and to help young people develop the common knowledge, skills and attributes that will be of benefit to them throughout life. It would serve the particular purposes of:

- supporting coherence across learning programmes, particularly by drawing out and underlining the cross-curricular applicability of the core, and identifying opportunities to access breadth and wider activities;
- developing and teaching the common knowledge, skills and attributes which young people will need for success in learning and employment – this would include personal awareness, how they seem to others, and encourage them to develop a coherent view of themselves;
- encouraging and helping young people to have a vision of themselves and their future; and
- helping learners to identify and choose appropriate learning and career paths.

77. Personal review, planning and guidance should be a compulsory component of the diploma at all levels, but there would not be a common specification nor any requirement for formal assessment of the process. There would, however, be a requirement on institutions to provide (or ensure the provision of) personal review, planning and guidance.

78. The delivery of personal review, planning and guidance would vary depending on the needs of the young person. We would expect learners to receive support from a range of sources. For instance, teachers, lecturers and trainers may be better placed to help young people develop and review their capabilities and achievements; while external agencies such as the Connexions Service and mentors could play a greater role in advising impartially on options for further learning and careers. However it is organised, young people must have access to a competent information and guidance service outlining the options that are available and the routes to achievement, including navigation of the diploma framework. Mentoring, coaching and one-to-one support may come from inside or outside the institution.

Recommendation 9

All 14-19 programmes should include regular formal personal review, planning and guidance to enable learners to:

- review and draw together their progress and achievements, and identify the knowledge, skills and understanding they have gained from the full range of their learning;
- raise their personal awareness, understand their strengths and identify learning and development needs; and
- formulate and review medium- and long-term objectives and goals, based on sound, impartial advice and guidance about the options open to them.

Guidance and exemplar material should be made available to schools, colleges and training providers to support effective delivery and the recording of the outcomes of personal review, planning and guidance.

Case studies: personal review, planning and guidance

Northallerton College

Learners are grouped in tutor groups for PSHE sessions, which are double-staffed. One teacher delivers the tutorial programme, and the other, the group's personal tutor, withdraws learners for one-to-one learning reviews. A learner can expect to meet her/his tutor in this way once a term. Learners' performance data is gathered twice-termly and is based on standardised testing, but also includes information about meeting coursework and homework deadlines, as well as effort and progress. This information is held in the college's data base and can be accessed by tutors at any time. The meeting is logged on special record pages in the Student Planner, along with any targets set. Although tutors and students meet up on a daily basis for registration and assembly purposes, allowing both formal and informal contact, the allocation of time-tabled time to focus on student progress and the factors which affect it, underlines the primary function of the tutorial role, which is to support learning, and encourage the student to think and plan ahead.

Bury College

Student H set out to succeed at Bury College and, with a minimum of support, proved to be one of the most enthusiastic and successful of AVCE ICT students.

Student H achieved a grade C at the end of Year 1 coupled with a huge growth in personal confidence. He is now predicted to achieve above grade C overall for the Double Award and is looking forward to Year 2.

From enrolment onwards, Student H's course team, his family and the Additional Support Team service worked together. He has mild cerebral palsy which leaves him physically weak and with a dyspraxic profile. However, the regular one-to-one subject specific mentoring for success sessions, loan of a laptop, coupled with extra time for all assessments, ensured Student H's success.

Marlborough College

Students are members of one of 14 boarding houses under the supervision of a housemaster or housemistress (HM). Each HM has a team of trained tutors drawn from the teaching staff and additional staff at a ratio of one tutor to eight students. Students will expect to see their tutor individually once each week to review progress across a wide range of areas including previously agreed targets. Students' performance is reported electronically every three or four weeks and discussed at the next weekly session: students are encouraged to seek assistance informally at other times from their tutor or HM on any personal matter. At the end of term, students see their report and complete a record of their achievement which is discussed with their tutor with targets being agreed for the following term. Specialist academic, HE and careers guidance is given at appropriate times during the school year in good time for future plans to be agreed between parents, students, tutors and HMs to whom tutors are responsible.

Wider activities

79. In our Interim Report, we recognised the significant role of wider activities⁷ as a vehicle for learning through experience and for developing CKSA. Wider activities provide the opportunity to enrich learners' lives and support their engagement as active citizens within their communities. For some young people, participation in wider activities provides an incentive to remain in learning, and for others it provides a way back into formal learning.

80. We want to bring wider activities within the diploma framework, to ensure that the learner gains recognition for undertaking them and for the skills developed by them. However, the volume and range of wider activities available to young people vary, and we recognise the widespread concern about the principle of withholding a diploma award from young people who have not undertaken a specified threshold of such activities. We also appreciate the difficulties of assessing wider activities in a way that would be both equitable and appropriate. We do not, therefore, propose that wider activities should be compulsory for award of the diploma, but that all young people should have an entitlement to wider activities as part of their 14-19 programme. We anticipate that the volume of wider activities to support a programme would normally be around 120 hours.

81. Learners would be strongly encouraged, particularly through the personal review, planning and guidance process, to undertake wider activities as part of their learning programme. The benefits of participation in wider activities would need to be clearly explained to highlight the contribution they can make to learning and how voluntary participation in activities could send positive signals to the community, employers, and Higher Education Institutions. To advise effectively, the institution would need to be aware of the range of wider activities available in the local area. This might include some activities available through the institution itself.

82. Wider activities would typically not be assessed formally, but participation and skill development could be recognised and attested on the transcript should the learner so wish. No young person should be penalised for not wanting to record their wider activities, for whatever reason.

83. In the longer-term we would like to move to a situation where all young people participate in wider activities. As a first step, it would be useful to determine the exact extent of provision⁸ and measure how far this could meet demand.⁹ If equality of access to participation in wider activities of an agreed standard could be secured, further consideration should be given to whether wider activities should become a compulsory component of diplomas.

⁷ Wider activities are activities usually undertaken outside formal learning time and include: the arts; sports and recreation; science and technology; family responsibilities; community service; and part-time employment.

⁸ It is estimated that 500,000 young people annually are involved in informal award schemes in England (Source: *Framework of Awards 2003*). Some awards, e.g. ASDAN, Duke of Edinburgh's, Girlguiding and Scouts, are available throughout England. However, some of the awards operate in defined geographical areas and others may have more provision or projects working in some areas than others. In addition to these accredited awards, there are many young people involved as millennium volunteers, gaining local youth service awards and certificates, undertaking a range of sports and arts activities, faith-based, community or family activities and in part-time employment, all of which would need to be incorporated in a mapping and modelling exercise.

⁹ We are aware of discussions that are taking place between the National Youth Agency and the Network for Accrediting Young People's Achievement as to how to determine how to map existing provision and plan for its extension.

Recommendation 10

Wider activities should not be a compulsory component of the core, but they should be an entitlement for all learners. Learners would be strongly encouraged to undertake one or more wider activities which could be detailed on their transcript if they so wished.

Recording and attestation models should be developed and piloted, involving a range of providers and drawing upon existing practice in this field.

Research should be undertaken to establish the extent of the current provision of wider activities and the strategies required to secure equity of access to provision of an agreed standard.

Options for further enhancing the status of wider activities within the diploma should be kept under review in the light of progress towards securing consistent access for all young people.

Main learning

84. Main learning would form the majority of most young people's programmes of study and approximately two-thirds of the diploma threshold requirements at foundation, intermediate and advanced level would be met through main learning. At entry level the figure would vary depending on the nature of learners' personalised programmes.

85. Main learning would:

- enable young people to select coherent programmes to pursue their own interests, strengths, gifts or talents. Up to 16, this would be within the context of a broad programme covering statutory curriculum requirements at KS4 (see chapter 2);
- be delivered through discrete components of learning, each of which would contribute credit towards the award of a diploma;
- ensure achievement and progression within individual subjects, disciplines and lines of learning which provide a basis for progression within the diploma framework and entry to employment (in general and to specific sectors), work-based training and HE; and
- include learning which supplements any areas of specialisation, such as mathematics for scientists.

86. Main learning components should be available at all levels of the diploma framework, from entry level to advanced level. All advanced level components should be divided between A1, broadly equivalent to the less demanding elements undertaken within the first year of a two-year programme, and A2 components, broadly equivalent to the more demanding material undertaken in year 2. This is similar in concept to the existing division of A levels into AS and A2. In some cases, it may be impractical or artificial to divide A1 and A2 material into separate components. In such cases, the credit value of a single component may be divided between A1 and A2 credits. This may particularly be the case for advanced vocational and competence-based components.

87. Further details about component design and types is included in chapter 4 and annex D. Some components would evolve from existing qualifications, such as A level, GCSEs, NVQs and some awarding bodies' own-brand qualifications such as BTECs and OCR Nationals and City and Guilds. Other components would need to be designed afresh for the new framework.

Recommendation 11

Criteria and processes for the development of 14-19 learning programmes and components should be adopted by QCA following the design principles and recommendations set out in this report, as a basis for the design of diplomas and components by awarding bodies and relevant stakeholders.

Particular attention should be paid to:

- the need to ensure that the content of specialised diplomas is coherent and relevant to the area of specialisation. In many cases this would mean a single awarding body or consortium taking responsibility for the overall content and division into components of main learning within individual diplomas; and
- preserving within individual components the integrity of individual subjects and areas of learning and preventing these from becoming fragmented.

Vocational main learning

88. The division of the framework into lines of learning does not make the traditional distinction between vocational and academic learning. We consider this to be a strength, but we are also conscious of the critical need specifically to improve the status, relevance and quality of vocational learning. Chapter 8 sets out in more detail our proposal for strengthening the vocational options available to young people, including the integration of apprenticeships within the diploma framework.

89. Within the reformed 14-19 framework, vocational options would consist of:

- specifically designed vocational components designed to fit into open diplomas in the same way that vocational A levels and GCSEs in vocational subjects may currently be combined with traditional GCSEs and GCE A levels. These components should draw upon and provide links with the specialised lines of learning;
- whole vocational programmes forming specialised diploma lines. These would be designed as coherent programmes, including the core, and sub-divided into components. Some components might be drawn from the adult qualifications framework,¹⁰ but many would be specifically designed for the programme of which they form part; and

¹⁰ The consultation revealed that employers and others had particular concerns about the role of NVQs in the new framework. Our proposals for the reform of vocational programmes and the development of new vocational programmes and components must ensure that assessment style is matched to the purpose of the learning. NVQ-style assessment of workplace competence would certainly have a place within many diplomas, but it should be carried out in settings which offer credible evidence of achievement within the workplace or a credible proxy for workplace circumstances.

- apprenticeships which are composed of NVQs, Key Skills and technical certificates; and which should become aligned with the structure we propose for the diploma framework.

90. The design of vocational programmes and diplomas should follow the principles set out in annex D for the design of specialised programmes more generally. The key outcomes of this process would be that:

- all diplomas which relate to vocational areas or occupational sectors would be designed with significant input from Sector Skills Councils, other sectoral and employer bodies, providers and HE to ensure that the diploma content was relevant to their needs and would be coherent and credible as a basis for progression into employment, training and HE, as well as progression within the diploma framework;
- within each vocational diploma line, young people would be able to opt either: to devote their entire programme to a broad vocational area offering a general introduction to the relevant sectors; or to devote some of it to a sub-specialisation, including some which would be highly occupationally specific, and may be localised, to meet the needs of local industries;
- vocational lines would typically require learners to undertake a substantial period of structured work placement with an employer in the relevant sector. The precise requirements for each diploma should be determined in consultation with the bodies identified above, in light of the circumstances of each sector and availability of placements. This requirement should not result in unduly restricted access to vocational programmes;
- all programmes, whether vocational, general or a combination of these, would be delivered using appropriate facilities and teacher expertise; and
- assessment of vocational skills and occupational competence would take place in settings which are relevant to the way these would be deployed in the workplace.

Recommendation 12

Vocational programmes giving access to a diploma should replace the existing range of vocational qualifications taken by young people.

These should be developed by awarding bodies, working closely with employer organisations, including SSCs, 14-19 providers and HE. They should build upon the best of existing qualifications and operate within design criteria specified by QCA, based on the design parameters set out in this report.

Most vocational lines should incorporate a substantial period of structured work placement, related to the area of specialisation and giving credit towards main learning.

Centre approval criteria should ensure that vocational learning is only delivered where there are appropriate facilities and teachers, tutors and instructors with relevant expertise.

Curriculum flexibility – Cumbria 14-19 pathfinder

A wide range of activity aimed at increasing post-16 participation and raising achievement in Key Stage 4 has been under way in West Cumbria for a number of years. There is a long history of link courses between the schools and the college, mainly aimed at disaffected or underachieving young people in Key Stage 4, and the Increased Flexibility Programme has helped to foster greater collaboration.

- At least three schools have disapplied some National Curriculum requirements to provide work-related learning opportunities for 14-16 year olds in partnership with local employers.
- Most schools have run at least one GNVQ Part One programme and many have implemented full award GNVQ intermediate in Key Stage 4.
- New GCSEs in vocational subjects have been introduced, building on existing expertise and provision in institutions within the pathfinder.

The outcomes are impressive:

- Over three times as many 14-16 year olds are following vocational courses compared with 1999/2000.
- There has been a significant increase in the number of learners taking GCSEs in vocational subjects, with similar increases projected in those opting for vocational A levels and other vocational qualifications at 16.
- Attendance and motivation have improved.
- Increases in attainment at 16 are rolling through into increases in intermediate and advanced achievement at 19.

English, mathematics and ICT in main learning

91. Alongside the core subjects of functional maths, literacy and communication and ICT, all young people must have access to wider or more conceptual and theoretical mathematics, English and ICT, either as key components of their main learning or to supplement another specialism within a named diploma.

92. Any learning and achievement beyond the core requirements in these subjects should be accredited and contribute to the main learning requirements of the diploma. This would require the development of a range of components alongside those which are designed simply to satisfy the core requirements. Drawing upon the model developed by Professor Adrian Smith for post-14 mathematics in his report, *Making Mathematics Count* we believe that the range of components should comprise:

- **core components** – components which meet only the core requirements of a diploma at each level;
- **extended components** – components which satisfy the core requirements in the relevant subject but also cover broader or more theoretical and conceptual aspects of the subject. Such components would count towards the main learning requirements as well as the core requirements in the relevant subject; and

- **transition components** – components which bridge the gap between core and extended component, and therefore enable young people who have already passed a core component to upgrade their achievement as a basis for progressing to higher levels of achievement in the wider study of mathematics, English or ICT. Transition components would count only towards main learning requirements.

93. In addition, we believe there will be a strong case for the development of mathematics, English and ICT components for learners not taking them as subjects in their own right, but who will need elements of them to support, and count towards, their main learning. Such components would build on the current availability of qualifications like statistics for non-specialists, which can be tailored to support a variety of other subjects and areas of learning.

Recommendation 13

We recommend that – alongside functional maths, literacy and communication and ICT – extended, transition and supplementary components should be available to ensure that these subjects can be pursued in breadth and depth as part of the main learning requirements of 14-19 programmes and diplomas.

Modern foreign and community languages

94. Modern languages skills have a particular importance to economic success in the increasingly internationalised business environment. Alongside the specific skills which it delivers, the teaching and learning of a foreign language is an effective way of fostering the understanding of other countries and other cultures which we have identified as an element of CKSA. Within the overall 14-19 framework, we are concerned to ensure that all young people have access to flexible teaching and learning in modern foreign languages, building upon the developments already in hand through the Government's national languages strategy, and that community languages are given the respect they deserve and recognised as a valuable asset for the future.

95. In particular we support the development of a graded 'languages ladder' to enable learners to progress in one or more of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) in one or more languages.

96. We also support the current statutory entitlement of all 14-16 year olds to study at least one modern foreign language. To ensure consistency across the 14-19 framework, we believe that this entitlement should be extended to 16-19 year olds.

97. For those who wish to focus on language learning after compulsory schooling, there should be within the diploma lines options to specialise in modern foreign languages. Within other specialisations, languages may also have a role in supporting the main area of specialisation either as an elective or compulsory component of main learning. Such options may well be tailored to support the main 'named' area of learning.

Recommendation 14

In developing the new 14-19 framework the Government should ensure a comprehensive and flexible modern foreign language offer, building upon the national languages strategy, and ensuring that the 'languages ladder' is integrated into the reformed system.

The existing entitlement to study a modern foreign language at Key Stage 4 should be extended to 16-19 year olds.

The diploma lines should include the option to specialise in modern foreign languages.

The design criteria and process for all named diploma lines should ensure that consideration is given to the inclusion of supplementary modern foreign languages learning as either an elective or a compulsory component.

Chapter 4

Diploma volume, thresholds and progression

This chapter sets out proposals for establishing the thresholds for the combination and level of core and main learning and the overall size of all diplomas within the new framework.

The threshold requirements for each diploma should be achieved through specified combinations of components at the level of the diploma and at the level below, so that they ‘interlock’ and ‘pull’ young people through the diploma levels, helping in particular to tackle the current high drop-out rates at age 16/17.

Components within diplomas should also be transferable where relevant to other diplomas at the same level. This would facilitate transfer and progression within the level.

A credit system should be used as the basis for establishing the threshold requirements for each diploma:

- *For the purposes of exemplifying the system, this chapter assumes that each diploma would require the learner to pass core and main learning components in specified combinations worth a total of at least 180 credits.*
- *Approximately one-third of the credits should be allocated for successful completion of the core, with the remainder being achieved through main learning.*

Diploma levels

98. Each level of the framework would represent at least the same level of demand as typical programmes within the current system and in many cases would be more stretching. For example, the requirement of the intermediate diploma to achieve the core at intermediate level in some respects makes it more demanding than currently where intermediate achievement is usually understood to be five GCSEs at grades A*-C in any subjects, with no requirement to achieve in mathematics or English.

99. The division of the framework into diploma lines would ensure that all learners could identify clear and transparent progression routes. At no stage would they hit dead ends or barriers within the framework.

Interlocking diplomas

100. The minimum requirements for all diplomas should include learning not just at the level of the overall diploma (e.g. the intermediate components within an intermediate diploma) but also some at the level below (e.g. foundation components within an intermediate diploma), so that diplomas at different levels overlap or ‘interlock’. Through this interlocking, young people achieving, for instance, a foundation diploma, would also begin to satisfy some of the requirements for an intermediate diploma, thus providing a bridge between diplomas at these levels and promoting progression from one level to the next. This pattern of learning is already evident in many existing

Figure 4.1: The diploma framework and existing qualifications

Diploma level	National Qualifications Framework level	Existing national qualification
Advanced	Level 3	Advanced Extension Award; GCE AS and A level; level 3 NVQ; equivalent qualifications
Intermediate	Level 2	GCSE at grades A*-C; intermediate GNVQ; level 2 NVQ; equivalent qualifications
Foundation	Level 1	GCSE at grades D-G; foundation GNVQ; level 1 NVQ; equivalent qualifications
Entry	Entry	Entry Level Certificates; other work below level 1

14-19 programmes both in learners mixing GCSEs and A levels, and in many large vocational qualifications, such as BTEC National Diplomas, which although at advanced level overall, contain units at intermediate level. It is also a feature of some apprenticeships.

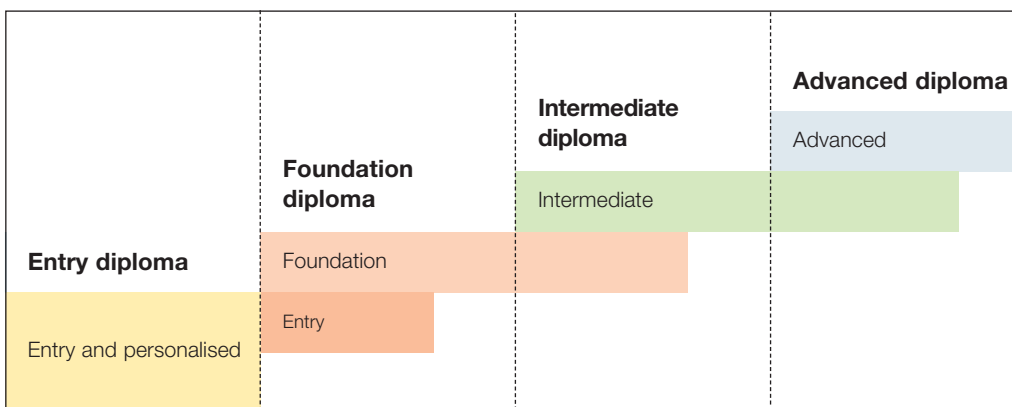
101. Those learners who are able to could exceed the minimum by securing a greater proportion of achievement at the higher of the two levels. For example, a learner could achieve an intermediate diploma on the basis of components all at intermediate level, rather than a combination of foundation and intermediate components. Learners could also receive credit for components above the level of the diploma. For instance, a learner whose main programme is aimed at achieving a foundation diploma could study at intermediate level in one or more subjects. Achievement at this level should generally be able to take the place of a foundation component in the same subject within the diploma (i.e. the higher level subsumes the lower) and would be recorded through the transcript accompanying the award of the foundation diploma, as well as counting towards a subsequent intermediate diploma. This applies equally at advanced level, where those who can should be able to progress beyond advanced level in some aspect of their learning. This, too, should be recorded on the transcript.

Recommendation 15

All diplomas should contain learning not just at the level of the diploma but also at the level below.

Designers of specialised diplomas should be asked to ensure that there is some overlap between the intermediate and advanced versions of their diplomas (e.g. that advanced level diplomas contain some intermediate material), while also ensuring that the balance of the diploma conforms with the requirements for the relevant level.

Figure 4.2: Interlocking diploma thresholds



Progressing through the system

102. The framework would allow learners to achieve diplomas at successive levels during the 14-19 phase. Many learners, particularly those entering the framework at intermediate or foundation level, would progress through the system in the same way that young people move through different qualifications now, by completing a diploma at that level before moving on to the next. But this method of progression would not be a requirement, and some may move quickly through a lower level and on to advanced level without 'claiming' a diploma at lower levels, receiving only one diploma towards the end of the 14-19 phase.

103. Some learners may achieve more than one diploma at the same level, progressing from an open diploma to greater specialisation. In doing so they would be able to transfer credits gained for relevant (particularly core) components.

104. Many young people proceed at a different pace in different elements of their programmes. They may, for instance, be working at foundation level in some subjects and intermediate or advanced level in others. The diploma would facilitate such patterns of learning, ensuring that faster progress in some components would be recognised on the transcript and provide the basis for achievement at higher levels.

105. This flexibility would be further enhanced by the absence of any expectation that diplomas would be awarded at specific ages. This means that those who needed it could take an extra year to gain a diploma at a higher level, rather than settling for one at a lower level.

106. Interlocking also enables many young people who have achieved a diploma at the lower level to complete a relatively short conversion programme to gain a diploma at the next higher level in only one year, often focusing on a particular specialist area. This builds on current practice, particularly in colleges, where some post-16 learners take one year to build on their achievements to 16 to obtain an intermediate level qualification, often focusing on a vocational specialism, before progressing to advanced level. In designing the detailed diploma framework, further work is needed to ensure that such young people are able to count their attainment pre-16, towards such 'conversion' programmes to promote their continued engagement and progression and enable them to move quickly to advanced level.

Using a credit system

107. Any system which combines units or components into whole programmes needs a means of measuring the amount or volume of learning successfully undertaken by the learner. We believe that a credit system provides the most appropriate means of expressing and measuring the amount of learning undertaken by learners within the reformed 14-19 framework, and of providing a mechanism for consistent aggregation of components into whole diplomas.

108. There might be various ways of measuring the volume of learning within individual components. A common measure is the amount of taught, guided and supervised learning time. This is an effective measure of the time and teaching resource needed to deliver the learning; and it would be necessary to ensure that the content of 14-19 programmes and diplomas can realistically be delivered within approximately 1,200 hours of taught or guided learning. But this takes no account of the additional learning which learners may need to undertake outside the classroom.

109. The QCA work on the adult qualifications and credit framework takes a broader view by assigning a single credit to each 10 hours of notional total learning time, including unsupervised learning such as homework assignments. This is closer to being a measure of the total amount of learning and we propose a compatible credit arrangement for the 14-19 framework, to promote smooth progression and credit transfer between 14-19 and adult learning.

Recommendation 16

Each available diploma component should be assigned a credit value according to the volume of learning it contains, and each diploma should require successful achievement of a minimum number of credits. The way credit is established for 14-19 diplomas should be the same as that for qualifications within the adult framework.

Diploma volume

110. For the purpose of this report we have assumed that each diploma should require the learner successfully to complete at least 180 credits at the appropriate levels. Of course the length of time that a learner may take to complete a programme and achieve 180 credits may vary. Some may attain the minimum threshold in two years. Others may take longer or may be able to build on earlier achievements to meet threshold requirements in just one year. Within the threshold requirements for each diploma:

- **main learning** should normally account for approximately 70% of the minimum required credits at all diploma levels (except within entry diplomas where the volume and balance of learning will be determined more flexibly); and
- **core learning** would normally account for approximately 30% of the minimum required credits at all diploma levels (again except within the more flexible entry diplomas). The credits would be achieved through the functional mathematics, literacy and communication, and ICT components and the extended project.

Component level

111. In addition to specifying the volume of learning through credit values, the system must also be able to differentiate between components at different levels. Broadly this means that while credit is a measure of volume, it is not a measure of the level of learning. At each level, diplomas require exactly the same number of credits, but the level of the components that generate those credits would be different in each case.

Diploma thresholds

112. The following illustrates how the minimum thresholds for open diplomas at advanced, intermediate and foundation levels might be expressed in terms of credits and component level. The entry diploma has also been expressed in terms of credit. Credit in this case would be awarded for successful completion of a personalised programme:

Advanced diploma

113. Over the period of the programme, the learner would need to have attained a minimum of 180 credits:

Main learning – 120 credits	At least 40 credits at advanced (A2) level	
	Remaining credits (up to 80) at advanced (A1) level	
Core – 60 credits	Extended project	20 credits at advanced level
	Functional mathematics	} Total 40 credits at intermediate level
	Functional literacy and communication	
	Functional ICT	

Intermediate diploma

114. Over the period of the programme, the learner would need to have attained a minimum of 180 credits:

Main learning – 120 credits	At least 60 credits at intermediate level or above	
	Remaining credits (up to 60) at foundation level	
Core – 60 credits	Extended project	20 credits at intermediate level
	Functional mathematics	} Total 40 credits at intermediate level
	Functional literacy and communication	
	ICT	

Foundation diploma

115. Over the period of the programme, the learner would need to have attained a minimum of 180 credits:

Main learning – 120 credits	At least 60 credits at foundation level or above	
	Remaining credits (up to 60) at entry level	
Core – 60 credits	Extended project	20 credits at foundation level
	Functional mathematics	} Total 40 credits at foundation level
	Functional literacy and communication	
	ICT	

Entry diploma

116. Over the period of the programme, the learner would need to have attained a minimum of 180 credits. These credits would be accumulated through a personalised programme. Components would be available for inclusion in personalised programmes which meet the entry level threshold of the National Qualifications Framework. These components would contribute towards foundation diplomas, ensuring that entry and foundation levels interlock.

Chapter 5

Meeting the needs of different learners – entry, foundation, intermediate and advanced programmes and diplomas

The preceding chapters have set out the generic template for 14-19 programmes and diplomas. This chapter focuses on the distinctive features of programmes and diplomas at entry, foundation, intermediate and advanced level. These have been designed to meet the needs of different groups of learners:

- *young people who are not ready or able to access full programmes and diplomas at foundation level or higher;*
- *young people at foundation level, some of whom will progress to intermediate level and others who are unlikely to do so during the 14-19 phase, though they may do so later;*
- *young people on the borderline between foundation and intermediate level, who need flexibility to work and achieve at both levels;*
- *young people at intermediate level, some of whom will progress to advanced level and others who are unlikely to do so during the 14-19 phase, though they may do so later; and*
- *young people at advanced level, including very able learners who need to be challenged and able to demonstrate their full ability.*

Entry programmes and diplomas

117. More learners at entry than at other levels are likely to experience difficulty with learning, to be involved with other agencies such as health and social services and to need additional time to consolidate progress made in learning. We recognise that young people who have special educational needs will be engaged at all diploma levels although those with the most significant and profound may continue studying for their entry diploma throughout the 14-19 phase.

118. Lord Dearing's *Review of Qualifications for 16 -19 Year Olds* (1996) recommended the establishment of entry level because of the motivation it would offer learners. This has been borne out in the success of Entry Level Certificates and motivation is prioritised in the model for entry programmes and diplomas offered here. Entry level has not been considered a pre-requisite for progression within the qualifications framework or to employment. The motivational benefits to the learner secured by successful completion of an entry programme could therefore be available to all learners below foundation level.

119. Learners' programmes at this level would be based on an Individual Learning Plan designed around their strengths and needs, together with personal learning targets. Achievement against these targets would be measured by the teacher. Those who achieve their targets should receive an entry diploma, recognising their progress and achievement.

120. Targets must be both realistic and challenging for the individual learner, and those who are capable of doing so should be encouraged to undertake some components at foundation level or above. Those who find it difficult to make progress would have personal targets that reflect the distance they have travelled in their learning, even if they fall short of established national qualification levels.

Recommendation 17

Learners who cannot access full programmes at foundation level or above should have access to programmes based on personalised planning and targets and entry level components.

The entry diploma should incorporate all the principal features of the diplomas at other levels, including all the elements of core and main learning tailored to the learners' needs. The balance between, and levels of achievement within, core and main learning should be allowed to vary according to the capabilities of the learner.

In-course assessment should predominate at this level, supported by training and exemplars to ensure consistent application of standards. Achievement of the diploma should be based on the attainment of individual learning goals.

Successful completion of a personalised programme below foundation level should be recognised through award of an entry diploma.

Entry diplomas should interlock with foundation level through target-setting processes which ensure that learners with the capability undertake components at entry, foundation or higher levels as part of their personalised programme.

121. The opportunity to engage in an extended project (see chapter 3) would be particularly motivational at this level. In many cases it would be the vehicle through which many of the learning goals of the diploma can be achieved.

122. Within main learning, we have identified four areas which evidence shows would allow many learners at this level to make progress. Because they are so key to success we propose that post-16, learners have the opportunity to focus on one or more of:

- preparing for employment;
- preparing for independent adult living;
- developing study or learning skills; and
- preparing for supported living.

123. Pre-16 main learning would cover the statutory requirements of Key Stage 4 where applicable.

124. Centres would be free to devise their own programmes, but, as at other levels, components should also be available nationally for inclusion in entry diplomas and programmes where appropriate. The availability of such components would help to make the delivery of the diploma manageable for providers.

Recommendation 18

Entry programmes and diplomas should provide and recognise a range of options relevant to learners' particular needs in employment, later learning and adult life. This should include to the opportunity to undertake components in:

- preparing for employment;
- preparing for independent adult living;
- developing study or learning skills; and
- preparing for supported living.

The broad design framework of entry components should be determined centrally, but schools and colleges should be able to develop their own components and programmes to meet the individual needs of their learners.

A central bank of 'off-the-shelf' components should be available to support entry diplomas.

125. A model of the entry diploma can be found at annex F.

Foundation and intermediate level

126. The great majority of young people will follow a foundation and/or intermediate level programmes at some time between the ages of 14 and 19. These will represent a stepping-stone for some and considerable terminal achievement for others. Some learners would achieve a foundation or intermediate diploma by the end of Key Stage 4, while others would get the diploma at 17, 18 or 19. For these latter young people in particular, we strongly believe that a foundation or intermediate diploma should represent a positive celebration of relevant achievement.

127. This relies upon good quality provision across the full range of diploma options. Outside the well-known GCSE route, too many current options at these levels lack credibility, status or relevance. It is essential that this is tackled through the availability of high-quality options and components which are closely linked to and designed for further progression within the diploma framework and/or which equip young people at this level with knowledge and skills which will be valuable in employment and adult life. These components must build on learners' interests and aspirations to ensure that they remain engaged and motivated. This is particularly important for those learners who find the current diet of GCSEs inappropriate and demotivating.

128. It is necessary also to strike a balance between allowing young people to find their own level within the foundation and intermediate range, and not seeing foundation level as a 'failed intermediate'. The current GCSE pattern of covering both levels in a single qualification, based largely on the result of a terminal examination, meets the first requirement by recognising a broad span of achievement, but it has also created a widespread perception that anything less than a grade C is failure. Nevertheless, we believe it right in principle that diploma components should be able to cover both levels where the content is appropriate (broadly, those in which the subject content is the same but the level at which the learner covers it can differ widely). This allows 'headroom' for learners on the borderline who may be capable of achievement at intermediate level.

129. The nature of some subjects, in which the actual content (rather than level of knowledge and understanding) is different at foundation and intermediate level, will be an obstacle to designing components capable of recognising achievement at more than one level. In such cases, teacher-led assessment would facilitate early judgements about the higher potential of some learners, who can be transferred to higher level components accordingly.

130. Fostering appreciation of foundation level as worthwhile in its own right means creating a culture in which learners understand their progress, using an assessment regime that helps them build up a picture of their progress as they learn. The award at the end of the programme can then be seen as recognition of achievement and progress built up over time – and not hinged on an "all-or-nothing" terminal examination as is often the case currently. This would ensure that those at foundation level get positive, ongoing recognition for their achievements, while those on the borderline and potentially capable of achieving at intermediate level, would have the opportunity to do so.

131. Open diplomas at foundation and intermediate level would be the principal offer for young people in Key Stage 4. These diplomas must build on the strengths of the current GCSE route, but should also offer motivational and relevant alternatives for learners for whom the existing GCSE diet is demotivating or inappropriate. The existing National Curriculum requirements enable 14-16 year olds to spend at least 40% of their teaching and learning time on non-compulsory options. Existing initiatives such as the Increased Flexibility Programme, and GCSEs in vocational subjects, are increasingly allowing young people to focus on practical or vocational options while also meeting the requirements of the National Curriculum. The more recent introduction of Young Apprenticeships has taken the delivery of structured vocational learning at KS4 a step further. All of these may be developed into specialised, and especially vocational, options within open diplomas at foundation and/or intermediate level. It is critical that they be carefully linked to, and allow progression to, the specialised diploma lines at higher levels, as well as within the open diploma line.

Recommendation 19

Components and programmes should be developed that recognise the particular needs of learners for whom foundation level would be a significant achievement. These must stand in their own right as effective preparation for employment and adult life for those who are not yet capable of progressing further in learning. Alongside specialised vocational and practical options, these might include components in life skills such as personal finance and food preparation.

Specialised options should be developed within open programmes at foundation and intermediate level, building upon initiatives such as the Increased Flexibility Programme and Young Apprenticeships to provide practical, coherent alternatives to GCSE at key stage 4 and to promote progression into relevant open and specialised diploma lines at the end of Key Stage 4.

Assessment at foundation and intermediate components should either:

- enable learners to demonstrate a range of achievement spanning foundation and intermediate level; or, where this is not possible; and
- allow and encourage rapid progression from foundation level to components at intermediate level.

Advanced programmes and diplomas

At advanced level the key issues are:

- *raising the proportion gaining advanced level qualifications to the proportion found in many other European countries, particularly through the introduction of specialised diplomas of a vocational nature;*
- *raising the ceiling on advanced level to enable the most able learners to demonstrate and gain clear credit for achievement beyond that currently identifiable within existing advanced level qualifications and programmes;*
- *promoting greater breadth of knowledge and experience within advanced level programmes, and more effective acquisition of high level research, problem solving and independent working skills; and*
- *reducing the burden and constraints of assessment and allowing more space for learning and for learners to pursue aspects of their subjects in greater depth.*

132. Advanced level must be flexible enough to accommodate and meet the needs of the highest achievers in the 14-19 cohort, preparing them to progress effectively into higher education and demanding training or employment. At the same time it needs to provide an upper secondary terminal certificate for well over the 50% of 17 year olds who currently study at this level¹¹ so as to bring us into line with participation and achievement rates in other advanced economies.

¹¹ DfES, SFR 18/2004, Table 4b.

133. Raising participation at advanced level crucially depends on developing solid vocational programmes at this level, as other countries have done, and as we have partially attempted in the past. Fewer than one in five of our 17 year olds currently study for advanced level in a vocational topic. The number of young people starting an advanced apprenticeship has halved since 1997. Our proposals for specialised diplomas are designed to make a major impact in this respect, with fluid progression routes to them from both intermediate open diplomas and from specialised diplomas at the intermediate level.

134. The increasing proportion of young people achieving the highest grades at advanced level has reduced the extent to which the current A level grading range is providing the information needed to differentiate between high achievers. There would be a range of arithmetical means of sub-dividing grade A candidates – for instance by publishing scores as well as grades for whole A levels or individual units or by identifying where in the grade A range the candidate lies. Such methods might be useful additional information, which could be made available to HE admissions officers, employers and others, but they would not guarantee that advanced programmes within the diploma framework test a higher level of knowledge, skills and understanding than current A level examination or that learners themselves are stretched to achieve above the existing range of A level achievement.

135. We therefore propose that the highest levels of achievement should be recognised by extending the grading range at advanced level by incorporating the levels of demand currently associated with Advanced Extension Awards, and by remodelling advanced vocational programmes to enable young people to demonstrate similarly high levels of achievement relevant to their chosen specialisation. This will ensure that high achievers are able to demonstrate not only that they are positioned very high in the A level cohort, but that they have achieved *beyond* the levels tested by current advanced qualifications.

136. For some learners, even this extended range of advanced level achievement would not be sufficiently testing. They need a greater challenge, which can be provided by the availability of components at level 4. While such outstanding progress would not itself result in a higher diploma award, it would be recognised on the transcript, providing strong evidence of a very high level of achievement – attractive to HE and employers alike.

137. Breadth of achievement would be secured by core requirements to attain intermediate level in functional mathematics, functional literacy and communication and functional ICT. For those who have already achieved this, advanced level components in these subjects should be available. In addition, high level investigation, planning, and analysis that begin to draw on the research skills commonly seen in industry and in higher education would be developed through the extended project. Breadth in main learning would be encouraged by opportunities to undertake complementary or contrasting learning and for this to contribute to the award of a merit or distinction for the diploma.

138. Reduction in the volume of assessment at advanced level (described in chapter 9) would ensure that all learners at advanced level have the space to pursue specific aspects of their chosen subjects or areas of learning in depth, rather than always requiring coverage of the whole syllabus (though this may still be appropriate for some components).

Chapter 6

Assessing the diploma

This chapter proposes significant reform in the nature of assessment and testing, particularly at intermediate level and below. The current system, particularly within GCSEs, encourages a repetitive and burdensome focus on external assessment of individual learners and fails to make use of the significant expertise and professional judgement of those who know the learners' work the best – their teachers and lecturers. A young person doing eight GCSEs and three A levels will take 42 external examinations, and lose about two terms' worth of learning in preparation and examination time. An average school pays £150,000 a year in examination entry fees, and an average college £300,000.

For assessment of components derived from the existing GCSE system, we believe it is possible to make a radical shift in this balance. The key to this is to use external scrutiny not principally to mark and grade individual learners' performance but to maintain the quality and professionalism of teachers' own judgements. Teachers should be given the freedom to make definitive, evidence-based judgements on their learners' work, according to clearly established national standards, and a quality control framework which guarantees the dependability of teacher-led assessment.

At advanced level, the changes to the assessment regime would reflect the need for finer distinctions between candidate performance and its role in leading to a wider range of destinations/progression opportunities than at other levels. For these reasons advanced level would maintain a balance between internal and external assessment. However, we believe that this can be made to be more fit for purpose, with subject content determining the balance and nature of assessment, assessment taking place in relevant contexts and a substantial reduction in the burden of assessment.

In time, we believe that the assessment regime at other levels may be applied to advanced level, although it would remain the case that advanced level would continue to require a higher degree of competitive differentiation among candidates, particularly A2, because performance is more finely judged for the purpose of entry to employment and higher education.

Principles

139. Assessment during the 14-19 phase performs the following functions:

- **diagnosis:** helping young people to establish a baseline and understand their progress, strengths and development needs;
- **recognition and motivation:** recording and rewarding learners' progress and achievement;
- **standard setting:** confirming levels and thresholds of achievement; and
- **differentiation and selection:** enabling employers and HE to understand what young people have achieved, and how individuals compare to their peers.

140. All of these purposes are useful and necessary. But the relevance of each, and the balance between them, will vary at different points during the 14-19 phase and with different types of learning.

141. To fulfil these purposes, assessment should:

- measure achievement in ways suited to the subject, level and type of learning, testing different types of knowledge, skills and understanding in ways which reflect their nature. Practical and skills-based learning should be assessed differently from subject knowledge and theoretical understanding, so that a young person's results are an accurate and realistic representation of the contents of their learning;
- have consistency and wider currency, underpinned by appropriate quality assurance, to enable employers, HE and others to understand what young people have achieved and to select and differentiate between them;
- help learners to extend, deepen or consolidate their knowledge, skills and understanding and provide formative feedback on their progress as a natural part of teaching and learning;
- enrich their experience through a variety of types and styles of assessment which test their attainment in a variety of ways, including time-limited tests and examinations, project and portfolio work and through ongoing assessment of their progress and capabilities;
- avoid undue burden on learners, teachers, and awarding bodies; allow time for learning; and embrace the potential benefits of e-assessment; and
- make appropriate use of the professional judgement of teachers, who are in the best position to follow and assess learners' progress and attainment over the course of the programme.

142. In balancing these factors in different ways and for different purposes across the 14-19 phase, we believe it is necessary to tackle the following concerns about existing assessment arrangements:

- over-reliance on formal, externally set and marked examinations part-way through the 14-19 phase, which contributes to the perception of age 16/17 as a break-point in learning and reinforces the pre-16/post-16 divide;
- 'academic drift' in the assessment of vocational learning – movement away from practical and continuous assessment towards external written examinations which skew the teaching and learning of some practical and vocational courses;
- excessive burdens on learners, teachers, institutions and awarding bodies, from the number of examinations which many young people now take, the increasing number of examination entries and the administrative and other arrangements which support the examinations system;
- unimaginative, over-specified and repetitive coursework, often testing the same skills in several subjects; and
- lack of scope for learners to demonstrate in-depth knowledge and critical analysis, driven by the need for teaching and learning to focus on broad, but relatively shallow, coverage across the whole of each subject.

International systems

143. No other qualifications and assessment system in Europe is built solely on national examinations. In many other countries, high status qualifications and assessment systems are built on different processes. Teacher assessment is a common, often dominant, characteristic of the lower secondary phase of education in the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, Germany and France.¹² Such a system also operates in Australia,¹³ the United States and in New Zealand.

Sweden

The Swedish school leaving certificate (*Slutbetyg från grundskolan*) taken at the end of compulsory comprehensive education, is assessed mainly by teachers, with national standardisation through the quality assurance measures taken by the municipality. There are national tests in Swedish, English and mathematics, which are used to calibrate school assessments, but it is not essential for each pupil to take the tests.

The upper secondary school leaving certificate (*Slutbetyg från gymnasieskolan*) offers a choice of 17 programmes, two of which are academic. Syllabuses are nationally determined, with core and optional subjects. There are compulsory national tests in Swedish/Swedish as a second language, English and mathematics; for other subjects teachers decide the assessment method and undertake the assessment.

For the apprenticeship programme learners take a school component, based on the upper secondary curriculum and a locally determined and assessed component of 'learning in working life'.

144. Such systems are also characterised by:

- a mixed economy of internal and external assessment in upper secondary education (post-16);
- teachers being trained effectively for their role in assessment.

145. In tackling the concerns about assessment in this country we believe we can learn from these examples and develop a system which recognises much more clearly the distinction between milestones and progress checks part-way through 14-19 learning on the one hand, and terminal assessment and certification at the end of the phase on the other.

146. In particular, we believe that within the diploma framework a radical shift can be effected in the assessment methods and processes currently associated with GCSEs by moving to a system in which the professional judgement of teachers predominates.

¹² T. Leney and C. Ward, (QCA) *What can we learn from present-day teacher assessment practices internationally?* (2004 – unpublished).

¹³ G.S. Maxwell, *Progressive assessment for learning and certification: some lessons from school-based assessment in Queensland* (March 2004). Paper presented at the Third Conference of the Association of Commonwealth Examination and Assessment Boards, Redefining the Roles of Educational Assessment, Fiji.

Assuring standards

147. The first priority in the reform we propose is to ensure that the teachers are equipped with the knowledge and expertise to play a greater role in the assessment of their learners, underpinned by robust national and local quality assurance systems which offer a guarantee of comparability of standards across the education and training system as a whole. Currently, the guarantee of consistency of standards is provided very largely through external judgement about each learner's achievement. We envisage that it is possible to move to a system in which external quality assurance focuses on the ability of institutions and teachers to make such judgements themselves.

148. The quality assurance system we envisage is one where:

- QCA would be responsible for overseeing national consistency in the demand of diplomas, including components and diploma content and clear statements about the levels of achievement expected at any given level. National exemplars and guidance would be developed and used for training of teachers and other assessors;
- only approved or licensed awarding bodies would contribute to the diploma system, on either a full diploma or component basis. Approval would depend in part on the quality of their standard-setting and support for individual teachers and institutions. Consistency in the judgements would be obtained through these bodies supporting local and/or subject-based networks of teachers, developing and consolidating assessment expertise supported by training and clear guidance on standards;
- the quality and consistency of judgements made in institutions would be tested through national 'sampling' and comparison of assessment outcomes;
- awarding organisations would have a role in providing moderation (i.e. double-checking of the original assessment) of judgements made by institutions. Their role could also include the organisation of local moderation arrangements. Decisions would probably need to be made at a subject level;
- centre approval would act as a 'licence to assess' diplomas, depending in part on inspection and other evidence of institutions' ability to conform to national standards of assessment and quality assurance in applying professional teacher-led judgements;
- an Institute of Assessment would support the professional development of teachers and ensure that all of those operating the system develop expertise in assessment practice; and
- internal quality assurance systems would include internal moderation and verification procedures. Chartered Assessors in each school, college and training provider would be integral to developing their institutions' assessment strategies and managing this process.

149. The Institute of Assessment is to be made operational in 2005. We believe it will have a pivotal role in providing rigour and quality of assessment in schools, colleges, training centres and the workplace. The Institute will support the professional development and standing of teachers, markers, examiners, moderators, assessors and verifiers by providing membership services, training and qualifications. It will have an important role in supporting public confidence and recognition of the role of assessors. As the Chartered Assessors initiative develops, under the auspices of the institute, it will be important to give careful thought to how their role in quality assuring the assessment process in institutions might work. The co-ordination of assessment

activity and the need to raise the profile of this role and its importance in securing quality teaching and learning is a critical function in our vision of in-course assessment. Many further education institutions are accustomed to the responsibilities described here and it is important that we can learn from this experience in rolling out a national system for quality assurance.

Entry, foundation and intermediate level assessment: the model

150. With a quality assurance system along these lines, we believe that, in place of the existing GCSE style assessment which most learners undergo part way through their 14-19 learning, it would be possible to move to a system of assessment led by teachers, tutors and trainers exercising their professional judgement. For many this would not be a new role. Currently there are 57,000 teachers who work as professional examiners, moderators and verifiers, therefore providing an immediate pool of expertise within schools and colleges. In addition, every teacher and tutor is already engaged in setting and marking assignments, tests and practical projects as a part of everyday teaching and learning. This work typically contributes very little to the learner's final grade, with minimal time for developing the activities, marking and sharing interpretations of the standards with other teachers.

151. A formal assessment system built around teachers' assessment of the ongoing work of the course (*not* formal coursework specified by an awarding body) would:

- support high quality teaching and learning;
- increase learners' ownership of their own work, encouraging them to work consistently well throughout the course;
- allow for more assessment in authentic settings, allowing for subject/sector validity;
- empower and motivate teachers, giving greater ownership of assessment, and therefore greater control of the curriculum; and
- promote good practice across the system as a whole.

152. The system of professional judgement that we propose would be the main form of assessing the majority of components for open diplomas at entry, foundation and intermediate levels and would be characterised by the following practice:

- assessment takes place at the point of learning in the workshop, work-based setting or classroom;
- assessment is conducted through a range of different styles including time-limited tests and examinations, set assignments, and practical and written tests and observations;
- judgements are made against a clear standard that sets out the expected level of performance and is updated on the evidence collected during the course;
- overall judgement of each young person's progress is continuously updated as s/he completes more of her/his programme and the evidence of her/his capabilities accumulates to provide a final assessment of overall attainment at the end of the programme or component;
- young people can monitor their progress on a regular basis through feedback from

their teachers, improve their work and work towards the highest levels of attainment of which they are capable;

- teachers and trainers are fully trained and supported for their role as assessors, mentors and advisers, and this expertise attracts professional recognition;
- training in the interpretation of nationally determined assessment criteria and their consistent application is provided using externally produced exemplar material and tests. Local and subject-based networks of teachers and assessors promote best practice and ensure that standards are consistent between institutions and within and across subjects;
- teachers can draw on a bank of national tests, some of which are externally marked, to reinforce the assessment tasks they set themselves and to assist in the national quality assurance system;
- each institution has a cadre of Chartered Assessors to lead in the development and implementation of its assessment strategy; and has the systems – and staff with the expertise – to underpin effective assessment, verification and moderation; and
- awarding bodies are responsible for ensuring that assessment is of the appropriate quality to verify grades and to handle appeals.

153. The assessment and quality assurance process are illustrated in figure 6.1. Annex E sets out further details on how a teacher-led system of assessment could operate.

The role of formal external assessment and time-limited examinations

154. Good quality examinations are effective tests of knowledge, understanding and critical capacity. In-depth questions drawing on what has been learnt from across the course (synoptic assessment) help learners to develop the ability to select from and analyse a wide range of material to develop arguments and conclusions. Formal examinations and tests, when used appropriately, can target precise elements of knowledge very accurately. Such examinations can be set and/or marked either by teachers (internal examinations) or by awarding bodies (external examinations). In either case, the test results would contribute to the teacher's overall judgement.

155. While we have characterised this system as being predominantly based on teacher judgement, there would still be an important role for traditional external assessment – set and marked by awarding bodies. We propose that a process of external examinations should be developed appropriate to the nature of the subject. We would expect every programme to include an element of nationally prescribed tests to help reinforce teachers' own judgements. Using banks of appropriate pre-tested questions there would be no requirement for such tests all to be sat at a particular time on a particular day. The marking of such tests would be open to both internal and external moderation and these results, based upon a secure national standard, could be used to moderate the teacher judgements of the in-course assessment, forming a strand of the quality assurance system.

E-assessment

156. The capacity and technology for e-assessment is developing rapidly. We recognise the potential of this development to enhance the quality and efficiency of assessment. E-assessment should not be construed as limited to quick multiple-choice testing; it has the potential to test learners in both structured and unstructured environments, with both short and long answer questions, as well as the ability to use techniques such as video clips to test a wider range of knowledge, skills and understanding than is possible at present. Such tests can be assessed rapidly by awarding bodies, reducing the burden on all. We have not sought to predict what may be possible over the 10 years it will take to implement our proposed reforms, but the implementation process must take account of the new opportunities which technological development permits and lessons learned from the QCA's work on the KS3 ICT assessment pilot.

Making the transition

157. We recognise the extent to which these proposals are a departure from existing practice and represent a significant shift in the existing culture, which places a premium on external examinations. While we believe that this is achievable there can be no irrevocable change without the most careful preparation and testing. A pre-condition is robust evidence that all the aspects of this system can be put in place and made to operate effectively and fairly. To manage the transition effectively while maintaining public and professional confidence, a carefully managed programme of preparation would be required, which would need to be based on:

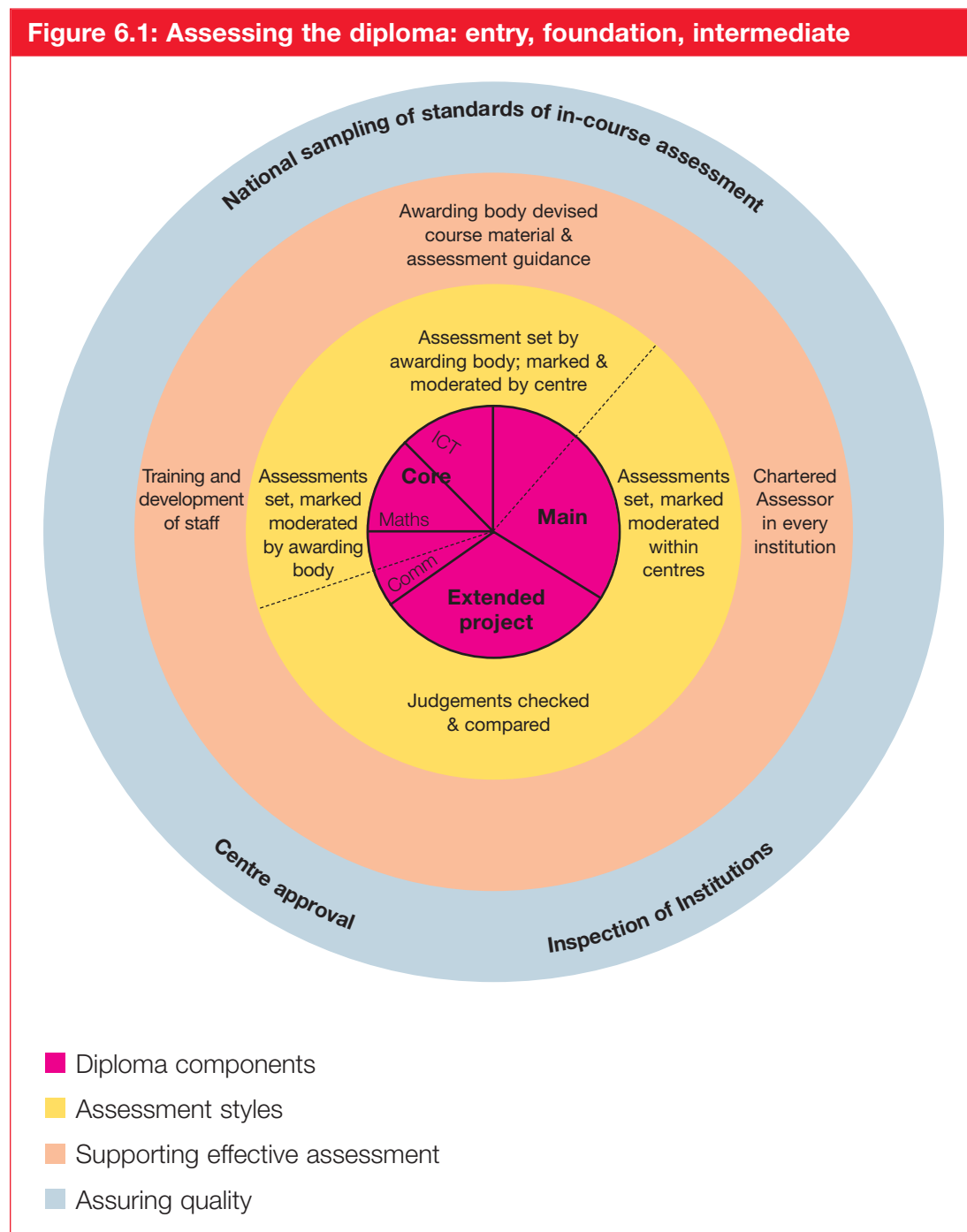
- extensive research, testing and piloting to ensure that the methods are manageable and for learners and teachers alike, and that their impact on equal opportunities is monitored;
- extensive training and support beginning at the earliest opportunity; and
- excellent communication with teachers and those operating the systems of assessment and quality assurance.

158. The evidence resulting from research, testing and piloting must indicate that this approach is fair, manageable and carries the support of parents, teachers, employers and higher education.

159. There is experience from previous practice in the United Kingdom on which to build, such as Mode III Certificate of Secondary Education in the 70s and 80s and the 100% coursework option for the GCSE English in the 80s and 90s. The lessons from these need to be absorbed into the 14-19 reform process. Encouragingly there is also a number of pilot qualifications that have been accredited by QCA that aim to test and evaluate different approaches to in-course assessment. The results of this work and the development of further trials would need to inform the development of in-course assessment models.

160. Further work will be needed too on the implications of a teacher-led assessment system on measures of institutional performance, which for 16 and 19 year olds are based on externally-assessed qualifications. Chapter 15 sets out the principles which we believe should inform the necessary review of institutional performance measurement.

Figure 6.1: Assessing the diploma: entry, foundation, intermediate



Recommendation 20

In open diplomas at entry, foundation and intermediate levels, in-course assessment within clear national standards should be the predominant mode of assessment.

Assessment should be based upon a mixture of: ongoing assessment; one-off, time limited, internal and external written and practical tests and examinations; and project/portfolio work.

Teachers should be able to draw upon banks of tests to supplement the assessment tasks which they devise themselves.

The focus of external assessment and quality control should be on ensuring that teacher-led judgements are exercised reliably and consistently, through mechanisms such as institutional inspections and validation, teacher training and development; sampling of candidates' work; and the establishment of a network of Chartered Assessors who can act as a focus for quality-control within their institutions.

Sufficient resources are made available for: the training and development of teaching staff; the quality assurance system set out in paragraph 148 above; a national information system and ICT infrastructure that supports tracking of performance data; and performance measures and accountability systems that support this form of assessment.

Terminal assessment at intermediate level and below

161. The proposals above primarily concern the components which develop from, and replace, GCSEs. GCSE is the form of assessment which young people are most likely to undertake at or around the mid-point of the 14-19 phase, and which currently creates an unnecessary and constraining burden on the system. While far too many young people still leave learning at this point, it is, and increasingly will be, more in the nature of a progress check or stepping stone to further 14-19 learning.

162. However, many young people currently also follow intermediate qualifications or below which are much more likely to be their exit points from 14-19 learning, although they may lead on to further qualifications outside the diploma framework. These are typically:

- intended for post-16 learning lasting one to three years;
- delivered in a college or workplace;
- vocational or occupational in nature; and
- assessed through a mix of external tests and internal assessment of knowledge, skills and competence.

163. We do not propose radical reform of the arrangements for assessing such learning. The existing range of vocational and occupational provision also includes a very wide range of assessment styles, tailored to the nature of the content of such courses and intended to underpin effective acquisition and recognition of the knowledge and skills which are relevant to work and further learning. Many existing

vocational qualifications incorporate well-established and credible assessment regimes which we would like to see carried forward into the assessment arrangements for relevant parts of the diploma framework – principally within specialised diplomas of a vocational nature.

Assessing functional mathematics, literacy and communication and ICT

164. In keeping with the role of functional mathematics, literacy and communication and ICT as elements of core learning within all diplomas and their function in providing transferable skills and knowledge, we propose that these components are externally set, marked and moderated in ways which are appropriate to the content and skills of the area. Assessment should be suited to the nature and volume of learning. Young people should be able to take them when they are ready to be assessed and have the opportunity to take them as many times as required to pass. Deciding when a young person is ready to be assessed should be agreed between the tutor and young person. The detail on the approach to assessment of these areas would need to be developed by QCA. However, we would propose that they should be developed using a ‘mastery’ model, unlike assessment of GCSEs which allows high performance in one aspect of a subject to compensate for lower performance in another. This would mean that to attain in core learning, young people would need to command good knowledge and skills in every aspect of the component. It would make this assessment a more significant hurdle, but it would ensure that all young people are adequately equipped across the range of functional mathematical, literacy and communication and ICT skills.

165. Assessment could be embedded in wider mathematics, English and ICT components, but the functional skills should be clearly identifiable. We see a potential role for e-learning and e-assessment in assessing these areas.

Recommendation 21

Assessment of functional mathematics, literacy and communication and ICT should:

- be externally set, marked and moderated and based on a mastery model;
- not create a large additional burden on learners, and where appropriate be subsumed within assessment of another relevant subject, such as English; and
- be available to be taken when a young person is ready to be assessed in that area.

QCA would need to develop approaches to the assessment of these subjects.

The extended project

166. Assessment of the extended project should operate the same system as for main learning. Ongoing assessment of the young person's performance as s/he progresses through the stages of the project would be suited to this area of learning. In addition to assessing the process skills associated with project work, such as effective planning and investigation, ability to monitor and review and to evaluate, the final outcome and its quality would also need to be judged. Young people should also be able to account for and explain their work – an ability which might be assessed through an oral presentation or viva. It is likely that assessment will take place in defined stages at various intervals over the project's duration, to ensure it remains manageable for both institutions and learners.

167. While in many cases the project would be supervised by staff within the school, college or training provider, there should also be the possibility of supervision, assessment and mentoring from outside organisations. People in business and higher education, for instance, might well have expertise and interest in playing such a part.

Recommendation 22

Assessment of the extended project should be in-course, carried out by teaching staff or suitably qualified people in other organisations, and should assess the quality of the processes as well as the final piece of work; and

Assessment should take place in stages throughout the project, including an oral presentation or viva by the learner, and against level descriptions and nationally agreed guidance and criteria.

Advanced level model

168. Although discussion of assessment at advanced level is often dominated by the arrangements for GCE A levels and their traditional reliance on externally marked public examinations, these are only one strand of advanced qualifications. Many others feature a much greater degree of in-course and continuous assessment. In particular in many well-established and highly-regarded vocational and occupational qualifications, such assessment has been effective and credible as part of a balanced package of different modes of assessment. Our proposals do not call into question these arrangements by imposing a single model for the balance between external and teacher-led assessment.

169. It would remain the case that advanced level would continue to require a finer degree of differentiation between candidates, particularly A2, because the need to permit competitive selection between individual learners means that achievement at this level is often more finely judged for the purpose of employment and, particularly, higher education. However, we believe that it would be possible to reduce significantly the quantity of assessment currently undertaken at AS/A2 level within GCE A levels because:

- a significant proportion of the generic skills which currently underpin A level coursework would be developed through the extended project; and
- the quality assurance arrangements and teachers' greater expertise in assessment at lower levels would also provide a secure basis for a greater reliance on professional teacher-led assessment at advanced level.

170. In particular we would expect the system to be able to move quickly towards a greater proportion of teacher-led assessment within the new A1 components. This would help address the problem identified elsewhere in this report of over-constrained and burdensome assessment which means that young people embarking upon A level courses have very little time to explore their chosen subjects, and find that their learning is driven by the need to undertake a high volume of regular external examinations and prescribed coursework.

171. In addition we support the recent proposal by QCA to reduce the number of assessment units within AS and A2 from three to two to allow more in-depth and exploratory learning. This should be carried through into the A1 and A2 diploma components derived from current A levels.

172. There is no single assessment model which can fit all advanced learning. Some subjects and areas would lend themselves to, and benefit from, a high level of external testing and time-limited, written examinations. Others might be more suitable for practical, teacher-led professional judgement. We see few if any arguments for a greater degree of external assessment than now in any parts of the proposed 14-19 system. Where teacher-led assessment already plays a significant part, it should be retained.

Recommendation 23

Advanced level assessment should be a balance between assessment based on professional judgement (in-course) and formal external assessment which reflects both the nature of the learning being assessed and the levels of differentiation required within individual subjects, areas of learning and individual components.

In time, there should be a shift away from external and coursework assessment towards professional, teacher-led assessment, especially at A1, underpinned by the proposed quality assurance arrangements to maintain the dependability of teacher judgements.

The AS and A2 elements of existing A levels should each consist of two rather than three assessment units. In time, this arrangement should be reproduced in equivalent A1 and A2 diploma components.

The levels of teacher-led assessment currently associated with many vocational and occupational qualifications should be retained.

Chapter 7

Grading and reporting achievement

This chapter sets out our proposals for recognising and recording achievement within and across each diploma.

Achievement in individual components should be graded to recognise and reward higher achievement in individual subjects or areas of learning where such grading is relevant to the content and to the needs of recruiters such as HE, employers and training providers. More than one grading scale should be available across the diploma system to ensure that each component may be graded in ways that reflect the nature of the learning and the requirements of recruiters and others who may need to understand what young people have achieved.

We want to reward achievement beyond the basic threshold pass in foundation, intermediate and advanced diplomas. We believe that diploma grading above the pass threshold would offer an incentive for learners to achieve more than the minimum needed to gain the diploma, and would enable employers and HE to differentiate effectively those learners who have excelled across their full diploma programme. We therefore propose grading the diploma as pass, merit or distinction at these levels. Entry diplomas should not be graded.

Detailed reports of performance within the programme should be available to the learner, and to employers, HE and others. These 'transcripts' should record individual components taken, credits and grades achieved and other relevant information about the learner's programme such as any wider activities and achievement. Available electronically, the transcripts might also provide a gateway into more detailed information, such as component scores (rather than grades), portfolios of the learner's work, and references from school, college or training provider.

Component grading

173. While possession of a diploma would offer an assurance that a young person has completed a broad and challenging programme, it would not on its own offer the detailed information about, or recognise high achievement within individual diploma components. This information is needed to ensure that informed judgements can be made about young people's achievement in specific subjects or areas of learning within their programmes. Learners themselves should be rewarded for higher achievement within specific elements of their programme; and employers, HEIs and others need to be able to differentiate effectively the achievement of potential recruits within the individual elements of the programme which they value most highly.

174. We therefore propose that many components of main learning should be graded above the basic pass threshold. Given the diversity in the range and type of components that would make up a diploma programme, a single grading scale would be too inflexible. Some subjects and areas are more suitable for grading than others, and components of interest to different end-users may require varying levels of differentiation. Some may require detailed grading information. Others may look simply for skills above a pre-determined threshold and not be interested in fine levels of difference. It would be inappropriate and burdensome to grade all components according to the needs of one set of 'end-users'. We therefore propose a flexible

system, in which components may be graded according to one of two grading systems, depending upon the content of the component and the needs of likely end-users. At advanced level a third grading scale should be available for some components.

175. At foundation and intermediate levels we propose either a two point or a four-point grade scale for all components. This would reflect the levels of differentiation that are typically appropriate at these levels. The appropriate choice between these two grading scales would be determined by the designers depending upon the content of the component.

176. At advanced level we propose to add a further option – an eight-point grade scale, reflecting the existing A level grade scale of A-F, extended above the A grade to recognise the very high levels of knowledge and understanding associated with the existing Advanced Extension Awards. The design of the scale must take account of the implications for attainment of grades at the other end of the scale and not disenfranchise learners in the middle and lower bands. This extended scale would be appropriate only for components where very high levels of differentiation are needed within individual subjects to aid competitive recruitment. This raises some significant technical issues about the extent to which it will be possible to devise examinations, which can reliably identify performance at the full extended range of grades in some subjects and areas of learning. While it would be desirable to avoid tiered examinations, such an option may need to be considered for some linear subjects.

177. This degree of differentiation is not needed at intermediate level and below. Some universities and employers use detailed information about GCSEs when recruiting candidates. This is currently used as a proxy for a broad general education. We believe that the manner in which achievement would be accumulated over the course of advanced programmes, and the guarantee of functional mathematics, literacy and communication and ICT within the core of the diploma would make recruiters less dependent upon information about learners' achievement at earlier stages within the 14-19 phase.

Two-point scale	Four-point scale	Eight-point scale (Some advanced level components only)
Pass	Distinction	A++
		A+
		A
	Merit	B
		C
	Pass	D
	E	
Fail	Fail	F

Recommendation 24

Each main learning component should be graded appropriately and would use one of three scales:

- fail/pass;
- fail/pass/merit/distinction; or
- for some advanced components, fail/E/D/C/B/A/A+/A++.

These three scales should retain common grade boundaries to establish the equivalence of components graded in different ways.

Grading foundation, intermediate and advanced diplomas

178. In consultation on our Interim Report, opinion was divided upon whether diplomas should be graded. We are particularly conscious of the risk that the availability of higher grades could appear to devalue the achievement of a threshold diploma pass. However, grading would send a clear signal about the calibre of the achievement and provide an incentive for learners to achieve above the minimum threshold across their programme. We therefore believe that diplomas should be graded providing that technically secure grading criteria can be established which represent recognition of added value in young people's achievements beyond the pass threshold.

179. Grading would also help shape desirable patterns of higher and broader achievement independently of the requirements of specific recruiters such as the universities or individual employers. It would send a strong message about the value of the diploma over and beyond its individual parts.

180. In shaping criteria for higher grades, the requirements should combine:

- higher achievement in the components needed to complete the minimum threshold –
 - a) higher grades in main learning, higher levels of achievement in main learning; and/or
 - b) higher grades in the extended project; and/or
 - c) higher levels in the core functional skills; and/or
- broader achievement – i.e. passing more components that demonstrably add to the demand of the programme, and require additional and relevant knowledge and skills which would be valued by HEIs, employers and others. This extra breadth would usually be expressed as additional main learning credits and/or the requirement to pass specified additional components.

181. Further analysis would be needed during the implementation phase before grading criteria can be firmly established. This work should take account of patterns of achievement within the existing qualifications system when determining the appropriate criteria. It should recognise the required breadth and demand of the diploma.

182. We believe that as a starting point, the grading should confirm the following principles for each grade:

- a) pass diploma – recognised as a substantial achievement in its own right and therefore establishing the diploma pass as the most likely outcome;
- b) merit diploma – recognised achievement that is significantly broader and higher than the threshold;
- c) distinction diploma – marking outstanding achievement and possibly gained by only a small proportion of the young people – perhaps just 10% of diplomas awarded, broadly equivalent to the proportion of A level candidates who currently achieve three A grades at A level.

183. However, grading of diplomas should not be norm-referenced over time. If an increasing proportion of young people meet the established criteria for higher grades then the proportion achieving those grades should be allowed to rise.

184. The precise combinations of breadth and depth for the higher grades may well be different for different lines of specialised diploma. For instance, in some fields or areas of study specific additional areas of knowledge or skill might be more valuable than higher achievement within the basic threshold programme, and in other programmes, very high achievement across a narrower programme might be more relevant. The design process for specialised diploma lines should include consideration of appropriate grading criteria, so that both additional breadth and depth contribute useful additional achievement above the threshold. This might mean, for instance, specifying particular additional components which would add valuable additional knowledge or skills within the context of a named diploma.

185. The open diploma line should have a single set of grading criteria.

Figure 5.1: Illustration of potential grading scale for an advanced 'open' diploma

Grading criteria for an advanced 'open' diploma might be:

Pass (minimum threshold) 60 core plus 120 main learning credits; all components gained at pass grade or above.

Merit: 60 core credits; 140 main learning credits, including 60 at A2, (approximately equal to four A1s and three A2s) – 70 main learning credits to be achieved at grade C or above.

Distinction: 60 core credits, including either functional mathematics or functional literacy and communication at advanced level; 160 main learning credits, including 80 achieved at A2 level – 110 main learning credits achieved at grade A or above.

Figure 5.2 Illustration of potential grading scale for advanced diploma in a specialised line

Grading criteria for an advanced diploma might be:

Pass: 60 core credits, plus 120 main learning credits from components specified by the awarding body.

Merit: 60 core credits, plus 140 main learning credits from components specified by the awarding body; 100 of these credits achieved at merit grade or above.

Distinction: 60 core credits, including either functional mathematics or functional literacy and communication at advanced level; 160 main learning credits from components specified by the awarding body, including at least 80 achieved at distinction grade.

186. QCA should be responsible for ensuring the broad comparability of demand between diploma lines. Given the varying demands of different specialist areas, attempts to set hard and fast rules for diploma grades beyond those described would be arbitrary at this stage. However, the system would need to at least:

- guard against the unnecessary accumulation of components;
- show that any additional component clearly increases the demand of, and adds value to, the programme and has been achieved at a minimum standard; and
- demonstrate that the relative demands of diplomas are comparable.

187. We do not propose grading the entry diploma. The distinctions required at other levels of the diploma do not apply at this level and would be inappropriate in the context of programmes based on personal target setting. The main focus here is on motivation and recognition of progress.

188. The detailed system needs to be developed by the QCA working with awarding organisations and other partners. Over time it would be necessary to monitor the impact of grading the diploma to ensure that it does not lead to undesirable behaviours or act as an obstacle to progression.

Recommendation 25

All successfully completed diplomas at foundation, intermediate and advanced level should be graded pass, merit or distinction.

Grades above pass should be awarded on the basis of a combination of breadth and depth of achievement.

Grading criteria should be fixed and transparent, so that any candidate who achieves the defined breadth and depth should receive the relevant grade. This means that patterns of achievement may vary over time.

QCA should advise on establishing grading criteria for each diploma line which represent increments of additional value above a threshold pass.

Entry diplomas should not be graded.

The transcript

189. If the diploma framework is to enable effective recording of achievement it must be supported by a means of recording detailed information about the content of learners' programmes and about their achievement in the range of activity that contribute to the diploma. The transcript would do this and provide a mechanism to present evidence for the progression within the diploma framework and selection for HE, work-based training and employment. It should be available electronically via a secure database, and on paper.

190. The transcript would need to record a range of information including:

- all components contributing to the diploma, including constituent units;
- credit and (where applicable) grades awarded for each component;
- details of wider activities undertaken and the skills developed; and
- achievement in any additional components beyond the diploma threshold.

191. The transcript would be in two parts. The front end document would be available both electronically and on paper and would record the information set out above. The electronic transcript should also be a gateway to a more detailed portfolio, including additional information about the learner's achievements, such as component scores (additional to the grades available at the top level), examples of the young person's work, including their extended project, a personal statement, and contextual data about their school/college/training provider. We recognise the need for a national ICT infrastructure that permits the transcripts to operate in the ways we have described.

192. There would need to be security measures put in place to ensure that the information on the transcript would not be corrupted. In addition, a legally secure framework for access and ownership of personal data would need to be established. Learners, as owners of their transcripts, would then be able to allow secure access to the two levels of their transcript to interested individuals and organisations, including prospective employers and Higher Education Institutions.

193. A model of the transcript can be found at annex G and electronically at www.14-19reform.gov.uk/transcript

Recommendation 26

All learners should receive a transcript, detailing achievements within their 14-19 programmes to accompany the award of a diploma and to provide a record of their progress at key transition points, such as moving between institutions.

The transcript should be available electronically and be capable of acting as an on-line gateway to further more detailed information about the learner.

03 Themes

Chapter 8 Strengthening the vocational offer

This chapter expands the proposals set out in chapter 3 for vocational learning within the diploma framework.

In order to tackle fragmentation, low status and low participation in vocational pathways in this country compared to many other countries a range of vocational diplomas should be developed with the involvement of employers, HEIs and other stakeholders to offer:

- *coherent delivery of the knowledge and skills needed by different employment sectors;*
- *options to specialise in particular occupations within broad vocational areas, with clearly defined routes into apprenticeships as well as employment and higher education; and*
- *relevant, structured workplace experience.*

Vocational learning should be delivered only where there are appropriate facilities and teaching and training staff with relevant expertise.

Over time, apprenticeships should be integrated with the diploma framework.

194. There is no absolute distinction between vocational and general (or academic) learning. Good vocational provision develops skills, knowledge and attributes that are desirable in adult life generally, and not only in the workplace; conversely, much of what is learnt in general or academic learning is relevant to employment.

195. In this chapter we focus on *full-time vocational programmes*, that is on programmes specifically designed to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes directly relevant to an occupation or a field of employment. The remit from the Secretary of State invited us to make proposals to strengthen such programmes. This is central to our basic endeavour to increase participation and attainment in the final phase of secondary education. What is apparent to us, particularly by looking at successful 14-19 systems

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abroad, is that vocational learning is not just a matter of contributing skills to the economy, nor of providing opportunities to young people who find difficulty with academic subjects – though it can do both of these things. Soundly-based vocational education is an absolutely key feature in the education project itself as it is capable of attracting large numbers of young people to participate in, and attain at, advanced level study.

196. It is precisely in this area that we fall behind in international league tables. The OECD has pointed to our low participation rate at 17 (despite good attainment results at 15). We have high participation at 17 in academic studies, but only one in five of our young people undertake vocational education at advanced level, whether in apprenticeship or in full-time programmes. In Section 2 we have proposed specialised diplomas in vocational areas, supported by employers and – crucially – part of a pathway that leads readily from intermediate to advanced level, with clear opportunities for advancement into vocational higher education programmes as well as into higher apprenticeships and work. Such programmes would mirror best practice abroad, which has been shown to boost overall participation in the 14-19 system. These vocational diploma ‘lines’ are explored further here, together with other aspects of vocational education and apprenticeship.

197. In discussing vocational programmes, we should recognise that they have an important role as a vehicle for general education as well as for occupational preparation. Moreover, many vocational learners may still be tentative or undecided in their occupational choices, or may subsequently change their minds. A large proportion of young people eventually find work in occupations other than those for which they have studied and gained qualifications. Vocational programmes should therefore be designed to achieve broad objectives and to support progression to a wide range of destinations.

198. Vocational programmes cover a broad spectrum of education and training from job-specific to work-related:¹⁴

- work-based and job-specific programmes and qualifications normally attest to the ability to fully meet the performance standards expected in the work environment as a result of a period of extended application, a quality which has come to be termed ‘competence’. Apprenticeships and NVQs are examples;
- work-related programmes tend to focus on providing a range of skills and knowledge that are relevant and show that the individual is ready to take advantage of employment opportunities or has gained an insight into an employment sector. Programmes with an emphasis on Key Skills and work experience are examples; and
- qualifications associated with an intermediate phase of transition to employment often involve a blend of theoretical and practical learning and allow the practice of real work activities and skills in a simplified or protected environment, especially for the purposes of either training or risk reduction where costly or safety-critical processes are involved. BTECs and VCEs are examples.

¹⁴ We are grateful to the Federation of Awarding Bodies, whose paper on *The Essential Characteristics of Vocational Provision* is heavily drawn upon here.

Proposals for improving the vocational offer

199. Bringing vocational pathways into a single framework would give formal equality of standing between, academic, vocational and mixed pathways; recognise areas of overlap between them; provide opportunities to combine, transfer and progress between them; and ensure general educational content within vocational programmes. It would make it easier for learners to identify progression routes to advanced level and beyond.

200. In comparison with many other countries, we have a proliferation of vocational qualifications of various sizes and many different types, often without any clear routes of progression between them. As a result, learners and employers are often confused, and the recognition for, and currency of, many vocational qualifications is low. Many of our qualifications are short, particularly at intermediate level, so that young people often leave the system at 17 after only a year of post-compulsory learning. In the labour market, wage returns to vocational qualifications tend to be below those for academic qualifications at the same level. This reflects and exacerbates the perception that vocational learning is inferior to academic study and only for those of lower ability. More detail on weaknesses in existing vocational pathways can be found at annex H.

201. Other countries (e.g. Sweden, Finland and increasingly, France) have reformed their systems and improved staying-on rates by offering more substantial vocational courses of two to three years duration, and generally aiming for advanced level as the exit point. We believe that the English system should move in this direction also, building upon elements of the existing qualifications framework which already have the desirable characteristics.

202. In designing a vocational programme for young people our aim is to balance a number of objectives. First, we need to give students a solid grounding in their chosen area, for example that of the hospitality industry, to develop the general skills and knowledge needed in that sector and to give the context in which more precise choice of occupation may be made. Second, it is important to allow specialisation for a particular occupation giving the skills required in depth, recognising that full proficiency is unlikely to be obtained until a person is actually working in that occupation. Third, we need to continue elements of general education which will assist not only in future careers, but also in adult life more generally. And fourth, we need to provide skills and knowledge that will be valuable in a range of occupational destinations, in addition to the specialism of the programme, enabling young people to keep their options open and to thrive in a dynamic labour in which occupational change is frequent.

Involvement of employers

203. A range of stakeholders will need to be involved in the development of vocational learning, but we believe that the importance of involving employers cannot be overstated. It is only through their involvement that vocational pathways will attain real value, relevance and authenticity. Throughout the consultation employers expressed the desire and willingness to be involved in the design and the delivery of vocational pathways. *All* of the employers at our consultation event in July thought they had a role to play. We urge the Government and policy-makers to build on this momentum.

204. Employer involvement must mean seeking their input in and encouraging ownership of:

- the structure of diplomas providing access to their sectors;
- the content of vocational programmes based on lines of learning, which they must also have a role in identifying (see chapter 2);
- the curricular content of core components (common across all diplomas);
- the design of work experience and work-related learning; and
- the delivery of all of these – from acting as mentors to young people completing their extended project or personal challenge and developing CKSA, to providing work experience opportunities, to delivering diploma components.

205. Although much remains to be done in identifying the best mechanisms for securing employer engagement in 14-19 learning (and education generally), progress has been made in recent years. The Skills for Business Network (the Sector Skills Development Agency and Sector Skills Councils) provides the focus for identifying employer and economic needs and considering how these can be addressed through education and training. The Government and its partners should continue to foster development of the Network, including enlisting sectors not currently represented, and should ensure that it fulfils its potential as a partner in the reform of 14-19 curriculum and qualifications.

Appropriate curriculum and assessment

206. In developing components and programmes for inclusion in the diploma framework, awarding bodies should build on the best of existing qualifications and include them as components and programmes of the new system where it is appropriate to do so. New vocational components and programmes should also be developed, including at foundation level, for inclusion in both open programmes and specialised lines.

207. In undertaking this work, awarding bodies should work with employers, teachers, lecturers, training organisations and HEIs to ensure that the structure and content of components and programmes meet their needs and those of learners and provide access to HE or training and employment. The National Occupational Standards developed by Sector Skills Councils should provide a useful starting point in determining the nature of vocational pathways, particularly those designed to provide progression to specific sectors.¹⁵

208. An appropriate vocational curriculum must be matched by appropriate assessment. It is particularly important that assessment of vocational learning reflects the nature of the knowledge and skills which are being developed, and the practical, workplace and other settings in which they will be used.

¹⁵ The Skills for Business Network has the specific responsibility to “develop occupational standards defining the skills needed in their sectors informed by best practice and relevant across the UK as the basis for designing up to date high quality courses and qualifications”. These ‘National Occupational Standards’ are required to “include the essential knowledge and understanding required, the relevant technical, planning and problem-solving skills, the ability to work with others, the ability to apply knowledge and understanding, and other skills which would enhance flexibility in employment and opportunities for progression”. They must also “meet the needs and have the support of all significant groups of employers and potential users”.

Work placements and experience

209. Where practicable all vocational programmes should require structured and relevant work placements. In other countries where vocational learning is more highly regarded, work experience is an integral part of vocational programmes and does much to make the programmes relevant and realistic.¹⁶ It has a similar impact in vocational programmes in England, but is not yet the norm. We believe it should be if vocational programmes are genuinely to prepare young people for work. In specialised vocational programmes, work placement should constitute a structured component related to the area of specialisation, giving credit towards main learning.

210. Work experience also has a role to play in other programmes because it can provide young people with real insight into the skills and attributes needed to succeed in the workplace. During the 14-19 phase young people should be able and encouraged to take up such opportunities even when these are not required elements of the diploma they are working towards. Any employment or work experience would contribute to the wider activities entitlement within core learning.

211. When it works well, work experience can deliver significant benefits for both employers and young people, and more must be done to ensure that these benefits are delivered consistently. This means involving employers not just in delivering work experience for individuals, but systematically in identifying how work experience can best be structured so that it is an attractive proposition for learners and employers.¹⁷

Appropriate facilities

212. Although we are keen that all young people who wish to should have access to vocational opportunities, we do not believe that all institutions will be able to provide them. Indeed we do not think that all institutions should try to do so. High quality vocational learning is dependent on the availability of appropriate facilities that mirror the workplace as closely as possible. Not all institutions, and particularly schools, will be able to provide this.

213. We recognise and welcome the opportunities presented by the CoVEs and Specialist Schools initiatives to develop appropriate facilities and expertise within schools and colleges. Initiatives like Building Schools for the Future will also offer some opportunities for schools to upgrade their facilities. However, where good facilities already exist in a nearby institution or training provider, schools would be better advised to invest in collaboration with such partners. The importance of collaboration is examined in greater detail in chapter 15.

¹⁶ See Ofsted, *Pathways to parity: A survey of 14-19 vocational provision in Denmark, Netherlands and New South Wales* (January 2004).

¹⁷ We have heard from a lot of employers through our consultation who are engaged in work experience. They have emphasised the importance of preparing young people for the experience and identifying clear objectives, as well as drawing out the learning afterwards. Many employers feel that the young people who come to them are not adequately prepared and that this is to the detriment of both the young person and the employer.

Placements for school and college teaching and lecturing staff

214. Relevant expertise among teaching and lecturing staff is also an important factor in high quality vocational provision. Teachers, lecturers, tutors and instructors are already encouraged to undertake placements to ensure that their knowledge is up-to-date and accurate, and efforts are also being made to foster even closer links between education and business. However, more needs to be done to ensure that staff in schools and colleges have the expertise needed to deliver high quality vocational programmes based on knowledge and recent experience of the business environment.

Integrating apprenticeships within the diploma framework

215. Over a quarter of a million young people over 16 are now undertaking work-based training and the Secretary of State's remit invited the Working Group to make recommendations for integrating apprenticeships within a new unified 14-19 system.

216. The recommendation in the Working Group's Interim Report, that apprenticeships should be fully incorporated into the proposed diploma framework, was warmly welcomed in responses to the consultation. Integration of apprenticeships would also increase opportunities for progression from the work-based route to higher-level programmes, contributing to the Government's aim of widening access to HE.

217. Apprenticeships combine vocational main learning, in the form of NVQs and Technical Certificates, with a core of Key Skills, employment rights and responsibilities and other components, and thus are already close to our proposed diplomas at intermediate and advanced level in many respects. Some make extensive use of project work as an important part of the training process. Also, in common with an increasing proportion of future 14-19 provision, apprenticeships are delivered through a process of collaboration between training providers, colleges, employers and, in some cases, schools.

218. Employers have consistently complained that too many young people are not properly prepared for the world of work and the standards expected of work-based learners should be no different to those demanded of learners who choose school- or college-based programmes. We believe, therefore, that apprenticeships should incorporate the same components as the diploma core designed to address this. However, the methods of assessment used in schools and colleges would not necessarily be appropriate for use in work-based training and apprenticeships.

219. The individual core and main learning components of diplomas would be transferable between, and give credit towards, all diplomas for which their subject material is relevant. Similarly, wherever appropriate, apprenticeships and their counterparts in school/college-based vocational programmes should lead to the same diploma award. Nevertheless, apprenticeship programmes should retain their distinctive identity, recognised by sector body certification, while providing full or partial credit towards an intermediate or advanced diploma award.

Recommendation 27

All apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3 (equivalent to intermediate and advanced levels) should eventually incorporate the same components of core learning that are adopted for every other 14-19 programme at that level, but with sector bodies determining all other aspects of programme content to meet the employment requirements of their sector and satisfy the needs of the young people concerned.

Sector bodies should be encouraged to adopt the components of core learning by the early development and release of specifications and the provision of appropriate resources and support to assist their introduction.

Technical Certificates used in apprenticeship should, from the start, feature as options within relevant diploma lines.

Sectors with apprenticeships that already include some or all of the components of core learning and meet the minimum threshold size of an intermediate and/or advanced diploma award should be encouraged to align their frameworks with the diploma system, with appropriate incentives for them to do so.

Once the appropriate systems are in place, trainees should receive full credit for all their achievements during the apprenticeship programme and recognition by means of the transcript.

220. It is likely that the present diversity of apprenticeships will continue and that, for many sectors, aligning their frameworks to meet the full diploma thresholds at intermediate or advanced level would be regarded as inappropriate by employers and prospective trainees alike. So it will take time, and in some sectors may never be feasible, for apprenticeship to become fully integrated with the diploma system. Nevertheless it is an achievable and highly important aim that firm links with apprenticeship should be designed into the diploma framework from the start:

- those achieving diplomas in vocational areas should be able to gain material credit towards apprenticeships – this will attract them into apprenticeships as a progression route and make them attractive recruits for apprenticeship employers;
- diploma core learning should count for Key Skills; and
- the specialist options that we have proposed should include the Technical Certificates that form part of apprenticeships.

In these ways learners studying diplomas could gain a significant requirement for their apprenticeship before starting on it.

Recommendation 28

We recommend that once the new diploma system is in place for all 14-19 year olds:

- apprentices whose sector frameworks do not meet the threshold requirements for a diploma award should be guaranteed access to impartial advice and guidance on completion of the relevant diploma, if they wish to do so; and
- sector bodies with apprenticeship frameworks which do not meet the threshold requirements for a diploma award should design one or more 'bridging programmes' to enable those who wish to do so to complete a full diploma that is relevant to the employment needs of the sector and satisfies the aspirations and potential of the individual.

Gender and ethnic stereotyping

221. Gender and ethnic stereotyping has been a major unintended feature of the take-up of many vocational programmes and options. Efforts to counteract its effects have had only mixed success. With stereotyped attitudes already well-established by the start of Key Stage 4, the uptake of Year 10 work experience placements is highly gender stereotypical and, instead of broadening pupils' horizons, their perceptions of the adult workplace are frequently being reinforced by work experience practice. Among young people from ethnic minorities, participation in many apprenticeship frameworks also remains very low. Stereotyping helps to exacerbate sector skills shortages. Care must be taken not to perpetuate these perverse outcomes within the new framework.

Chapter 9

Reducing the assessment burden

We have seen significant progress in assessment over the past 20 years. There are more young people than ever before taking increasing numbers of qualifications and passing them and there is greater variety in the forms of assessment available generally. However, with this progress have also come problems, specifically in relation to the burden of assessment and its implications for teaching and learning.

As part of our remit to improve the learning experience for 14-19 year olds we were asked to look at ways to reduce the burden of assessment in general and general vocational qualifications.

The exact nature of the burden of assessment varies according to constituency; for learners, teachers, institutions, awarding bodies and the wider system the burdens are different. We identify four main sources of burden, which are:

- *volume of qualifications and assessment;*
- *type of assessment;*
- *specification/syllabus design and impact on teaching and learning; and*
- *the administrative and management features of the system.*

We believe that our proposals reduce the overall burden of assessment, rather than shifting it from one constituent to another. It is achievable through:

- *reducing the number of times learners are examined, particularly the repetition of some GCSE coursework assessment;*
- *introducing teacher judgement as the dominant method of assessing main learning at intermediate level and below;*
- *changing the design of specifications to encourage more sampling of learning and to minimise the number of assessment units (going from 6 to 4 in A levels) and decoupling GCE AS from A2; and*
- *tackling the administrative burden on institutions by modernising and streamlining systems.*

What are the burdens?

222. The volume of assessment is significant:¹⁸

- This year there were around 7.5 million qualification entries in the national school and college qualifications (GCSEs, VCE and GCE A levels, AEA's and GNVQs) and 11.6 million unit entries, covering 262 specifications of learning.
- Awarding bodies deal with 26 million scripts each year.

¹⁸ Excluding the National Curriculum and vocational qualifications other than those listed, there were 25.6 million examination transactions in 2004, and around 57,000 examiners. Approximate examination entries were as follows: GCSE 5.4 million; AS 983,000; A2 720,000; GNVQ 123,000; entry 127,000; VCE 104,000; AEA 7,200. Source: *National Assessment Agency (NAA)*.

- The majority of 15 year olds attempt at least 9 GCSEs/GNVQs (75%), nearly half (46%) attempt 10 or more.¹⁹
- Coursework assessment is often overly structured, and reduces the opportunity for innovation and dynamic learning. The requirement for coursework in every GCSE, even when the tasks do not fit easily into the approach of the subject, makes this an exercise, rather than a learning experience. It creates a bottleneck at a specific time of the year, when all coursework must be completed, marked and a sample prepared for moderation.
- Currently it is estimated that £60 million is spent on moderators and examiners for GCSE/GNVQ and GCE entries. This could be redirected to institutions.

223. All this reflects the fact that most learners are examined at 16, 17 and 18. In addition, doing more subjects at the same level is the main way in which stretch is provided for the most able learners. Our proposals challenge both this definition of stretch and the notion that learners need to be repeatedly assessed through external examinations during the 14-19 phase. Learners would be stretched through broader programmes, more varied learning and assessment styles and the possibility of moving faster to a higher level, rather than simply doing more subjects.

Changes to the assessment regime

224. The move to a system of assessment based on the professional judgement of teachers and tutors would reduce significantly the overall burden associated with external examinations, allowing resources to be redeployed within the system and creating more time for teaching and learning. Nevertheless we are conscious of the need to ensure that these proposals do not replace the burden of external assessment with a new burden upon teaching staff.

225. We believe that it is possible to avoid this by:

- building teacher-led assessment upon the significant amount of assessment which teachers already carry out as a natural part of their work and which at the moment plays no part in the outcome of qualifications. In feedback from teachers in a survey of their time, we understand that about 0.2 hours a week is spent by school teachers on administering and invigilating examinations. Time spent marking pupil work is about 6.4 hrs a week and planning, preparing of practical tests or other assessments is about 3.2 hrs a week. Our proposals would embed assessment time within the teaching day. Tasks and activities that are part of the learning programme already would contribute to teacher judgements. Additional time might be required for planning and moderation, but this would be absorbed in part by training days, and help teachers to improve their teaching. We would also expect a little more time for teachers to be able to question young people effectively to help them improve their work;
- supporting teachers with high quality training and support from awarding bodies and from within their own institutions, including, for instance, exemplar assessment material, and nationally-available tests;

¹⁹ 31% obtain 9 A*-C GCSE/GNVQ passes, 18% obtain 10+ A*-C GCSE passes (DfES statistics).

- redeploying the examiner time and other resources currently devoted to marking of external examinations, and rewarding those teachers who take on additional responsibilities in relation to assessment, such as becoming Chartered Assessors; and
- making effective use of the emerging possibilities for e-learning and e-assessment in transforming both teaching practice and assessment.

226. Development of the reformed assessment system must be accompanied by very careful monitoring to assess its impact on teacher workload.

Design of specifications and qualifications

227. The way in which content and assessment tasks are specified is also seen to lead to burdensome assessment practice. Evidence in this area is limited, but clearly specifications have become more detailed '*statements defining the purpose, content, structure and assessment arrangements for a qualification*' (QCA/ACCAC/CCEA). Assessment criteria require adherence to the specification, because it makes assessment more accessible and transparent. However, many complain that it leaves little room for intellectual growth, in-depth study and experimentation.²⁰

228. To address the problem in the short term, it is possible for awarding bodies to build a level of flexibility into qualifications which allows centres greater freedom in tackling assessment tasks. In the medium term, specifications would need to be redesigned to suit the new system of assessment, for example as pre-defined standards supported by more holistic assessment approaches, with exemplars to guide teachers. Criteria would need to be detailed enough to support judgements and sufficiently flexible to allow teacher choice. The burden experienced by adhering to overly specified tasks would be removed. It would remove a mechanistic approach to subjects, which has been highlighted by some teacher associations in their response to the Interim Report.

229. During our consultation, many respondents expressed concern about the constraints of existing forms of coursework in GCSE in particular where it is repetitious, but also within GCE specifications. Our proposal for a single large extended project that focuses on developing and assessing skills of planning, investigation and analysis was welcomed and it was felt it could replace much of the existing coursework. At the earliest opportunity coursework criteria should be relaxed or the requirement for coursework should be removed. This needs to be carefully aligned with development of materials and criteria to support an extended project.

230. The number of assessment units also adds to the burden – in all but a few GCE A levels and VCEs there are at least six units. We believe that the burden can be lightened immediately by reducing the number of assessment units from six to four within each A level. This aligns with the QCA proposals for developing the qualification.²¹ This recognises that the assessment of the qualification can be more holistic and focused on the broader areas of learning while retaining and enhancing the depth and variety of assessment. VCEs are to be relaunched as GCEs in 2005,

²⁰ A. Hodgson and K. Spours, *2003 Beyond A levels; Reforming the Curriculum and Qualifications System from post 14 +* (2003).

²¹ Ken Boston, *Speech to Secondary Head Association and Association of Colleges Conference* (2 March 2004).

when they will be ready for first teaching. In considering the number of assessment units in GCEs, the appropriateness of fewer assessment units in vocational areas should be evaluated.

231. A modest reduction in overall burden would also flow in time from more A2 components which can accredit an extended range of attainment in the diploma and would thus remove the need for separate AEA examinations.

Administrative systems

232. The National Assessment Agency is working to reduce the administrative burden of assessment in schools and colleges, among awarding bodies and the system as a whole. It is working to modernise the examinations system and this includes a convergence in IT systems to improve electronic administration of assessment and the professionalisation of examinations offices and officers.

233. These features of modernisation provide an important platform on which to build our reforms. A young person's programme might involve a combination of provision from a range of providers, using components from a variety of awarding organisations. To minimise the burden on providers, it would be important for them to make just one entry to register a young person for a diploma programme. Institutions should not have to deal separately with multiple awarding bodies for this entry and other administrative arrangements, though they may need to in relation to the curriculum and content of specific programmes and components. This single point of entry and certification would be critical to managing diploma assessment. Achievements could then be tracked and could contribute to a central pool on which a transcript system can be built.

234. The bureaucratic burden associated with vocational assessment must also be tackled. Achievement is shown through the compilation of portfolios and records that provide evidence of what the young person can do. The processes for verifying and moderating those can lead to rather large portfolios showing every element of learning. Electronic portfolios are providing exciting new opportunities for learners to record their achievements in an efficient way. They enable use of video clips, voice recordings etc. and we believe this type of development has the potential to reduce the burden of managing some vocational assessment.

235. Other administrative issues which are seen to add to the burden include the timetabling of assessments. For instance, many GCSE candidates need to prepare and submit 10 or more pieces of coursework for assessment within the same limited timeframe. Institutions have to submit marks and sample work within a given period. A further concern is the timetabling of GCE and VCE AS and A2 examinations, which in *some* institutions can curtail the time available for teaching and learning at the end of the first year. These problems would be addressed by our proposals for the reduction in coursework and changes to GCE and VCE examinations.

Recommendation 29

GCE A level specifications should be revised to reduce the number of units in an A level from six to four, and reduce the weight and prescription of the assessment criteria, as already proposed by QCA.

GCSE and GCE should have no specific requirement for coursework.

Research into the impact on attainment for specific groups of learners should be undertaken.

The NAA's work on modernisation should be extended to cover the vocational awarding bodies.

Moving swiftly to establish a single point of entry for registration of learners for qualifications would reduce considerably the assessment burden on centres.

Use of electronic learning and assessment in 14-19 provision should be extended.

Chapter 10

Stretch and challenge

The proposed reforms would ensure that all young people, whatever their capabilities, are stretched and challenged to achieve their best, through:

- *broader programmes incorporating a wider variety of skills and experiences than many young people have access to now;*
- *the possibility of learning above the level of the diploma by drawing down components from a higher level;*
- *moving more quickly through levels within the framework; and*
- *increased 'headroom' and opportunities for greater breadth and depth at advanced level.*

Challenge for all

236. All young people should be challenged in their learning. They must have demanding, but realistic goals, whatever their personal capabilities and aspirations. While many young people are challenged and motivated to achieve highly by the current system, too many are not.

237. The proposed framework would ensure that all learners can follow challenging programmes that meet their needs and at which they can succeed.

238. The focus on whole programmes rather than smaller free-standing qualifications would ensure that many learners follow programmes which are broader than now, and which deliver generic and broadly-based knowledge, skills and experiences which would enrich their learning while making greater demands on their abilities. In particular, core learning would provide a solid foundation, which many young people currently lack, for further learning, employment and adult life.

239. The ability to tailor programmes by drawing down components from higher levels would ensure that no young person need be held back in subjects where they have a particular talent, even if they are not yet ready to undertake a whole diploma at a higher level.

240. For those who are capable of progressing more quickly across their programme as a whole, they may enter the diploma framework at the most appropriate level and move as quickly as their abilities allow, either taking less time to complete lower levels or skipping lower levels of assessment and moving on to the level at which they expect to emerge from the 14-19 framework.

Advanced level: stretching higher attainers

241. For the highest attaining young people, the framework offers the prospect that whatever their diploma line they would be able to take their learning as far and as fast as they are capable of, through:

- the extended advanced level grade range, incorporating the levels of demand currently associated with the AEA in the A level system, with equivalent levels of achievement being equally recognised in vocational learning;

- the availability of components at level 4;
- opportunities for more in depth learning through the remodelled A1/A2 syllabuses and assessment regimes, which reduce the number and weight of individual assessment objectives currently associated with AS/A2;
- opportunities to take functional mathematics, functional literacy and communication and ICT at level 3; and
- the opportunity to develop and demonstrate higher level research, problem solving, analytical and presentational skills through the extended project.

Stretch and challenge – Cumbria 14-19 pathfinder

The Excellence Cluster within Cumbria has had particular success in linking up with HE and developing opportunities for gifted and talented students. Together with the e-learning based pilot of the “Scholar” learning environment for A levels in maths and science, there is now a good range of support and learning opportunities for gifted and talented students. For example, there are over 110 young people in Year 12 currently engaged in Open University Units.

In addition, 25 of the 42 secondary schools in the County have enabled pupils in Year 10 to take a wide variety of GCSE examinations a year early. Just over 10% of the Year 10 cohort in these schools took one or more GCSEs in 2004, and 62% achieved passes at A*-C. Seven schools are developing access to Year 11 entry to AS examinations. Twenty-two young people were involved in 2004 and they all achieved grades A-C in between one and five subjects.

Chapter 11

Raising participation and tackling disengagement

At 76%, UK participation at age 17 is fifth lowest among 28 OECD countries. Too many young people are turned off learning and fail to achieve between 14 and 19.

Disengagement peaks during Key Stage 4 and is manifest in truancy, exclusion and bad behaviour. Some of the causes of disengagement are cultural, social and economic and not easily addressed through changes to curriculum and qualifications.

Our proposals would raise participation and tackle the educational causes of disengagement by:

- offering a choice of relevant programmes and activities, which allow young people to pursue their interests and aspirations, while working towards high status qualifications linked to progression in learning and employment;*
- sign-posting progression routes within the diploma framework and making it easier for learners to follow them because diplomas would interlock;*
- ensuring that all young people develop the knowledge, skills and attributes needed to access the curriculum; and*
- enabling young people to build confidence by gaining credit for small steps of achievement, which is recognised on a transcript.*

They should be underpinned by high quality teaching and learning, collaboration between institutions and improved information, advice and guidance, as set out in chapters 12 and 15.

242. The real scandals of our low participation are the 9% of young people who are not in education, employment or training (the NEET group) and the 15% in employment without training.²² We share the Government's aspiration that all young people should remain in some kind of education or training until they are 19, recognising that for some this will be combined with employment. To do this, we must tackle the high drop-out rate at age 16/17 and provide young people with relevant and motivating choices, leading to qualifications which are valued by employers and HEIs.

243. Many young people leave learning at 16 or 17 after making a calculation of the balance between the immediate rewards of entering employment and the longer-term benefits of staying in learning. One way to improve staying-on rates is therefore to increase the perceived value of post-16 learning by ensuring that it is seen to deliver clear benefits in terms of access to desirable employment, education and training. We believe that our proposals would achieve this by replacing the existing proliferation of qualifications, many of which have uncertain currency, with a framework of diplomas which are seen to open doors to employment and further learning, thus persuading young people that they can benefit from staying on and completing a diploma.

²² 2001 figures based on an analysis of learning activity and the labour market of 16-18 year-olds.

244. Young people who may be described as ‘disengaged from learning’ can be found across the spectrum of achievement. Hilary Steedman’s (2003) summary of a seminar series on *how to motivate (demotivated) 14-16 year olds, with special reference to work-related education and training* focuses on disengaged learners who achieve less than 5 GCSEs at A*-C. It examines the success of recent initiatives intended to help these learners. Its main findings can be summarised as follows:

- the hardest to reach are the very small group (1-2%) who lose touch with school between 14 and 16. Evidence suggests that this group make some progress in alternative provision, which provides one-to-one contact, an adult approach and atmosphere, and the opportunity to mark progress through certification;
- the larger “disaffected but in touch” group which comprises approximately 20% of 14-16 year-olds have been shown to respond to a range of initiatives which often share the characteristics of taking them out of school, whether into work-related settings (e.g. FE college, workplace) or a setting associated with leisure and cultural activities (e.g. football club, music). However, benefits tend to take the form of general reanimation, rather than increases in attainment; and
- disengaged learners with 1-4 GCSEs at A*-C account for up to a further 20% of the cohort. For this group, better vocational options can have a highly motivating effect and raise young people’s performance.

245. These findings demonstrate how choice and relevance play an important role in motivating young people to learn. This applies both to learners at risk of disengagement before 16 and those making their choices at 16.

246. All young people would be able to select programmes from a clear suite of options covering a range of subjects and areas of learning, including improved vocational and practical options which would have a greater general currency than many existing vocational qualifications. The ability to construct personalised entry programmes and improved foundation programmes and components would be particularly important for learners at the lower end of the achievement spectrum and those with special educational needs, but choice and relevance would be available to all and should equally benefit ‘bright but disengaged’ learners and those considering their options at 16

247. Once engaged on a programme, the learner would be able to pursue his or her interests and aspirations through a choice of main learning components (greater in open programmes than in the specialised diploma lines) and the extended project. The entitlement to and recognition of wider activities would motivate learners by enabling them to build on informal learning in the family, community, cultural sphere and workplace, and help them more easily combine earning and learning.

248. The ability to succeed once enrolled on a programme has a vital part to play in keeping young people in learning and ensuring that they do not become discouraged and demotivated. The multi-level learning inherent in the diploma proposals would ensure that all programmes would contain a ‘learning gradient’ which would enable young people to build their confidence quickly by accumulating early achievement.

249. The diploma framework would provide clear sign-posting to learners about how they can build on their achievements to progress to programmes at higher levels or more specialised programmes at the same level or apprenticeships or Entry to Employment programmes appropriate to their needs and aspirations. The interlocking nature of diplomas and transferability of relevant components would facilitate and encourage progression by ensuring that achievement in one diploma would form the basis of progression to and achievement in other diplomas at the same level or the next.

250. Core learning would provide young people with the functional mathematics, literacy and communication skills, and the personal, inter-personal and learning skills that they need to access the rest of the curriculum. Teacher-led assessment would give young people a clear insight into their progress from the outset of the programme and recognise progress along the way. Personal review, planning and guidance would help learners to understand what they have learned and consider how it can help them to achieve their aspirations. The ongoing coaching and encouragement young people would receive as part of the assessment and personal review, planning and guidance processes would be particularly beneficial to those at risk of disengagement or non-participation post-16.

251. 14-19 components and programmes would be delivered in schools, colleges and workplaces. Collaboration between institutions should ensure that young people have access to a range of curriculum options, delivered in a setting appropriate to both the content and the learner's needs. This should have particular benefits for young people who prefer the more adult environment associated with colleges and workplaces. Wherever learning and teaching takes place, it should be of high quality and based on high expectations.

Chapter 12

Quality of learning and teaching

Our proposals are designed to deliver significant improvements to 14-19 learning, with broad and clear curricular choice allowing learners to follow programmes suited to their individual needs, interests and aspirations. These must be underpinned by:

- *time for learning;*
- *excellent teaching; and*
- *better use of learner feedback.*

Time for learning

252. We have been careful to ensure that the template for 14-19 learning we have specified would not place unmanageable demands on learners or teachers. This is because we recognise that the quality of learning must improve. 14-19 programmes need to be brought to life by engaging and innovative teaching and time must be released to allow this to happen.

253. Time for learning would be secured through:

- changes to the assessment regime, which would reduce the burden of assessment;
- diploma thresholds which are smaller than the total available curriculum time; and
- acknowledgement of informal learning, particularly through wider activities.

254. Changes to the assessment regime would not only free more time for learning, but would ensure that assessment supports learning and teaching, rather than being the driver of it. Subject specifications would be reviewed to tackle concerns about mechanistic assessment objectives and tasks, which have encouraged ‘teaching to the test’. This would ensure that teaching is about inducting young people into a body of subject knowledge or area of learning and equipping them with the variety of skills they need to access and apply it.

255. Meeting the requirements of the diploma would not absorb all the curriculum time available and this would allow young people to study additional subjects that contrast with or complement their learning. The quality of the overall programme would be enhanced by this opportunity to secure additional breadth and/or depth.

256. Additional time within the curriculum is complemented by our recognition of the learning that goes on outside formal education and training. The curriculum accounts for only about 20% of young people’s time and we believe that they learn a great deal in the other 80%. We do not wish to formalise this learning because what makes it so valuable is the fact that it is something young people do for other reasons – often for enjoyment, but also to make a contribution to the family or community or to earn money. We do, however, want to provide the opportunity for young people and others to appreciate that learning is taking place and for their achievements to be recognised. This would emphasise the wide applicability of knowledge and skills, which can be transferred between formal and informal settings and would help to generate an appetite for lifelong learning. Teachers would have an important role to play in drawing out the learning in young people’s wider activities and personal review, planning and guidance would provide a context in which they could do so.

Quality of teaching

257. The quality of learning depends heavily on the quality of teaching. Time would enable teachers, lecturers and trainers to do more of what they do best – that is to inspire learners by delivering a varied, relevant and interesting curriculum in ways that motivate them. Teachers would also have the time to develop and use their specialist expertise and passion for subject depth. Where there is a particular local demand, teachers would have the opportunity to work with stakeholders to develop locally relevant curricula for recognition within the national diploma framework (see annex D).

258. To make the most of these opportunities, teachers need high-quality training, guidance and support. Initial teacher training (ITT) and continuing professional development (CPD) form a major strand of our implementation plan. They must ensure teachers possess both the specific subject knowledge and repertoire of teaching skills to excite learners and to develop them to their full potential. Where vocational areas are concerned this must also mean ensuring that teachers have up-to-date and accurate knowledge and recent experience of the area they teach.

Making better use of learner feedback

259. Gathering and analysing feedback from learners is now established practice in many institutions, producing vital evidence for use in self-assessments and inspection. The best schools, colleges and training organisations already know what their learners think of the teaching and support they provide and welcome criticism as an opportunity for improvement. According to Ofsted, one of the key features of effective school improvement is that the views of learners are sought and are acted upon.

260. Within a much more learner-focused 14-19 system, it is entirely appropriate that we consult learners on whether their needs are being met and how the teaching and learning process might be improved. However, actively involving learners in this way can also help develop valuable skills and attributes and contribute to wider programme objectives. These include:

- linking learner feedback processes with the development of functional literacy and communication, mathematical and ICT skills;
- promoting reflection, critical thinking, respect for others' opinions, collaboration in groups;
- providing a vehicle for active citizenship and positive learner engagement;
- challenging limited or stereotyped aspirations;
- development of personal awareness;
- demonstrating the contribution that individuals can make to process improvement in the adult workplace; and
- providing opportunities for wider community involvement with 14-19 education and training (e.g. Connexions advisers, Trade Union officials, school and college governors, LEA elected members, employers etc.).

261. Only by consulting learners can we discover how they feel about the education and training system and whether the reforms are working as they should.

Chapter 13

Entering and leaving 14-19 learning – providing a coherent experience for learners and meeting the needs of end-users

14-19 reform cannot be seen in isolation. It must be consistent with what comes before and after if it is to form part of a smooth lifelong learning experience for individuals and meet the needs of end-users in HE and employment.

This chapter sets out where learners need to be by 14 if they are to make the most of the new opportunities for 14-19 learning, and how the diploma framework integrates with the Framework for Recognising Achievement for adults.

It also considers how the diploma framework prepares young people for HE and employment.

Outcomes at 14

262. We have not been able to give detailed consideration to the implications of our proposals for KS3 and primary education. However, we do have a strong sense of the knowledge, skills and attributes learners will need to have developed during these phases if they are to take advantage of the opportunities available to them post-14 and the type of provision this will require.

263. Pre-14 education must deliver a **broad curriculum** as the basis for further subject learning and choices 14-19. It should:

- ensure coverage of essential content and skills in subjects which may be dropped at 14;
- provide a foundation of knowledge, skills and attributes. This should include both generic CKSA alongside knowledge and skills specific to some of the subjects which will be studied 14-19, particularly mathematics, communication and ICT;
- help learners to understand their strength in subjects and vocational areas of learning and experience success in them;²³ and
- provide an enjoyable experience, which prevents young people becoming disengaged, particularly during KS3.

²³ With many more vocational and work-related options now available for 14-16 year olds and the take-up of GCSEs in vocational subjects already exceeding initial expectations, pupils are increasingly having to make important choices in Year 9 which, for many, could have a significant impact on the direction of their future education and training. The launch of the Young Apprenticeships programme for Key Stage 4 pupils represents a further expansion of work-based learning and introduces a new opportunity for promoting the apprenticeship route and influencing occupational choice. It is essential that these young people are better prepared to take such decisions.

264. Young people must be equipped with the skills and capabilities they will need to progress and succeed in the variety of programmes offered 14-19, including project and autonomous working. We do not expect 14 year-olds to have fully developed the set of common knowledge, skills and attributes that we have identified, but we do expect the foundations to have been laid. This means developing learning skills in particular, including the capability to work independently and in a group, and to understand what is required by different tasks and have some capacity to think about how they might be tackled. We expect that by 14, young people will have experienced a range of teaching and learning styles, including some associated with vocational learning, and to understand which best suit them.

265. Assessment and reporting at the end of KS3 should provide information about learners' achievements and capabilities, as a basis for:

- identifying any particular weakness to be addressed (particularly in core components) or strengths to be nurtured; and
- measuring progress/distance travelled post-14 – that is, KS3 assessment needs to provide a baseline for 14-19 assessment.

Recommendation 30

5-14 education, and particularly KS3, should be reviewed to ensure that it prepares young people to make the most of opportunities post-14. Particular attention should be paid to lessons from the KS3 strategy and 2 year KS3 pilot, particularly in focusing on basic skills, and options for enhancing curriculum flexibility to allow time for learning.

Systems should be introduced for identifying and measuring, during KS3, as full a range as possible of each young person's latent potential – in the form of aptitudes, interests and other characteristics – as a basis for building confidence and motivation, informing the choice of pathways through the 14-19 phase, underpinning the development of individual learning plans and choice of work experience placements, and providing a foundation for subsequent career, learning and life decisions.

Interface with the Framework for Recognising Achievement

266. The Interim Report outlined the Working Group's commitment to ensuring a seamless transition from 14-19 to adult learning, while recognising the distinctiveness of the two phases. Coherence and broad preparation must underpin all 14-19 programmes, which aim to provide a foundation of knowledge, skills and attributes necessary for further learning, employment and life. By contrast, the flexibility of the Framework for Recognising Achievement allows learners to mix smaller units to suit their particular and changing needs at different points in time. While this is appropriate for adults, it could easily lead to an unsatisfactory and fragmented experience if applied to 14-19 programmes.

267. For this reason we are proposing that the diploma system be the qualification for the 14-19 phase and replacing other qualifications. However, learners would often be able to draw-down qualifications from the adult framework in the form of components as part of their main learning or to supplement or extend their diploma programme beyond the minimum threshold required for any particular diploma. The exception to this is for those young people who have left 14-19 learning for employment outside the apprenticeship framework, and whose employers wish them to acquire specific skills or gain an adult qualification necessary for them to perform effectively in their job. In such cases we believe it right that the young people in employment should be able to undertake such training even if it is not part of a diploma programme.

268. The diploma and adult frameworks must fit together to provide a seamless transition from 14-19 into adult learning. Both use credit to recognise achievement, and a common approach to credit would ensure that learning and achievements have currency and can be transferred between the two frameworks (see chapter 4 for a fuller discussion of credit).

269. In designing the diploma framework, and specific diplomas within it, components based on qualifications from the adult framework would sometimes form part of the specified threshold requirements for 14-19 diplomas. Such components would need to meet specified requirements for level and volume and be assessed in a way which is consistent with the diploma assessment framework. Such components should not be ‘cashed in’ for qualifications other than the diploma before the age of 19, but after this age attainment, within 14-19 programmes could be carried forward to give credit towards adult qualifications where appropriate.

Recommendation 31

The approaches to credit in the diploma framework and Framework for Recognising Achievement should be developed to ensure consistency and transferability where appropriate across the two frameworks.

Interface with the labour market and benefits for employers

270. We have sought to respond to the needs and concerns of employers and to ensure a smooth transition from learning to the labour market through our focus on:

- getting the basics right – all learners would be expected to achieve in functional mathematics, literacy and communication and ICT, progressing over time towards at least level 2 (see chapter 3);
- developing common knowledge, skills and attributes – specific skills and the “right attitude” developed across the curriculum and through particular experiences like wider activities (see chapter 3);
- strengthening vocational pathways – including through the involvement of employers in the design and delivery of programmes to ensure that they fully meet employers’ needs (see chapters 3 and 8); and
- making the system simpler and more transparent and presenting young people’s achievements clearly on the transcript.

Interface with HE

271. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) value much in the existing qualifications framework. A number of developments have, however, led many in HE to favour reform. It is widely accepted that the most able must be stretched, that performance at the top end needs to be carefully assessed and differentiated; that high quality vocational qualifications should offer clear pathways into HE; that a still stronger emphasis needs to be placed on learners refining basic skills and developing their ability to undertake major projects and manage aspects of their own learning; and that all learners need to pursue programmes that reflect the pace of change in the knowledge economy.

272. We are building on the best practice in education and training, to design a system that prepares them for HE, in particular by:

- increasing stretch and differentiation at the top end (see chapter 10);
- ensuring a wide range of high-quality vocational and academic pathways, all capable of leading to higher education (see chapter 3);
- providing detailed information on the transcript about the type and level of achievement contributing to each diploma, including individual component grades, and contextual information relevant to the HE applications process. We also propose that admissions officers should have access to the extended project at the earliest possible opportunity (see chapter 3);
- reducing the burden of assessment, increasing the time available for teaching and learning and the scope for learners to study in depth in their chosen subjects (see chapter 9); and
- developing consistent standards of oral communication, literacy and numeracy, and – especially through the extended project – young people’s capacity to undertake research, self-managed learning, defend an argument, and for practice-based programmes, to produce and assess an artefact where appropriate (see chapter 3).

Participation

273. We envisage that our proposals would significantly increase participation post 16, giving HE:

- an increased pool of potentially well-qualified applicants, which would assist in progress toward a 50% participation rate; and
- significantly enhance participation rates amongst young people from social classes III, IV, and V. The effect of enhanced participation rates post 16 would therefore facilitate HE institutions in meeting their targets for widening access.

Post Qualification Application

274. In his report, published in September 2004, Professor Schwartz proposed Post Qualification Application (PQA) as an alternative to the current mechanism for applying for a place at an HEI. The diploma framework is flexible enough to work effectively with the current arrangements, or, if PQA is taken forward, could be adapted to facilitate PQA. However, the Government would need to consider the implications for the diploma framework in adapting it to meet the requirements of PQA. We recognise the potential benefits to learners and HEIs, but we also recognise that there are a number of issues and practicalities for the government, examining bodies, schools, colleges and HEIs to address, when considering the introduction of PQA.

Additional testing

275. As Professor Schwartz noted in his report, there are three reasons why some HEI use their own admission tests:

- to differentiate between similarly qualified applicants;
- to identify potential; and
- to test subject specific skills.

276. We recognise that some institutions currently rely on their own admissions arrangements and tests to differentiate between candidates, and understand that they endeavour to ensure that their admissions policies are fair, and any additional tests are demonstrably fit for purpose. However, by offering greater stretch and differentiation, and by contextualising a candidate's performance through data on the transcript, we expect that our proposals would reduce the need for HEIs to develop their own tests. Because of the challenges that some face in judging between candidates and assessing potential as well as achievement to date, we recommend that urgent attention is given to providing greater differentiation in the assessment of current qualifications, and an early introduction both of the transcript and the extended project.

277. Professor Schwartz recommended that consideration be given to a national test to assess potential for higher education. We considered this issue, and, at this stage, we would not recommend this type of test should be part of the diploma framework. We do, however, welcome the Schwartz proposal of a research project and/or a pilot to investigate the benefits of such a test. Our view is that a national test would need to contribute to fair admissions and help to widen participation. The test would also need to be available and accessible to all learners aspiring to enter higher education. If, on the basis of a robust pilot, a decision were taken to introduce such a test, administered either by the universities or by the assessment bodies, it would seem sensible to incorporate it within the diploma framework.

04 Delivering the new system

Chapter 14 Quality assurance of the new system

This chapter builds upon the quality assurance system for teacher-led assessment proposed in chapter 6 and outlines the procedures that would need to be put in place to guarantee the quality of the new system as a whole.

Our proposals for the diploma and for assessment require a shift in the balance between validation of inputs and monitoring of outputs in favour of the former. This will ensure that the quality of 14-19 programmes and assessment can be guaranteed, including those aspects that do not produce easily measurable outcomes.

The quality assurance arrangements we propose rely on:

- careful monitoring of the content and assessment frameworks developed for programmes and components; and
- centre approval.

Quality of programmes, components and assessment frameworks

278. Improving the quality of programmes means ensuring that they are coherent and relevant. This implies:

- ensuring that all programmes promote achievement in core and main learning, including CKSA;
- developing main learning programmes and components based on identified lines of learning and capable of providing progress to higher levels of achievement, and to HE and employment; and
- systematically involving end-users alongside subject experts and learned bodies in designing the structure and content of programmes and components.

279. QCA would need to develop a regulatory framework to ensure that these principles were embedded in diploma design and content, and that components also met specified demands of level and volume. Inspection and local quality assurance systems should reinforce this process by identifying any weaknesses emerging during delivery.

280. Approved awarding bodies would design, develop and offer diploma programmes and components. They would be responsible for maintaining the standard of their products. They would need to show that they have the expertise to support the assessment framework and the system to manage a national award.

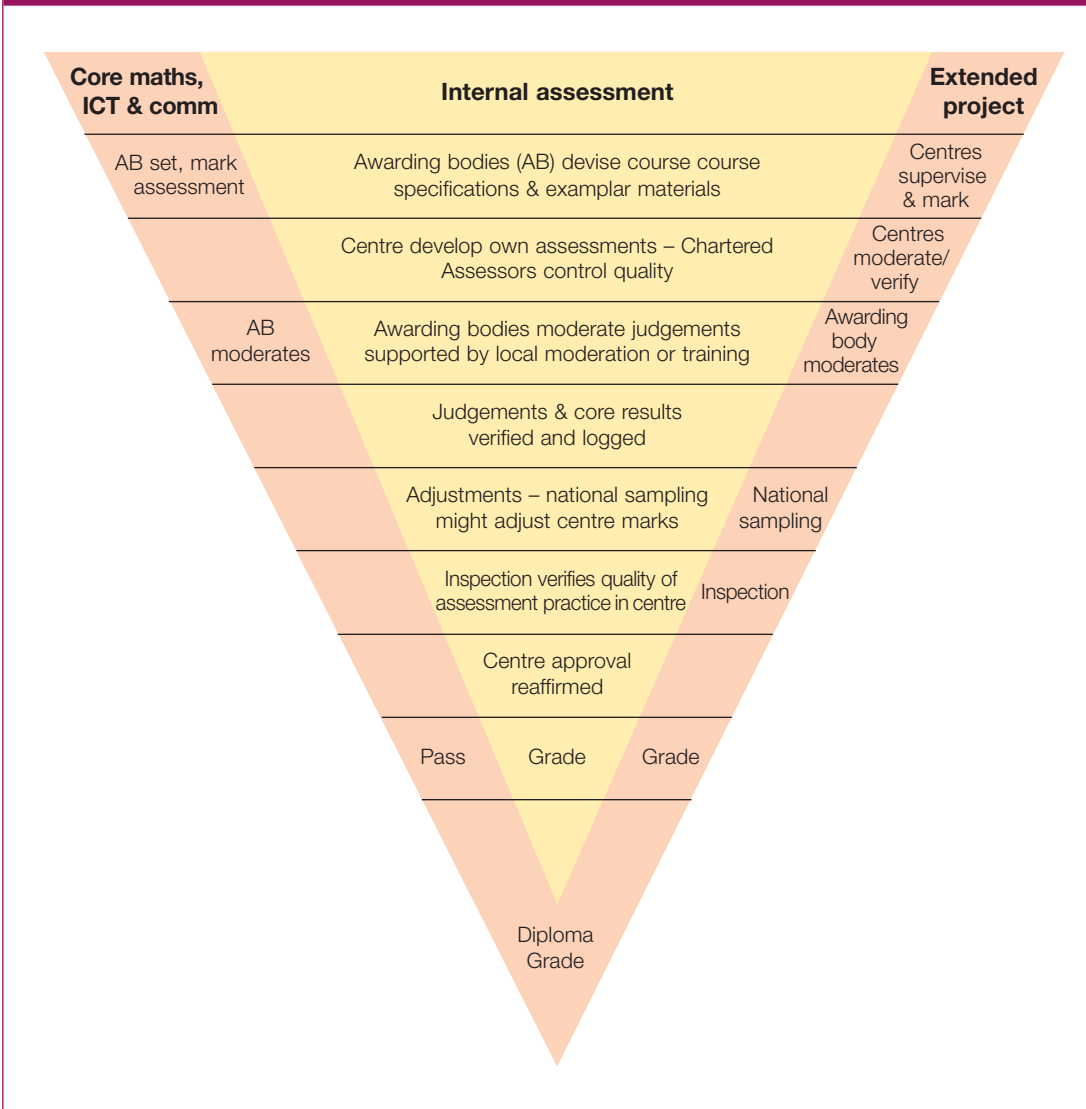
281. Regular national audits should monitor assessment practice and manageability, as well as the coherence and relevance of the knowledge, skills and understanding developed by diplomas and their components. This should also include a national sampling exercise, which focuses on the quality of teacher-set assessments, their marking and judgements.

Centre approval

282. Inspection by Ofsted and ALI, working with awarding organisations, monitors the quality of provision in schools, colleges and training providers. The move towards area inspections is making it easier to hold groups of institutions to account for provision within a locality. To ensure that 14-19 programmes and diplomas conform to the principles outlined in this report, we propose that inspection is used to underpin the validation of institutions or groups of institutions to ensure that they:

- collaborate to provide a wide range of programme and diploma options to young people within an area, with care taken to ensure that one institution has lead responsibility for each young person;
- have appropriate accommodation and facilities and teachers with relevant and up-to-date expertise;
- have arrangements in place to ensure that all components of the programme are delivered, with particular attention paid to arrangements for those components which do not have easily measurable outcomes:
 - CKSA
 - personal review, planning and guidance
 - entitlement to wider activities;
- have robust arrangements in place that would ensure the validity and integrity of assessment, including:
 - administrative systems
 - robust internal quality assurance systems including a potentially pivotal role for Chartered Assessors in institutions, responsible for co-ordinating assessment across the institution, and ensuring that standards are applied consistently and codes of fair practice are adhered to
 - training for other teachers to ensure that they understand their role as assessors and the standards they must apply.

Figure 14.1: Quality assurance process: assessment and grading



Chapter 15

A supportive infrastructure

This chapter outlines changes to the infrastructure that will be necessary to make a reality of our proposals.

Our proposals for the diploma and for assessment require a shift in the balance between validation of inputs and monitoring of outputs in favour of the former and require institutions and the system to work in different ways. In particular, there will need to be greater collaboration between institutions to provide the full range of 14-19 options. This will have implications for governance, funding and performance management arrangements.

Further pressure for changes to performance management arrangements arise from the enhanced coherence of the 14-19 phase, which should reduce the importance of 16 as a break-point in education and training.

Changes will also be necessary to the awarding infrastructure and to information, advice and guidance arrangements.

Collaboration

283. It is our aspiration that, in time, all young people in an area should be entitled to access the full range of diploma lines and main learning options. This cannot be achieved without a significant level of collaboration and planning across an area.

284. The new system would rely on schools, colleges and training providers working collaboratively. Collaboration is not a new idea and we want to build on existing good practice, such as that developed in the 14-19 pathfinders (see annex K) and the Increased Flexibility Programme. However, collaboration would need to happen more systematically if all learners are to have access to a range of options, delivered in institutions with appropriate facilities and expertise.

285. At the local level, collaboration would require resolution of a number of issues:

- identification of a lead institution with responsibility for the learner – particularly to ensure coherence across the learner's programme, that they receive personal review, planning and guidance and are registered with awarding bodies;
- child protection issues and joining up with other agencies; and
- resource allocation and sharing between institutions.

286. Particular issues would arise in rural areas where the distance between and small size of institutions can make it difficult to provide a full range of options. Further consideration and piloting of measures to mitigate these difficulties are needed.

Gateshead pathfinder – collaboration

The area of Central Gateshead covered by the Central Gateshead 6th Form strand of the pathfinder includes some of the most deprived areas of the Borough from which participation rates post-16 are comparatively low. CG6 is a collaboration between Kingsmeadow, Thomas Hepburn and Joseph Swan Schools and Gateshead College all of which are situated within the central Gateshead area. The first two schools are 11-16 only, Joseph Swan School is 11-18 and Gateshead College is a general FE college with a broad range of provision. The overall aim of the CG6 strand of the pathfinder is to provide a full range of progression opportunities within central Gateshead in the belief that this will encourage participation by young people who would not choose to continue their education and training if even a modest amount of travel is involved.

Outcomes

Enhanced advice and guidance was a key objective for CG6 and the four partners have combined the best practice from each institution to produce an agreed statement of learner entitlement to ensure that all learners from the Central Gateshead area obtain the same high standard of support. The delivery of that entitlement is being monitored by a working group with the assistance of a consultant. The partnership has, as intended, delivered a broader range of subjects at AS and A level and a greater variety of work-related learning opportunities building on the strengths of each partner. By sharing staff and resources it has been possible to provide opportunities for post-16 learning in a wider range of locations and this has contributed to an increase in participation within the inner urban area.

Transferability

Much of the development work carried out through the CG6 strand of the Gateshead Pathfinder is transferable both within and outside of the Borough. This part of the project has demonstrated the benefits to be gained from collaboration across a broad front. The four institutions have shared good practice across a range of issues including tutorial and pastoral care, staff development, curriculum development, timetabling and marketing of the provision.

Institutional governance

287. Collaboration has implications for the governance of institutions. Governance models would vary from locality to locality and should not be centrally prescribed. However, arrangements should be put in place to facilitate the development of new governance arrangements, including legislative changes where necessary.

Funding

288. The regime for Government funding of schools, colleges and training providers would need to take account of a range of issues arising from our recommendations, including the implications of collaboration especially where this cuts across the schools/FE/training provider divide. Other issues include differences in pay and

conditions between these three sectors and differing professional qualifications for teachers, lecturers and trainers. Different funding arrangements for 14-16, 16-19 and adult learning would also need to be reviewed if young people are to be able to progress smoothly through the 14-19 phase and into later stages of learning.

Institutional target setting and performance measures

289. It lies beyond the remit of the Working Group to make detailed recommendations on the targets and performance measures which should accompany our proposed reforms. However, it is self evident that the current system based on existing free-standing qualifications would need to change if those qualifications are no longer available.

290. It is clear also that the ways in which performance measures judge the performance of institutions has significant impact on their behaviour. It is essential that a new performance measurement regime reflects and reinforces the overall objectives of the new framework.

Recommendation 32

We recommend that in reforming the performance management system, the Government should pay particular attention to:

- promoting participation at levels appropriate to the young people concerned, by recognising increased success in keeping young people in learning, especially after the end of compulsory schooling;
- fostering flexible progression throughout the 14-19 phase which recognises that not all programmes at a given level will take the same length of time for all learners, especially by focusing on continued participation and distance-travelled, rather than specific outcomes at specific ages, before the end of the phase;
- recognising institutions' success in raising the highest level of achievement which their learners reach, especially by focusing on achievement when young people leave the phase;
- ensuring that the achievements of all young people are counted, enabling all young people to feel pride in their achievements;
- recognising the collaborative efforts of all those institutions which contribute to 14-19 programmes, by giving credit for success to all partners in collaborative arrangements; and
- promoting responsible, professional assessment by teachers, by ensuring that their primary consideration is to deliver valid, dependable judgements on their learners, rather than to provide institutional performance monitoring data.

Awarding infrastructure

291. The awarding infrastructure for the diploma needs to be configured in a way that ensures that young people are correctly registered for the diploma, receive accurate information about their achievements, and that information across the range of diploma achievements can be put together without undue complexity.

292. In the Interim Report we offered four models for awarding diplomas. They were:

- a separate certification agency, working with lots of individual awarding bodies to collect data and award;
- a franchise – where individual diploma titles are designated to specific awarding bodies;
- a limited number of awarding bodies offering a diploma having met specified requirements; and
- a single awarding body responsible for the range of diplomas.

293. There are two key issues here. First, whether a single or multiple bodies should be able to certify whole diplomas, and second, how the awarding bodies responsible for individual diploma programmes and components should be organised.

294. It is our view that a central body will be needed to collect achievement data and award the diplomas. This would simplify arrangements for collating achievements which may cover two or more separate diploma programmes and involve transferring credit from one to another. It would also ensure a clear single point of national recognition for 14-19 qualifications.

295. The organisation of awarding bodies is less clear cut in our view. We believe that some rationalisation of the existing number of awarding bodies (currently in excess of 100) is inevitable and desirable, but the exact nature of the final structure must take account of issues which go wider than our remit, especially the rationalisation of adult qualifications and the development of an adult credit framework. Any reform of awarding bodies must also safeguard the stability and reliability of the qualifications system during the transition period.

Information, advice and guidance infrastructure

296. Personal review, planning and guidance forms part of core learning for all 14-19 programmes. If it is to be successfully delivered, resources will need to be made available to ensure significant development of and improvement in the information, advice and guidance provided by schools, colleges and training providers and by Connexions.

297. In responding to the recent review of careers education and guidance and developing an information, advice and guidance (IAG) infrastructure to support the diploma framework, policy-makers should consider the need for:

- impartiality – ensuring that young people are made aware of the full range of options available to them and can access specific advice, focused on their individual needs, when they need it;
- easily accessible and up-to-date information on 14-19 pathways and labour market information. This should provide both the national picture and reflect regional and local variations; and
- workforce development to ensure that those responsible for giving IAG (whether personal advisors, teachers/lecturers or support staff) are properly trained to undertake the role.

Chapter 16

Implementation

The reforms described in this report are ambitious and far-reaching and it would take at least 10 years for their full implementation. There are multiple and interconnecting strands to the work and these should be carefully aligned to ensure manageability for those responsible for delivery.

A strong coalition between teachers, employers and HEIs, between different government departments and between communities and a host of agencies providing services to young people would be needed if the reforms are to be a success. Perhaps the most significant challenge for implementation is the change in mindsets that our proposals demand. Thinking would need to be in terms of whole programmes rather than individual qualifications. This has implications for everything from day-to-day teaching to institutional boundaries and accountability measures.

Full introduction of the proposals would take 10 years, but some changes should be introduced earlier to alleviate quickly some of the more pressing weaknesses of the system. These 'quick wins' include:

- *changes to the structure, content and assessment of qualifications to reduce the burden of assessment;*
- *development of components in functional mathematics, literacy and communication and ICT to be made available as stand-alone qualifications;*
- *design of vocational programmes to form specialised diploma lines and development of vocational components for open diplomas;*
- *development of criteria for and piloting of the extended project; and*
- *greater availability of information on learners' performance to help HEIs, in particular, to distinguish between top performers.*

Each reform should secure significant improvements, but the full benefits would not be felt until the diploma is introduced. This should only happen after careful piloting of the full system.

Timescale

298. Annex L sets out an illustrative timetable and milestones for implementation of our proposals.

299. Sufficient time must be given to the development work needed, to put the supporting infrastructure in place, and to carry parents, teaching staff, employers, HEIs and others with us. It takes time to build trust, introduce new ways of thinking and to shape expectations. It takes time to develop the new resources to support delivery and to secure agreement on common ends and how to achieve them.

300. We can also learn from other reform programmes such as Scotland's Higher Still reform and GCSE introduction and GCE A level reforms. They show that when reforms aim to create unified frameworks the task of building understanding and support is both difficult and important. In working up the detailed features of our reform proposals, we should expect changes, but hold firm to the principles.

301. To introduce our reforms successfully, we believe the following approach to implementation would be necessary:

- maintaining the momentum towards full implementation, because we cannot wait ten years before experiencing at least some of the benefits of reform. This includes carrying out extensive research, modelling and testing of the operation and manageability of our proposals with deliverers and users;
- ensuring the stability of the existing system of qualifications and that any short-term changes feed into the long-term proposals for change. It is important that, in the interim, young people continue to experience good quality provision; and
- good clear communication with the key stakeholders to ensure that they both understand the reforms and are involved in the process of winning hearts and minds.

Momentum

302. In the ten years between now and full roll-out of the diploma system considerable gains could be made for many 14-19 year olds by integrating into current qualifications, programmes and structures changes that take us closer to reform. Many teachers, employers and HEIs are impatient for change. They want to see improvements in participation and attainment in the short to medium term that clearly feed into long-term changes. To minimise disruption to the existing system, interim changes would need to be carefully integrated. Further advice would be needed on the detailed timing and sequencing of the reform to systems and programmes.

303. Reductions in the burden of assessment in qualifications could be introduced early. This involves changes to their structure, content and assessment. QCA believes that redeveloped GCEs and GCSEs can be with institutions in 2007 and 2008 respectively.

304. Employers and HEIs are clamouring for a significant rise in the number of young people with a good command of functional mathematics, functional literacy and communication and functional ICT skills. Components in these subjects should be available as stand-alone qualifications by 2008 for use both by the wider cohort and for pilot centres.

305. Development of enhanced vocational programmes and options should begin immediately, including:

- establishing of the framework of specialised diploma lines, in consultation with relevant stakeholders;
- developing design criteria to ensure progression, integration between the diplomas and apprenticeship frameworks and bridging courses between the two;
- design of diploma content, including modification to existing qualifications; and the development of common components that would support horizontal transfer;
- design of vocational options drawn from these lines for inclusion within open diplomas.

306. Much of this work could form part of the existing Sector Skills Strategy for improving vocational provision, and should be ready by 2010.

307. HEIs want to be able to discriminate better between candidates presenting A grades. A profile of grades and scores for each unit assessed can already be provided and should be made available systematically as a fore-runner to the transcript. The introduction of the extended project would also aid differentiation, and criteria and guidance to support its use should be introduced early, by 2008. In the longer-term, changes to the demand of A levels would inject greater challenge into all advanced programmes. This alongside an extended grading scale would need to be trialled ahead of implementation.

Research and piloting

308. Piloting the whole diploma system is important. Without an assessment of the full impact of the package of reform on learners, institutions and their staff, we are in danger of adding to workloads and burden. The system should be tested through:

- pilots of individual elements of the diplomas framework, such as the core components; and 14-19 curriculum innovation projects such the Increased Flexibility Programme and 14-19 Pathfinders, which should be extended to allow the evaluation of some of the key features of diploma type programmes;
- extensive research and evaluation into the assessment regime and its impact on different groups of learners, benefits to learners, teacher workload and professionalism and general institutional manageability of quality assurance; and
- a four-year pilot of the full system, including evaluation against the objectives set out in this report and for the purposes of identifying any unintended consequences.

309. The strands of work that must be completed before the system can be piloted²⁴ include:

- workforce training and development and assessment of the impact on managing workload;
- infrastructure changes – including governance, funding, performance management and information, advice and guidance arrangements as detailed in chapter 15; and
- the development of data management systems.

310. We believe that implementation must be supported by research and modelling of the reforms, to provide a secure basis for their final introduction. This would ensure that further developments and detailed features of the system are carefully underpinned through working with those who have to operate the system – teachers, lecturers, tutors and training providers. This is particularly true of the proposed assessment regime and quality assurance arrangements. This modelling work would need to be built into the implementation programme at all stages.

311. During implementation, it would be important to ensure that reforms remain true to the principles we have set out and that any deviation from them has a sound basis. An independent group should be set up to monitor this and to provide a consistent overview as Ministers and potentially Governments, as well as key personnel in partner organisations, change. Arrangements would also need to be put in place to consider how the reforms impact on different groups of learners.

²⁴ COI Communications, *A summary of research findings in implementation planning. A report prepared for 14-19 Working Group on Reform* (July 2004).

Communication

312. Clear and consistent communication and an open dialogue with those ultimately responsible for delivering the diploma system during the implementation phase would be important. Full consultation with all stakeholders would be vital during implementation. This should include young people themselves. Transition to the new framework should not present any surprises to key partners. The information and examples gleaned from pilot activity and curriculum innovation projects should be shared nationally.

313. At a strategic level, the impact of the proposal for other policy areas should not detract from the need to make change and for a sensible timetable for their implementation. Government commitment to the proposal would need to go across departments and functions.

Recommendation 33

The strategy for implementing reform should include:

- early implementation of some changes that would deliver benefits in their own right and pave the way for implementation of the new system;
- continuation and support of curriculum innovation projects to encourage them to accommodate and pilot elements of the new system;
- establishment of a four-year pilot of the diploma system with a sample of 14-19 year olds. Evaluation of the pilot prior to full roll-out should consider whether it meets the objectives we have set and whether it has any adverse impacts on specific group of learners; and
- extensive research and modelling of the proposals and their impact on institutions and systems.

A strategy for communication between those involved in delivery, and with stakeholders, young people and the public should be established in the early stages of the work and maintained throughout.

Costs

314. We believe that our reforms would offer value for money, not least from the increased economic activity that should result from better trained and educated young people, and the benefits to young people themselves. Based on information and data provided by DfES, LSC and QCA, we believe the additional costs should not be substantial compared to the overall costs of operating the education and training system as a whole. A significant amount could be achieved by refocusing and reallocating existing resources in support of the reforms.

315. It is self evident that the implementation process and the reforms themselves would need to be adequately resourced and that the method of implementation would impact on the cost. While more detailed work to cost reform must follow, what is clear is that the biggest costs would derive from the increased participation we expect to result from our reforms, though this would carry significant economic, social and educational benefits and therefore represent good value for money.

316. We welcome the Secretary of State's recent announcement that money would be set aside to begin to develop our proposals over the next three years.

Cost categories

317. The costs of reform fall into four main categories. These include:

- maintenance of the existing system;
- transition to the new system (includes development and pilot);
- impact of new system e.g. participation;
- operation of the new system.

318. Within these main categories, there are five principal features of the system against which costs arise. They feature as costs for both transition and ongoing operation and include:

- **Curriculum and assessment development work.** This would form part of early work, but will need continuous updating.
- **Workforce training/recruitment** would require considerable input in the earliest stages, but as practice becomes embedded in initial rather than continuing teacher education, costs would reduce. Nevertheless this will still potentially cost more than in the current system. It should include workforce development to ensure that those responsible for giving information, advice and guidance (whether personal advisers, teachers/lecturers or support staff) are properly trained to undertake this role.
- **Infrastructure.** This includes at a national level: establishing and operating a national database and also funding, regulation and quality assurance of other structures. At a local level it includes local planning for collaboration, timetabling, and support for wider activities and guidance which present additional costs.
- **Higher participation** as a result of the new system. Increased post-16 participation is already a key objective of Government policy. Our proposals are part of an overall strategy for securing it.
- **Additional costs per learner** under the new system, arising particularly from the increased proportion of vocational provision which is typically more expensive to run than other courses, and the increased average volume of 14-19 programmes in institutions where current programmes fall below the volume required for a diploma.

Recommendation 34

We recommend that funding of the reforms should take account of:

- Transition costs, including:
 - workforce development;
 - curriculum and assessment development;
 - developing and piloting the diploma components and system in operation, including the infrastructure to support the system;
 - building the national and local infrastructure – including ICT-based information systems, and awarding infrastructure support for extended projects, wider activities and common skills, local planning and increased collaboration; and
 - communication.
- Steady state costs, including:
 - the impact of increased participation, greater take-up of vocational courses and their additional cost and higher average programme volume;
 - funding per pupil;
 - local infrastructure, to support the assessment system, local timetabling, increased collaboration and improved, information advice and guidance with better advice on pathways and opportunities; and
 - maintenance of national infrastructure, including ICT and data management to support the diploma system.

Overseeing implementation

319. While it is clearly right that the Government should lead and be accountable for strategic reform on the scale which we propose, effective delivery would require a coalition across the very wide range of those who have a stake in the delivery and outcomes of 14-19 learning. Managing this would be a complex task. It would require a strong strategic focus and continuing dialogue with those involved in making it happen, including those in the many areas of the country where significant progress has already been made towards improving 14-19 learning. In the early stages, it would be important to work with teachers, lecturers, trainers and those running education and training institutions to model the impact of the reforms and to explore different approaches to their implementation. This would provide useful information on which further refinements of the system can be made. It would be important to involve inspection and funding agencies fully to ensure that systems align to support the principles of reform, as well as the detail. There would be an important role for development and support for curriculum and assessment bodies in testing methodologies and approaches and preparing guidance and support.

Recommendation 35

Alongside the implementation programme, management arrangements would be needed to ensure that all the strands of activity are co-ordinated and contribute effectively to the implementation process. We recommend the establishment of an independent advisory panel comprising key stakeholders and experts (including young people and representation of equal opportunities issues) to advise upon the implementation of the reforms.

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