

# National evaluation of Diplomas: cohort 2 - the second year

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Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

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

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## Executive summary

### Background

The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and the University of Exeter to conduct a national evaluation of the implementation and impact of Diplomas. The two main aims of the evaluation were to: review the **implementation and delivery** of the Diplomas and to assess the **impact** of the Diplomas on young people.

The Diploma qualifications are offered at three levels (Level 1 (Foundation), Level 2 (Higher) and Level 3 (Progression and Advanced)) across 14 subjects, and have been implemented in three phases in 2008, 2009, and 2010. The Diploma is often delivered through consortia of schools, colleges, training providers and higher education institutions (HEIs), although the requirement to deliver via consortia was lifted in 2010.

The Diploma consists of three main components:

- sector-specific principal learning
- generic learning (including functional skills in English, mathematics and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), the development of personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS), and a project or extended project)
- additional/specialist learning (ASL).

Diplomas also include ten days of work experience including learning in the workplace and learning through realistic work environments to enable the development of practical skills and work-related application of learning.

Following the election of the coalition government in 2010, a number of changes to the implementation and delivery of the Diploma qualification were introduced. Updates on these reforms can be found at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/qualifications/diploma/>

### Methodology

This summary reports on findings from the second year of Diploma delivery for the second cohort of learners. These learners started a Diploma in September 2009 on one of the first ten Diploma subjects. This summary reports on data collated during spring 2011 from:

- surveys of 606 Diploma learners in Year 11 and 97 Diploma learners in Year 13, and 1111 comparison learners in Year 11 and 155 comparison learners in Year 13.
- case-study visits to six consortia which involved interviews with consortium leads (5), Diploma subject leads (12), staff responsible for Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG; 7), senior institution

managers (14; in pre-16 and post-16 institutions), Diploma teachers (14), and Year 11 learners (53) who had embarked on the Diploma.

It should be noted that the qualitative findings from interviews across these six case-study consortia provide illustration of views only and should not be generalised as numbers of consortia and interviewees are small.

## Key Findings

- Staff in three consortia reported that the Diploma gave young people a broad insight into different aspects of an industry sector, which was considered helpful for them when making decisions about future pathways, and for offering the opportunity to experience varied learning environments and learning in a different style. Staff and learners reported other benefits which included the development of independent learning skills, communication skills, team-working skills, and enhanced research and evaluation skills.
- Learners appeared generally satisfied with their Diploma course. However, there was some evidence to suggest that it had not always met expectations, for example, the lower than expected amount of practical activities and the higher than expected level of challenge of the functional skills examinations. The latter was emphasised because it is a requirement to pass it to achieve the full Diploma.
- The evidence has shown that most Diploma learners planned to stay in education. A minority planned to undertake a work-based learning route. It was evident that, in most cases, learners felt that the Diploma had helped them to make a decision about what to do next. Just under half of learners studying a Diploma in Year 13 had applied to university or HEI, and encouragingly, most had received an offer of a place on the course.
- Teachers reported that they had enjoyed delivering the qualification. Moreover, they said that in order to deliver the Diploma they had extended their teaching approaches through utilising a greater amount of application to real-world contexts, using a more facilitating approach to teaching and, for vocational teachers, undertaking more theory-based teaching.
- Teachers' confidence with assessment had increased since the first year of delivery, in particular in terms of controlled assessment. However, some teachers needed a better understanding of external moderation, and in particular, understanding of why assessments marks had been reduced when moderated by external assessors.
- The evaluation found that the IAG provided to learners could be improved to ensure that they understand the programme and are equipped to make an informed decision about their choices. There was evidence that staff knowledge of the Diploma and their ability to provide information to learners was inadequate. There was a lack of consistency across institutions with regard to IAG.
- Staff considered that the Diploma qualification was too big in terms of content and guided learning hours, and too complex due to the

number of components. Additionally, it was perceived by some staff to be too demanding and restrictive for some learners.

### **Which component parts of the Diploma are key?**

The evidence revealed that the principal learning component was considered most useful (although some felt it would benefit from simplification). Staff interviewed perceived that this component was valued by learners for its scope and coverage of a broad range of topics relevant to the sector. However, learners interviewed had expected the course to involve more practical activities. In three case-study areas, consortium leads said that the specialist learning element of the ASL component was beneficial as it provided learners with opportunities to take part in more practical work. Therefore, if the ASL (particularly specialist learning) is removed from the Diploma, the opportunity to provide an underpinning practical element and personalisation will also be removed.

Concerns were expressed regarding the difficulty of functional skills, in particular the mathematics and ICT examinations. The removal of functional skills from the Diploma was widely suggested partly to ensure that passing them was not a pre-requisite for attaining the full Diploma. However, these skills were also recognised as important for all young people to acquire.

Overall, the Diploma was generally regarded by staff interviewed as too big, complex and demanding in its current format and its future would be enhanced by streamlining.

### **In terms of the experience of Diplomas, what has been learnt about effective teaching and learning?**

Diploma learners (survey respondents and case-study interviewees) were largely satisfied with their Diploma courses and felt they were progressing well. They enjoyed the rich and varied learning environments, the different approach to teaching and learning inherent in Diplomas and the focus on their chosen sector. Teachers reported enjoying the facilitative approach to enabling young people to become independent learners (skills needed for further and higher education) and building links with employers. They also highlighted that, although intensive in nature, the longer Diploma teaching sessions (and the smaller numbers of students in each class) enabled them to '*get to know*' students better – this also contributed to enabling young people to learn effectively.

Teachers observed that they, and learners, benefitted from the applied nature of Diplomas. Although challenging, teachers reported the benefits of broadening and deepening their theoretical knowledge of the wide-ranging

Diploma industry sectors. The collaborative approach to delivery was felt to have contributed to this expansion of knowledge as many teachers exchanged ideas and knowledge with colleagues at other institutions. Having the capacity to strengthen the theory with practical application (although this was not always happening) was perceived to be important to effectively teaching the Diploma. Teachers reported that linking the component parts of the Diploma to make it a cohesive qualification was a major challenge.

### **In what way have Diploma learners benefitted from taking a Diploma?**

Teachers and young people concurred that the Diploma had enhanced learners' communication, team-working and independent learning skills. Furthermore, teachers observed that Diplomas had enabled learners to take more responsibility for their own learning and to have enhanced their ability to use their own initiative.

The evidence indicates that most Diploma learners have gained from an alternative and diverse way of learning and have clearly been satisfied by the course, have enjoyed it, have remained engaged in education and (as discussed below) intend to remain in education or training after their Diploma experience.

Overall, the majority of Diploma learners across both year groups were satisfied with their course, although levels of satisfaction dropped in the second year. Reasons cited amongst the Year 11 learners interviewed included the amount of coursework, the pressure of deadlines and a reduction in involvement with employers and the world of work in the second year.

### **What progress have Diploma learners made?**

Most Year 11 and 13 Diploma learners felt they were progressing well on their Diploma course and were planning to continue in education or undertake work-based learning opportunities. Aspects of the course that were more frequently cited amongst Year 11 learners as having helped in decision-making were activities carried out with an employer/someone from the world of work, the principal learning units and the Diploma project. In terms of progress post-18, a greater proportion of non-Diploma respondents in Year 13 intended to progress onto a course at a university/HEI compared with their Diploma peers.

As mentioned above, the functional skills component of the qualification was cited amongst the majority of consortium management staff as a factor that could impact adversely on learners' ability to progress.

A key consideration in Diploma learners' progress is ensuring that appropriate learners are enrolled on the Diploma qualification. It will be necessary to build



up awareness of this new qualification amongst adults advising young people. Young people would benefit from more consistent IAG across institutions, as illustrated by the fact that Year 11 Diploma learners reported receiving less IAG than their non-Diploma peers about future opportunities.

The inconsistency in coverage and quality of IAG received by young people is of particular concern when schools take over the responsibility for deciding their IAG priorities from local authorities in September 2012 (and in the interim there is minimal IAG provision from Connexions).

### **What has been learnt about the effective management of consortia and collaboration?**

The key success factors to the effectiveness of consortium management were considered to be good communication across the consortium, effective consortium leadership and planning and time to carry out these tasks.

Staff reported that collaboration works best when it is allowed to evolve over time and where there is a simple model of operation, trust and effective communication between institutions, an established protocol agreed at the outset and protected funding. Benefits of collaboration included: enhanced relationship with other educational institutions and employers, increased staff development opportunities, and the opportunity to offer learners a qualification with a different approach. Disadvantages were linked to the complexity of the delivery models, including logistical issues, the number of institutions involved and aligning protocols such as monitoring of teaching and learning, assessment and exam registration.

### **What is the future of the Diploma?**

The majority of consortium managers said that they would not offer the Diploma in its present form in the immediate future. Although the Diploma was recognised to confer benefits on both learners and practitioners, the evidence suggests that the original aim of the qualification was perhaps too broad, and points to a need for streamlining. Consortium managers also felt that recent changes to Diploma policy<sup>1</sup> would reduce Diploma delivery in the future.

There was a decrease in interest in take-up of the Diploma, either due to a decrease in demand from learners or due to the reduced number of Diploma courses offered by consortia. Consortium leads believed this decrease in interest was because of: widespread uncertainty surrounding the future of the Diploma, cuts in Diploma funding, the Wolf Review (Wolf, 2011)

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/qualifications/diploma/>

recommendations on curriculum time for vocational qualifications at Key Stage 4, decreased support at consortium level, the perceived difficulty of achieving the Diploma, the complexity of assessment, and the perception that the Diplomas were too theory-based.

## Recommendations

- The principal learning component should be maintained if changes to the structure of the Diploma are made, although streamlined by doing any or all of the following three options: reducing the number of guided learning hours per unit, amalgamating units in order to reduce overlap, and/or removing some units altogether.
- Staff and learners valued the project and work experience/employer involvement, feeling these should be maintained because of their applied nature of learning and the application of theory to real-world contexts.
- Although considered important in terms of generic, transferable skills, for all young people to acquire, PLTS and functional skills were the least valued components within the Diploma qualification. ASL was also not fully understood by either staff or learners. The future of these components should be considered and clarified.
- There was further scope to improve assessment by ensuring that training was timely. Teachers' practice would be enhanced by better understanding of how Awarding Bodies externally moderate. This would better equip them to provide effective feedback to learners so they could more fully understand marking criteria and improve their work.
- The evaluation found that there is a lack of consistency across institutions with regard to IAG which means that some young people are being given partial and incomplete information. This has meant that for some young people the Diploma has not met their expectations for example in terms of the amount of practical work. This suggests that offering training and support to *all* staff is key to ensure they have the necessary knowledge to assist learners in making decisions.
- The benefits of collaboration were recognised, with young people clearly indicating the value of learning in different types of institutions.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and the University of Exeter to conduct a national evaluation of the implementation and impact of Diplomas. The introduction of Diplomas for 14-19 year olds in England in 2008 provided a new qualification which aimed to bring the skills and knowledge associated with business sectors alongside an academic curriculum.

The Diploma qualifications are offered at three levels (Level 1 (Foundation), Level 2 (Higher) and Level 3 (Progression and Advanced)) across 14 subjects, and have been implemented in three phases, as Table 1.1 illustrates:

**Table 1.1 Diploma subjects**

<b>Phase 1 subjects</b> Construction and the Built Environment Engineering Information Technology Creative and Media Society, Health and Development	Introduced in September 2008
<b>Phase 2 subjects</b> Business, Administration and Finance Hair and Beauty Studies Hospitality Environmental and Land-Based Studies Manufacturing and Product Design	Introduced in September 2009
<b>Phase 3 subjects</b> Public Services Retail Business Sport and Active Leisure Travel and Tourism	Introduced in September 2010

The Diploma is often delivered through consortia of schools, colleges, training providers and higher education institutions (HEIs). The requirement to deliver via consortia was lifted in 2010.

The Diploma consists of three main components:

**Principal learning** – sector-related knowledge and underpinning skills needed to progress in relevant sectors.

**Generic learning** – Functional Skills in English, mathematics and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), development of personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS), and a project or extended project.

**Additional/specialist learning (ASL)** – additional subjects that offer the opportunity to study a particular topic in more depth, or to study something different that widens the learner experience such as another language, for example. ASL aims to broaden horizons and help to open up lots of different opportunities in future study and employment.

Diplomas also include learning in the workplace (a minimum of ten days' work experience), and learning through realistic work environments, to enable the development of practical skills and work-related application of learning.

The Diploma components have been designed with the aim of preparing learners for employment or further study through incorporating elements that aim to develop learners' life skills, problem-solving and creative thinking, as well as their Functional Skills in mathematics, English and ICT and subject-specific knowledge. The introduction of the Diploma also aims to benefit employers by enabling young people to enter the workforce with relevant skills and an understanding of work.

Following the establishment of the coalition government in May 2010, a number of changes to the implementation and delivery of the Diploma qualification were introduced. In addition to lifting regulations around consortia, the Gateway process (whereby consortia applied to deliver each Diploma) was ended, and the Diploma entitlement was removed. On 25 November 2010, Ministers announced plans to simplify the Diploma to make it easier to teach and award and to bring the Diploma into line with other vocational qualifications. This was supported by the outcomes of the Wolf Review of Vocational Education (Wolf, 2011). The government has accepted all the findings of the review and acknowledges that whilst vocational education is an essential part of a broad curriculum and supporting the economy, the vast majority of 14-16 year olds should be taught an academic core, which can be supplemented by a vocational element confined to 20 per cent of the timetable. The government is also seeking to remove the statutory duty to provide every young person at Key Stage 4 with a period of work experience, which has been seen as a real benefit of the Diploma; see Section 2.6).

Updates on the Diploma reform can be found at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/qualifications/diploma/a0064056/diploma-announcements>

This report presents the findings from all data collected in the spring term 2011, during the second year of delivery of the second five Diploma subjects introduced in September 2009<sup>2</sup>.

## 1.2 Aims and objectives

The purpose of the national evaluation was to provide policy makers and practitioners with systematic and robust evidence which will enable them to make informed judgements about the outcomes of the Diplomas for different stakeholders and to make improvements to design and delivery, if appropriate. The two main aims were:

- To review the **implementation and delivery** of the Diplomas – in terms of the processes and factors facilitating or hindering successful implementation; the structural issues related to design and content; and the systems for planning, organising and resourcing provision and supporting progression.
- To assess the **impact** of the Diplomas on young people – in terms of their participation in education and training; attainment of qualifications; and progression to further (FE) and higher education (HE), training and employment.

The evaluation gathered the perceptions and experiences of the Diplomas from a range of stakeholders which included young people, parents, teachers, employers and HE staff.

## 1.3 Research Methods

The overall research design for the evaluation provides a complementary mixed-method approach to address the complex range of issues and aims associated with the implementation of the Diplomas. The study has comprised three main strands: surveys of a range of stakeholders (including consortium leads, learners, teaching staff, parents, employers and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)); a longitudinal programme of qualitative case studies; and statistical analyses of external datasets.

This report principally draws on the evidence from surveys of learners and case-study visits to a sample of Diploma consortia. The sections presented below provide details about each element of the data collection.

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<sup>2</sup> Although it should be noted that the first five subjects are included if introduced for the first time in 2009 in consortia where none of the second five Diploma subjects commenced.

### 1.3.1 Selection of the survey sample

A sample of 60 consortia that had planned (according to their Diploma Gateway applications) to commence delivery of at least one of the new five Diploma subjects in September 2009 was identified prior to delivery commencing. The sample was drawn to include consortia planning to offer all three levels of Diploma and all of the five new Diploma subjects. These consortia included those that had delivered Diplomas from 2008 and those that commenced delivery in 2009. The schools that comprised the sampled consortia were broadly representative of all Diploma-delivering schools in terms of key variables such as achievement bands and the proportion of their pupils who were known to be eligible for free school meals.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.3.2 Survey of learners

This report presents findings of a survey of Diploma and comparison learners (those in the same institutions not taking a Diploma) in Year 11 and Year 13 in the sample of 60 cohort 2 consortia, undertaken between February and April 2011 (when Diploma learners were in the second year of their course pre- and post-16).

Learners from 85 institutions across 46 consortia (out of the 60 consortia in the sample) responded to the survey comprising:

- 606 Diploma learners in Year 11
- 97 Diploma learners in Year 13
- 1111 comparison learners in Year 11
- 155 comparison learners in Year 13.

The questionnaire data was matched by DfE to the National Pupil Database (NPD) which contains details of learners' characteristics and prior attainment. This enabled the analysis to explore representativeness and to examine differences in responses in relation to characteristics and achievement of students.

The Diploma learners who responded to the survey were not representative of all Diploma learners in some key respects<sup>4</sup>. Consequently, the data was weighted by gender and Key Stage 3 attainment for Year 11 learners, and gender<sup>5</sup> for those in Year 13, to be representative of all Diploma learners in these characteristics. Similarly, the responding comparison groups were not representative of all non-Diploma students in schools that offered Diplomas. Therefore, the data was weighted by gender and Key Stage 3 attainment for Year 11 learners and by gender for Year 13 learners, so that the responding

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B for details of the sample.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix C for details of the representativeness of the responding samples of learners

<sup>5</sup> There was insufficient attainment data available to weight by attainment

sample of comparison learners was representative of learners in schools that offered Diplomas who had not chosen to take a Diploma.

Of the Year 11 Diploma learners, the majority (86 per cent) reported that they were taking a Level 2 Diploma while 10 per cent reported their Diploma was at Level 1 (the remaining four per cent were not sure or did not respond). This reflects that the majority of Diplomas studied nationally are at Level 2 (DfE Statistical Release, 2010<sup>6</sup>). Among the post-16 Diploma learners who responded to the survey, most (75 per cent) were taking a Diploma at Level 3 while 19 per cent were taking a Level 2 Diploma and two per cent Level 1 (four per cent were not sure or did not respond).

As can be seen from Table 1.2 below, among the respondents in Year 11, the most widely taken Diplomas were Creative and Media, Information Technology and Hair and Beauty Studies.

**Table 1.2 Diploma subjects taken by Diploma survey respondents**

Diploma Subject	Year 11 Diploma respondents %	Year 13 Diploma respondents %
<b>Second phase subjects (available from 2009)</b>		
Business Administration and Finance	12	13
Hair and Beauty Studies	16	11
Hospitality	6	-
Environmental and Land-based Studies	2	-
Manufacturing and Product Design	-	-
<b>First phase five subjects (available from 2008)</b>		
Construction and the Built Environment	7	-
Creative and Media	20	15
Engineering	10	-
IT	18	23
Society, Health and Development	7	37
No response	2	3
<b>N=</b>	<b>606</b>	<b>97</b>

*A series of single response questions.*

*The percentages in this table are weighted by gender and Key Stage 3 attainment for Year 11 and by gender for Year 13.*

*Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100.*

*Source: NFER Year 11 and 13 Diploma Learner Surveys*

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/d000967/osr26-2010.pdf>

The only subject not represented by Year 11 survey respondents was Manufacturing and Product Design. In Year 13, the most common subjects taken were Society, Health and Development, Information Technology and Creative and Media. Survey responses also represented Business, Administration and Finance and Hair and Beauty Studies. While the sample of consortia surveyed ensured coverage of the second phase Diploma subjects (all consortia were planning to offer at least one of the phase 2 subjects), the extent to which these were taken by learners affects their representation in the survey sample. Moreover, the proportions of survey respondents representing each Diploma subject broadly reflects the picture in terms of the plans for the Diploma 'offer' as reported by consortium leads in 2009 (O'Donnell and Lynch, 2009).

Amongst the Year 11 comparison group, the majority (97 per cent) were taking GCSEs, seven per cent were taking National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and 16 per cent were taking other qualifications (most often Level 2 courses).<sup>7</sup> In Year 13, just under half (46 per cent) of the comparison group were taking AS/A levels, while just over half (52 per cent) were studying for 'other qualifications' (most often Level 3 BTECs). A small proportion (three per cent) were doing GCSEs.

In considering the findings of the surveys of learners it is worth considering that not all learners responded. Consequently, as is often the case with questionnaire surveys, there is a risk of non-response bias in the data. For example, it may be the case that individuals who have certain characteristics, such as being more motivated, or have a greater desire to express their view of the Diploma as a result of a particularly positive or negative experience, are more likely to respond. As far as possible we have sought to minimise this impact in the analysis through weighting the data by attainment and gender in Year 11 and by gender in Year 13. These factors are likely to be influential on young people's experience and attitudes (prior attainment and gender are both significant predictors of attainment and attitudes (O'Donnell *et al.*, 2009 and Lynch *et al.*, 2010) at Key Stage 4).

### 1.3.3 Selection of the case-study sample

In 2009, a sub-sample of 15 consortia was selected for the case studies, from the 60 Diploma consortia used for the surveys. This sample was selected to ensure that the case-studies covered all Diploma subjects and levels, a geographical spread, different types of institutions involved in delivery, and different partnership structures and models of Diploma delivery. Visits were conducted to the 15 consortia in spring 2009, to explore preparation prior to Diploma delivery. They were then re-visited in spring 2010, in the first year of delivery of Diploma subjects which commenced in 2009. Following the

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<sup>7</sup> Note that more than one qualification could be taken as ASL, so percentages do not necessarily sum to 100.



election of the coalition government in 2010, the evaluation was streamlined and follow-up visits were conducted in six of the original 15 consortia – these visits, carried out in the spring term of 2011, are the focus of this report.

Across the six consortia, all Diploma subjects were represented, except Manufacturing and Product Design<sup>8</sup>, as well as all three Diploma levels. The north and south of England and the Midlands were represented (including two ‘rural’ consortia). See Appendix D for full details of the characteristics of the sub-sample.

### 1.3.4 Case studies

Case-study visits to the sub-sample of six cohort 2 consortia were conducted in the spring term 2011. These visits explored how implementation had developed since the first year of delivery, focusing on the range of approaches to delivering the Diplomas, the experience of teaching and learning the qualification and the extent to which this had changed and developed as Diplomas became more embedded. The visits also explored views on the Diploma qualification and the component parts of the qualification.

In total, 15 institutions were involved in the case-study research. In-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with interviewees (see Table 1.3 for a summary of the number of interviews achieved across the consortia).

**Table 1.3 Numbers of interviews achieved**

Type of interviewee <sup>9</sup>	Number of interviews completed
Consortium leads/strategic managers	5*
Diploma subject leads	12
Senior institution managers	14
Diploma teachers	14
Information, advice and guidance (IAG) coordinators	7
Year 11 Diploma learners	53

*\*In two consortia, the original consortium lead was no longer in role. In one, there remained no lead. In the other, a senior manager of an institution delivering Diplomas took over this role.*

A total of 43 of the Year 11 learners were doing Level 2 Diplomas and 10 were doing Level 1. It should be noted that post-16 learners were not

<sup>8</sup> After initial selection of consortia, we found that none of the original 15 commenced delivery of Manufacturing and Product Design, despite having planned to do so according to Gateway applications.

<sup>9</sup> Please note that some staff may have dual roles so these categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

represented across the case-study consortia, most often because there was no post-16 offer.

Where possible, the number of consortia where a view was expressed is given throughout this report. This is to provide some guidance on the extent of an experience or approach within the six case-study consortia. As interviewees are not always asked identical questions during a qualitative interview, the views expressed reflect the issues, priorities, concerns and context perceived to be important for each interviewee. It should be noted that the qualitative findings from interviews across these six case-study consortia provide illustration of views only and should not be generalised, as numbers of consortia and interviewees are small.

## 1.4 Analysis of data

As noted above, the survey data was weighted by gender and attainment for Year 11 and by gender for Year 13, using data from the NPD, in order to enhance its representativeness of Diploma learners and non-Diploma learners. The survey data analysis then comprised the following:

- Descriptive statistics of the responses to the learner surveys.
- Comparative analysis, to explore for example, the extent of differences or similarities between the responses of Diploma and comparison learners. These comparisons were not subject to tests for statistical significance, which is not appropriate when dealing with weighted data.
- Cross-tabulations, exploring the relationship between a number of variables (for example, Diploma subject and learner satisfaction).
- Factor analysis to aggregate variables from the Year 11 and 13 learner questionnaires in order to produce more robust measures than a consideration of the individual items on the questionnaire alone. Factors are also included in the multilevel models.
- Multilevel modelling to explore the relationship between Year 11 learners' background factors and outcomes, such as their satisfaction with the Diploma and whether they would consider taking a Diploma in future, whilst taking account of other influences.<sup>10</sup>

## 1.5 Structure of report

Chapter 2 explores the views of staff and learners on each of the component parts of the Diploma and on what changes could be made to improve the qualification. Chapter 3 focuses on the experience of teaching and learning, from the perspective of the teaching staff and learners. Assessment is discussed in Chapter 4, including the role of assessors and staff and learners'

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<sup>10</sup> Multilevel modelling was not carried out for the analysis of the Year 13 learner surveys, as the number of responding learners was too small.

understanding of assessment requirements. Chapter 5 explores learner satisfaction with the Diploma. The intended future destinations of learners are explored in Chapter 6, including whether they intend to take a Diploma in the future. Chapter 7 includes a discussion on strategic and operational management of Diplomas and plans for the future delivery of the qualification across consortia. An overview of the main conclusions is given in Chapter 8, including a summary of implications for the future of the Diploma.

## 2 Diploma components

### Key findings

- The main benefit of the Diploma was perceived by staff to be the impact on learners, particularly in terms of the development of independent learning skills, increasing self-confidence and the development of team-building skills.
- Staff felt that the qualification was also beneficial for giving young people a broad insight into different aspects of a sector, which was considered helpful for them when making decisions about future pathways, and for offering the opportunity to experience varied learning environments.
- Staff considered the Diploma qualification to be too 'big' in terms of content and guided learning hours, and complex due to the number of components, and therefore in need of streamlining.
- The principal learning component was reported by staff and learners to be most useful and should be maintained if changes to the structure of the Diploma are made, although this component would benefit from being streamlined by reducing the number of guided learning hours.
- Staff and learners reported the project and work experience/employer involvement to be valued aspects of the Diploma and should be maintained. These components did not always relate to the principal learning subject; relevance to the sector was considered important to maximise impact on learners.
- The specialist learning element of the ASL component was perceived by staff to be beneficial for enhancing learners' opportunities for practical learning. Some learners lacked awareness of ASL and the offer of qualifications, particularly of specialist learning, was often limited due to timetable constraints.
- PLTS were considered to be useful by staff for learners' employability skills. Where they were made explicit to learners, the development of skills was more likely to be recognised by learners.
- Staff and learners recognised the importance of functional skills for learners' future employability, but the majority of staff across case-study consortia thought this component should be removed from the Diploma. The examinations were considered too difficult by many staff and learners, which meant there was a risk of learners failing the examinations and, in turn, the whole Diploma. Making GCSE mathematics, English and ICT more 'functional' was suggested, so that young people develop these important skills but outside of the Diploma.
- A challenge associated with delivering the Diploma, highlighted by teaching staff, was linking the different components of the Diploma together in their teaching.

This chapter explores the component parts of the Diploma qualification (see Chapter 1), reporting the views of learners, consortium managers and Diploma teachers in relation to each component. This chapter is largely based on qualitative interviews with small numbers of staff and learners (unless

otherwise stated) and, therefore, findings are illustrative and should not be generalised.

Tables 2.1 and 2.2 below show that the principal learning component was considered most useful by learners in Years 11 and 13. Each component is discussed in turn in the following sections.

**Table 2.1 Usefulness of Diploma components, Year 11**

Components	Very useful %	Quite useful %	Not very useful %	Not at all useful %	Don't know %	No response %
The Diploma units that relate to my Diploma subject (Principal Learning)	23	51	10	4	11	2
Functional skills	22	44	17	10	5	2
The Diploma project	24	46	15	6	6	3
The other courses I am taking that count towards the Diploma (ASL component)	14	39	16	5	23	3
Activities carried out with an employer/someone from the world of work (undertaken as part of my Diploma)	21	42	13	5	16	3
PLTS	23	42	13	10	9	3
N = 606						

*A series of single response questions.*

*The percentages in this table are weighted by gender and Key Stage 3 attainment.*

*Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100.*

*Source: NFER Year 11 and 13 Diploma Learner Surveys*

**Table 2.2 Usefulness of Diploma components, Year 13**

Components	Very useful %	Quite useful %	Not very useful %	Not at all useful %	Don't know %	No response %
The Diploma units that relate to my Diploma subject (Principal Learning)	23	58	9	2	8	0
Functional skills	12	33	43	10	2	0
The Diploma project	25	45	19	2	9	0
The other courses I am taking that count towards the Diploma (ASL component)	12	51	13	5	17	2
Activities carried out with an employer/ someone from the world of work (undertaken as part of my Diploma)	17	49	10	2	20	2
PLTS	13	64	11	4	9	0
N = 97						

*A series of single response questions.*

*The percentages in this table are weighted by gender.*

*Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100.*

*Source: NFER Year 11 and 13 Diploma Learner Surveys*

## 2.1 Principal learning

The principal learning units included in the Diploma offer learners sector-related knowledge and underpinning skills needed to progress in relevant sectors. Most learners who responded to the survey (81 per cent in Year 13 and 74 per cent in Year 11; see Tables 2.1 and 2.2 above) reported that the principal learning units were either *very* or *quite useful*. Interviews with staff across all six case-study consortia revealed that this component was valued for its scope and coverage of a broad range of topics relevant to the sectors.

The main challenges associated with the principal learning (mentioned across four of the six consortia) were the scale of the content to get through in the guided learning hours and the level of difficulty of the units for learners (particularly Level 1 learners).

Another challenge with delivering the principal learning component was perceived to be a lack of clarity in specifications from Awarding Bodies in terms of the scale of work and evidence required for assessment (mentioned across three of the six consortia). As one Diploma subject lead reported, '*it's been very difficult to gauge the expectations of the exam board [Awarding Body]*'.

## 2.2 Functional skills

One aspect of the generic learning included in the Diploma is functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT. Amongst the survey Diploma respondents, 66 per cent in Year 11 and 45 per cent in Year 13 found the functional skills component *very or quite useful*. More than half (53 per cent) of learners in Year 13 found this component to be *not very or not at all useful*; this was also the case for more than a quarter (27 per cent) of Year 11 learners.

Interviews across all six case-study consortia revealed that staff were generally positive about the *aims* of the functional skills component, to help young people develop important skills for employability. The majority of learners could also understand that developing such skills was important, but across four consortia learners wondered why they had to do functional skills examinations as well as GCSEs in English, mathematics and, in some cases, ICT (this could explain why Year 13 learners, who would have been likely to have already taken GCSE examinations, found functional skills less useful than learners in Year 11).

Functional skills examinations were also considered difficult by staff across all consortia (more so than GCSEs, particularly mathematics). The '*biggest problem*' according to staff, therefore, was whether learners would pass the functional skills examinations, and if not, whether they would pass their Diploma overall.<sup>11</sup> Learners across four consortia also reported that they found functional skills difficult and were worried about passing. Having to re-sit examinations was common.

Although staff acknowledged that functional skills should ideally be embedded in principal learning, it was more common for discrete lessons to be taught to

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<sup>11</sup> Information provided by the DfE clarifies that to pass their overall Diploma a learner may only need to *complete* the principal learning and project components *if* all other components are passed (including functional skills) and marks for the components are sufficient (which is determined by the Awarding Body).

prepare learners for the examinations. It was clear that where learners talked about on-going lessons, rather than on-off sessions, they were more likely to recognise that they had developed skills.

## 2.3 The project

Diploma learners have to complete a project, to explore a topic of interest in depth. It requires evidence of planning, preparation, research and autonomous working. The project component was highly valued by learners who responded to the survey (70 per cent of those in Years 11 and 13 found the project *very* or *quite useful*; see Tables 2.1 and 2.2 above). Staff in case-study consortia were also generally positive about the project component. Across three consortia, staff praised the project for giving young people the opportunity to research a topic of personal interest, for its impact on independent learning, and for its usefulness for preparation for post-16 study.

The project topic being related to the Diploma subject/sector was highlighted as important in two consortia, in order to give learners a relevant experience that they could link to other aspects of Diploma learning, and also to make it useful if they took future pathways relevant to their Diploma subject. However, this alignment was not always evident. Staff across three consortia perceived the project to be difficult to undertake, particularly for Level 1 learners who were considered to find independent learning challenging (although, as noted above, this was also identified as a benefit for some learners who could cope with such an approach as their Diploma experience was said to strengthen such skills).

## 2.4 ASL

As part of their Diploma, learners take additional courses/qualifications that offer the opportunity to study a particular topic related to their Diploma in more depth, or to study something different that widens their experience. A small majority of Diploma learners who responded to the survey (56 per cent in Year 11; 63 per cent in Year 13) were aware they were taking other qualifications that counted towards their Diploma, but a proportion did not know this (17 per cent in Year 11 and six per cent in Year 13) or said they were not doing so despite the necessity to take additional qualifications as ASL (26 per cent in Year 11 and 28 per cent in Year 13).

Five out of ten learners who responded to the survey in Year 11, and six out of ten in Year 13 found ASL courses to be *very* or *quite useful*. Just over half of Diploma learners surveyed (52 per cent in Year 11; 56 per cent in Year 13) reported that qualifications that counted towards their Diploma had helped to broaden their knowledge in relation to their Diploma subject at least a little.



Similarly, half (50 per cent in Year 11; 49 per cent in Year 13) reported that these other qualifications had helped them to gain specialist in-depth knowledge.

A substantial proportion of learners said that they did not know how useful ASL was (23 per cent in Year 11 and 17 per cent in Year 13; see Tables 2.1 and 2.2) or that they were unsure of whether ASL had an impact on them (a quarter of Year 11 learners and 16 per cent of those in Year 13). These findings suggest these learners could have lacked understanding of the contribution of ASL to the overall Diploma.

From a staff perspective, in three areas, consortium leads said that the specialist learning element of the ASL component was beneficial as it provided '*practical underpinning for the principal learning*'. Courses which enhanced learners' opportunities to take part in practical work were said to be chosen (this was particularly the case for Hospitality and Hair and Beauty Studies Diplomas). In four of the six consortia the ASL offer was limited (and more likely to be *additional* rather than *specialist*) in some institutions due to timetable constraints. Interestingly, in three of the four consortia, ASL had been described as beneficial for providing opportunities for practical learning (see above). The research evidence indicated, therefore, that the ASL offer was different across institutions and for different Diploma subjects. ASL was not always considered to be an integral part of the Diploma and was clearly not fully understood in the second year of delivery.

## 2.5 PLTS

Part of the generic learning included in the Diploma is the development of PLTS. As shown in Tables 2.1 and 2.2. above, the PLTS component was reported as useful by 65 per cent of Diploma learners in Year 11 and 77 per cent in Year 13.

Interviews with staff across six case-study consortia revealed that although PLTS were thought to be useful skills, particularly because they are '*what employers want*', the extent to which this component was considered integral to the rest of the Diploma varied considerably, even across institutions within the same consortium. For example, staff were more positive about PLTS where the skills had been embedded in principal learning and were explicitly highlighted for learners throughout, so they could see how they were developing the skills. There were positive examples of this in institutions across four of the six case studies. This was not always the case though; PLTS were sometimes treated simply as checklists to tick and were not seen as an integral component. Experiences and views of PLTS varied so much *within* consortia, indicating a lack of consistency in the delivery and perceived importance of PLTS.

## 2.6 Employer contact and work experience

Studying for a Diploma includes learning in the workplace (a minimum of ten days' work experience), and learning through realistic work environments, to enable the development of practical skills and work-related application of learning. At the time of the survey (spring 2011), two-thirds (66 per cent) of learners in Year 11 had spent time on a work placement with an employer or someone from the world of work as part of their Diploma course. This is compared with 83 per cent of the Year 11 comparison group who had spent time on a work placement in Years 10/11 (it might have been the case that the remaining Diploma learners were due to complete their work placements in the coming months).

In Year 13, 81 per cent of Diploma learners had spent time on a work placement with an employer or someone from the world of work, compared with 41 per cent of the comparison group who said they had spent time with employers in Years 12/13 (it should be noted that it is more common for work placements to take place when in Key Stage 4, so this might be expected).

Of the Diploma learners who had spent time with employers or someone from the world of work, this was most often during a block of time for a whole week or two (80 per cent in Year 11; 77 per cent in Year 13). Other than work placements, it was common for Diploma and comparison learners to have undertaken other activities with employers (see Table 2.3 below).

**Table 2.3 Involvement in activities with employers, Diploma and comparison group**

Have you done any of these other activities listed below with an employer/someone from the world of work as part of your Diploma course?	Year 11 Diploma Learner Yes %	Year 11 comparison learner Yes %	Year 13 Diploma learner Yes %	Year 13 Comparison learner Yes %
Someone from the world of work visited my school to talk to us	66	66	71	48
I visited a workplace with other students	73	38	66	30
I had advice/help from someone from the world of work (e.g. a mentor)	51	57	53	44
I have undertaken projects or challenges with someone from the world of work	52	46	38	34
Someone from the world of work teaches my Diploma lessons	44	N/A	38	N/A
N =	606	1111	97	155

*More than one answer could be given so percentages may sum to more than 100. The percentages in this table are weighted by gender and Key Stage 3 prior attainment for Year 11 and by gender for Year 13.*

*Source: NFER Year 11 and 13 Diploma Learner Surveys*

### 2.6.1 Usefulness of employer involvement in the Diploma

As shown in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 above, involvement with an employer or someone from the world of work was considered by learners to be one of the most useful aspects of the Diploma. Around two-thirds of Diploma learners who had undertaken work experience or participated in activities with someone from the world of work found activities *very* or *quite useful* (63 per cent in Year 11 and 66 per cent in Year 13). Employer involvement in the Diploma was considered particularly useful because:

- learners did worthwhile tasks (72 per cent of Year 11 and 70 per cent of Year 13 learners were in agreement with this)
- it helped them to learn about jobs they could get after finishing their Diploma (63 per cent and 70 per cent respectively).

Around three-fifths of learners who had undertaken activities with employers (61 per cent in Year 11 and 63 per cent in Year 13) reported that the employers involved were relevant to their Diploma subject. Year 13 learners in particular agreed that they were using skills with employers that they were

learning on the rest of their Diploma course (67 per cent). A notable minority (19 per cent in Year 11; 16 per cent in Year 13) could not see the link between their experience with employers and the rest of their Diploma course.

Staff interviewed across all six case-study consortia generally considered work experience and employer involvement to be a '*strength*' of the Diploma. The majority of learners were clearly motivated and enthused by their experiences with employers. Comments included:

*It's good seeing what we could accomplish if we finish the course. It's motivating...it makes you think "that could be me".*

In two consortia, staff reported that demand for employer involvement was high, which made it '*tough to find good work placements*'. There were consequently '*not enough proper placements*' so it became more of a '*tick box*' exercise. Linked to this were reports in two consortia that work placements were not always linked to the principal learning subject matter.

Diploma learners in five of the six consortia said they would have liked to have had more contact with employers. In three of these consortia, learners noted that most (if not all) of their employer-related activities had occurred in the first year of the Diploma, while in the second year more focus was given to written assignments.

## 2.7 General views on the Diploma

The following main benefits of the Diploma were identified by staff across case-study consortia:

- Impact on learners: particularly in terms of the development of independent learning skills (mentioned across all six consortia), self-confidence (four consortia); and the team-working skills (two consortia). For example, one senior manager said, '*their [learners'] self-confidence has rocketed*'.
- Offering an insight into different aspects of an industry/sector (three consortia): this was thought to help young people make decisions about future career paths. Comments included, '*it can help them decide which aspects of the subject to develop in future*'.
- Offering learners experiences of varied learning environments (three consortia): for example, when delivery involved learning at a local college or with employers.
- Benefits for staff/teachers (four consortia): such as increased knowledge of a sector, or learning how to structure teaching differently (for example, involving more interaction with learners). As one teacher commented, by

teaching the Diploma he had *'enjoyed having small group sizes'* and *'valued developing subject knowledge'*.

- Opportunities for practical/applied learning (two consortia): relating learning to the real world was considered a real motivating factor for learners, although there was a desire for the Diploma to include more practical learning. As one senior manager said, for example, *'It [the Diploma] has given them [learners] opportunities that they simply wouldn't have got from more traditional study, including...having to go off site and all of the practical side of it'*.

When asked to comment on the disadvantages of the Diploma, comments largely overlapped with suggestions for changes to the qualification (see Section 2.8 below). Other different responses related to:

- Assessment (two consortia): expectations not being clear to teachers and requirements being higher than expected which led to learners being marked down.
- The level of difficulty (two consortia): specifically that the Level 2 Diploma was considered more difficult than other Level 2 qualifications.

A challenge associated with delivering the Diploma, highlighted by teaching staff, was linking the different components of the Diploma together. Although principal learning teachers found it relatively easy to link the theory of the Diploma to the real world, it was felt that links between functional skills and the principal learning were harder to make. For example, functional skills were most often delivered discretely and not by principal learning teachers. In a small number of institutions where an effort was made to embed functional skills in the principal learning, teachers were able to make explicit links.

Moreover, principal learning teachers were often unaware of the courses learners were taking as ASL and were therefore unable to make any links. Where learners were offered specialist learning courses that added practical knowledge to their Diploma principal learning, this allowed the teachers to make the connections between the different courses.

## 2.8 Suggestions for changes to the Diploma

In terms of changes to the Diploma qualification, suggestions from staff across the six case-study areas mainly related to the need for it to be **streamlined** (for example, to fit into two option blocks instead of three in terms of guided learning hours). This was for two main reasons:

- because the qualification was considered **too demanding**, for learners and teachers, with too much content to cover in the time allowed
- to give young people who want to study a Diploma **more flexibility on the timetable** to study other qualifications, so not to restrict them at a

young age. It was considered a big risk for learners to *'have all their eggs in one basket'*.

This may be of value given the government response to the Wolf review (see Chapter 1) which suggests that the vast majority of 14-16 year olds will be taught an academic core curriculum, which will then be supplemented by a vocational element confined to 20 per cent of the timetable (Wolf, 2011).

Across the six consortia, the general consensus was for the principal learning, project and work experience/employer involvement to be maintained (see the benefits of each explored in Sections 2.1, 2.3 and 2.6 above). However, a case for streamlining the principal learning was argued, either by decreasing the number of units or reducing the content of each. The value of the principal learning and project components was highlighted by the fact that staff in two consortia wanted to deliver both as stand-alone qualifications.<sup>12</sup>

The majority of staff across all six consortia recommended that the functional skills component be removed from the Diploma. Although the skills were considered important for employability, it was the *necessity* for the component to be passed for a learner to pass their overall Diploma that was criticised. To illustrate this point, one subject lead said:

*Functional skills should not have an impact on results because it puts Diploma students at a disadvantage. The Diploma would be a lot more attractive to students without functional skills.*

It was perceived that, without functional skills, the Diploma could be more attractive to learners (although it should be noted that learners were not always aware that passing functional skills was a requirement and thus this would not have impacted on their decision to take a Diploma). As young people study English, mathematics and often ICT GCSEs, making those qualifications more 'functional' was suggested (for example, incorporating new ways of teaching these subjects which equip learners with techniques to solve different problems they could face in everyday life). If the functional skills component is retained, consideration should be given to delivery and assessment and the extent to which the skills are aligned to the content of the Diploma. The perceived level of difficulty of examinations would benefit from being reviewed.

In terms of potential changes to the Diploma, little was said about the ASL component. ASL seemed rather disjointed from the rest of the Diploma, indicating that it might not have an impact on the whole Diploma experience if

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<sup>12</sup> Announcements made by the DfE about Diplomas in April 2011 have confirmed that the component qualifications – particularly principal learning and the extended project – can be offered outside of the framework of the Diploma, and can support progression in their own right.

removed. However, it should be noted that there is evidence that some HEIs request certain qualifications as ASL for entry on to some HE courses<sup>13</sup>; this should be considered when reviewing the future of the component at Level 3. Moreover, other than streamlining the qualification, the main suggestion for change related to making it more practical. The value of specialist learning for increasing learners' opportunities for practical learning should be considered. The qualitative evidence suggested that the success of PLTS (including the impact on learners) could be dependent on making the skills explicit for young people and, in turn, making them meaningful.

## 2.9 Summary

The principal learning, project and work experience/employer involvement elements of the Diploma were considered most useful and, therefore, should be maintained if changes to the structure of the Diploma are made. The DfE announcement that the component qualifications – particularly principal learning and the extended project – can support progression in their own right is likely to be welcomed by staff involved in Diploma delivery.

The generic skills included in the Diploma were thought to be important for employability for learners in general. But, the functional skills examinations were criticised for being too difficult, which had a potential impact on pass rates for the overall Diploma. This added to pressure on staff and learners and could impact negatively on the demand for the qualification. The general consensus was that this component should be removed from the qualification. This is not to say that the idea of 'functional skills' was not valued (indeed it was suggested that GCSE mathematics, English and ICT would benefit from becoming more 'functional'), rather than having to pass the functional skills examinations should not be a prerequisite of passing the entire Diploma. If the component remains included in the structure, the perceived level of difficulty of examinations should be explored.

If PLTS continue to be included, the delivery should be reviewed by teachers and the skills should be made explicit for learners even if they are embedded in other elements of the Diploma. Staff interviewed had fewer views on the ASL component. Choice of qualifications was often limited, and the courses taken were often not seen as integral to the rest of the Diploma. This might suggest that if this component was removed from the Diploma that it would not be at the detriment of the learning experience. However, the types of qualifications and subjects required by HEIs alongside the Diploma should still be considered.

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<sup>13</sup> See Haynes, G. and Richardson, W. (2011). *Evaluation of the implementation and impact of diplomas: findings from the 2009/10 survey of higher education institutions*. Available online: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-RR093>

## 3 Teaching and learning

### Key Findings

- Reflecting the findings from the first year of delivery for this cohort, case–study interviews revealed that teaching staff have extended their teaching approaches in order to deliver the Diploma course. The main ways in which teaching approaches have changed were through a greater amount of application to real-world contexts, using a more facilitating approach to teaching and, for vocational teachers, undertaking more theory-based teaching.
- Teachers across all of the case-study areas had enjoyed delivering the qualification. Positive experiences of teaching the Diploma included the relationships the teachers developed with their students and the flexibility the Diploma allowed in teaching and learning.
- There were challenges to teaching the Diploma which included helping learners to develop the different skills set required by the course, the high theory content of the course, the length of the Diploma lessons and a lack of time for delivery.
- Survey results showed that learners believed that they had benefited from their Diploma lessons through the development of communication skills, team-working skills, the ability to use their own initiative and take responsibility for their learning, researching skills and evaluating their own work.
- Diploma learners also felt the Diploma qualification offered a different learning experience compared with their other courses in that the classes were smaller, it involved more work and gave them more skills and experience.
- Overall there was very little consortium-wide monitoring of Diploma teaching being undertaken. The majority of consortia were relying on in-house quality assurance procedures and policies to monitor Diploma teaching.
- Diploma learners tended to be less committed to learning when compared with learners in the comparison group. Diploma learners were also more likely to prefer team-work and practical learning compared with comparison learners.

This chapter explores the different teaching approaches and learning experiences of both delivery staff and learners. It examines the teaching approaches adopted by staff, and the related positive experiences and challenges faced by these approaches. It also looks at the benefits to learners. This chapter also discusses the attitudes of Diploma learners to learning in general and their attitude to the Diploma.

### 3.1 Teaching approaches

In order to explore the extent to which Diploma learners had received a different learning experience compared with those not taking a Diploma, the



learner surveys explored the extent to which learners had undertaken a range of activities. Year 11 Diploma learners reported more frequently than comparison learners that they gave presentations, undertook group work, undertook problem-solving activities and recorded their own progress or achievements in *all or some* of their lessons, as can be seen in Table 3.1 below. When you compare these findings with the activities undertaken by this cohort in the first year of delivery (McCrone *et al.*, 2011), it can be seen that there has been an increase in the proportion of Diploma students working alone, working from text books and worksheets and undertaking problem solving activities in year two. This may suggest that learners are spending more time working alone on assignments, including the Project, in the second year of delivery compared with the first year.

**Table 3.1 Students' engagement in the following activities in all or most lessons**

Activity	Year 11 Diploma %	Year 11 Comparison %	Year 13 Diploma %	Year 13 Comparison %
Contribute to a class discussion	60	60	57	68
Problem-solving activities	48	41	47	50
Group work	49	41	44	42
Give presentations	21	12	19	22
Work alone	71	73	78	83
Practical activities	30	32	31	36
Work from textbooks or worksheets	62	66	40	51
Record your own progress or achievements	28	22	31	32
N	606	1111	97	155

*More than one answer could be given so percentages may sum to more than 100.*

*The percentages in this table are weighted.*

*Source: NFER Year 11 and 13 Diploma Learner Surveys*

Differences were also seen in the Year 13 cohort. As with Year 11 students, Diploma learners in Year 13 were less likely to be regularly working from textbooks or worksheets, compared with those not currently studying a Diploma. However, there were no notable differences in the levels of problem-solving activities, group work or giving presentations. Instead, the main difference between the two learning experiences of Year 13 Diploma students and the comparison group were that the comparison group were more likely to contribute regularly to class discussions and work from textbooks or worksheets. When compared with the first year of Diploma delivery for this cohort (McCrone *et al.*, 2011), it can be seen that the amount of working alone learners do has increased, whereas their contributions to class discussion and group work, and practical activities have all decreased.

The differences in teaching approaches used for delivering the Diploma compared with other courses were explored through interviews with teaching staff in the case-study areas. In the first year of delivery, the majority of teachers had reported that they had adapted their teaching approach in order to deliver the Diploma qualification (McCrone *et al.*, 2011). After a further year of delivery, teachers across five of the six case-study consortia further reflected that, largely in similar ways to those outlined in the first year of delivery, the main differences in teaching approaches were:

- greater links with business and more real-world application
- acting more as a facilitator rather than a teacher
- teaching more theory compared with vocational subjects such as NVQs and BTECs.

These are discussed in more detail below.

The majority of teachers interviewed across all consortia believed that the Diploma qualification allowed them to **apply their teaching to real-world contexts**. This was often done through the learners' work experience placements and visits to and by employers. Teachers would then link relevant units of their principal learning to the visits or work experience. However, as noted in Section 2.6, a small number of teachers were unable to make links between work experience and principal learning as learners had not undertaken placements in businesses related to their Diploma subject. Some of the teachers, who had worked in industry, felt their background had helped them to make the links between theory and the real world.

Some Diploma subjects such as the Hair and Beauty Studies Diploma were better suited to provide more realistic links between theory and practice. This was because learners were often being taught in a 'working' salon where they were constantly surrounded by clients and could observe how a salon operates on a day-to-day basis. This meant it was easier for the teachers to make links between theory and industry.

Teachers from two consortia felt that building links with employers and linking learning to real world contexts was one of the main benefits of teaching the Diploma qualification. One teacher commented: '*It's fun, it's bringing learning to life*'.

Teachers across three consortia believed that the Diploma allowed the teachers to act as **facilitators** rather than traditional teachers. This allowed for more flexibility in the lessons with learners taking a greater responsibility for their own learning. This was seen to be a positive change but also challenging, as it required a level of maturity from the learners that may not be expected in other qualifications. The project, in particular, was cited as an example of where teachers could act more as a facilitator than teacher.

A new perspective that has emerged in the second year of delivering the cohort 2 subjects, was that some teachers across three consortia with experience of teaching vocational qualifications explained that the Diploma was **more theoretical** than other vocational qualifications and they were not accustomed to teaching this degree of theory. One teacher explained this difference as *'an academic approach using the vocational area as a tool'*. Furthermore, due to the theory-rich content, a small number of vocational teachers in two consortia explained that they had needed to undertake their own learning and research on certain units in order to be able to teach them. One teacher commented:

*[I] have had to learn it myself before delivering it to them in some instances which had been challenging.*

These teachers generally felt that, despite the challenge posed by having to further their own knowledge, this opportunity for continued professional development was a positive outcome of teaching the Diploma course.

Overall, teaching staff believed that the Diploma had been a positive teaching experience. Teachers across all of the case-study areas had enjoyed delivering the qualification. In particular, teachers across four of the case studies explained that teaching the Diploma has enabled them to build close relationships with the students that they would not have been able to do otherwise.

### **Challenges of teaching approaches**

Despite the majority of institution-level staff reporting positive experiences and enjoying teaching the Diploma qualification overall, they reported some challenges. The main challenges were:

- The different set of skills required for studying a Diploma, including the need for evaluation and reflection, independent learning and learners taking responsibility for their own progress.
- The amount of written work and the high theory content were also seen to be a challenge for both learners and delivery staff across four consortia.
- The length of the Diploma lessons, which, in some instances, lasted up to a day, as learners were required to spend a large amount of time focusing on one subject. This was also seen to be a challenge for teachers with regards to keeping the learners engaged and dealing with behavioural issues.
- The lack of time for delivery of the Diploma course (see Chapter 2).

### **Access to resources for teaching and learning**

While the majority of staff were satisfied with the access to resources and facilities they had received while teaching the Diploma, a notable minority in three consortia considered that, as the Diploma was a new course, there

were fewer materials and resources available in the initial stages of delivery and staff therefore needed to develop their own resources.

Additionally, a small number of teaching staff across two consortia, were concerned about insufficient funding in the future, which they felt would impact on their teaching of the Diploma. This was a particular concern in relation to funding trips to employers.

### **Impact of Diploma on learners**

In Section 2.7, staff outlined what they perceived to be the benefits of the Diploma to students. This included the development of independent learning skills, self-confidence and team-working skills. Building on these findings, Year 11 Diploma learners indicated that the Diploma had helped them to develop or improve a range of generic study skills. Notably, Year 11 learners reported that the Diploma had helped them to:

- Improve their team-working skills (80 per cent either *very well* or *quite well*),
- take responsibility for their learning (80 per cent),
- improve their communication skills (79 per cent), and
- use their own initiative (79 per cent).

They also felt they had benefited through the development of researching skills (76 per cent) and being able to evaluate their own work (76 per cent).

Areas in which the Diploma was seen to be having less impact was in relation to helping the learners make decisions about their future, such as where to study next (57 per cent) or what job to they would like to do (58 per cent).

For Year 13 Diploma learners, a similar pattern was seen whereby learners indicated that their Diploma course had helped them develop a number of generic skills. Notably, Year 13 learners reported that the Diploma had helped them to:

- to take responsibility for their own learning (89 per cent either *very well* or *quite well*).
- use their own initiative (85 per cent),
- evaluate their own work (80 per cent),
- improve team-working skills (80 per cent) and
- develop researching skills (79 per cent).

These findings are generally consistent with the findings from the second year of delivery for the first cohort of Diploma learners (Golden *et al.*, 2011). One difference that has emerged is that for the first cohort of Year 13 learners, the

majority felt that the Diploma had helped them to decide what job to do. In contrast, in the second cohort, a smaller proportion felt the Diploma had helped them in this area.

## **3.2 Monitoring the quality of teaching and learning**

In the first year of delivery, the majority of case-study areas reported developing consortium-wide monitoring systems, but they were more likely to be using already established processes within individual institutions (McCrone *et al.*, 2011). In the second year of delivery, two case-study areas developed Diploma-specific consortium-wide policies for monitoring teaching and learning. In one of these areas the consortium lead had established a thematic group on quality assurance and in the second consortium, the domain assessors and department leads were responsible for quality assurance of teaching and learning and undertook lesson observations across the institutions delivering the Diploma.

In the other case-study consortia, monitoring the quality of teaching and learning was the responsibility of each individual institution. In three of these areas, some institutions were undertaking extra monitoring of Diploma teaching, but this was not a consortium-wide approach. For example, the consortium lead or lead assessor had undertaken joint observations in some institutions when Diploma teachers were being observed internally.

Staff in the consortium not undertaking any additional monitoring for Diploma subjects explained that they had chosen not to instigate centralised monitoring of teaching and learning as they believed the Diploma qualification would only be delivered in-house in the future. Furthermore, another consortium had planned to develop a cross-consortium monitoring system but this had not been put into practice due to a lack of time to implement it - as highlighted above, some institutions within this consortium were undertaking extra monitoring of Diploma teaching.

The main challenge with regards to consortium-level monitoring of teaching and learning within Diplomas, highlighted by two consortia, was the lack of time. This encompassed both the practicalities of travelling to different institutions and also the time needed to understand and work within the different institutions' monitoring policies and procedures.

## **3.3 Learners' attitude to learning**

### **3.3.1 Learners' attitude towards learning in general**

As discussed above, teachers felt that the Diploma required a different teaching approach to other qualifications. This section explores whether there

were any differences between Diploma learners and the comparison group regarding their attitude to learning, their commitment to learning, their preferences for team-work and practical learning, and their confidence in a range of skills.

The surveys of the Year 11 Diploma learners and the comparison group included questions which explored their attitudes to and preferences for learning. By asking both groups of young people the same questions, it is possible to compare the views of each. A range of survey questions which explored attitudes or learner preferences were grouped together using factor analysis, which consolidates the data in order to produce more robust measures than a single question would do. Through this method, the following factors (see Appendix A for explanation of factors) were produced:

- Positive attitude to learning
- Commitment to learning
- Preference for team-work and practical learning.

These factors, along with other variables, were then included in multi-level modelling analysis (see Appendix A), which takes into account a range of influential variables to assess whether young people who take Diplomas differ from their peers in their views and attitudes. The models explored whether Diploma learners differed from comparison learners in their attitudes and whether Diploma learners taking each subject differed from their peers not taking a Diploma. The analysis identified that Year 11 learners (both Diploma learners and comparison group learners) with the following characteristics held a more **positive attitude to learning in general** (Factor 1; see Appendix A for more details):

- learners with English as an additional language
- learners with a higher Key Stage 3 mean score<sup>14</sup>.

In contrast, Year 11 Learners with the following characteristics were less likely to hold a positive attitude to learning:

- learners who were studying for a Hair and Beauty Studies Diploma

With regards to **commitment to learning** (Factor 2), Year 11 learners (both Diploma learners and comparison group learners) with the following characteristics were more committed than their peers:

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<sup>14</sup> Prior attainment at Key Stage 3 is based on average Key Stage 3 point scores, which are obtained by converting Key Stage 3 level in each of the three core subjects into the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency point score equivalents, and then taking an average for each learner.

- girls
- learners with a higher Key Stage 3 mean score
- learners who were studying for an Engineering Diploma.

In contrast, Year 11 Learners with the following characteristics were less committed to learning:

- learners who were studying for a Diploma, particularly:
- learners who were studying for a Construction and the Built Environment Diploma
- and learners who were studying for a Hair and Beauty Studies Diploma.

Overall, this suggests that there are some differences between the Diploma learner group and the comparison group in terms of their attitude to learning. In particular, the research evidence indicates that Diploma learners studying the Hair and Beauty Studies Diploma are less committed and have a less positive attitude to learning than their peers who are not studying for a Diploma.

Multi-level modelling revealed that Year 11 learners (both Diploma learners and comparison group learners) with the following characteristics had a stronger **preference for team-work and practical learning** (Factor 3):

- learners who were studying for a Diploma, particularly:
- learners who were studying for a Creative and Media Diploma
- learners who were studying for an Information Technology Diploma
- and learners who were studying for a Hospitality Diploma.

In contrast, Year 11 Learners with the following characteristics had less preference for this type of learning:

- girls
- learners with a higher Key Stage 3 mean score.

This suggests that Diploma learners have a stronger preference for team-work and practical learning than their peers who are not studying a Diploma.

### **Learner confidence**

Overall, it appears that Year 11 Diploma learners felt they were confident in a range of skills relating to their learning. When compared with the comparison group, levels of confidence in a range of tasks were similar, however, Year 11 Diploma learners were seen to be more confident with thinking about their progress in class compared with the comparison group (69 per cent

compared with 58 per cent). There was also a small difference in the two sets of learners' confidence in speaking in group discussions, with the Diploma learners being slightly more confident (63 per cent compared with 58 per cent).

For Year 13 learners, a different picture was seen whereby the Diploma learners appeared to be less confident than their peers in nearly all areas. The most notable differences were:

- working with adults or other young people (79 per cent of Diploma learners compared with 87 per cent of comparison learners)
- communicating clearly in writing (73 per cent compared with 80 per cent)
- using computers and other ICT (88 per cent compared with 94 per cent)
- researching an issue or subject on their own (79 per cent compared with 85).

These findings are similar to that seen in the first year of delivery (McCrone *et al* 2011). However, it does appear that, for Year 13 learners, the confidence gap has grown between the Diploma learners and the comparison group, with there being more areas in which Diploma learners reported having lower confidence than their peers.

### **3.3.2 Learners' attitude towards Diploma teaching**

The majority of learners in both Year 11 and Year 13 felt that their Diploma course had provided a different learning experience compared with their other courses in some respects. For example, the majority of Year 11 Diploma learners felt that their Diploma course:

- involved more work (80 per cent),
- had fewer learners in the class (78 per cent), and
- gave them more experiences and skills than their other courses (75 per cent).

However, learners generally felt the Diploma course was not harder to learn than other courses (60 per cent *disagreed* with the statement that *I find it harder to learn on my Diploma course*), which contradicts the views of some teachers in the case-study consortia (see Section 2.7).

Additional ways in which the Year 11 Diploma learners felt their Diploma course differed from other courses included:

- providing more relevance to the world of work/ their future plans
- being taught in a different school or location



- a more 'laid back' or relaxed environment for studying
- staff giving the learners more freedom.

Learner interviews from the case-study consortia provide an insight into the perceived differences between the Diploma course and other qualifications being undertaken by Year 11 learners. As with the survey data, there was a mix of opinion on whether the Diploma was more or less practical than other courses.

Mirroring the survey findings, learners in three case-study areas noted that their Diploma classes were smaller than their other classes. This was seen as a positive aspect of the Diploma as the learners received more support and attention from the teachers.

Nearly a third of Year 13 Diploma learners (29 per cent) who responded to the survey were only studying for a Diploma qualification and therefore could not comment on how it compared with other qualifications. Of those who were undertaking other courses, Year 13 Diploma learners generally felt that the Diploma differed from their other courses in the following ways:

- it contained fewer people (71 per cent),
- involved more work than other courses (68 per cent),
- gave learners more experience and skills (67 per cent), and
- was less practical than their other courses (only 34 per cent *agreed* that the Diploma course was more practical).

In contrast, the learners did not believe the course was harder to learn than their other courses (59 per cent *disagreed* that the course was harder). There was less consensus on whether the course was more or less interesting than other courses, with 33 per cent *agreeing* that it was less interesting and 38 per cent *disagreeing* with this statement.

When compared with the first year of delivery (McCrone *et al.*, 2011), learners' views about their Diploma course had generally remained consistent. However, a higher proportion of learners in the second year of delivery were finding the course less interesting than other courses. Additionally, the proportion reporting the Diploma as involving more work was also higher in the second year of delivery compared with the first.

Additional ways in which Year 13 learners felt the Diploma course differed from their other learning experiences included:

- providing more opportunities to work on their own
- being taught by a range of different teachers
- a more relaxed working environment

- more coursework but less examinations.

### 3.4 Summary

Overall, the evidence indicates that the Diploma qualification offers a different approach to teaching and learning. Teaching approaches vary in respect to the greater amount of application to industry and real-world contexts and providing a facilitating rather than an instructive approach to teaching. The Diploma also offers learners the opportunity to undertake more group work, while there is less work from textbooks or worksheets. Teachers have enjoyed delivering the Diploma and have developed close relationships with their students. As highlighted in Section 2.7, learners benefit through developing skills related to independent learning and team-working.

The research evidence shows that teaching and learning have not been without challenges for both the teachers and learners. The Diploma has required a different set of skills than learners are used to using and the amount of work is greater than for other subjects. Reflecting this, teachers have felt there was a lack of time for delivery, which may explain the greater amount of working alone seen in the second year of delivery compared with the first year.

## 4 Assessment

### Key Findings

- All case-study areas had consortium-wide procedures for assessment in place. These procedures generally involved training for staff and in some cases, moderation and standardisation across the consortium.
- Domain assessors were in place in all case-study areas. Lead assessors were in place in nearly all areas. Both these roles were seen to be working well. This suggests that there has been some progress in these areas since the first year of delivery.
- Confidence was slightly higher with assessment procedures in the second year of delivery compared with the first year. However, there was still some concern over external moderation, and in particular, understanding why assessments had been marked down.
- Timely and tailored support from within the consortium and, most importantly, from the Awarding Body was seen to be very important in facilitating confidence in assessment.
- Confidence with controlled assessment was seen to be high, which was an improvement on the first year of delivery.
- Learners understood how to get a good grade in their Diploma assessments. They were also aware that they were required to pass Functional Skills in order to pass their Diploma. There was, however, very little awareness of PLTS and ASL and how the components of the Diploma fitted together.

This section explores the progress made with assessment. It investigates to what extent case-study areas have adopted consortium-wide procedures and put in place domain and lead assessors, staff confidence with the assessment of Diplomas and their views on controlled assessment. Finally, it examines learners' understanding of assessment. This chapter is based on qualitative interviews with small numbers of staff and learners and, therefore, findings are illustrative and should not be generalised.

### 4.1 Consortium-wide procedures

Case-study visits undertaken during the first year of delivery revealed that consortium-wide procedures for assessment were starting to be established (McCrone *et al.*, 2011). Building on this, findings from the second year revealed that all six case-study areas had consortium-wide procedures for assessment in place.

All consortia had provided training and support to staff regarding assessment and the importance of consistency. Often this had been led by Awarding Bodies. In three case-study areas the consortium-wide procedures included cross-Diploma subject moderation and standardisation whereby, subject leads or domain assessors met to discuss a sample of the marking of

assignments from each subject. In two consortia, external moderators from the Awarding Body had visited the areas to undertake moderation, but this had been in place of, and not in addition to, internal moderation.

While all five consortium leads stated that there were consortium-wide assessment procedures in place, in three consortia, a small number of teaching staff were unaware of these procedures.

#### **4.1.1 Domain assessors**

The domain assessor has overall responsibility for quality assurance and standardisation of internal assessment within a particular Diploma subject (including principal learning and the project).

In all six case-study consortia, domain assessors were reported to be in place. This is consistent with the findings from the first year of delivery for cohort 2 (McCrone *et al.* 2011). Domain assessors, who were generally the subject leads, provided support to teaching staff and took responsibility for internal moderation of assessments. They also attended consortium-level assessment meetings and meetings with awarding bodies.

The role of the domain assessor was working well across four consortia. However, a small number of domain assessors across two consortia believed that the role was time-consuming and they did not have enough non-teaching time to be able to undertake this role successfully.

#### **4.1.2 Lead assessors**

Lead assessors were in place across five of the six case-study consortia, a higher proportion than was seen in the first year of delivery (McCrone *et al.*, 2011). In three areas the role was conducted, either in whole or in part, by the consortium lead. The lead assessors were reported to work closely with the subject leads, many of whom were domain assessors, to provide advice and ensure there was consistency in assessment across the consortium. They also organised meetings relating to standardisation and moderation of Diploma assessments. In all but one of the areas, where lead assessors were currently in place, the role was thought to be working well and teachers valued the support they received.

## **4.2 Teachers' understanding of assessment**

In the first year of delivery for cohort 2, it was reported that confidence in assessment was growing but was variable amongst staff (McCrone *et al.*, 2011). In the second year of delivery, confidence levels appeared to have improved slightly, although consortium-level staff felt that in some cases, there was scope for further improvement. At an institution-level, senior leaders and teaching staff were generally very positive about their confidence with assessment criteria. However, in two consortia some staff across all

institutions expressed some concern about their understanding of the assessment criteria.

Both consortium-level and teaching staff identified the factors that were seen to help facilitate confidence in assessment to be:

- support from the Awarding Body (five consortia). This included training, face- to-face support from the Chief Examiner and receiving feedback from the external moderator on why marks had been changed
- consortium-level support (five consortia). This included having regular support from and access to the subject leads, lead assessor and domain assessor.

Conversely, where it was felt staff lacked confidence, this was often related to:

- the external moderation process (three consortia). Staff confidence was affected due to a lack of understanding of why marks had been lowered after external moderation. In these instances, staff did not know how to support their students to achieve higher marks in the future.
- the perceived complexity of the Diploma qualification (two consortia). Staff reported that they were unclear on how the Diploma components fitted together.
- a perceived lack of support and clarity from the Awarding Body. Staff in two consortia felt there was a lack of clarity on assessments and standards from the Awarding Body and a lack of exemplar materials and guidance on these areas.

Across five consortia, institution-level staff believed that the role of the examination officer was very different for the Diploma qualification compared to other qualifications. The examination officer's role was seen to be different due to the component nature of the Diploma whereby different institutions could enter students for different components and therefore this required a new, more collaborative, approach to the role. There was also a new system for recording the Diploma marks - the Diploma Aggregation Service (DAS) - which required initial training to use it.

Overall, institution-level staff believed the examination officers were finding the role burdensome and, to some extent, confusing due to the differences highlighted above.

#### **4.2.1 Teachers' understanding of controlled assessment**

From the evaluation of the first year of delivery for cohort 2, it could be seen that staff were concerned about controlled assessment<sup>15</sup> (McCrone *et al.*,

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<sup>15</sup> Controlled assessment is a form of internal assessment where the control levels are set for each stage of the assessment process: task setting, task taking and task marking. Information on controlled assessment can be found at:  
[http://www.diplomainfo.org.uk/documents/AQA\\_CG\\_Control\\_Assess\\_FAQs\\_-WR.pdf](http://www.diplomainfo.org.uk/documents/AQA_CG_Control_Assess_FAQs_-WR.pdf)

2011). In particular, it was believed at that stage, that the process was not fully established or understood.

The findings from the visits to case-study areas in the second year of delivery show that consortium-level staff across all consortia were confident with controlled assessment and felt the teaching staff understood the process, indicating that a great deal of progress had been made since the first year of delivery. This was further confirmed by teaching staff across all institutions. This was reported to have been achieved through planning and communicating the procedure for controlled assessment to all staff and through ongoing support and training from both colleagues within their consortium and the Awarding Bodies.

### **4.3 Learners' understanding of assessment**

Overall, the learner interviews suggest that they understood the assessment process for individual assignments and functional skills. Nearly all learners across the six case-study consortia explained that they were given the banding criteria and knew what they needed to do in order to achieve a certain grade for each assessment. Nearly all learners were also given regular feedback from teaching staff on their assessments. Learners expressed confidence that through this process of receiving the marking criteria in advance of their assessment and subsequently receiving feedback, they understood the assessment process.

A small proportion of the learners in two consortia explained how their understanding of assessment had improved since their first year on the Diploma course. They had gained this information through having access to the marking or banding criteria which they did not have in the first year or was not clear to them in their first year.

Furthermore, learners from three consortia explained that they understood how some of the different types of assessments and components of the Diploma linked together and there was generally a high level of awareness of the need to pass the functional skills examinations in order to gain the Diploma qualification. This awareness was often related to the learner having previously failed one or more of these examinations. There was, however, no evidence that the learners understood how PLTS and ASL fitted into their Diploma qualification.

### **4.4 Challenges and further development needs**

Encouragingly, few consortium and institution-level staff reported any challenges and further development needs. However amongst those that did, these generally related to a lack of time and a lack of understanding of the assessment requirements. These are discussed in more detail below.

A small number of consortium leads and subject leads from two consortia commented on a lack of time to undertake additional roles relating to assessment. This was particularly the case for those who were lead or domain assessors.

As highlighted earlier, across two consortia, staff were concerned that they were still unclear on the assessment criteria, in particular in terms of standards to achieve certain grades. Similarly, a small number of staff in two consortia felt that the training and support they had received from the Awarding Body had not been consistent with the assessment requirements for the Diploma course. Indeed, it was felt that the training provided did not match the marking model of the Diploma.

Despite these challenges, interviewees were generally confident about assessment. Indeed, these views represent a very small number of interviewees across four consortia with the majority of staff not highlighting any significant challenges or further development needs relating to assessment.

## **4.5 Summary**

Overall, the evidence from teachers and their management staff indicates that progress has been made with assessment since the first year of delivery. This has been facilitated by ongoing consortium-level support and by guidance and training from Awarding Bodies. In particular, staff are more confident with the process of controlled assessment. Although concern was raised relating to the time needed to undertake assessment roles and some need for further clarification of procedures, there were minimal identified challenges and future development needs. This confidence is mirrored in the learners' own understanding of assessment. There is, however, limited evidence of learners' awareness of the roles of PLTS and ASL in the overall qualification.

## 5 Learners' satisfaction with and progress on the Diploma

### Key Findings

- The majority of learners in Years 11 and 13 were satisfied with their Diploma course. However, levels of satisfaction amongst those surveyed had decreased compared with the first year of delivery. In addition, a sizeable minority were not satisfied with the Diploma.
- Most learners involved in the survey across both year groups felt that they were progressing well in the various elements of the qualification.
- Case-study learners who studied some of their Diploma at an FE college particularly enjoyed the experience that this offered.
- Most learners who were interviewed said that they would recommend the Diploma qualification to a friend; however, amongst those that would not, reasons included a lack of practical activities, the amount of work required and the disorganisation of the course.
- Interviewees across five consortia identified functional skills as a factor that could prohibit learner progress to pass the qualification.
- The majority of case-study learners felt that they were receiving sufficient learning support. Teachers who they could approach for help were considered a particularly valuable source of support.

This chapter explores learners' satisfaction with the Diploma during the second year of cohort 2. It also examines staff and learners' views about how they were progressing on the course, and the extent to which learners' expectations had been met.

### 5.1 Learners' Views

#### 5.1.1 Learners' satisfaction with the Diploma

As Table 5.1 shows, most Diploma learners across both year groups were satisfied (either *quite satisfied* or *very satisfied*) with their Diploma course; however, this does represent a slight decrease in satisfaction compared with the first year of delivery (McCrone *et al.*, 2011) (11 per cent and nine per cent, respectively). Nearly one third of Year 11 learners (31 per cent) and over a quarter of Year 13 learners (28 per cent) were not satisfied.



**Table 5.1 Diploma learners' satisfaction with their Diploma course**

Level of satisfaction	Year 11 Diploma learners %	Y13 Diploma learners %
Very satisfied	23	15
Quite satisfied	45	50
Not very satisfied	20	20
Not at all satisfied	11	8
Not sure	1	5
No response	1	2
N=	606	97

*A single response question*

*The percentages in this table are weighted*

*Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100*

*Source: NFER Year 11 and 13 Diploma Learner Surveys.*

In line with the survey findings, the majority of case-study learners were satisfied (either *quite satisfied* or *very satisfied*) with the course so far. Interviewees identified a number of aspects about the course that they perceived as positive:

- doing the project – reasons included the opportunity to select a topic of interest and having enjoyed the research elements
- undertaking practical activities
- learning in a different environment . One learner on the IT Diploma, for example, said that the experience had helped prepare him for attending college next year.

Despite this largely positive response, some learners also identified aspects of the course that they perceived to be less positive. The lack of practical activities was mentioned by around a quarter of learners and in particular, amongst those who had undertaken the Hair and Beauty Studies Diploma, as illustrated by the following comment:

*...everything we had been told about the Diploma was completely wrong – there are exams [and]...very little practical work.*

In addition, some learners expressed concern that they would not pass particular functional skills subjects.

Several learners also made reference to the amount of work required, which a few interviewees said had to be completed within a short period of time. This

may well reflect that young people were close to the deadline for their year 2 assignments.

Table 5.2 and Table 5.3 below present views towards the Diploma held by young people. Notably, the majority of those young people studying a Diploma in Year 11 agreed that they were learning useful skills on the course (75 per cent), while a similar proportion expected the course to involve more practical work (71 per cent). Conversely, wanting to spend less time on their Diploma course (27 per cent) and expecting to leave their Diploma course before it is finished (12 per cent) were views reported by a minority of survey respondents.

**Table 5.2 Year 11 learners' views of their Diploma course**

Views on the Diploma	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
	%	%	%	%	%	%
I am enjoying my Diploma course	22	43	11	15	8	1
The work I do in lessons is interesting	13	45	16	17	8	1
I find the course challenging	16	48	17	14	3	1
I thought there would be more practical work	42	29	12	15	2	1
I would like to spend less time on my Diploma course	9	18	20	38	13	1
I am learning useful skills on my Diploma course	20	55	9	10	4	1
I can cope with the amount of work	17	47	19	11	5	1
I expect to leave my Diploma course before it is finished	3	9	20	37	30	2
My Diploma will help me to get a job in the future	23	40	25	6	4	1
My Diploma will help me get into college in the future	23	45	23	5	3	1
My Diploma will help me get into university	15	32	39	8	5	1
I made the right choice to do a Diploma course	25	31	21	10	11	1

N = 606

*A series of single response questions*

*Weighted data*

*Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100. Source: NFER Year 11 and 13 Diploma Learner Surveys*

As shown in Table 5.3 below, the majority of Year 13 Diploma learners (albeit based on a small sample) reported that they found the course challenging (73 per cent); that they were learning useful skills on their Diploma course (72 per cent) and that their Diploma course would help them get into university in the future (71 per cent).

**Table 5.3 Year 13 learners' views of the Diploma course**

Views on the Diploma	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Not sure %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	No response %
I am enjoying my Diploma course	11	54	11	18	5	0
The work I do in lessons is interesting	8	46	18	22	6	0
I find the course challenging	17	56	13	11	3	0
I thought there would be more practical work	29	32	16	17	4	2
I would like to spend less time on my Diploma course	8	11	32	46	4	0
I am learning useful skills on my Diploma course	16	56	14	7	6	0
I can cope with the amount of work	15	50	22	11	1	0
I expect to leave my Diploma course before it is finished	1	6	18	46	29	0
My Diploma will help me to get a job in the future	18	42	31	4	5	0
My Diploma will help me to get into university	28	43	24	5	1	0
I made the right choice to do a Diploma course	18	33	28	11	7	3

N = 97

*A series of single response questions*

*The percentages in this table are weighted*

*Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100*

*Source: NFER Year 11 and 13 Diploma Learner Surveys*

To explore the satisfaction with Diplomas further, multilevel modelling (see Appendix A) was used to identify the factors associated with being satisfied or dissatisfied with the Diploma course. The data revealed that Year 11 learners

with the following characteristics reported **greater satisfaction** with their Diploma course:

- learners who felt they were progressing well in the principal learning component
- learners who had found the principal learning useful to their education
- learners who found the Diploma project useful to their education
- learners who found PLTS useful to their education
- learners who had a positive attitude to learning.

The data also revealed that Year 11 learners with the following characteristics reported **less satisfaction** with their Diploma course:

- learners who were studying for a Construction and the Built Environment Diploma.

To further explore learners' attitude towards the Diploma qualification, a range of survey questions were grouped together using factor analysis. The learners' responses to the survey were grouped into one factor '**attitude to the Diploma**'. This produced a more robust and rounded measure of attitude than overall satisfaction, as it included a number of statements (Factor 1, see Appendix A).

Multi-level modelling was then undertaken to examine the characteristics of learners and their experiences of the Diploma course that were associated with having a more or less positive **attitude to the Diploma**. The modelling revealed that Year 11 learners were significantly more likely to have a positive attitude to the Diploma where they:

- were satisfied with their Diploma overall
- felt they were progressing well with the principal learning component and the Diploma project
- were more committed to learning than similar students.

Learners gained a significantly lower score in their attitude to the Diploma than their peers where they were taking the:

- IT Diploma
- Society, Health and Development Diploma
- Business, Administration and Finance Diploma.

Case-study Diploma learners reflected on how their Diploma course is taught compared with their other subjects. In particular, the balance between theory and practical application was reported by interviewees. While in some cases

(14), learners across the different Diploma subjects felt that the course offered more practical, 'hands-on' learning opportunities, others (10 learners) reported that a lot of written work was required in comparison to other subjects. Providing more opportunities for independent learning (reported by 10 learners) and being treated more like an adult (amongst those who were studying outside of their home institution) were examples of other more commonly cited responses (mentioned by seven learners).

### 5.1.2 Learners' experience of studying for a Diploma outside of their own school

Of those Diploma learners who were doing some or all of their Diploma lessons outside of the institution they were enrolled at, the majority of Year 11 survey respondents said that they:

- liked working with students from other schools (72 per cent)
- liked the atmosphere when studying for their Diploma outside of their school (68 per cent)
- felt that they were treated more like an adult during their lessons outside of school (66 per cent)
- felt that students from their own school mixed well with other students (65 per cent).

Survey responses from Year 13 Diploma learners (although a small sample) largely echoed those findings presented above. Notably, however, fewer respondents said they liked working with students from other schools on their Diploma course (49 per cent).

These findings were further highlighted during case-study interviews which also revealed that learners who studied some of their Diploma at an FE college particularly enjoyed the experience that it offered, as illustrated by the following comment: *'You can call teachers by their first name and you're treated more like an adult'*.

### 5.1.3 Learners' views of their progress

The survey asked learners how well they felt they were progressing in the different components of the Diploma<sup>16</sup>. Most Year 11 learners felt that they were progressing well (either *very well* or *quite well*). However, a higher proportion of young people felt that they were *not* progressing well in functional skills maths compared with the other functional skills.

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<sup>16</sup> Progress in terms of overall achievement will be evident from outcomes at the end of the course. Achievement outcomes for the first cohort of Diploma learners, who studied the first five Diploma subjects over the two academic years 2008/09 have been analysed (see Lynch *et al.*, forthcoming).

Overall, learners appeared most confident about the principal learning component, with 83 per cent reporting that they were progressing well (either *very well* or *quite well*). Notably however, over a quarter were uncertain about their progress on the other courses they were taking that count towards the Diploma. This might reflect a lack of understanding about the ASL component of the Diploma (as discussed in Chapter 2).

A similar pattern emerged amongst those young people studying for a Diploma in Year 13 in so far as most felt they were progressing well across the various components. In particular, a higher proportion of Year 13 learners than their Year 11 peers felt they were doing well in functional skills in English (85 per cent compared with 78 per cent). Although based on small numbers, a notable minority of Year 13 learners felt that they were not progressing well in the project (22 per cent) or the ICT functional skills (20 per cent).

#### **5.1.4 How learners assess their progress**

Most survey respondents felt they were progressing well on the course because they had received some form of feedback. In particular, most Year 11 learners had received feedback from their tutor or received coursework or internal assessment marks. Moreover, 72 per cent had reflected on skills and knowledge they had developed, while examination or mock exam results had been received by 71 per cent of respondents. These findings are reflected in the interviews with learners and are consistent with the first year of delivery (McCrone *et al.*, 2011).

The majority of Year 13 learners had received feedback from their tutor (95 per cent). In addition, most had received examination or mock examination results (84 per cent), coursework or internal assessment marks (82 per cent) or had reflected on their own skills and how their knowledge had developed (77 per cent).

#### **5.1.5 Whether the course had met expectations**

Around one third of case-study learners felt that the course had met their expectations (or in some cases, had exceeded expectations). Where further comments were provided, this had been achieved through receiving good information about the course or having attended taster days prior to commencing the course.

A lack of practical learning was considered a particular issue amongst over a third of case-study learners. There was also some evidence to suggest that learners were unaware prior to the course commencing that they would be required to do functional skills.

Approximately half of learners interviewed during case-study visits in spring 2011 spoke of particular problems that they had experienced during the course. Those more frequently cited included:

- **staffing** – in terms of, for example, the lack of continuity in teaching staff or lessons being taught by staff who were perceived to lack relevant subject knowledge
- **lack of communication between institutions** – in terms of, for example, decisions made in one institution not being communicated to another or a lack of awareness amongst one institution of the requirement for learners to undertake functional skills tests.
- **Time pressures** in order to complete assignments on time.

### 5.1.6 Whether learners would recommend the Diploma to others

Around a quarter of learners in both year groups said that they would definitely recommend their Diploma course to a friend (see Table 5.4 below), while around a third of survey respondents in Year 11 and Year 13 said they would consider recommending it.

A greater proportion of cohort 2 Year 13 learners would probably or definitely not recommend the Diploma compared with cohort 1 learners during the second year of delivery (22 per cent) (Golden *et al.*, 2011).

**Table 5.4 Whether learners would recommend the Diploma to others**

Would you recommend your Diploma course to a friend?	Year 11 %	Year 13 %
Definitely	26	25
Maybe	33	35
Probably not	13	19
Definitely not	21	18
Not sure yet	2	1
No response	4	2
N =	606	97

*The percentages in this table are weighted.  
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.  
Source: NFER Year 11 and 13 Diploma Learner Surveys*

Case-study findings revealed that most learners would recommend the Diploma qualification to a friend but stressed the importance of ensuring that, for example, they had a genuine interest in the subject or they were well informed about what the course would entail (views which were also held by cohort 1 learners during the second year of delivery (Golden *et al.*, 2011)). The following comment provides an illustration of the importance of an interest in the subject matter:

*If you're the type of person who definitely knows that Hair and Beauty is your forte then you should go down that road because it equips you with everything you need for that pathway.*

A lack of practical activities, the amount of work required and the disorganisation of the course were examples of the reasons provided by those who would not recommend the Diploma to others.

### **5.1.7 Whether learners would consider doing a Diploma in the future**

When asked to reflect on their experience, most learners who were interviewed during spring 2011 said that, if they could go back in time, they would do a Diploma again; the more commonly cited reason being that they enjoyed the course. Other comments related to helping to determine future progression pathways or career opportunities and knowledge and skills development. One Business, Administration and Finance learner for example, said '*...it's a good qualification and gives you a good knowledge base...*'

Despite a largely positive response overall, some interviewees said that they would not do a Diploma again. A lack of practical work and little understanding of the grading criteria were examples of some of the reasons provided.

## **5.2 Teachers' and subject leads' views of learners progress**

The functional skills component of the qualification was cited amongst consortium-level staff (consortium leads and subject leads) across five consortia as a factor that could impact on learners' ability to pass the Diploma. In some cases, this was attributed to the variability in delivery across institutions. One consortium lead, for example, remarked:

*...it's [functional skills] the responsibility of the schools and there's not always been enough input. It's [functional skills] been raised at consortium meetings many times, but I can't tell people how to run their schools.*

Learner engagement and motivation, understanding of the assessment criteria and communication between institutions were examples of other factors identified by interviewees as prohibiting learner progress.

### **5.2.1 Learner discontinuation**

In general, consortium-level staff reported that drop-out rates had been small and largely related to personal circumstances and behaviour. On the whole, numbers were small and were attributed to, for example, concerns regarding passing the functional skills component of the qualification which resulted in students being withdrawn from the course and a lack of practical activities. In a minority of cases, institutions had ceased to offer the Diploma subject or



particular levels of a subject that they started offering in 2009 during subsequent years due to a lack of demand.

### 5.3 Support for learners

Overall, the majority of case-study learners felt that they were receiving enough support with their learning, which in some cases, was attributed to teachers who they could approach to ask for help as and when required. In a small minority of cases however, there was some indication to suggest that support was variable across institutions. For example, one Year 11 learner on the Business, Administration and Finance Diploma felt that she and her peers received more support from their home institution, particularly with regard to assessment:

*teachers at our school mark it, put comments on it and tell us what we need to do to improve...but she [teacher at the host institution] just gives us the work and tells us to look at the mark bands.*

### 5.4 Summary

In summary, learners appeared generally satisfied with their Diploma course. There was some evidence to suggest that it had not always met expectations, in terms of, for example, the amount of practical activities. Most learners felt they were progressing well on their course. However, it was evident that this was not always the case, particularly with regard to the functional skills component. This was also identified by institution level staff as a factor that could impact on learners' ability to pass the Diploma.

## 6 Learners' future destinations and Information Advice and Guidance (IAG)

### Key Findings

- Across both year groups, most learners were planning to continue in education or undertake work-based learning opportunities such as an apprenticeship.
- Most learners reported that the Diploma had helped in their decision making about what to do next. Aspects of the course that were more frequently cited amongst Year 11 learners as having helped *most* included activities carried out with an employer/someone from the world of work, the PL component and the Diploma project. The latter two aspects were also cited by Year 13 learners, who also mentioned PLTS.
- A greater proportion of non-Diploma respondents in Year 13 intended to progress onto a course at a university/HEI (68 per cent) compared with their Diploma peers (43 per cent).
- Most comparison learners across both groups who were surveyed had heard about the Diploma, however, over two-thirds of Year 11 respondents (69 per cent) and half of Year 13 respondents (50 per cent) did not know much about them. This finding highlights that there is some scope to improve the information provided to all learners.
- Survey respondents in the Year 11 comparison group were more likely to report that they had received help or guidance when choosing what they wanted to do after finishing Year 11 (74 per cent) than their Diploma counterparts (47 per cent). This finding, alongside the variability of IAG across institutions identified through the case-study interviews, suggests that there is some scope for improvement with regard to the information delivered to young people.

This chapter examines learners intended destinations after pre-and post-16 education and compares the future plans made by Diploma learners and their peers, including whether or not young people would consider taking a Diploma in the future. Satisfaction levels amongst consortium and institution level staff are explored with regard to careers IAG provided to young people.

### 6.1 Future progression of Year 11 learners

Young people in Year 11 were asked to consider what they might do after finishing pre-16 education<sup>17</sup>. Table 6.1 shows that as was the case during the first year of delivery (McCrone *et al.*, 2011), the vast majority of young people across both groups were intending to stay in education after Year 11. A notable proportion of Diploma learners (25 per cent) and their peers (20 per cent) were intending to undertake work-based learning opportunities such as an apprenticeship or a full time job with training.

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<sup>17</sup> These percentages have been recalculated from the data. Diploma learners could choose more than one response option; therefore, duplicate responses need to be accounted for.

**Table 6.1 Year 11 students' intended future destinations: Diploma students and comparison students**

Intended destinations after finishing Year 11	Diploma students %	Comparison students %
Do a course in a school sixth form	25	27
Do a course at a college/sixth form college	66	68
Do a course at a training provider	3	2
Do an apprenticeship/advanced apprenticeship	17	13
Get a full-time job with training	11	10
Get a full-time job without training	4	3
Something else	5	4
Don't know yet	3	4
No response	2	1
N =	606	1111

*More than one answer could be given so percentages may sum to more than 100. The percentages in this table are weighted.*

*Source: NFER Year 11 and 13 Diploma Learner Surveys*

In considering the extent to which their Diploma course had helped them to make decisions about their future options, three-quarters of young people reported it had done so (either *a bit* or *a lot*). The more commonly cited parts of the Diploma that had helped learners to make a decision about the future were:

- activities carried out with an employer/ someone from the world of work (mentioned by 23 per cent of respondents)
- the principal learning component (23 per cent)
- the Diploma project (22 per cent).

In addition, nearly half of survey respondents (48 per cent) reported that the principal learning had helped *a little* in their decision making. In contrast, the functional skills component of the qualification was most frequently reported as the component that had not helped (38 per cent).

Interviews with institution level staff during case-study visits in spring 2011 revealed that, in some cases, the Diploma qualification was perceived to have helped learners decide which aspects of the subject area, if any, they might want to pursue in the future.

In contrast to the first year of delivery (McCrone *et al.*, 2011), learners were largely clear about what they might do after they finished Year 11, which

might be expected, given that learners were in their final year of pre-16 education. In general, reflecting the survey findings, learners had decided to continue in education or training and, in some cases, had already been accepted onto their chosen course, subject to achieving the required grades.

Learners had generally discussed their options with family and friends, teaching staff such as a college tutor or Diploma teacher or careers advice staff such as Connexions Personal Advisors.

Over two-fifths of those young people taking a Diploma said the course that they were planning to take after Year 11 would be in the same subject area as their Diploma course (43 per cent). This figure is slightly lower than that reported during the first year of delivery (McCrone *et al.*, 2011) and may simply reflect greater certainty amongst young people about their future plans. Case-study interviews with teaching staff further supported this finding. However, one teacher on the Hair and Beauty Studies Diploma highlighted that students would need to take more practical courses such as an NVQ Level 2 in order to complement the theory-based learning gained through the Diploma. The lack of practical elements in this Diploma had meant that they would not be progressing onto the next level post-16, although the broadly-based Diploma had enabled them to select the area (i.e. hair or beauty) into which they wanted to progress.

In considering their future options, the survey data revealed that a greater proportion of Diploma students than their peers planned to take a Diploma immediately after finishing Year 11 (as shown in Table 6.2). This finding is consistent with that found during cohort 1, second year of delivery (Golden *et al.*, 2011).

**Table 6.2 Whether young people considered taking a Diploma post-16**

Would you consider doing another/a Diploma in the future?	Year 11 Diploma students %	Year 11 Comparison students %
Yes, I plan to take another/a Diploma immediately after finishing Year 11	16	7
I may take another/a Diploma at some time in the future	18	20
Probably not	28	39
Definitely not	20	17
Not sure yet	13	15
No response	5	2
N =	606	1001

*Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100*

*The percentages in this table are weighted*

*Source: NFER Year 11 and 13 Diploma Learner Surveys.*

Multi-level modelling was undertaken to explore the characteristics associated with the possibility of Diploma learners and their peers doing a Diploma at some point in the future (see Appendix A for further information). The analysis revealed that Year 11 Diploma learners with the following characteristics were **more likely** to consider this as an option for the future:

- learners who were studying for a Hospitality or Construction and the Built Environment Diploma (compared with those learners who had undertaken the Creative and Media Diploma)
- learners who felt that the course would give them skills for the future
- learners who were more satisfied with the course.

Overall, most learners in the comparison group had heard of the Diplomas (88 per cent) but over two-thirds reported that they did not know much about them. Year 11 comparison learners with the following characteristics were **more likely** to do a Diploma in the future:

- learners who live in low income households
- learners with lower prior attainment (Key Stage 3)
- where they had a preference for teamwork and practical learning.

Of those comparison learners who were not considering doing a Diploma in the future, half said that they would prefer to study other qualifications. Other commonly cited responses related to learners feeling that a Diploma would not be useful for their future (27 per cent); no interest in the Diploma subjects

(26 per cent); a lack of knowledge about Diplomas (26 per cent) and the perception that a Diploma is not as good as A-levels (26 per cent). The latter two responses and the fact that comparison learners with a preference for more practical learning were more likely to do a Diploma in the future, suggests that the content and learning style of Diplomas should be explained more clearly to young people.

Over a quarter of interviewed Diploma learners across five consortia said that they would *not* consider doing a Diploma again in the future. Reasons were diverse and related to, for example, a lack of practical activity and the amount of work required. One learner on the Business, Administration and Finance Diploma said: *'It's OK having the experience now but the quantity of work - I don't like it'*. A lack of information about the content of the course and dissatisfaction with grades awarded and subsequently, the need to re-do assignments were also mentioned by interviewees.

The survey data revealed that the proportion of Year 11 Diploma learners and their peers in the comparison group who were considering university or HE as a possible option in the future was similar (50 per cent and 47 per cent respectively).

Multi-level modelling analysis was undertaken to explore the characteristics associated with learners' perceptions about skills for the future while controlling for other factors such as background characteristics (see Appendix A for further information). The analysis revealed a positive association between Year 11 Diploma learners who considered their education would provide them with useful skills for the future and:

- being more satisfied with the Diploma course
- feeling that the Diploma project and their Principal Learning had been useful to their education
- the view that the activities carried out with an employer or someone from the world of work had been helpful to their education
- having a preference for teamwork and practical learning
- having a lower key Stage 3 mean score.

## 6.2 Future progression of Year 13 learners

As can be seen in Table 6.3 below, a greater proportion of non-Diploma students in Year 13 intended to progress onto a course at a university or HEI (68 per cent) compared with their Diploma peers (43 per cent); a finding which reflects that found during cohort 1, second year of delivery (Golden *et al.*, 2011).

The option of getting a job without training was more appealing for Diploma students (24 per cent) than their peers (12 per cent). Nonetheless, as was the case for cohort 2 learners during the first year of delivery (McCrone *et al.*, 2011), the educational route appeared the most commonly intended way forward across both groups.

**Table 6.3 Year 13 students' intended future destinations: Diploma students and comparison students**

Intended destinations after finishing Year 13	Diploma students %	Comparison students %
Do a course at college/sixth form	15	8
Do a course at a training provider	5	2
Do an Apprenticeship/Advanced Apprenticeship	22	19
Get a job with training	25	24
Get a full time job without training	26	12
Do a course at a university/HEI	43	68
Something else	3	2
Don't know yet	12	8
No response	3	0
N =	97	155

*More than one answer could be given so percentages may sum to more than 100.*

*The percentages in this table are weighted.*

*Source: NFER Year 11 and 13 Diploma Learner Surveys*

The same proportion of Diploma learners and their peers had applied for a place at a university or HEI (47 per cent in both cases). Of these learners, 79 per cent of Diploma learners said that they had received an offer of a place which is comparable to the proportion of comparison learners (82 per cent).

Around three-quarters of Diploma learners surveyed (76 per cent) said that their Diploma course had helped them to make a decision about what to do next (either *a bit* or *a lot*). Just under a quarter (23 per cent) felt that the course had not helped at all; a finding which might suggest that learners had already decided their future destination prior to undertaking the course or that learners were still unsure what they wanted to do.

Over half of Year 13 Diploma learners surveyed said that the course or job they were planning to take after their Diploma would be in the same area as their Diploma course (56 per cent), while over a quarter were unsure (28 per cent). Moreover, of those Year 13 learners who were currently taking a Foundation or Higher Diploma, over two-fifths said they would definitely not

consider doing a Diploma at the next level in the future and a similar proportion said probably not.

### **Aspects of the Diploma that had helped in decision making**

The most commonly cited parts of the Diploma that were perceived to have *helped most* in learners' decision making were:

- the principal learning (22 per cent)
- PLTS (20 per cent)
- the Diploma project (19 per cent).

In addition, PLTS and the principal learning units were reported to have *helped a little* by over half of learners (54 per cent and 53 per cent respectively). Conversely, the functional skills component was considered unhelpful by over half of those learners surveyed (54 per cent); a finding which mirrors that reported by their Year 11 counterparts.

The majority of those young people who did not undertake a Diploma had heard of the qualification (93 per cent); however, amongst this group, half reported that they did not know much about them, which further indicates that there is scope to improve the information provided to all learners.

While about one third of the comparison group said that they were probably not going to take a Diploma in the future (35 per cent), around a third were interested in doing so (34 per cent) and were either planning to do a Diploma immediately after finishing Year 13 or would do one at some point in the future.

Of those comparison learners who were not considering doing a Diploma in the future, over a quarter said they wanted to get a job instead (28 per cent) and around one-fifth said they preferred other qualifications (19 per cent).

## **6.3 Guidance to support future progression**

As was the case amongst cohort 1 learners during the second year of delivery (Golden *et al.*, 2011), survey respondents in the Year 11 comparison group were more likely to report that they had received help or guidance when choosing what they wanted to do after finishing Year 11 (74 per cent) than their Diploma counterparts (47 per cent). This finding suggests the need to ensure that the delivery of IAG is consistent for all learners, regardless of which course they have undertaken. The survey evidence also revealed that one in five young people who studied a Diploma were unsure if they had received any help or guidance; this might indicate the need to ensure different methods of impartial IAG are explored. The proportion of Year 13 learners surveyed across both groups who had received information was largely similar (59 per cent and 60 per cent respectively).



Across both groups (and both year groups), young people had more frequently received guidance from teachers in their own institution and their family (although the frequency of responses did vary). In general, most learners found the guidance they had received useful (either *very useful* or *quite useful*).

### 6.3.1 Satisfaction with IAG

#### Overall quality of IAG

The lack of focus on IAG for Diplomas during the case-study interviews appeared to reflect the feeling that due to government changes, the future of Diplomas was uncertain (see Chapter 7 for further discussion).

Interviews with consortium-level staff indicated that, overall, there appeared to be some scope for improvement with regard to the IAG that young people receive about Diplomas at Key Stage 4 and post-16 option stages. A lack of awareness amongst students, the variability in the level of guidance provided across year groups and inaccurate content were examples of reasons why students were believed to be not very well informed. The Diploma IAG report (Wade *et al.*, 2011) highlighted the variability in awareness amongst young people which was attributed to three factors: *'the institution at which a young person is located, the IAG methods employed and the emphasis placed on different qualifications'* (p8).

In a few cases, Hair and Beauty Studies Diploma subject leads said that students had been given accurate information about the mode of learning but felt that there was still an expectation from students and their parents that the course would be more practical. As noted in the first Diploma evaluation report (O'Donnell *et al.*, 2008), one interviewee believed that the title of the Diploma is flawed, noting *'they [young people] only see hair and beauty'*; perhaps an indication that the way in which the Diploma subjects are marketed could be changed in order to ensure that learners and their parents fully understand what the course entails.

There was no consensus in the views held by IAG staff and senior institution managers about the content of information; rather, it appeared to vary across institutions. Of those staff across four consortia, who were generally satisfied, this had been achieved through various methods of delivery including parent evenings, attending options evenings and taster days. Reasons expressed amongst those interviewees who were less satisfied (across three consortia) related to, for example, concerns that the nature of the Diploma and the currency of the qualification were misleading and the lack of understanding about progression routes.

Overall, consortium leads and subject leads appeared largely satisfied with the various mechanisms and formats through which information on Diplomas

is provided to young people. This included open evenings, inductions, parents' evenings and taster days; the latter was highlighted as a particularly effective approach in previous research (Wade *et al.*, 2011) because, for example, it provided learners with an insight into what the course would entail. On the whole, the views held by classroom teachers and senior institution managers largely mirrored those provided by consortium-level staff.

### **Staff who provide IAG to learners**

As noted in the Diploma IAG report (Wade *et al.*, 2011), access to knowledgeable staff is crucial in order to ensure that learners have the necessary information to make an informed decision about their future choices. However, over half of consortium-level staff commenting appeared dissatisfied and felt that the people who provide learners with IAG on Diplomas are not necessarily those best able to do so. For example, one Hair and Beauty Studies Diploma subject lead remarked:

*I think there's a lot of bias, a lot of opinion [amongst teachers]. If it's not something they want to sell, then they're not going to sell it in a positive light so if there's no buy-in, they're not going to embrace it in a positive way or give effective and correct IAG.*

In contrast, some senior institution managers and IAG staff across four consortia appeared generally satisfied (at least to some extent) with the ability of staff to provide such information. This was attributed to a range of factors including a knowledgeable workforce and having student advocates.

### **Characteristics of learners suited to the Diploma**

Most consortium-level staff (consortium leads and subject leads) who commented, reported that schools identified young people to take Diplomas. In some cases, this was reported to be the less academic, lower ability or C/D borderline learners. One consortium lead felt this was illogical '*...that's why functional skills has been such a disaster...[the Diploma] should be [aimed] more at C plus students*'.

Across four consortia, some institution level staff also reported that young people were targeted for Diplomas, which included the more academically able. The need to ensure that students who embark on a Diploma qualification are of the right ability was identified as particularly important.

In one consortium, a few interviewees highlighted the lack of input that the college had into the recruitment of Diploma students from local schools. Although identified by the schools as Level 2 students, the college staff deemed some suitable only for a Level 1 Diploma, as this remark indicates:

*The weakness is the schools have not sent us the right learners; they do not understand the depth and the amount of coursework.*

There was little consensus amongst consortium staff regarding the characteristics of learners who had been more interested in doing a Diploma. For example, some interviewees said that learners who had previously been disaffected or disengaged were more receptive, while in two further cases comments referred to higher ability learners (for some subjects).

In line with findings from the first cohort during the second year of delivery (Golden *et al.*, 2011), the views held by institution staff were also mixed. The characteristics identified by interviewees included learners with high academic ability, those who were self-motivated or had a keen interest in the subject area.

### **Encouraging atypical learners**

Atypical learners are learners who have chosen to take a subject that is not traditionally chosen by learners of their gender. For example, girls taking Engineering or the Construction and the Built Environment Diplomas, or boys taking the Society, Health and Development Diploma, can be classed as 'atypical', as a clear majority of learners taking these Diplomas nationally are the opposite gender' (Golden *et al.*, 2011, p88).

Institutions developed their own strategies for recruiting atypical learners across three consortia. In one consortium, taster sessions were reportedly open to all learners in order to encourage their attendance. One interviewee said that this approach had been used for the Hair and Beauty Studies Diploma in order to encourage male students to enrol. The event was attended by a male barber to act as a role model. Male and female guest speakers from the product industry had also visited the school. In another consortium, one senior institution manager said that they held courses such as 'boys into beauty' and 'girls into motor vehicles' in order to try and overcome gender stereotypes.

### **Awareness of Diplomas amongst IAG staff**

There was evidence to suggest that where staff felt well informed about Diplomas, this had been achieved through having attended training and having received marketing information prior to commencement of the qualification. There was some indication to suggest, however, that staff would welcome further information, as this interviewee's comment indicated: '*...the mass of information we had seems to have dropped off*'.

### **IAG strategies**

In general, it appeared that Diploma IAG within institutions had been incorporated into the regular programme of activities which may have included assemblies, personal interviews and written documentation such as prospectuses. Responses from three consortium leads also suggested that IAG for Diplomas was now a natural part of the IAG programme. One interviewee, for example, said that she went into schools to talk about

Diplomas at options evenings and was available for follow-up talks with students who were interested.

## 6.4 Summary

The evidence has shown that most young people had planned to stay in education. A minority (just under a third) planned to undertake a work-based learning route. It was evident that, in most cases, the Diploma was perceived to have helped learners in their decision making about what to do next, which for some, potentially involved taking a course or job in the same subject area as their Diploma. Just under half of learners studying a Diploma in Year 13 had applied to university or a HEI, and encouragingly, most had received an offer of a place on the course. Findings from the 2009/10 survey of HEIs revealed that the percentage of Diploma and non-Diploma applicants that had been accepted onto a HEI course was very similar (Haynes and Richardson, 2011).

Overall, there appears to be scope for improvement with regard to the IAG provided to learners to ensure that they are equipped to make an informed decision about their choices. There was evidence to suggest that, for example, the course had not met expectations amongst case-study learners in terms of the amount of practical application or the content of the course. Moreover, there was some concern regarding staff knowledge about the Diploma and their ability to provide information to learners and the lack of consistency with regard to IAG across institutions. This suggests that offering training and support to *all* staff is key in order to ensure they have the necessary knowledge to assist learners in their decision making.

## 7 Consortium Management and Future Plans

### Key Findings

- The key success factors for consortium effectiveness were considered to be ring-fenced time, good communication across the consortium and effective consortium leadership and planning.
- According to management staff, models of delivery in the second year were largely unchanged, although the role of the consortium lead had been removed in two of the six case-study consortia. Learners reported a shift to more in-house delivery than in the first year of provision.
- Reasons provided by consortium leads for the decrease in interest in take-up of the Diploma, included uncertainty surrounding the future of the Diploma; cuts in Diploma funding; decreased support at consortium level; the perceived difficulty of achieving the Diploma; the complexity of assessment; and the perception that the Diplomas were too theory-based.
- The majority of senior leaders, consortium leads and subject leads across the six case-study consortia reflected that collaborative practice continued to be used to some extent in the delivery of Diplomas.
- The majority of consortia management interviewees reported that the Diploma would no longer be offered to their learners. They believed recent events such as the introduction of the English Baccalaureate and the recommendations of the 2011 Wolf Review had made the climate a more challenging one for the Diploma in its current form.

This chapter examines the effectiveness of consortium management structures in the second year of delivery of the second cohort of Diploma subjects. It also considers the efficacy of the main delivery models and discusses the likely future of Diplomas. The chapter is largely based on qualitative interviews with small numbers of staff and, therefore, findings are illustrative and should not be generalised.

### 7.1 Strategic and operational management

In the second year of delivery, reforms to the Diploma (as outlined in Chapter 1) had resulted in uncertainty with regard to the future of Diplomas. This had influenced the overall management of the qualification and had largely diminished the emphasis on Diplomas in general. For example, in two consortia the role of the consortium lead no longer existed – one consortium had no one leading the consortium and in the other a senior institutional manager had additionally taken on the role of consortium lead.

### 7.1.1 Consortium effectiveness

Reflecting the evaluation findings from cohort 1 (O'Donnell *et al.*, 2009; Lynch *et al.*, 2010; Golden *et al.*, 2011) and cohort 2 (McCrone *et al.*, 2010, McCrone *et al.*, 2011), the key success factors to consortium effectiveness, in addition to **ring-fenced time**, were considered by consortia interviewees to be:

- **good communication** across the consortium
- **effective consortium leadership**, in terms of coordination, for example, one consortium lead highlighted: *'the consortium lead role is the glue that sticks things together'*.

Effective planning was also believed to be critical by interviewees in three consortia in terms of, for example, aligning timetables, monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, exam officers updating DAS and tracking and monitoring learners' progress.

### 7.1.2 Impact of the Diploma on institutions and practitioners

There were discernible benefits in terms of impact on institutions and practitioners associated with the Diploma qualification, notably:

- enhanced collaboration with other educational institutions and employers – several interviewees across four consortia
- increased staff development in terms of, for example, teachers being able to update their subject knowledge (as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3) and their teaching skills and experience by means such as more teaching observations across institutions – several interviewees across four consortia
- the ability to offer to learners a qualification with a different approach – a few interviewees across two consortia. For example, young people were reported to have benefitted from the broader range of experiences inherent in the Diploma (also discussed in Chapter 2).

In terms of impact on institutions and practitioners, the main disadvantage of the Diploma was perceived by management across three consortia to be the complexity associated with the delivery model, that is the number of institutions working together to deliver the qualification. One consortium lead pointed out that collaboration at strategic level was very challenging because of *'politics and self-interest of partner institutions'*. This complexity of the delivery model highlights the challenge to strategic and operational management.

## 7.2 Structural models of delivery

### 7.2.1 Models of Delivery

In year one of delivery of the second five Diploma subjects (introduced in September 2009), the most common delivery models were those involving students from a school travelling to a college or training provider, and the in-

house model where delivery was to an institution's own learners only. This was largely unchanged in year two of delivery.

However, some minor changes had taken place. For example, one consortium had developed plans to change delivery from September 2011 so that there would be more in-house delivery, but these plans had been superseded as the decision had been taken to cease delivery of Diplomas from September 2011 due to the uncertainty surrounding the future of the Diploma. In another consortium, they had adopted a more holistic approach to delivery of the units in order to try and make the Diploma more fun and more practical (and to reduce repetition between modules), and they had endeavoured to link assessments more closely to employer engagement.

### Location of Diploma Delivery

Table 7.1 shows that 60 per cent of Year 11 learners surveyed undertook at least some of their Diploma learning at their own school, while 23 per cent said that they studied some of their Diploma at another school and 29 per cent did so at a FE or sixth form college.

**Table 7.1 Where Diploma lessons take place**

Where do your Diploma lessons take place?	Year 11 Diploma learners %	Year 13 Diploma learners %
At my own school (or FE college/sixth form college)	60	87
At another school (or FE college/sixth form college)	23	13
At a FE college/sixth form college	29	-
At a training provider	1	-
At an employer	0	5
At a university/higher education institution	1	0
Somewhere else (please say where)	3	1
No response	2	1
N =	606	97

*More than one answer could be given so percentages may sum to more than 100.*

*The percentages in this table are weighted.*

*Source: NFER Year 11 and 13 Diploma Learner Surveys*

These figures suggest more in-house delivery than in the first year of delivery of cohort 2 subjects. (In year one, 46 per cent of Year 11 learners undertook at least some of their Diploma learning at their own school, while 33 per cent said that they studied some of their Diploma at another school and 36 per

cent did so at a FE or sixth form college.) The majority (87 per cent) of Year 13 Diploma learners attended Diploma lessons at their own institution.

Diploma learners learning at each institution were asked how many days a week they spent at that institution. Time spent on Diploma work at their own institution, by Year 11 Diploma learners, was on average two days per week, time spent at college was 1.3 days per week and time spent at another school was 1.2 days per week. Time spent on Diploma work at their own institution, by Year 13 Diploma learners, was on average 3.7 days per week, and 2.2 days per week at another school or college. This indicates that the majority of Diploma learning is currently taking place in home institutions.

Table 7.2 indicates that for those Year 11 learners who took some or their entire Diploma learning outside their home institution, the majority either used public transport (37 per cent) or a minibus provided by the school (30 per cent). Amongst Year 13 Diploma learners the majority took public transport (57 per cent).

**Table 7.2 Method of travel to other locations**

If doing some or all of Diploma lessons OUTSIDE OWN SCHOOL, means of travel to the other location	Year 11 Diploma learners %	Year 13 Diploma learners %
By public transport (e.g. bus/train)	37	57
Minibus provided for me/school bus	30	0
Taxi	10	0
By car	18	12
Walk/Bicycle	22	23
Other (please specify)	2	0
No response	2	12
N =	327	23

*More than one answer could be given so percentages may sum to more than 100.*

*The percentages in this table are weighted.*

*A filter question: all those Year 11 and Year 13 Diploma learners studying some or all of their Diploma lessons outside their own school.*

*Source: NFER Year 11 and 13 Diploma Learner Surveys*

Of those who were travelling to learn, in Year 11, 54 per cent reported no travel problems, 36 per cent had problems which they could manage and only eight per cent experienced major problems. Amongst Year 13 learners, 41 per cent reported no travel problems and 32 per cent had problems which they felt they could manage.



### 7.3 Collaboration and partnership working

The majority of interviewees across the six case-study consortia reported that collaborative practice was to some extent used in the delivery of Diplomas. In the second year of delivery of the cohort two Diploma subjects, and after the removal of the requirement for consortium collaboration in Diploma delivery, some interviewees still believed that partnership working can be advantageous, as this college interviewee's comment illustrates: *'It's [collaborative delivery] been fantastic in sharing experiences and good practice about working with 14 to 16 year olds and working with equipment that may be some of the school staff have not had access to before.'*

With the experience of a minimum of two years of Diploma delivery, interviewees from across five consortia observed that collaboration works best when it is allowed to evolve over time and where there is:

- a simple model of operation
- trust between institutions
- effective communication between institutions
- an established protocol agreed at the onset of collaboration (for example, behaviour management policies for students and monitoring of teaching and learning)
- funding, as effective collaborative practice requires time for partners to meet together regularly.

It was observed that, although Diploma collaboration was unlikely to further develop mainly due to lack of funding (indeed one senior manager reported that *'schools are retrenching back into their fiefdoms'*), in terms of broader 14-19 partnership-working interviewees from across four consortia believed that well-established collaboration would be likely to continue. In some cases, collaborative ways of working were established before the introduction of Diplomas, but there was recognition that in places where institutions had not previously worked together, Diploma collaboration had raised awareness of potential benefits of partnership working and there was some evidence of a willingness to try to continue to work collaboratively.

### 7.4 Future developments

All the consortium and subject leads, and senior institutional leaders either reported that they would not be offering any Diplomas in future or were still undecided about the future delivery of Diplomas – principally because of the withdrawal of funding (see below). Other reasons included the strength of competing qualifications (for example in the hospitality sector) and the perception that the Diploma was not practical enough (for example, in the hair and beauty sector).

Four subject leads and three consortium leads across five consortia were unsure about future delivery of the Diploma in their consortia. For example one consortium lead said: *'If they [Diplomas] flounder this year, they will probably disappear'*. Another explained that the future of Diplomas would be through in-house delivery *'If they survive at all.....'* He continued by saying that he believed:

*They [Diplomas] are dead in the water...because of the removal of entitlement; removal of the funding for partnership working; the 2011 Wolf Review throwing into doubt all vocational courses; the introduction of the English Baccalaureate. (See Section 7.4.1 below for exploration of the impact of changes in government policy on Diplomas.)*

Amongst the Diploma subjects started in September 2009, consortium leads in two consortia reported that there had been an increase in interest in the Hair and Beauty Studies and Environmental and Land-based Diplomas (for 2011 starts). In the remaining four consortia there was reported to be a similar level (to the existing level) or a decrease in interest in take-up of the Diploma. This lack of interest largely reflected changes in government policy (as discussed below).

#### **7.4.1 Impact of changes in government policy**

Interviewees from across all six consortia considered that changes in government policy had impacted on the future of Diplomas. Three areas of policy were viewed as particularly influential:

1. The removal of the requirement for Diploma entitlement and consortium collaboration in Diploma delivery. The Diploma was a new qualification and was not embedded so the removal of entitlement to Diplomas meant some interviewees from across all the case-study consortia felt it would not be prioritised in the future.
2. The closure of the 14-19 Workforce Support Programme, which included centrally-funded support. The removal of funding was perceived to be critical to the future of Diplomas (as discussed below).
3. The review of vocational qualifications examined in the Wolf Report<sup>18</sup>. Interviewees in three consortia said that the Wolf Report had raised concerns about the future of Diplomas, for example one subject lead pointed out that the Diploma *'can't possibly be fitted into 20 per cent of the timetable'*.<sup>19</sup> The focus on the English Baccalaureate was also felt to be disadvantageous to the Diploma as one senior manager

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<sup>18</sup> Professor Alison Wolf's independent review of vocational education published in March 2011.

<sup>19</sup> One of professor Wolf's suggested 'ways forward' is that: *'Performance measures should also reinforce the commitment to a common core of study at Key Stage 4, with vocational specialisation normally confined to 20% of a pupil's timetable'*.

explained: *'it's impossible to study for the English Baccalaureate and study a Diploma at the same time'*.

Interviewees reported that the impact of these changes made it hard for the newly-developed Diploma to compete with other qualifications.

#### **7.4.2 Future funding for Diplomas**

In the second year of delivery, in the majority of consortia the central management of Diploma funding was being carried out at local authority level. However, concerns such as the removal of funding for partnership working, and the cost of shared delivery (i.e. travel to learn) meant that the majority of interviewees suggested that in future, schools with students taking Diplomas will pay a fixed amount per student.

The removal of funding was perceived to have been fundamental to the future of Diplomas. Eight subject leads and two consortium leads from across four consortia said they would not be offering Diplomas in future principally because of the withdrawal of funding. Similarly, some schools pointed out that there would be no need to fund Diplomas in the future because they would not be offering them, as illustrated by the following observation: *'we made the decision to stop Diplomas when we were told the funding would stop'*.

### **7.5 Summary**

Understanding of what makes effective consortium management in the second year of the second cohort of Diploma subjects continues to develop. It is apparent that dedicated time, strong communication between all parties, effective decision making, trust between delivering institutions and a refined understanding of the most appropriate models of delivery are important.

In terms of the future for Diplomas, it is clear that the majority of consortia management interviewees felt they would not offer the Diploma in future. Further, they felt that government policy had impacted on the existence of Diplomas in the sense that it was perceived to be challenging for the newly-developed Diploma in its current form to compete with existing qualifications.

## 8 Conclusions

The delivery and implementation of the second five Diploma subjects (introduced in September 2009) in their second year has been the focus of this report. The case- study interviews and learner surveys were conducted in the spring of 2011. Overall, although both learners and practitioners were positive about their Diploma experiences, there was recognition by senior leaders in particular that the Diploma was in need of adjustment in order for it to establish its place in the current educational landscape.

### Which component parts of the Diploma are key?

The Diploma components were originally designed with the aim of preparing learners for employment or further study through incorporating elements that aim to develop learners' life skills, problem-solving and creative thinking, as well as their functional skills in mathematics, English and ICT and subject-specific knowledge.

In this second year of delivery of the second five Diploma subjects (started in September 2009), the Diploma was generally regarded as too big, complex and demanding in its current format. Although the Diploma was recognised to confer benefits on both learners and practitioners, the evidence suggests that the original aim of the qualification was perhaps too broad, and points to a need for streamlining in order to secure a manageable, focussed and simplified qualification for the future.

The principal learning component was reported to be the most useful but the evidence suggests that its future would be enhanced by streamlining. This could be achieved by doing **any or all** of the following three options; reducing the guided learning hours per unit, amalgamating units in order to reduce overlap, and/or removing some units altogether.

The project and work experience/employer engagement were also highly valued by learners and teachers as they were reported to provide learners with the ability to develop their independent learning skills. Additionally, they provided learners and teachers the opportunity to apply learning to the world of work. It was observed that, in order to promote manageability and motivation, these components would benefit from being delivered in a timely and consistent manner throughout the two year course.

The ASL component was devised to provide greater depth and breadth to the Diploma; however the evidence reveals that ASL has largely not been used in this way. There was also data to indicate that learners expected the Diploma to be more practical (although IAG was **reported** to have addressed this issue in some areas by informing young people about the predominantly theoretical nature of the Diploma). Evaluation of the first five Diploma subjects

(O'Donnell *et al.*, 2009; Lynch *et al.*, 2010) also pointed to the fact that the names of the Diplomas suggested a more practical emphasis to the qualification. If the ASL (particularly specialist learning) is removed from the Diploma the opportunity to provide an underpinning practical element and personalisation will also be removed.

While the PLTS and functional skills components were recognised as valuable in providing employability and life skills, their position within the Diploma was questioned. Furthermore, the functional skills were rarely embedded in the principal learning as originally envisaged and the examinations, particularly the mathematics and ICT, seemed difficult to pass. The removal of functional skills from the Diploma was widely suggested partly to ensure that passing them was not a pre-requisite for attaining the full Diploma. However these skills were recognised as important for all young people to acquire. It was proposed that GCSEs could be revised so that they better equip young people to solve problems faced in every day life.

### **In terms of the experience of Diplomas, what has been learnt about effective teaching and learning?**

As discussed below, Diploma learners were largely satisfied with their Diploma courses and felt they were progressing well. They enjoyed the rich and varied learning environments, the different approach to teaching and learning inherent in Diplomas, and the focus on their chosen sector. Teachers reported enjoying the facilitative approach to enabling young people to become independent learners (skills needed for FE and HE) and building links with employers. They also highlighted that, although intensive in nature, the longer Diploma teaching sessions (and the smaller numbers of students in each class) enabled them to '*get to know*' students better – this also contributed to enabling young people to learn effectively.

Teachers observed that they, and learners, benefitted from the applied nature of Diplomas. Although challenging, teachers reported the benefits of broadening and deepening their theoretical knowledge of the wide-ranging Diploma industry sectors. Contributing to this expansion of knowledge was the collaborative approach to delivery as many teachers benefitted from exchanges with colleagues at other institutions. Having the capacity to strengthen the theory with practical application (and this was not always happening) was perceived to be important to effectively teaching the Diploma.

However, teachers also observed that it was perhaps too challenging to link all the component parts of the Diploma effectively together. Additionally, some observations suggested that several Diploma subjects were easier to apply to the world of work than others, for example Hair and Beauty Studies (as work was often conducted in a hair salon) and Environmental and Land-Based

Studies, in contrast to Business, Administration and Finance and Hospitality Diplomas.

There was evidence to suggest that where collaborative approaches to monitoring teaching and learning were used, then consortium-wide monitoring was more effective. Additionally, although progress has been made in terms of understanding the implementation of controlled assessment, there was evidence to suggest that teachers' practice would be enhanced by better understanding of how Awarding Bodies externally moderate. This would better equip them to provide effective feedback to learners so they could more fully understand marking criteria and improve their work.

Over the course of the evaluation, much of the training for this new qualification has been reported as being too late by those planning and delivering the qualification. It is important to ensure that training is provided in a timely manner so that all staff feel confident in their teaching and assessment.

### **In what way have Diploma learners benefitted from taking a Diploma?**

Teachers and young people concurred that the Diploma had enhanced learners' communication, team-working and independent learning skills. Furthermore, Diplomas were seen to have enabled learners to take more responsibility for their own learning and to have enhanced their ability to use their own initiative. Pre-16 Diploma learners studying all or part of their Diplomas in an FE college particularly welcomed the opportunity to study at college, enjoying the different environment and the adult ethos.

Diploma learners also felt the Diploma qualification offered a different learning experience compared with their other courses in that, for example, the classes were smaller and it involved more work. Additionally, approximately three-quarters of Year 11 and 13 Diploma learners felt they were learning useful skills on their Diploma course (and more than two thirds felt the Diploma was giving them more skills and experience than other courses would). Moreover, although approximately one quarter were unsure if the Diploma would be more useful for their future than other courses, three in five Diploma learners felt it would be.

Year 11 Diploma learners reported higher levels of confidence in terms of thinking about their progress in class and speaking in group discussions than their peers on other courses – although this was not the case for Year 13 Diploma learners.

It is important to note that that Diploma learners, specifically those studying for a Creative and Media Diploma, IT Diploma and Hospitality Diploma, displayed a stronger preference for teamwork and practical learning (and the

Diploma did not always meet expectations as it is not a practical course). Furthermore, Diploma learners, specifically those studying for a Construction and the Built Environment Diploma or the Hair and Beauty Studies Diploma, were less committed to learning than their peers taking other courses (those studying for the Engineering Diploma were more committed to learning than peers taking other courses).

It is hard to assess the extent to which Diploma learners have benefitted by studying a Diploma over and beyond how they would have benefitted on other courses (although the evidence above indicates clear advantages for some learners). However, the evidence points to the fact that most Diploma learners have gained from an alternative and diverse way of learning and have clearly been satisfied by the course, have enjoyed it, have remained engaged in education and (as discussed below) intend to remain in education or training after their Diploma experience.

### **What progress have Diploma learners made?**

The majority of Diploma learners were satisfied with their course, although levels of satisfaction dropped in the second year. Reasons cited included the amount of coursework, the pressure of deadlines and a falling involvement with employers and the world of work. This may partly be explained by the newness of the qualification for the teachers and the lateness of much of the training on assessment which meant that assignments tended to be left to the second year of the programme.

Most Year 11 and 13 Diploma learners felt they were progressing well on their Diploma course and were planning to continue in education or undertake work-based learning opportunities such as an apprenticeship, and most reported that taking the Diploma had helped them make decisions about what to do next. Aspects of the course that were more frequently cited amongst Year 11 learners as having helped in decision making were activities carried out with an employer/someone from the world of work, the principal component and the Diploma project.

In terms of progress post-18, a greater proportion of non-Diploma respondents in Year 13 intended to progress onto a course at a university/HEI compared with their Diploma peers. However, this should not be viewed in isolation as, for example, most Diploma learners remained open to jobs with training and apprenticeships.

The functional skills component of the qualification was cited amongst the majority of consortium management staff as a factor that could impact on learners' ability to progress and pass the Diploma. Additionally, learners were most concerned about passing this element of the Diploma as it would impact on their overall ability to pass the Diploma and their subsequent progression.

A key overarching consideration in terms of Diploma learners' progress is ensuring that appropriate learners are enrolled on the Diploma qualification (in terms of for example their academic ability, their awareness of the content – particularly the practical/theoretical balance, the location and the style of learning inherent in the Diploma). As this is a new qualification, it will be necessary to build up awareness amongst adults advising young people. Young people are still not receiving consistent IAG, as illustrated by the fact that Year 11 Diploma learners reported receiving less IAG than their non-Diploma peers about future opportunities.

The inconsistency in coverage and quality of IAG received by young people is of particular concern when schools will take over the responsibility for deciding their IAG priorities from local authorities in September 2012 (and in the interim there is minimal IAG provision from Connexions). It must be remembered that if all young people receive comprehensive (which often requires face-to-face guidance), impartial and consistent IAG then they will be able to make well-informed decisions which would promote positive progression.

### **What has been learnt about the effective management of consortia and collaboration?**

The key success factors to the effectiveness of consortium management were considered to be good communication across the consortium, effective consortium leadership and planning and **time** to carry out these tasks.

Collaboration was believed to work best when it is established and allowed to evolve over time and where there is a simple model of operation, trust and effective communication between institutions, an established protocol agreed at the outset and protected funding.

Benefits of collaboration included: enhanced relationship with other educational institutions and employers, increased staff development opportunities, and the opportunity to offer to learners a qualification with a different approach. Disadvantages of collaboration were linked to the complexity of the delivery models (in terms of, for example, logistical issues, the number of institutions involved and aligning protocols such as monitoring of teaching and learning, assessment and exam registration). When funding for collaboration (and more broadly for 14-19 partnership working) is removed many of these issues become insurmountable.

### **What is the future of the Diploma?**

In terms of the future for Diplomas, it is clear that the majority of consortia management interviewees felt they would not offer the Diploma in its present form in the immediate future. Further, they felt that government policy (the



removal of the requirement for Diploma entitlement and consortium collaboration in Diploma delivery, the closure of the 14-19 Workforce Support Programme, which included centrally funded support and the review of vocational qualifications examined in the 2011 Wolf Report) has impacted on the existence of Diplomas. It was perceived to be challenging for the newly-developed Diploma in its current form to compete with existing qualifications.

There was a decrease in interest in take-up of the Diploma either due to a decrease in interest in take-up from learners or in the number of Diploma courses offered by consortia. Consortium leads believed the reasons to be: widespread uncertainty surrounding the future of the Diploma, cuts in Diploma funding, decreased support at consortium level, the perceived difficulty of achieving the Diploma, the complexity of assessment and the perception that the Diplomas were too theory-based.

The Diploma would be a more viable course, which could be accommodated in the Key Stage 4 reduced curriculum time for vocational learning recommended in the 2011 Wolf Review, if it were slimmed down, perhaps comprising principal learning, the project and employer engagement.

## Recommendations

- The principal learning component should be maintained if changes to the structure of the Diploma are made, although streamlined by doing any or all of the following three options: reducing the number of guided learning hours per unit, amalgamating units in order to reduce overlap, and/or removing some units altogether.
- Staff and learners valued the project and work experience/employer involvement, feeling these should be maintained because of their applied nature of learning and the application of theory to real-world contexts.
- Although considered important in terms of generic, transferable skills, for all young people to acquire, PLTS and functional skills were the least valued components within the Diploma qualification. ASL was also not fully understood by either staff or learners. The future of these components should be considered and clarified.
- There was further scope to improve assessment by ensuring that training was timely. Teachers' practice would be enhanced by better understanding of how Awarding Bodies externally moderate. This would better equip them to provide effective feedback to learners so they could more fully understand marking criteria and improve their work.
- The evaluation found that there is a lack of consistency across institutions with regard to IAG which means that some young people are being given partial and incomplete information. This has meant that for some young people the Diploma has not met their expectations, for example, in terms of the amount of practical work. This suggests that offering training and support to *all* staff is key to

ensure they have the necessary knowledge to assist learners in making decisions

- The benefits of collaboration were recognised, and should be encouraged where possible as young people clearly indicated the value of learning in different types of institutions.

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## Technical appendix

### Appendix A: Research Methods and Analysis

#### A1 Survey analysis

##### A1.1 Matching to National Pupil Database (NPD)

Information on name, gender and date of birth provided by learners on the questionnaires was matched to background information held on the NPD and the Individualised Learner Record (ILR), where possible, to explore differences in responses in relation to their background characteristics.

##### A1.2 Weighting

The survey responses were **weighted** to ensure that the responding samples were representative of Diploma and comparison learners in England. Population data from the Diploma Aggregation Service (DAS) and background data from the NPD were used to derive the weights.

##### *Year 11 Weighting*

The samples of Year 11 Diploma and comparison learners were significantly different from their corresponding national populations in terms of gender and Key Stage 3 attainment. The samples were therefore weighted by these two variables. Survey gender data was taken from the questionnaires. National gender data was taken from the NPD.

##### *Year 13 Weighting*

As there were insufficient attainment data to weight the Year 13 Diploma and comparison learners, the Year 13 Diploma learners and comparison learners were weighted by gender. Survey gender data was taken from the questionnaires. National gender data was taken from the NPD or ILR.

##### A1.3 Analysis undertaken

##### *Cross-tabulations*

The further analysis of the learner surveys included **cross-tabulations**, which explored the relationships between two categorical variables.

##### *Factor analysis*

Factor analysis looks for variables that correlate highly with each other. The existence of such correlations between variables suggests that those variables could be measuring aspects of the same underlying issues. These underlying issues are known as factors. Thus, the aim of the factor analyses was to derive a smaller number of composite 'attitude' variables from selected questions on the questionnaire which could be used to explore the attitudes of

learners in further detail. Aggregated variables produce more robust measures of learners' attitudes than a consideration of the individual items on the questionnaire alone. Exploratory factor analyses were carried out on the cohort 1 data in 2009. In 2010, the same factors were used for cohort 2, after their reliabilities were checked (that is, the extent to which the questions in each factor were measuring a consistent underlying trait). Some questions were identical on each questionnaire, in order for comparisons to be made between the attitudes of Diploma and comparison learners. Some were specific to Diploma learners, as they asked about their experiences of their Diploma course.

The 'factors' which are identified can also be used in more sophisticated analysis (multilevel modelling).

For **Year 11 learners**, five separate factors were identified:

- Attitude to the Diploma (Diploma learners only)
- Impact of the Diploma on my future (Diploma learners only)
- Positive attitude to learning (both groups)
- Commitment to learning (both groups)
- Preference of teamwork and practical learning (both groups)

A description of the individual items on the questionnaire that made up each factor is presented below:

***Factor 1: Attitude to the Diploma***

- I am enjoying my Diploma course
- The work I do in lessons is interesting
- I would like to spend less time on my Diploma course
- I can cope with the amount of work
- My Diploma course is more practical (than other subjects)
- My Diploma course is less interesting (than other subjects)
- I find it harder to learn on my Diploma course (compared with other subjects)

***Factor 2: Impact of the Diploma on my future***

- I am learning new skills on my Diploma course
- My Diploma will help me get a job in the future
- My Diploma will help me get into college in the future
- My Diploma will help me get into university/HE if I want to go in the future

- My Diploma will be more useful for my future (than other subjects)
- My Diploma course is giving me more skills/experience (than other subjects)

***Factor 3: Positive attitude to learning***

- The subjects I am doing make me want to learn
- The subjects I am doing make me feel ready for work in the future
- The subjects I am doing make me feel confident about what I can do
- The subjects I am doing are giving me useful skills
- Most of the time I like going to school
- School work is worth doing
- I enjoy learning

***Factor 4: Commitment to learning***

- I always do my homework/coursework
- I am well behaved in school
- The work I do in lessons is a waste of time
- I am often late for school or lessons
- I sometimes play truant/skip lessons

***Factor 5: Preference of teamwork and practical learning***

- I like working in a team
- I prefer practical work to lots of writing
- I learn best when I put something into practice
- I don't like lessons where we work in groups

Five separate factors were also identified for **Year 13 learners**, as follows:

- Attitude to the Diploma (Diploma learners only)
- Impact of the Diploma on my future (Diploma learners only)
- Impact of subject on motivation to learn (both groups)
- Intrinsic motivations for learning (both groups)
- Preference of teamwork and practical learning (both groups)

A description of the individual items on the questionnaire that made up each factor is presented below:

***Factor 1: Attitude to the Diploma***

- I am enjoying my Diploma course
- The work I do in lessons is interesting
- I would like to spend less time on my Diploma course
- I can cope with the amount of work
- My Diploma course is more practical (than other subjects)
- My Diploma course is less interesting (than other subjects)
- I find it harder to learn on my Diploma course (compared with other subjects)

***Factor 2: Impact of the Diploma on my future***

- I am learning useful skills on my Diploma course
- My Diploma will help me get a job in the future
- My Diploma will help me get into university/HE if I want to go in the future
- My Diploma will be more useful for my future (than other subjects)
- My Diploma course is giving me more skills/experience (than other subjects)

***Factor 3: Impact of subject on motivation to learn***

- The subjects I am doing make me want to learn
- The subjects I am doing make me feel ready for work in the future
- The subjects I am doing make me feel confident about what I can do
- The subjects I am doing are giving me useful skills

***Factor 4: Intrinsic motivations for learning***

- Most of the time I like going to school
- School/college work is worth doing
- I enjoy learning
- I always do my homework/coursework
- I am well behaved in school

***Factor 5: Preference of teamwork and practical learning***

- I like working in a team
- I prefer practical work to lots of writing
- I learn best when I put something into practice



- I don't like lessons where we work in groups

All of the items for each factor are consolidated and scaled (reversing any negative statements) to provide an average score for learners overall of between zero and ten (with ten being the most positive score).

### ***Multilevel modelling***

Further exploration of the relationship between Year 11 learners' attitudes and various background factors that might have an impact on outcomes for learners, such as satisfaction with the Diploma, was carried out using **multilevel modelling**, which estimates the true relationship between each background factor and the outcome of interest, whilst taking account of other influences. Multilevel modelling was carried out to explore the following outcomes for learners:

- Attitude to the Diploma (Diploma learners only; Factor 1 above).
- Satisfaction with Diploma course (Diploma learners only; question 14 in Year 11 Diploma learner survey *Overall how satisfied are you with your Diploma course?*).
- Possibility of doing a Diploma in the future (question 25 in Year 11 Diploma learner survey and question 14a in comparison survey); separate models for Diploma and comparison learners.
- Views on whether the school was preparing learners for their future (Factor 2 above)
- Positive attitude to learning (two models, one comparing Diploma and comparison learners overall, and another comparing Diploma learners doing each line of learning and comparison learners).
- Commitment to learning (two models, one comparing Diploma and comparison learners overall, and another comparing Diploma learners doing each Diploma subject and comparison learners).
- Preference for teamwork and practical learning (two models, one comparing Diploma and comparison learners overall, and another comparing Diploma learners doing each Diploma subject and comparison learners).

Multilevel modelling was not carried out on the Year 13 learner surveys, as the number of responding learners was too small to conduct a robust analysis.

Details of the variables included in each model are provided below.

**Table A1 Variables included in the Year 11 model outcome ‘attitude to the Diploma’ (Diploma learners)**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Explanation of variable</b>	<b>Fixed effects</b>
Q14diploma	Progress in Diploma units and Diploma project	0.162
Q11	Extent to which learners were satisfied with their Diploma overall	1.053
Factor 4	Commitment to learning factor score of 0 to 10	0.129
InfTech	Diploma subject – IT (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	-0.463
SHD	Diploma subject – Society Health and Development (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	-0.578
BAF	Diploma subject – Business Administration and Finance (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	-0.742

**Table A2 Variables included in the Year 11 model outcome ‘satisfaction with Diploma course’ (Diploma learners)**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Explanation of variable</b>	<b>Fixed effects</b>
Const	Diploma subject – Construction and the Built Environment (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	-0.430
Lvdk	Diploma level – Don’t know (model compares learners to those doing a Level 2 Diploma)	-1.166
Q14diploma	Progress in Diploma units and Diploma project	0.143
Q16b1	Learner considers Diploma units (Principal Learning) useful	0.297
Q16b3	Learner considers Diploma Project useful	0.452
Q16b6	Learner considers PLTS useful	0.253
Factor 3	Positive attitude to learning factor score of 0 to 10	0.108

**Table A3 Variables included in the Year 11 model outcome ‘learning helps with future skills’ (Diploma learners)**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Explanation of variable</b>	<b>Fixed effects</b>
KSmean	Mean point score for KS3 English, maths and science	-0.046
Q11	Extent to which learners were satisfied with their Diploma overall	0.760
Q14diploma	Progress in Diploma units and Diploma project	0.078
Q16b1	Learner considers Diploma units (Principal Learning) useful	0.389
Q16b3	Learner considers Diploma Project useful	0.474
Q16b5	Learner considers activities carried out with an employer/someone from the world of work useful	0.430
Factor 5	Preference of teamwork and practical	0.094

**Table A4 Variables included in the Year 11 model outcome  
‘possibility of doing a Diploma in the future’ (Diploma learners)**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Explanation of variable</b>	<b>Fixed effects</b>
Const	Diploma subject – Construction and the Built Environment (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	0.521
Hosp	Diploma subject – Hospitality (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	0.630
Q11	Extent to which learners were satisfied with their Diploma overall	0.258
Factor 2	Impact of the Diploma on my future	0.182

**Table A5 Variables included in the Year 11 model outcome  
‘possibility of doing a Diploma in the future’(comparison learners)**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Explanation of variable</b>	<b>Fixed effects</b>
KSmean	Mean point score for KS3 English, maths and science	-0.062
IDACI	Deprivation index	0.570
Factor 5	Preference of teamwork and practical	0.050

**Table A6 Variables included in the Year 11 model outcomes ‘positive attitude to learning’, ‘commitment to learning’ and ‘preference of teamwork and practical learning’ (comparing Diploma and comparison learners overall)**

Variable	Explanation of variable	Fixed effects		
		Positive attitude to learning	Commitment to learning	Preference of teamwork and practical learning
Gender	Male/Female (model compares female learners to male learners)		0.229	-0.211
KSmean	Mean point score for KS3 English, maths and science	0.023	0.059	-0.026
NPDmiss	missing NPD data	-0.199	-0.347	
EAL	English as an Additional Language (model compares learners with EAL to learners with English as first language)	0.521		
Lvdk	Diploma Level not known	-2.448		
LOLdk	Subject/ line of Learning not known		-1.438	
HAB	Diploma subject – Hair and Beauty (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)	-0.397	-0.400*	
Const	Diploma subject – Construction and the Built Environment (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)		-0.701*	
Engin	Diploma subject – Engineering (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)		0.455*	
Creat	Diploma subject – Creative and Media (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)			0.488 <sup>^</sup>
InfTech	Diploma subject – Information Technology (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)			0.416 <sup>^</sup>
Hosp	Diploma subject – Hospitality (model compared learners who participated in this subject with all learners)			0.756 <sup>^</sup>

\* replacing the individual subjects with a Diploma variable to compare Diploma learners as a whole with comparison learners resulted in a significant fixed effect of -0.212

<sup>^</sup> replacing the individual subjects with a Diploma variable to compare Diploma learners as a whole with comparison learners resulted in a significant fixed effect of 0.330

## Appendix B: The consortia sample

### Selection of the survey sample of 60 consortia

A sample of 60 consortia was selected to be involved in the learners surveys. The sample was selected with the aim of ensuring that the Diploma learners surveyed could be considered representative of Diploma learners in general. In order to achieve this, the characteristics of consortia, and schools within consortia, were used as the sample frame. These consortia were selected according to the following criteria:

- **Not selected in other samples** – the sample frame excluded consortia who were sampled as part of the evaluation for the first cohort of Diploma learners. In addition, consortia were excluded where they were known to be involved in other research and evaluation of the Diplomas.
- **Consortium lead agreement** – only those consortia who agreed in principle during the telephone interview to be involved in the next stages were sampled.
- **Diploma subjects and levels offered** – to ensure that all Phase 2 Diploma subjects and levels were represented. The sample was drawn to over-represent the larger consortia (in terms of the number of subjects offered, and the number of estimated learners) and under-represent the smaller consortia.
- **Involvement in Cohort 1** – the sample was selected to include some consortia that began delivering Diplomas in September 2008, and were due to embark on new Diplomas in September 2009 (Cohort 1 and Cohort 2), as well as some who were due to start in September 2009 (Cohort 2 only).
- **School-level variables** - in order to ensure that the sample can be said to be representative of Diploma students as a whole, the sample of consortia was selected to be representative in terms of school-level variables (for example, achievement, and Free School Meal eligibility). Schools' membership of a consortium was based on information provided by DfE which drew on consortia's applications to deliver the Diploma.
- **Government Office Region at consortium level** – to ensure a geographical spread of consortia.

The table below details the key characteristics of the Cohort 2 sample – at a school level. In summary, the sample is broadly representative in terms of:

- School type
- Free school meal eligibility
- Achievement of schools.

**Table B1 Representativeness of institutions in the sample consortia**

Characteristic	Sample of institutions		All institutions involved in Diplomas	
	Number	%	Number	%
<b>School type</b>				
Middle deemed secondary	1	<1	4	<1
Secondary Modern	38	6	120	4
Comprehensive to 16	222	32	887	29
Comprehensive to 18	212	31	1167	38
Grammar	23	3	84	3
Special schools	64	9	271	9
Pupil referral units	8	1	48	2
6th Form colleges	21	3	80	3
Tertiary colleges	12	2	39	1
FE colleges	66	10	323	10
Academies	21	3	63	2
<b>N=</b>	<b>690</b>		<b>3104</b>	
<b>Eligible for FSM 2008</b>				
Lowest 20%	29	5	125	5
2nd lowest 20%	126	21	526	20
Middle 20%	153	26	688	26
2nd highest 20%	165	28	711	27
Highest 20%	115	20	590	22
<b>N=</b>	<b>588</b>		<b>2640</b>	
<b>Achievement Band (total GCSE point score 2008)</b>				
Lowest band	153	28	645	26
2nd lowest band	109	20	479	19
Middle band	105	19	451	18
2nd highest band	87	16	452	18
Highest band	102	18	451	18
<b>N=</b>	<b>556</b>		<b>2478</b>	

## **Appendix C: The responding samples**

Details are given below about the characteristics of the responding samples of learners.

### **C1 The responding learner sample**

A total of 606 Year 11 and 97 Year 13 Diploma questionnaires were returned, along with 1111 Year 11 and 155 Year 13 comparison questionnaires.

Tables C1 and C2 present the characteristics of the Year 11 Diploma and comparison learners who responded to the survey. Diploma respondents are compared with all Diploma Year 11 learners nationally (those registered on DAS in April 2010) and with all learners nationally. The responding comparison learners are compared with all Year 11 non-Diploma learners in all schools which have any Diploma learners, as well as all learners nationally. Tables C3 and C4 show the equivalent information for Year 13 Diploma and comparison learners.

**Table C1 Background characteristics of Year 11 Diploma learners – responding learners, all Year 11 Diploma learners registered on DAS, and all Year 11 learners nationally**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Year 11 Diploma respondents to the survey %</b>	<b>All Year 11 Diploma learners (from DAS data) %</b>	<b>All Year 11 learners in England %</b>
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	46	53	51
Female	54	48	49
Missing	1	0	0
<b>Eligibility for free school meals</b>			
Not eligible	62	85	86
Eligible	8	15	14
Missing	30	0	0
<b>Special Educational Needs</b>			
No SEN	59	77	76
School Action/Plus	10	21	20
Statement	1	2	4
Missing	30	0	0
<b>English as an Additional Language</b>			
No EAL	66	91	88
EAL	4	9	12
Missing	30	0	0
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
White – British	63	83	78
White – Other	1	3	4
Gypsy/Roma	0	0	<1
Mixed	1	3	3
Asian – Indian	1	1	2
Asian – Pakistani	0	2	3
Asian – Bangladeshi	<1	1	1
Asian – Other	1	1	1
Black – Caribbean	<1	1	1
Black – African	2	2	3
Black – Other	<1	1	1
Chinese	<1.	<1.	<1
Other	0	1	1
Preferred not to say	1	1	1
Missing	30	<1.	1



<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Year 11 Diploma respondents to the survey %</b>	<b>All Year 11 Diploma learners (from DAS data) %</b>	<b>All Year 11 learners in England %</b>
<b>Key Stage 3 Average<sup>20</sup></b>			
Below Level 2	0	0	0
Level 2	0	1	2
Level 3	2	4	6
Level 4	10	21	18
Level 5	32	42	32
Level 6	22	24	27
Level 7	4	3	9
Level 8	0	0	<1.
Missing	31	4	6
<b>Total N =</b>	<b>606</b>	<b>18285</b>	<b>572430</b>

**Table C2 Background characteristics of Year 11 comparison learners – responding learners, all Year 11 non-Diploma learners in schools with any Diploma students, and all Year 11 learners nationally**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Year 11 comparison respondents to the survey %</b>	<b>All Year 11 comparison learners (in schools with any Diploma learners) %</b>	<b>All Year 11 learners in England %</b>
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	44	51	51
Female	56	49	49
Missing	<1	0	0
<b>Eligibility for free school meals</b>			
Not eligible	70	86	86
Eligible	7	14	14
Missing	24	0	0
<b>Special Educational Needs</b>			
No SEN	65	76	76
School Action/Plus	10	21	20
Statement	1	2	4
Missing	24	0	0
<b>English as an Additional Language</b>			
No EAL	73	89	88
EAL	4	10	12
Missing	24	0	0

<sup>20</sup>Based on a truncated average National Curriculum level from Key Stage 3 tests in English, Maths and Science

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Year 11 comparison respondents to the survey</b>	<b>All Year 11 comparison learners (in schools with any Diploma learners)</b>	<b>All Year 11 learners in England</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
White - British	68	81	78
White - Other	2	4	4
Gypsy/Roma	0	<1.	<1
Mixed	2	3	3
Asian - Indian	1	2	2
Asian - Pakistani	<1	3	3
Asian - Bangladeshi	<1	1	1
Asian - Other	<1	1	1
Black - Caribbean	<1	1	1
Black - African	1	2	3
Black - Other	<1	<1.	1
Chinese	1	<1.	<1
Other	1	1	1
Preferred not to say	1	1	1
Missing	24	1	1
<b>Key Stage 3 Average<sup>21</sup></b>			
Below Level 2	0	0	0
Level 2	<1	1	2
Level 3	2	6	6
Level 4	10	19	18
Level 5	29	33	32
Level 6	26	27	27
Level 7	8	7	9
Level 8	0	0	<1.
Missing	26	6	6
<b>Total N =</b>	<b>1111</b>	<b>257401</b>	<b>572430</b>

<sup>21</sup>Based on a truncated average National Curriculum level from Key Stage 3 tests in English, Maths and Science

**Table C3 Background characteristics of Year 13 Diploma learners – responding learners and all Year 13 Diploma learners registered on DAS.**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Year 13 Diploma Respondents to the survey</b> %	<b>All Year 13 Diploma learners (from DAS data)</b> %	<b>All Year 13 students in England</b> %
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	27	49	49
Female	72	50	483
Missing	1	1	3
<b>Eligibility for free school meals</b>			
Not eligible	64	88	86
Eligible	2	11	10
Missing	34	1	3
<b>Special Educational Needs</b>			
No SEN	60	73	74
School Action	5	12	10
School Action Plus/Statement	1	7	7
Missing	34	8	10
<b>English as an additional language</b>			
No EAL	64	85	82
EAL	2	8	9
Missing	34	8	10
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
White - British	58	75	73
White - Other	3	3	2
Asian	3	5	7
Black	0	4	4
Mixed	1	3	3
Other	0	<1	1
Preferred not to say	1	<1	<1
Missing	34	9	11
<b>Key Stage 4 achievement (based on GCSE and all equivalent qualifications)</b>			
Achieved five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A*-C	57	67	72
Achieved five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A*-G	13	29	20
Achieved at least one GCSE or equivalent at grade A*-G	0	3	3
Achieved any passes at GCSE or equivalent	0	<1	1
Achieved no passes at GCSE or equivalent	0	<1	1
Missing	30	1	4
<b>Total N =</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>3353</b>	<b>532842</b>

*\*The missing data for the responding sample is because of a low match to NPD and the ILR, caused by learners' transition between institutions at age 16.*

**Table C4 Background characteristics of Year 13 comparison learners – responding learners and all Year 13 non-Diploma learners in schools with any Diploma students.**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Year 13 comparison respondents to the survey</b> %	<b>All Year 13 comparison learners (in schools/colleges with any Diploma learners)</b> %	<b>All Year 13 students in England</b> %
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	43	50	49
Female	57	45	48
Missing	0	5	3
<b>Eligibility for free school meals</b>			
Not eligible	55	82	86
Eligible	4	13	10
Missing	41	5	3
<b>Special Educational Needs</b>			
No SEN	48	65	74
School Action	6	13	10
School Action Plus/Statement	2	8	7
Missing	43	14	10
<b>English as an additional language</b>			
No EAL	54	79	82
EAL	3	8	9
Missing	43	14	10
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
White - British	51	70	73
White - Other	<1	2	2
Asian	1	7	7
Black	0	4	4
Mixed	1	3	3
Other	1	1	1
Preferred not to say	1	<1	<1
Missing	43	15	11
<b>Key Stage 4 achievement (based on GCSE and all equivalent qualifications)</b>			
Achieved five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A*-C	47	62	72
Achieved five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A*-G	12	27	20
Achieved at least one GCSE or equivalent at grade A*-G	1	4	3
Achieved any passes at GCSE or equivalent	0	1	1
Achieved no passes at GCSE or equivalent	0	1	1
Missing	40	5	4
<b>Total N =</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>222889</b>	<b>532842</b>

*\*The missing data for the responding sample is because of a low match to NPD and the ILR, caused by learners' transition between institutions at age 16*

## Appendix D: Case-study Sample

### The case-study sample of consortia

A sub-sample of six consortia was drawn from the Cohort sample to be involved in the case-study elements of the evaluation. Across the six consortia, all Diploma subjects were represented, except Manufacturing and Product Design<sup>22</sup>, as well as all three Diploma levels. The north and south of England and the midlands were represented (including two 'rural' consortia).

Further details of the case-study sample are given below:

**Table D.1 Diploma subjects delivered in the six case-study consortia**

Diploma subject	Number of case studies
Engineering	4
Construction and the Built Environment	2
Information Technology	3
Society, Health and Development	3
Creative and Media	4
Business, Administration and Finance	2
Hair and Beauty Studies	6
Hospitality	1
Environmental and Land-based Studies	3
Manufacturing and Product Design	0*

**Table D.2 Diploma levels delivered in the six case-study consortia**

Level	Number of case studies
Level 1	4
Level 2	6
Level 3	3*

*\*One of which is delivering Level 3 Progression only*

**Table D.3 Geographical regions represented by the six case-study consortia**

Region	Number of case studies
North	1
Midlands	2
South	3

*\*Please also note that two consortia were located in rural areas*

<sup>22</sup> After initial selection of consortia, we found that none of the original 15 commenced delivery of Manufacturing and Product Design, despite having planned to do so according to Gateway applications

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