

Qualifications

Specialised Diploma

2006

The Specialised Diploma

Qualification structure



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Curriculum Authority

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Acknowledgements

The Centre for Education and Industry (CEI) at the University of Warwick was commissioned to undertake development work on the structure and standards of the Specialised Diploma.

First published in 2006

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ISBN 1-85838-825-2

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Printed in Great Britain.

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Introduction

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) are, as part of the 14-19 reform programme, developing a new qualification called the Specialised Diploma. This qualification, agreed by the Secretary of State, recognises achievement at levels 1, 2 and 3 from ages 14 to 19.

The Specialised Diploma will be available for each of 14 employment sectors (called 'lines of learning' in this document; see the Glossary for a list.)

The purpose of the Specialised Diploma is to:

- develop the knowledge and skills needed to progress into employment, training or further or higher education
- meet the skills needs of employers
- achieve the target (set in the White Paper on 14-19 education) of 90 per cent of 17-year-olds in full-time education or training
- help increase the percentage of young people who achieve level 2 and 3 qualifications
- improve the quality and recognition of qualifications in applied subjects.

Main components of the Specialised Diploma

The diploma has three main components ensuring a balance of practical and theoretical understanding, underpinned by essential skills:

- principal learning
- additional/specialist learning
- generic learning.

Principal learning

In this component, students acquire knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes relevant to a line of learning and are given opportunities to apply them in work situations.

Principal learning is:

- essential sector-related learning
- mandatory (although sometimes learners may choose between several mandatory pathways within a diploma line)
- applied in character.

Principal learning will be set in the context of the relevant sector and offer opportunities for learners to apply knowledge and skills in practical ways.

Principal learning may include:

- visits to and learning in the workplace
- school- or college-based activities led by representatives of the sector
- realistic environments such as workshops, kitchens or salons in schools or colleges
- e-learning.

A sector may also provide up-to-date case studies and web-based resources. Mentoring by older students and employers, including via the internet, may also play a role.

Assessment and design criteria will be appropriate to this type of applied, sector-related learning and recognise achievement in a range of different settings.

Principal learning will ensure that:

- skills development is related to purpose and context
- teaching and learning draw on current experience from the relevant sector
- there is an emphasis on learning by doing
- rich and varied learning environments are used.

At least 50 per cent of principal learning will feature real or realistic sector situations, to ensure it can accurately be described as ‘applied’.

Fifty per cent represents around 25 per cent of the total qualification, depending on the level.

Where Diploma Development Partnerships (DDPs) reduce the proportion of principal learning and increase the proportion of additional/specialist learning, the proportion of principal learning allocated to realistic contexts must be adjusted accordingly.

Additional/specialist learning

In this component, students specialise within a sector and/or complementary areas.

Additional/specialist learning:

- consists of units or qualifications chosen by the learner
- enables the learner to specialise or take up relevant complementary learning
- provides opportunities to meet particular needs
- may include some national curriculum key stage 4 entitlement areas
- supports choice and progression within a coherent whole.

Additional/specialist learning will allow for both flexibility and specialisation.

The relevant sector will identify units that can be combined to allow the learner to explore the sector in different ways. For example, a Specialised Diploma in retail might offer units to specialise in fashion retail. In some sectors, options may be grouped together to create pathways.

Generic learning

In this component, students develop and apply the broad skills and knowledge necessary for learning, employment and personal development. Generic skills have a wide application and can be developed in a variety of contexts.

Generic learning:

- includes functional skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT)
- includes personal, learning and thinking skills
- is based on learning through experience (see ‘Experiential learning’, below)
- includes a project offering the chance to show potential, such as interests and creativity, plus depth, breadth and independence of learning.

Other aspects of the Specialised Diploma

Experiential learning

Learning by experience or experiential learning is central to developing work-related skills. It requires learners to reflect on their experience, draw out and articulate lessons learnt (generalise), and then apply their learning to new situations or activities. With guidance, learners will be able to review, plan and set targets for their programme.

Experiential learning:

- actively involves learners in planning and reviewing their Specialised Diploma programme and in recording their progress and achievements
- explores different experiences and environments
- promotes functional skills and personal, learning and thinking skills
- encourages learners to recognise, apply and extend their learning (which can include achievement of units at a higher level as well as experience gained outside the Specialised Diploma such as part-time work or volunteering)
- offers a coherent learning experience that is more than a piecemeal collection of units/qualifications.

Projects

Projects, an essential part of the Specialised Diplomas at each level, will provide the opportunity to draw on and integrate learning from all components.

Through the project, learners can:

- demonstrate their full potential, interests and creativity
- focus in more depth on specific aspects of their specialist area
- broaden their sector-related learning by engaging in an investigative piece of work, for example, on environmental, social, economic, political and/or other issues related to their principal learning
- develop their ability to learn independently and carry out an enquiry
- apply functional skills and personal, learning and thinking skills
- adopt an inter-disciplinary or cross-sector approach
- adapt their applied and generic skills and learning to other contexts such as business, social or community enterprise or democratic participation.

Project requirements and opportunities for autonomy and enquiry are appropriate to each level. Projects at level 3 will work within the same criteria as the extended project available at A level.

Students will be able to design a project relating to any aspect of their diploma. This is important to motivate learners and personalise the Specialised Diplomas.

Functional skills and personal, learning and thinking skills

Specialised Diplomas require learners to gain functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT. At levels 1 and 2 learners must match or exceed the level of the respective Specialised Diploma. At level 3 learners must at least reach level 2 functional skills, although some sectors may require particular skills at level 3.

Personal, learning and thinking skills are necessary for most kinds of work and for general learning. They are important because they require the learner to be creative, investigative, self-directed/managing, reflective and able to work cooperatively. These skills will be developed in context in the Specialised Diploma programme. DDPs will draw primarily on the framework to determine for each line of learning how these wider skills will apply to their area.

Work experience

A period of work experience with specific expectations is required. This will be at least 10 days at each level.

Work experience will:

- support the development and recognition of work-related learning
- build on the near-universal provision of pre-16 work experience
- recognise sector skills when set in relevant settings
- develop general employability skills in other settings
- enhance the overall learning experience
- have different learning results at different levels
- be flexible about how results are achieved.

For older students part-time employment could provide some or all of the required experience.

Levels of Specialised Diplomas

There are three levels of Specialised Diploma:

- Specialised Diploma level 1
- Specialised Diploma level 2
- Specialised Diploma level 3.

In each level, there is:

- a volume, given in number of guided learning hours (GLHs)
- a weighting of the three main components (principal learning, additional/specialist learning, generic learning).

Specialised Diploma level 1

Volume

A Specialised Diploma level 1 requires 600 GLHs, broadly comparable, in terms of average length of study, to four to five GCSEs.

A Specialised Diploma level 1 can be completed:

- in one year if taken on its own
- in two years if taken at the same time as the key stage 4 national curriculum programme of study.

Weighting of components

The Specialised Diploma level 1 main components are weighted as follows:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| • principal learning | 40 per cent |
| • additional/specialist learning | 20 per cent |
| • generic learning | 40 per cent. |

The proportions of the components in the different lines of learning may be varied.

Specialised Diploma level 1:

- provides a milestone for achievement at level 1 and an incentive to move on to level 2, particularly within key stage 4
- provides the foundation to progress to level 2
- helps keep learners in 14–19 education
- includes learning related to a specific sector or several sectors
- includes a project to allow individuals to plan and organise their own learning
- requires functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT at level 1
- provides the essential personal, learning and thinking skills to progress in education, training

- provides the opportunity to explore sectors further, as well as to take up some national curriculum entitlement within additional/specialist learning
- coexists with and, where appropriate, supports pre-16 national curriculum study
- encourages progress by allowing the possible co-teaching of aspects of level 1 and level 2.

Principal learning

Principal learning is sector-related but may include learning from more than one sector.

Additional/specialist learning

Additional/specialist learning offers the chance either to take up relevant complementary learning or to specialise, with the appropriate sector determining the range of options available.

It may be possible to meet some of the requirements of the national curriculum entitlements if sectors consider it appropriate.

Generic learning

Generic learning includes personal, learning and thinking skills, and functional (English, mathematics, ICT) skills at level 1. It also includes a project offering the opportunity to achieve agreed objectives through particular topics and activities that engage the learner. Generic learning also supports experiential learning through an individual planning and review process. Generic learning is heavily weighted at this level because it is critical to successful progress to level 2.

Case study: level 1

Dan achieved level 4s in his national curriculum tests at 14. Dan's dad and uncle are roofing contractors and Dan has always been enthusiastic about hands-on activities at school. During year 9 options Dan spent some time at a local construction centre, run jointly by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB)-ConstructionSkills and a local college, as well as sampling other key stage 4 options. Following discussion with his tutor, his parents and an adviser Dan decided that he wanted to take a Specialised Diploma level 1 in construction and the built environment.

This contained units that introduced him to a variety of jobs and organisations in this sector and to basic construction terminology and techniques. It also gave him the opportunity to try taster units featuring the skills and knowledge required by the core construction occupations of bricklaying, carpentry and joinery, painting and decorating. Dan spent two days a week in a workshop at his local college where he benefited from working alongside more advanced trainees while being supervised by a specialist trainer. Dan also completed units in health and safety and enterprise. During his second term Dan worked two days a week for five weeks at a building maintenance company.

Back at school Dan followed a programme of study that included his core national curriculum and a GCSE in construction and the built environment. He also researched and carried out a project that looked at how the industry affects the environment and the community. Dan achieved his Specialised Diploma level 1 in construction and the built environment at the end of year 11. He can now choose between going on to level 2, taking an apprenticeship in construction or following a general programme.

Specialised Diploma level 2

Volume

A Specialised Diploma level 2 requires 800 GLHs, broadly comparable, in terms of average length of study, to five to six GCSEs.

A Specialised Diploma level 2 can be completed:

- in one year if taken on its own
- in two years if taken at the same time as the key stage 4 national curriculum programme of study.

Weighting of components

The Specialised Diploma level 2 main components are weighted as follows:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| • principal learning | 56 per cent |
| • additional/specialist learning | 18 per cent |
| • generic learning | 26 per cent. |

The proportions of the components in the different lines of learning may be varied.

Specialised Diploma level 2:

- provides an opportunity to prepare for employment or progress into work-based learning
- provides the foundation to progress to level 3
- includes principal learning related to a specific sector and may include units relevant to other sectors
- includes a project to allow individuals to plan and organise their own learning
- requires functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT at level 2
- provides the essential personal, thinking and learning skills to progress in education, training and employment
- provides the opportunity to explore the sector further, or take up complementary learning as a part of additional/specialist learning
- coexists with and, where appropriate, supports pre-16 national curriculum study.

Principal learning

Principal learning is sector-related but may include learning from more than one sector.

Additional/specialist learning

Additional/specialist learning offers the chance either to specialise further in a sector or take up relevant complementary learning. The range of units will include the opportunity to explore one line of learning in greater depth.

Sectors will agree the optional units for additional/specialist learning. Choices will be determined by relevance to the sector, coherence for the learner and plans for progression. There will be opportunities to gain complementary skills and knowledge, as well as to explore related sectors.

In some lines of learning units enabling fulfilment of some national curriculum entitlement within a line of learning (for example, extended science for the health and care sector, modern languages for business/hospitality and catering) will be available.

Generic learning

Specialised Diploma level 2 requires level 2 functional skills. A project demonstrating generic and principal learning, including personal, thinking and learning skills relevant to a sector, is also required. Generic learning forms approximately 26 per cent of the total, reflecting the greater weight given to principal learning at this level.

Case study: level 2

Saideep has developed an interest in the health sector, partly through his sister who is a dental technician. However, he is also attracted to the music industry. He achieved level 5s and 6s in the key stage 3 tests.

Through careers education he researched roles in the health sector and the qualifications required. During the options process he talked to students and teachers across his local partnership about a number of key stage 4 courses before he decided that he wanted to take a Specialised Diploma level 2 in health and social care.

As part of his principal learning programme Saideep explored a range of work roles by interviewing health and social care professionals. He experienced work-related learning in a variety of contexts including a local health centre, a residential home for the elderly, a radiography department and a dental surgery. In addition to GCSEs in mathematics, English and core science, Saideep's individual learning plan included health science and extended science specially designed for those interested in the health sector, which forms part of his additional/specialist learning.

Saideep also studied for a GCSE in music and secured a work placement in a music shop. This boosted his confidence and helped him develop employment and generic skills and to consider his career plans.

Saideep also took part in a taster programme for healthcare occupations offered by a local healthcare trust in conjunction with the local Health Workforce Development Agency (HWDA). This inspired his Specialised Diploma project that explored the use of music therapy in psychiatric care.

During the second year of his Specialised Diploma studies, Saideep received careers advice that helped him explore different ways of pursuing a career in the health sector, perhaps as a nurse, either through A levels or through a Specialised Diploma at level 3. He chose the latter because, after visiting a local college, he was attracted to the opportunities for work-related learning that it, together with local employers, was able to offer.

Specialised Diploma level 3

Volume

Specialised Diploma level 3 requires 1,080 GLHs, broadly comparable, in terms of average length of study, to three GCE A levels.

There is also an award, a subset of level 3, broadly comparable, in terms of average length of study, to two GCE A levels. Its content, however, will be drawn from the full Specialised Diploma level 3. (QCA will provide guidance on this in spring 2006.)

A Specialised Diploma level 3 can be completed as a two-year full-time programme.

Weighting of components

The Specialised Diploma level 3 main components are weighted as follows:

- principal learning 48 per cent
- additional/specialist learning 33 per cent
- generic learning 19 per cent.

The proportions of the components in the different lines of learning may be varied.

A Specialised Diploma level 3:

- provides the foundation to progress to higher education and to employment with training
- includes an extended project to allow individuals to plan and organise their own learning and to demonstrate synthesis and other higher skills
- provides the essential personal, thinking and learning skills to progress in education, training and employment
- allows for the highest possible level of achievement within level 3, including the scope to demonstrate higher intellectual capability
- requires level 2 functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT
- includes sector-related principal learning, which may involve options to explore different specialisms within a sector
- permits further specialisation through the choice of options offered by the sector in additional learning or complementary learning through relevant units or qualifications.

Principal learning

Principal learning is sector-related and may include options to specialise within a sector.

Additional/specialist learning

Additional/specialist learning allows for further specialisation through the choice of options set out by the sector. However, relevant complementary learning will also be offered, such as languages, music or science.

Generic learning

An extended project stretches learners and encourages them to demonstrate higher-level skills and cognitive abilities. Level 2 functional skills will be required. Although many learners will already have reached this, others will need to achieve level 2 at the same time as they are studying for the Specialised Diploma level 3.

Some sectors might require additional mathematics, English or ICT at level 3. This will be made available within additional/specialist learning. For example, level 3 mathematics might be needed for a Specialised Diploma level 3 in engineering.

Case study: level 3

Amber achieved nine GCSEs, seven at grade C or above, including A grades in mathematics and ICT. Amber researched careers in pharmacy and ICT. Following an interview with an adviser and discussions with sixth-form and college tutors, she decided to take a Specialised Diploma level 3 in ICT which she saw as an opportunity to gain the necessary university qualifications and find out more about the work done by IT professionals. Together with her tutor she developed an individual learning plan. Her principal learning included units on network management, IT systems, website development and management as well as a shared unit on IT in business (business technology). Amber and her teachers/lecturers were able to access up-to-date IT projects through e-skills UK (the Sector Skills Council), which provided a starting point for some of Amber's assignments. As part of her business technology unit, Amber carried out research into the IT system used at the local supermarket where she works on Saturdays. This part-time job also helped her develop a range of employment and generic skills, for example, an understanding of how competition might change job roles.

Amber also chose to study A level chemistry, a subject she had always enjoyed, as part of her additional/specialist learning. The analytical demands of chemistry provided the functional skills in mathematics to level 3 (beyond the minimum requirement in her Specialised Diploma).

Amber's cousin is diabetic and Amber had been involved in fundraising for a diabetes charity. Building on this, Amber developed a proposal for her extended project – designing and implementing a web-based mutual-support network for diabetics. This enabled her to combine personal interests and applied studies. She identified the skills, knowledge and aptitudes that she hoped to develop and demonstrate, including project management, problem solving and patient empowerment. Although the website did not progress beyond a working prototype, Amber was able to record significant learning, which was documented in her assessed project evaluation. After two years Amber completed her Specialised Diploma gaining a merit overall and a distinction for her extended project. Her individual learning programme provided a detailed record of her plans and achievements and her Specialised Diploma transcript recorded achievement at unit level.

Although Amber considered a full-time job on an IT helpdesk, she decided instead to apply for a degree in IT, knowing that she could still earn money through vacation work at the supermarket, where she had been promoted to supervisor. Amber's Specialised Diploma demonstrated to the university that she had the knowledge, skills and attitude necessary to study IT at degree level and she was offered a place.

Progression

Progression routes

There are various ways to progress through the Specialised Diplomas. They are designed to enable learners to combine learning and achievement at different levels within a single academic year. For some the change in level will coincide with a change in year (though they may have studied some units at other levels), while others may progress between levels mid-year. This ensures progress at a pace appropriate to the learner's needs.

It follows that:

- Specialised Diploma level 1 can be completed in less than two years
- if Specialised Diploma level 2 is not completed at age 16, the units achieved can be carried forward and the full award completed post-16
- in general, partially completed Specialised Diplomas will be portable across time and between institutions
- providers and partnerships of providers will need to share and plan provision and progression arrangements
- providers are expected, working in partnerships, to offer progression through the lines of learning
- where learners complete level 2 during year 12 they will be able to begin studying units towards a Specialised Diploma level 3
- learners in key stage 3 may have access to aspects of diploma generic learning.

Age	Route 1	Route 2	Route 3	Route 4
Age 19–20				Level 3
Age 18–19		Level 3	Level 3	Level 3
Age 17–18	Level 3	Level 3	Level 3	Levels 2 and 3
Age 16–17	Level 3	Level 2	Level 2	Level 2
Age 15–16	Level 2	Level 2	Levels 1 and 2	Level 1
Age 14–15	Level 2	Level 1	Level 1	Entry level and level 1

Entering a level

Achievement at one level of the Specialised Diploma will normally allow students to progress to the next level of any Specialised Diploma.

Learners on entry-level programmes will have access to units from Specialised Diplomas at level 1 and higher.

Moving to a higher level

The Specialised Diplomas will support progression to a higher level through:

- the development of generic skills, including personal, learning and thinking skills
- the learning and evidence of achievement demonstrated in the project
- coherent applied learning, which combines practical and theoretical elements, enabling progression to appropriate foundation and other degree programmes
- confidence that learners are well advised about careers and are more likely to make successful and sustainable decisions about their learning and progress
- completion of level 4 units as part of Specialised Diploma level 3, where appropriate, demonstrating learners' capability for higher study
- recognition of diploma achievement with Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) tariff points
- involvement of higher education in the design and delivery of level 3 and 4 units for use in the diploma programme.

The national curriculum

A new entitlement to Specialised Diplomas is being created for 2013.

The Specialised Diploma model assumes that:

- core national curriculum learning requires about 350 GLHs per annum (based on Ofsted/QCA reports on averages)
- an average of 800 GLHs are available for each year of key stage 4 in schools
- national curriculum English, mathematics and ICT can be delivered in conjunction with generic learning and, for specific diplomas, with principal learning
- national curriculum work-related learning will be delivered through the diploma.

Some national curriculum subjects in arts, modern languages, design and technology and humanities could be accommodated in the additional/specialist or principal learning, where appropriate to the diploma. Extended science could be accommodated in the additional/specialist or principal learning for specific diplomas.

Such overlaps make it possible for a pre-16 learner to complete Specialised Diploma level 1 in one year alongside the national curriculum, provided a substantial portion of diploma generic skills are delivered through national curriculum time and a portion of the national curriculum entitlement is delivered by the diploma. Many students will take longer than a year to complete Specialised Diploma level 1: progress will depend upon the learner's pace and on the extent of national curriculum entitlement delivered through the diploma.

At level 2, the national curriculum and Specialised Diploma require 800 GLHs, approximately half the learning time available. Diplomas are likely to occupy much of the available curriculum time beyond the core. However, learners may take up aspects of one or more of their other entitlements through parts of the Specialised Diploma, if these fall within its scope.

Apprenticeships

Specialised Diplomas and apprenticeships are distinct. However, there will be clear routes to progress from Specialised Diplomas into apprenticeships and vice versa. Shared learning between the two will be maximised through the identification of common aspects. Units within these two routes will be designed so that, where appropriate, they meet the needs of both apprenticeship frameworks and the Specialised Diplomas.

Glossary

Additional/specialist learning

Units or qualifications that learners choose to include in their Specialised Diploma. Additional/specialist learning is complementary or specialised in character. It consists of further learning and can include national curriculum entitlement areas and/or learning options such as languages, music or science that relate to individual needs.

Diploma Development Partnership (DDP)

A partnership between employers (with an interest/stake in the area) and education representatives (with professional, educational and qualification-design expertise). Brought together through sector skills councils. Led by the most appropriate sector skills council. Responsible for a line of learning.

Entitlement areas

A guaranteed core curriculum providing all children with the opportunity to learn the skills and understanding required to continue learning regardless of sex, social background, race, religion or disability. They include the national curriculum, religious education, collective worship, sex education and career education as well as other wider opportunities.

Experiential learning cycle

A process that stresses the central role of experience in work-related learning. Learners reflect on their experience, draw out and articulate lessons learnt (generalise), and then apply their learning to new situations or activities.

Functional skills

Functional skills are core elements of English, mathematics and ICT, providing the essential knowledge, skills and understanding needed to operate confidently, effectively and independently in life and at work.

Generic learning

Generic learning enables students to develop and apply the skills and knowledge necessary for learning, employment and personal development. It applies across the Specialised Diploma programmes, in particular through projects.

Generic skills

Generic skills are relevant to learning, training and working in all lines of learning and all sectors. They include functional skills and personal, thinking and learning skills.

Guided learning hours (GLHs)

The number of hours of teacher-supervised or directed study time assigned to complete the qualification or a unit of a qualification.

Lines of learning

First teaching: September 2008

Information and communication technology

Health and social care

Engineering

Creative and media

Construction and built environment

First teaching: September 2009

Land-based and environmental

Manufacturing

Hair and beauty

Business, administration and finance

Hospitality and catering

First teaching: September 2010

Public services

Sport and leisure

Retail

Travel and tourism

National curriculum

What pupils will be taught in state-maintained schools. It provides a balanced education covering 11 subjects, divided into four key stages according to age.

Pathway

A route to progress through the Specialised Diploma framework.

Personal, learning and thinking skills

The framework of skills which, with functional English, mathematics and ICT, will equip all young people for successful employment and life-long learning.

Principal learning

Units or qualifications that the learner must include in their Specialised Diploma. Principal learning is applied in character and consists of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes that support progress through the line of learning into the sector concerned.

Specialised Diplomas

A defined set of qualifications or units of qualifications combined according to a set of rules. They may be existing units or qualifications or purpose-designed. The Specialised Diplomas are designed to support progress into further study, training and employment in a particular employment sector or line of learning.

Transcript

A report of the components and units that make up a learner's programme and achievement. It includes assessed achievement beyond the threshold required for award of a Specialised Diploma.

Unit

The smallest portion of a qualification that can be awarded credits in its own right and wholly transferred into another qualification.

About this publication

Who is it for?	This publication is for teachers, headteachers, educational professionals and all those involved in 14–19 education and achievement.
What is it about?	It describes the components, levels and progression routes of the Specialised Diploma.
What is it for?	It sets out the structure of the Specialised Diploma.
Related publications	<i>14-19 Education and Skills: Implementation Plan</i> (DfES, 2005) <i>14-19 Education and Skills White Paper</i> (DfES, 2005)

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