



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority

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# **QCA guidelines on recording personal, learning and thinking skills in the Diploma**

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## Introduction

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has developed a framework for personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS)<sup>1</sup> that comprises six groups of skills under the following headings: independent enquirers; creative thinkers; reflective learners; team workers; self-managers; and effective participators. These skills, together with the functional skills of English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT), play a crucial role in successful learning, work and life.

PLTS are essential to achieving the aims of the Diploma and the wider curriculum in enabling young people to become successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve; confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives; and responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society.

## Aim of these guidelines

The aim of these initial guidelines is to inform local planning and preparation for recording PLTS in the Diploma.

## Who these guidelines are for

These guidelines are intended for managers and practitioners who are responsible for planning and delivering Diploma programmes. They may also be of interest to others involved in 14–19 planning and implementation.

## How these guidelines can be used

These guidelines can be used to support discussions and development work on recording PLTS as part of Diploma teaching and learning. For some colleagues these guidelines will provide a starting point, stimulating initial thinking, and for others the guidelines will help to refine the work they are already doing. Account will need to be taken of awarding bodies' own requirements for recording PLTS as part of the formal assessment of principal learning. However, formative recording can help learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses and develop their skills further, preparing them for such assessment.

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<sup>1</sup> The PLTS framework is available on the QCA website at [www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_11742.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_11742.aspx)

QCA is undertaking further work on PLTS within the secondary curriculum which will supplement these guidelines. In the meantime, the following questions may be useful when considering how PLTS can be implemented:

- What are we trying to achieve for learners in developing and recording PLTS?
- How can we organise the planning, learning and review process to achieve our aim for learners?
- How will we know we are being successful?

These guidelines include a number of examples of how recording can be put into practice.

### **What these guidelines cover**

These guidelines are structured in the following sections.

- The importance of recording PLTS.
- General principles for recording PLTS.
- Management and quality assurance.
- Supporting the recording and communication of PLTS.
- Links with other developments.

## The importance of recording PLTS

The framework for PLTS has been developed to emphasise the importance of acquiring and improving skills that enable young people to cope with social, economic and technological change; become more effective learners who can continue to learn; and enjoy and achieve in all aspects of their life.

As well as offering benefits for learners in supporting learning and personal development, the framework also represents skills that employers and higher education want to see developed. For progression purposes, it is vital that young people can articulate the skills they possess in applications for jobs or courses, and during interviews. They must also be able to manage their skill development at work and during further studies.

Confederation of British Industry (CBI) research with employers on work experience,<sup>2</sup> has highlighted the 'attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy'. It also stresses the need for action to ensure that these competencies are developed. The research suggests that, where possible, students should have opportunities to reflect on and review their activities, and to draw out the lessons learnt using feedback from employers. A checklist has been produced to support this process, with scope for recording when students might use their skills at work, the activities needed during work experience and the outcomes of a skills-rating exercise.

The effective development of PLTS is dependent upon opportunities to learn, practise and apply skills in different contexts, supported by constructive feedback from a range of individuals (this allows for self, peer, partner and external feedback). Developing and integrating PLTS through Diploma principal learning, the project and work experience and, where appropriate, additional and specialist learning, makes the skills more meaningful to

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<sup>2</sup> CBI (2007) *Time well spent: Embedding employability in work experience*, available to download from the CBI website, [www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/timewellspent.pdf](http://www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/timewellspent.pdf). The Department for Education and Skills (now the Department for Children, Schools and Families) and CBI (2007) *Employability and work experience – a quick guide for employers and students* available to order from the CBI website at [www.cbi.org.uk/bookshop](http://www.cbi.org.uk/bookshop).

learners. However, learners will only understand the importance of these skills, and be able to apply them effectively, if they are made explicit as part of the teaching and learning process.

Learners need time for 'skills talk' to identify their skills and develop the language to describe them, and to recognise the sector relevance and personal relevance of PLTS. Planning and review, including the development and recording of PLTS, is an important process within Diploma programmes, recognised through the allocation of 60 guided learning hours. Evidence that all Diploma learners have engaged in this process will need to be provided for the awarding bodies and Ofsted.

Recording can enhance this process by:

- focusing learners' attention on skills that are integral to their Diploma learning and assessment
- providing a tool for reflection on skills development
- providing a snapshot of PLTS achievements at any one time
- showing progress in the development of skills over time
- informing plans for further skill development and wider application.

The recording of PLTS makes an important contribution to the planning, learning and review process by helping to bring coherence to learners' experiences and achievements. Recording can also support progression through and beyond the Diploma, offering a way of communicating skills to others.

## General principles for recording PLTS

Drawing on effective practice in recording achievement<sup>3</sup> and on discussions with Diploma developers and wider stakeholders<sup>4</sup>, the following principles have emerged. The aim of the principles is to support consistency in approach across Diploma programmes, centres and consortia, while allowing for local customisation in terms of delivery systems and methods.

- All Diploma learners, at all levels, should be encouraged to develop and should be provided with support in recording PLTS.
- The primary purpose of recording PLTS should be to inform and support skill recognition and development.
- The recording process should be relevant and meaningful to the learner, and owned by the learner.
- Recording should be part of the Diploma planning and review process, to aid reflection on PLTS, recognise progress and achievements, and to inform discussions on ways to further develop these skills.
- The form and frequency of PLTS recording should be manageable for learners and teachers, and take account of other systems in place within the centre/consortium.
- Access to and use of a PLTS record should be determined by the learner.
- The PLTS recording process and output of the recording should be subject to monitoring and evaluation to ensure quality of provision and equality of access.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the National Record of Achievement and the Progress File

<sup>4</sup> For example, consultation as part of research on *Recording PLTS in Diplomas*, Centre for Education and Industry and the University of Warwick (2007)

## Management and quality assurance

The recording of PLTS is one aspect of Diploma provision. Managers will need to take account of other aspects of the Diploma programme, awarding body requirements for delivery and ways in which the wider curriculum is being managed. *Design for success: Shaping your curriculum to incorporate the Diploma* (QCA, 2007<sup>5</sup>) offers curriculum guidance. Curriculum guidance and planning tools are also available at: <http://curriculum.qca.org.uk>.

For recording systems to be effective, investment in resources, infrastructure and training is required. A range of partners will be involved in Diploma delivery; support and implementation of the principles will need to be negotiated locally, with delivery customised to suit the available resources. PLTS recording as part of the learning process will require collaboration and careful explanation if learners and staff are to engage in and sustain the process.

Critical for planners is a realistic appraisal of where learners are starting from and what they are trying to achieve, followed by consideration of how learning can be organised to incorporate PLTS recording. Some centres may wish to incorporate PLTS recording for the Diploma into their existing system for planning from the start, reviewing and recognising learning across the wider curriculum. Others may decide to focus, in the first instance, on Diploma-specific recording needs. Some may already be developing consortium-wide recording systems that could include PLTS.

Whatever is decided, there are some key features of quality provision that need to be considered at a local level. The questions under the following headings are examples of what may need to be considered in particular areas.

### Coordination

- Who will coordinate PLTS delivery and recording? How will this be achieved within the centre and across the consortium?

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<sup>5</sup> QCA (2007) *Design for success: Shaping your curriculum to incorporate the Diploma* (QCA/07/3313). Available on the QCA website, [www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_13949.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_13949.aspx).

- How will the principles for recording PLTS be promoted consistently across Diploma programmes and, where appropriate, the wider curriculum?
- What plans/structures need to be put in place to mesh provision with other centre/consortium systems, to meet Diploma requirements and to avoid duplication of effort?
- How will the contribution of different individuals be managed over time and in terms of location to support effective practice?

### **Quality assurance measures**

- How can equality of access to the recording process and output be achieved for all learners?
- How can quality control for PLTS recording processes and outputs be incorporated into existing arrangements for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning?
- What opportunities will there be for learners, staff and all partners to evaluate the recording process, tools/methods and outcomes?
- How will findings from monitoring and evaluation be disseminated and used to inform future practice?
- What opportunities and methods will there be to brief other participants in the recording of PLTS?
- What support mechanisms will be put in place?

### **Resourcing**

- How will staffing and time issues be addressed to facilitate PLTS recording during the Diploma planning, learning and review process?
- How will fit-for-purpose and manageable recording tools (paper-based and/or electronic) be identified/developed?

## **Staff development**

- What opportunities will there be for staff to explore the purpose and methods of PLTS recording within effective learning experiences?
- How will the development needs of staff be identified and addressed, to achieve a quality recording process?

## **Induction and support for learners**

- How will learners be introduced to PLTS and the value of recording these skills?
- How will learners be encouraged to develop an understanding of their role, and that of others, in the recording process?
- How will learners become familiar with the recording process and tools?
- How will the ongoing development needs of learners be identified and addressed to support effective recording and the use of records?

## Supporting the recording and communication of PLTS

Support for learners in making connections across different activities and situations is a key factor in effective skill development and applied learning. The Diploma offers opportunities for developing PLTS in several of its components, each of which may be delivered in different locations and involve different partners.

Learners will need support to:

- understand the value of developing and recording PLTS
- understand their role and that of others in the development and recording of PLTS
- use different views on their skills ability constructively
- become familiar with recording processes and tools
- identify what they know about themselves and then decide what to do with this information (for example, work on strengths, develop skills in weaker areas, or try out skills in different contexts for progression)
- use recording to reflect on their skills and to inform discussions with their teacher, mentor or other partner when reviewing progress and planning ways to further develop and apply their skills
- make decisions about with whom they will share information
- develop skills in using PLTS records to communicate skills to others (for example, as a source to draw upon when making applications or during interviews)
- contribute to the evaluation of recording processes, tools and products.

Different learners will need different levels of support, depending upon their previous experience, language/writing/ICT skills and particular needs, to ensure equality of access to the recording process and quality outcomes. However, the way in which this support is provided will depend upon staff expertise, availability of resources and the systems that particular centres, consortia and awarding bodies have agreed to use.

Recording of PLTS could be situated within the process by which learners develop individual learning plans (ILPs) or an equivalent personal and careers planning system. In this case, the recording of PLTS will be integrated with activities such as evaluating achievement, exploring and supporting progression options, setting goals, and generating formal ways of communicating achievements and goals (such as through CVs and standard applications).

A provider may develop or adopt a particular recording tool that could be electronic or paper based. Common recording tools such as profiles are likely to support shared practice, although reaching a consensus on which tools to use among local providers may take time.

Different recording methods may suit different learners. For example, the Shropshire 14–19 partnership has used personal digital assistants (PDAs) to improve the motivation of key stage 4 pupils and help them to develop their organisational skills.

Another example of the successful use of recording methods comes from South Gloucestershire and can be seen on the following page.

### **Skills for Success profile**

The Work2Learn Engagement programme in South Gloucestershire has designed a skills profile based upon research with employers and those who work with 'challenging' young people. The skills profile, completed on paper or electronically, uses a six-point scale to enable students, their parents/carers and key workers to rate the individual's skills, including communication, teamworking and organisation, attitudes and other personal qualities relevant to progress. Guidance on using the profile suggests that:

- the key worker meets students to establish a profile, to include the involvement of parents/carers (for example, by telephone)
- reviews are carried out every six weeks or once every term, to see if the students are progressing across the profile or not, and to agree further action
- the most important aspect of the profile is the nature and quality of the discussion with the student
- there is a need to encourage students to take ownership of tracking their own experiences, learning and progress across the profile.

For further information visit: [www.qca.org.uk/14-19/11-16-schools/110\\_2479.htm](http://www.qca.org.uk/14-19/11-16-schools/110_2479.htm).

A further example of the successful use of recording methods comes from Hackney.

### **The Life Skills, Work Skills toolkit**

The Life Skills, Work Skills toolkit, developed in Hackney, is a bank of 13 multiple-choice questions that address three areas of skills and personal attributes: how you look, how you behave and how you feel. The questions can be used as a self-assessment tool or they can be used with a facilitator in a developmental situation. In practice the tool was used at the end of an extended induction and then later in a programme to measure distance travelled.

Scores can be aggregated to produce a total. The profile can also be expressed visually to map areas of relative strength and areas for development.

## Links with other developments

The six groups of distinctive, but interconnected, PLTS are being embedded more widely in the new secondary curriculum and other programmes including, where relevant, qualifications. The PLTS framework builds on competency frameworks and skills taxonomies promoted through other initiatives as identified in the 2007 FutureLab report, commissioned by QCA.<sup>6</sup>

Many schools are already addressing PLTS through other initiatives, such as the wider key skills, Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) for secondary schools,<sup>7</sup> Opening Minds,<sup>8</sup> and Enquiring Minds.<sup>9</sup> Some are developing or refining systems for tracking and capturing skills achievement. These initiatives offer different and legitimate ways of approaching the development and recognition of similar skills.

The recording of key skills has been well-developed in personal development programmes and careers education and guidance, particularly for work experience. One certificate, offered by ASDAN, features three units based on skills which are linked to the wider key skills.

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<sup>6</sup> FutureLab (2007) *Developing and accrediting personal skills and competencies*. Available online at: [http://www.futurelab.org.uk/resources/documents/project\\_reports/Developing\\_and\\_Accrediting\\_Personal\\_Skills\\_and\\_Compencies.pdf](http://www.futurelab.org.uk/resources/documents/project_reports/Developing_and_Accrediting_Personal_Skills_and_Compencies.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007) *Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning for secondary schools*, including self-awareness, managing feelings, motivation, empathy, social skills. Available online at: [http://bandapilot.org.uk/secondary/resources/welcome\\_page/sns\\_ssealguidance0004307.pdf](http://bandapilot.org.uk/secondary/resources/welcome_page/sns_ssealguidance0004307.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Royal Society of Arts (2006) *Opening Minds: implementing a competence-based curriculum*, including competencies for learning, citizenship, relating to others, managing situations, managing information. Available online at: <http://www.rsa.org.uk/newcurriculum/pdf/guidance.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> FutureLab (2007) *Enquiring Minds*, including different forms of enquiry skills. Available online at: [http://www.enquiringminds.org.uk/pdfs/Enquiring\\_Minds\\_guide.pdf](http://www.enquiringminds.org.uk/pdfs/Enquiring_Minds_guide.pdf)

### **Wider key skills**

The wider key skills standards of improving own learning and performance, working with others and problem solving, cover many of the PLTS and can themselves be used for skill development purposes; they are also available as separate qualifications.

The Certificate in Personal Effectiveness offered by ASDAN at levels 1, 2 and 3, has three units that are linked to the wider key skills. Learners and teachers are supported by documentation, including a suite of 'plan', 'review' and 'do' sheets that help to structure a process of reflection and articulation.

Recent guidance on the certification of generic skills through ASDAN and other awards is available in the report, *Key stage 4 Engagement programme: Ways to accredit generic learning*, (QCA/07/3255) at: [www.qca.org.uk/14-19/11-16-schools/110\\_2474.htm](http://www.qca.org.uk/14-19/11-16-schools/110_2474.htm)

### **Humber Education and Business Partnership**

In the past, reflective recording tended to be done using centre-devised work experience journals or diaries, but some Learning and Skills Council funding enabled a common approach to be launched across the Hull, East Riding, North and North East Lincolnshire area.

A skills-based journal was developed directly linked to the key skills frameworks and targeted at work experience. A level 2 qualification, accredited by NCFE, has now been created based on completion of the journal.

A well-presented, learner-focused journal, supported by a development and formative assessment process, could be one scalable solution for Diploma work experience.

Generic skills recording and communication is also promoted by the European Union.

### **Europass**

Europass aims to help Europeans record and communicate their skills and qualifications across Europe. It is particularly relevant to young people who want to study, work or gain work experience in Europe. It was developed by the European Commission and is supported nationally by UK National Europass Centre.

The website offers downloadable templates and examples. For example, the *Europass Curriculum Vitae* (E-CV) helps users highlight their skills, qualifications and work experience. It provides a common template in all European languages, to help users draw attention to the attributes that will set them apart from others. A further template is being developed to record non-formal achievements.

For further information visit: <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/> and [www.uknec.org.uk](http://www.uknec.org.uk).

Several 14–19 consortia have been developing electronic tools, such as ILPs, to support planning, learning and review processes, and to provide a source of information for learners when, for example, preparing for and making transitions.

For example, providers in the North West have collaborated to produce a common electronic ILP that can be transferred and accessed across the partnership. This approach supports personalised e-learning, and student mobility and progression, from year 8 through post-16 to adult learning. The local education authority is exploring ways to manage the system by using a central server.

A number of 14–19 partnerships have adapted and built on Progress File materials that include guidance and activities for learners to support skills development and recording. Some resources are available for download at: [www.dfes.gov.uk/progressfile](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/progressfile).

### **The Plymouth e-ILP**

Plymouth's e-ILP works as an ongoing portfolio/diary rather than a record of periodic activity. Learners are able to reflect on their activities and evaluate the contributions of other members of their group, as well as create/upload their own contribution. The e-ILP can be viewed and commented upon by a tutor and/or others involved in the process.

With increasing partnership-working e-ILP will become a central tool for tracking and evaluating the learner experience, used both by the learner and those associated with the delivery of the learner experience. This is seen by centres as the best way forward for the Diploma as careers education and individual advice and guidance will be central to success and needs to be embedded within the core curriculum. PLTS could be incorporated into this system mapped across the programme along with opportunities for self/peer/tutor evaluation.

Moving beyond 14–19 programmes, the recording of skills is an important part of work-based competency frameworks used for appraisal and professional development, and personal development planning in higher education.

For example, in Liverpool, university and NHS collaboration has resulted in an appraisal scheme for clinicians. This is linked to personal development plans (PDPs) for each member of staff within an overall business plan and service level agreement. The PDPs include a focus on independent, creative and critical thinking skills promoted by the General Medical Council.

Higher education and employers have also worked together to develop foundation degrees. Combining work-based learning with academic study, the aim is to equip learners with the transferable skills that employers demand. Skills, as well as knowledge, must be recorded in a transcript validated by the higher education institution and underpinned by PDPs.

To facilitate progression and make the most of such schemes, learners will need opportunities within their 14–19 programme to develop their skill management, including the area of recording.

## Conclusion

The examples given in this document represent a small sample of what is going on within 14–19 contexts. Models for the development and recording of PLTS can look quite different, which is acceptable. All Diplomas must provide opportunities within principal learning for learners to develop and apply all six PLTS. Therefore, recording is important to the formative planning and review process that runs through the Diploma. It can also be used to build a coherent framework of skills and learning across all the components of the Diploma (principal learning, generic learning and additional and specialist learning). Furthermore, recording provides a focus for skills discussion, as well as information for showing progress over time and communicating skills to others.