



House of Commons
Education and Skills Committee

14–19 Diplomas

Fifth Report of Session 2006–07

Report, together with formal minutes, oral and written evidence

*Ordered by The House of Commons
to be printed 25 April 2007*

HC 249

Published on 17 May 2007
by authority of the House of Commons
London: The Stationery Office Limited
£0.00

The Education and Skills Committee

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Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Education and Skills Committee, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6181; the Committee's e-mail address is edskillscom@parliament.uk

Footnotes

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Summary

In October 2004, the Government-commissioned Working Group on 14–19 reform, chaired by Sir Mike Tomlinson, brought forward wide-ranging proposals for changes to the examinations system. The Government laid out its response in February 2005 in its White Paper, 14–19 Education and Skills. Among other reforms, this proposed the introduction of 14 new awards, originally called vocational Diplomas, rejecting the overarching Diploma award that Tomlinson had proposed. Many of those from whom we took evidence were clearly disappointed by this decision, but the vast majority stressed that the priority now was to make sure Diplomas were high-quality awards, and were a success. We understand and welcome that approach, but we believe that the changes to the 14–19 curriculum would have been better structured and more coherent had Tomlinson’s proposals been adopted.

Aims and objectives

The Government describes Diplomas as charting a middle course between vocational and academic learning, but it is far from clear that those in charge of developing the different Diplomas share a common understanding of what they are for and what kinds of learning they will involve. Two key challenges are apparent; firstly, there is a need to ensure that the Diplomas contain sufficient practical content to inspire and enthuse those ill-served by existing programmes, and that the temptation to substitute academic content for practical content is resisted; secondly, the DfES must successfully convince parents, students, employers and higher education that Diplomas are new, exciting and offer something significantly different from existing qualifications.

There are also questions about the long-term structure of the post-14 examinations system. A review of A levels is planned for 2008—the year in which the Diplomas will first be taught. The Government says this will look only at the internal dimensions of A levels as opposed to considering the part the awards play in their broader context or attempting to assess the overall coherence of options open to 14–19 year-olds. This is a missed opportunity, and we urge the Government to consider both rescheduling the review so it can incorporate fully the experience of the Diplomas, and changing its terms of reference to ensure it provides an analysis of A levels in context.

Development

The Diploma development process has clearly been frustrating for many of those involved, and it is commendable that significant progress has been made in spite of the challenges. The new Diploma Development Partnership approach—with Sector Skills Councils and employers taking the lead—has been experimental, and also highly complex, given the number of players involved. At times, there has been a lack of clarity about who was responsible for taking key decisions about Diploma content and design, and there was underestimation of the complexity of the project at the outset, which in turn led to a lack of suitable management and oversight structures being put in place. More appropriate management arrangements at the Departmental level have now been put in place and this is welcome. Additionally, it does appear that some lessons from the first Diploma

Development Partnerships have been learned, so future developments are unlikely to be as fraught. However, the fact remains that in the case of the first five Diplomas, development work has sometimes been uncomfortably compressed—and it remains to be seen whether this will have a negative impact on the final ‘products’.

Implementation

Five Diplomas will be taught in a limited number of areas from 2008; the remainder will be rolled out progressively, with the intention that all students should be entitled to study any Diploma by 2013. It is absolutely essential that the first diploma cohort is limited in size, and that thereafter expansion takes place at a slow and controlled rate: the temptation to press ahead to achieve ‘quick wins’ needs to be firmly resisted. Too often in the past, initiatives have been rolled out in a rushed manner, with negative consequences in terms of quality.

Given all the concerns that have been expressed to us about the Diplomas’ aims, and their development, the Government needs to ensure that delivery in 2008 genuinely is a pilot. If problems are not resolved, or if further problems become apparent during this period, the wider roll out should be delayed or reviewed in order to prevent the failure of the Diplomas.

As the Government recognises, successful Diploma delivery will require close collaboration between schools, colleges, learning providers and employers in an area—no one institution alone is likely to be able to offer the full entitlement. In some cases, partnership working is well established and providers are confident of their ability to deliver. In other areas, partnership working is much less well advanced. In these situations, progress is unlikely to be hastened by the existence of policies which promote independence, autonomy and competition between institutions as opposed to collegiate, area-wide action—examples include the continuing existence of performance tables, and the presumptions toward sixth form expansion.

Appropriate workforce development will also be vital to the Diplomas’ success. The workforce is not a blank slate, insofar as there is a body of skilled and experienced staff in schools, colleges and other learning providers with relevant teaching expertise. However, we remain to be convinced that the workforce development requirements for the Diplomas have been fully assessed and costed, and that sufficient resources have been allocated on this basis. We look to the Government to clarify whether this sort of underpinning national analysis has been undertaken, or is in progress. We also wish to see evidence that the development needs of those in areas which are currently some way from forming successful Diploma partnerships are being addressed—otherwise the concern is that the universal entitlement to Diplomas in 2013 will remain an aspiration rather than a reality.

1 Preface

1. The Committee announced its inquiry into the 14–19 Diplomas on 30 November 2006. Our intention was to undertake a short and very focused inquiry into the design and implementation of the Diplomas in light of concerns that had been raised with us.
2. During the inquiry, we took oral evidence from: the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority; the Sector Skills Development Agency; e-skills UK; Skills for Health; Elaine McMahon, Hull College; Godfrey Glyn, Barton Peveril College; Paul Hafren, Warrington Collegiate; Lorraine McCarthy, Moseley Park School; Peter Hawthorne, Wolverhampton County Council; the National Union of Teachers; the Department for Education and Skills; Jim Knight MP, Minister of State for Schools; and the Rt. Hon. Alan Johnson MP, Secretary of State for Education and Skills.
3. In addition, we received around 45 written memoranda, which have helped us with our inquiry. We would like to extend our thanks to our Specialist Advisers, Chris Hughes CBE and Professor Alison Wolf, King's College London.

2 Introduction

Background—Tomlinson

4. In January 2003, the DfES published a Green Paper, *14–19: Opportunity and Excellence*, which proposed major changes to the curriculum and examinations system in England for 14–19 year olds, and other parallel fundamental changes to the nature of education and training at this stage. These proposals were motivated by a number of factors, including: a desire to improve attainment pre-16 and ensure better staying-on rates post-16; to provide more choice for young people in terms of what programmes they can follow; and to ensure there are better vocational options available to those not well-served by ‘academic’ options.¹

5. The Green Paper announced that a Working Group on 14–19 Reform, chaired by Sir Mike Tomlinson, would be formed to examine the options for reform in the longer term.² This group produced its final report in October 2004—now widely known as the Tomlinson Report.³

6. Tomlinson’s main recommendations were:

- That all students would work toward the attainment of one overarching qualification—the Diploma. This would be attainable at four ‘levels’, from foundation through to advanced. Existing qualifications, such as A levels, GCSEs and National Vocational Qualifications “should cease to be free-standing qualifications in their own right but should evolve to become components of the new Diplomas.”⁴
- That all students should undertake ‘core’ learning which was “about getting the basics right, and developing the generic knowledge, skills and attributes necessary for participation in higher education, working life and the community”.⁵ This would include an extended project, to provide more stretch and challenge for the most able, and to better develop independent skills of inquiry.
- That students would also undertake ‘main’ learning. This would be chosen by the learner to reflect their particular interests and aspirations, and could combine both ‘vocational’ and ‘academic’ options.
- That assessment would be undertaken internally up to intermediate level; thereafter, external assessment would continue to take place but would be less intensive than it is currently at, for example, A level.

1 Department for Education and Skills, *14–19: Opportunity and Excellence*, 0744/2002, January 2003.

2 The Working Group had 15 Members aside from the chair, representing state and private education sectors, further and higher education, industry, local authorities and the voluntary and community sector.

3 Working Group on 14–19 Reform, *14–19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform: Final Report of the Working Group on 14–19 Reform*, October 2004, p 5.

4 *Ibid*, p 24

5 *Ibid*, p 5

- That the overarching Diplomas would be described in reference to up to 20 ‘lines’ of learning—for example, science and maths, or languages, literature and culture. This would reflect the nature of the main subjects studied.

7. In February 2005, the Government published their formal response to the Working Group’s recommendations, in the form of a White Paper, *14–19 Education and Skills*.⁶ Tomlinson’s proposals were not accepted in full, despite strong professional support for them. Rather, A levels and GCSEs, the Government proposed, would continue to be available as separate qualifications. Fourteen new themed awards—initially referred to as vocational Diplomas—would be introduced. Each would incorporate academic and vocational content “appropriate to the sector”.⁷ Each Diploma would be available at three different levels—42 qualifications in all.

8. At the time, many expressed disappointment that the Government appeared to have ‘cherry picked’ aspects of Tomlinson, rather than taking a more radical approach. A key concern was that the continued existence of A levels and GCSEs alongside the new Diplomas would simply lead to the perpetuation of a damaging ‘academic/vocational’ split, whereby A levels were seen as the ‘gold-standard’ and vocational Diplomas as inferior.

9. From the evidence we received, it is clear that the rejection of Tomlinson’s key proposal to create an overarching Diploma award, which all students would work toward, is still a matter of deep regret to many. Nevertheless, it also appears that now the decision has been taken, most are very keen for the Diplomas to be a success, and see them as a highly significant development. Ken Boston of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority set the tone at the start of our inquiry when he claimed: “the specialised Diploma [...] is the most important reform in which I have ever been involved in 40 years in education”.⁸

10. The Association of School and College Leaders wrote:

“We were strongly supportive of the recommendations in the Tomlinson report and, although we were disappointed that the government did not accept these recommendations in full, we support the introduction of the Diplomas as a major step on the way to the 14 to 19 system that we believe to be necessary for England in the 21st century.”⁹

Similarly, John Bangs of the National Union of Teachers told us that he “agree[d] absolutely with Ken Boston [of the QCA], who said several times that certainly he wants to see these things work. That is the most important, top priority.”¹⁰ Godfrey Glyn of Barton Peveril Sixth Form College similarly emphasised that the priority now was on ensuring Diplomas were a success:

“I think it has got to work; it is fundamental to the future of the country, I accept that totally. I think it would be a total disaster if we abandoned this development because

6 Department for Education and Skills, *14–19 Education and Skills*, Cm 6476, 23 February 2005.

7 “Kelly Sets Out 14–19 Reform”, Department for Education and Skills press release 2005/0026, 23 Feb 2005.

8 Q 1

9 Ev 136

10 Q 104

I think it has got something which has been missing for an awfully long time. The problem with it [...] is that there is a long list of vocational initiatives which have been allowed to wilt and fail in the mainstream education system, and that cannot happen again.”¹¹

11. Speaking at the Association of School and College Leaders annual conference on the 10th March 2007, the Secretary of State for Education, Alan Johnson MP was quoted as saying that there was a danger that the Diplomas could go “horribly wrong”, and that on account of the continued existence of A levels and GCSEs, there was “a danger of the Diplomas becoming if you like the secondary modern compared to the grammar”.¹² However, he subsequently sought to clarify this, saying that “We are well on track to make sure they [Diplomas] are delivered from 2008 [...]. We are now turning them into the radical, exciting qualifications we all hoped for.”¹³

12. We asked the Secretary of State whether his reported comments at the ASCL conference had been taken out of context and he told us:

“It was taken out of context in the sense that the premise of the question was that this is all very difficult. [...] [T]he premise of the honest question to me from head teachers by and large who supported Diplomas was: “This is really difficult, is it not?”, and my answer was, “Yes, it is.” Actually things are going horribly right [...] I think to sit in front of people and say blandly, “This is all a walk in the park and there are no difficulties to it at all”, of course this is a very precious thing, and because it is a precious and fragile thing we have to make sure we deliver it successfully.”¹⁴

13. The disappointment many expressed after the Government decided not to fully implement Tomlinson’s proposals—which had strong support—has not yet dissipated. Like others at the time, we felt that the creation of the unified, overarching Diploma award proposed by Tomlinson held the promise of a less hierarchical, less complex, and ultimately more coherent qualification system for young people. We remain concerned that the Government’s decision to introduce 14 new discrete Diplomas, each at three different levels, has the potential to compound existing problems of over-complexity and stratification of qualifications, and may just cement existing hierarchies.

14. One of Tomlinson’s achievements was establishing a large and pressing consensus for change. This still exists. Now the Government has embarked on its chosen route, most appear to be taking the pragmatic and positive stance that what is important is ensuring the Diplomas are of a high quality, and are a complete success. We understand and welcome that approach, but we believe that the changes to the 14–19 curriculum would have been better structured and more coherent had Tomlinson’s proposals been adopted.

15. There is an enduring risk that a programme as complicated as Diplomas could face problems and it would have been disingenuous for the Minister to pretend that this was

11 Q 108

12 “Diplomas may go horribly wrong”, BBC News Online, 10 March 2007, news.bbc.co.uk.

13 The Guardian, March 20 2007, p 4.

14 Q 295

not the case. However, having made the decision to pursue the line it has taken, the very least that can be expected is for the Government to invest its full energy into making the reforms work. It is now imperative that ministers deliver strong leadership, by displaying the courage to intervene swiftly to address identified problems and showing public commitment to producing programmes of the highest quality.

What are Diplomas, and what are they for?

16. The Government identified a number of aims for Diplomas, including:

- Increasing participation levels at post-16, from a current rate of 76% of young people. In March 2007, the Government published a Green Paper, *Raising Expectations*, which contained proposals to effectively raise the leaving age for education or training to 18 by 2015, identifying Diplomas as a key means of meeting the additional demand for learning.¹⁵
- Providing a sound basis for progression to higher education, including developing the attributes that universities frequently say students lack—such as the skills of independent inquiry.
- Being a qualification which “genuinely meets the needs of employers”.¹⁶
- Providing more stretch and challenge “in a way that the current curriculum does not consistently achieve”.¹⁷

17. In themselves, these aims are clearly entirely laudable. What is more, the first of these is a major concern, given England’s low staying-on rates for education and training post-16, in international terms. Nevertheless, many of those from whom we took evidence were keen to point out that such a broad range of desired outcomes placed a heavy burden of expectation on the Diplomas, and was asking them to serve perhaps an unfeasibly large number of ends with the risk that none would be achieved particularly well. The National Association of Head Teachers summed up some of these concerns:

“Diplomas are intended to be a solution to several different difficulties and run the risk of addressing none of the needs adequately. There is considerable confusion about their purpose and it is unreasonable to expect the same qualification to address, simultaneously, issues of parity of esteem for vocational and academic routes, university discrimination and disaffected young people”.¹⁸

The University and College Union agreed, arguing that “The actual purposes of the specialist Diploma may be problematic as they seem intended to serve multiple and perhaps conflicting purposes.”¹⁹

15 Department for Education and Skills, *Raising Expectations: staying in education and training post-16*, March 2007, CM 7065.

16 Ev 53

17 Ev 53

18 Ev 83

19 Ev 148

18. Diplomas are intended to address several large-scale challenges, ranging from improving staying-on rates among those vulnerable to dropping out, to increasing ‘stretch and challenge’ for the most able. We do not necessarily view these as intrinsically conflicting purposes. However, for the qualifications and programmes to achieve such a wide range of aims successfully, there needs to be adequate time for development and reflection: as we contend later on in this report, it is far from certain that this has been sufficiently appreciated to date.

19. Each of the 14 Diplomas will be offered at three different levels. The QCA gives the following comparisons of how these will compare with other qualifications “in terms of average length of study”:

Level one Diploma—comparable to a programme of four or five GCSEs

Level two Diploma—comparable to a programme of five to six GCSEs

Level three Diploma—comparable to a programme of three A levels (an award requiring the equivalent amount of study to two A levels is also being developed).²⁰

20. A common structure will be shared by all 14 Diploma lines, although they will operate slightly differently at each of the three levels at which they will be offered. Learning will be divided between the following areas:

- *Principal learning.* This is the mandatory ‘core’ of Diplomas and will be specific to each Diploma line. It is suggested that students would typically spend approximately 40–50% of their time on this.
- *Generic learning.* This will be common to all 14 lines of learning, and includes: Functional skills in literacy, numeracy and IT (at levels 1 and 2); Personal learning and thinking skills; the completion of an extended project, to develop independent study skills. It is suggested that approximately 15–40% of time may be spent on this.
- *Additional/ Specialist learning (ASL):* this can involve either further development of specialist skills relevant to the main direction of the Diploma, *and/or* a wider combination of options which range across industries *and/or* ‘academic’ options, which could include one or more A levels or GCSEs. It is suggested that ASL might comprise approximately 20–30% of learner’s time.²¹
- A minimum of 10 days’ work experience with an employer in the relevant sector.

21. The DfES offers the following illustration of how the Engineering Diploma might work for one particular student, studying at level 2:

“Carly had always been interested in cars and had enjoyed Design and Technology throughout secondary school. Following advice from her teachers and school careers adviser she chose to do the level 2 Diploma in Engineering. Carly’s principal learning

20 Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, *The Diploma*, March 2007, 07/3084.

21 Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, *The Specialised Diploma*, January 2007, QCA/06/2986.

programme introduced her to different options and skills across engineering, including engineering design, engineering applications of computers, electronic and electrical systems, manufacturing engineering, maintenance, and innovation in engineering. Her school had good links with local businesses and was able to organise work experience for her with the local Jaguar dealership. This enabled her to find out about the technical side of working with cars and about vehicle sales. Carly was concerned about green issues, and through her project she was able to investigate hybrid cars and developments in alternative fuels. During her course Carly was able to find out more about career options in the motor industry, and when she completed her Diploma, she was well placed to take up an Apprenticeship in vehicle sales or vehicle technology, or to go on to further study in engineering.”²²

22. The Diploma will be a composite award, which will be attained on the successful completion of component units or modules, which can be ‘mixed and matched’. The intention is that individual providers will be able to customise Diplomas to suit their own, and students’, needs. The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) and City and Guilds have recently formed a partnership to develop the qualifications and assessment arrangements for the Diploma components. This, they argue, will provide “the most comprehensive curriculum offer across all 14 lines of learning. Centres will be able to access a wide choice of coherent progression pathways with the administrative simplicity of one point of contact.”²³

The long-term future for Diplomas

23. On the issue of the longer-term ambitions for Diplomas, the Association for College Management told us:

“We remain unclear as to whether the S[pecialised] D[iploma]s are paving the way for more far-reaching reform after 2008 towards a Diploma model or whether they are a long term third strand next to two separate strands: the academic (A level/ GCSE) and the vocational (apprenticeship).”²⁴

24. A review of A levels is due to take place in 2008, which will look at the opportunities for increasing the challenge and breadth they offer. The Government states, however, that “the review will not be looking at the future of A levels. They will remain long-term as free-standing qualifications”.²⁵ That statement seems to indicate categorically that the Diplomas are intended to be a permanent ‘third track’ option. However, in theory at least, students are free to pursue A levels or additional GCSEs as part of the additional or specialist learning elements of their Diploma; and, at key stage 4, it is claimed that students would

22 Department for Education and Skills (March 2007), *Raising Expectations: staying in education and training post-16*, p 25.

23 Ev 104

24 Ev 94

25 from www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19.

normally meet the functional skills requirements in the generic learning component by following GCSEs in Maths and English.²⁶

25. We asked the Secretary of State what the reasons were for pushing ahead with the review of A levels given that the Diplomas would only just have begun in 2008, and he told us:

“On the A level review, we were committed to that in the White Paper. It is a review of A level. It is not a review of Diplomas and A levels, a return to whether we should go back to pure Tomlinson; it is a review of A levels. So the fact that Diplomas are just getting off the ground in 2008 is exactly why it is not going to be an overall review of the whole thing together. It is looking at A levels specifically.”²⁷

26. Our view is that the Government’s decision to consider A levels in isolation in its 2008 review is a missed opportunity. More would be gained from considering A levels in their wider context, and in particular, in the light of experience of the Diplomas, which will have just started in September 2008. We would urge the Government to consider rescheduling the review and changing its terms of reference so that it can consider A levels in their wider context and after more is known about how Diplomas are working in practice.

Nature of Diplomas—vocational, practical or academic learning?

27. Vocational learning is commonly understood to mean learning which is work-related, in the sense that it provides preparation for either a particular career or even a particular task within a job, for possible entry into a particular occupational area, or for further study in that area. Examples range from apprenticeships in traditional trades such as plumbing or construction, to courses such as National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) which are available in a wide variety of occupational areas—for example, childcare or hospitality and catering, to courses such as BTEC National Diplomas. Common to all vocationally-based courses is a method of practical ‘learning by doing’.

28. ‘Academic’ learning, on the other hand, is usually understood to involve a less practical and more desk-based style of learning, to serve a more general educative purpose, and to be only indirectly related to career preparation (for example, in the sense of developing the skills of critical inquiry needed for a range of occupations, or a foundation of knowledge to serve as the platform for further, more career-specific training). Qualifications commonly thought of as ‘academic’ include traditional A levels’ or GCSEs.

29. In practice, however, learning does not always fall neatly into these categories. Some so-called academic learning programmes are by design highly skills-based or make use of some applied or practical learning methods (for example, the use of ‘practicals’ in the case of science A levels). Other courses commonly thought of as highly academic—such as law or medicine at degree level—are in reality highly vocational in the sense that they prepare learners for a very particular occupation and develop skills through practical experience.

26 Department for Education and Skills, *Your Questions Answered—further information following the Regional Conferences*, available to download from www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19

30. A key issue from the outset concerning Diplomas—and one which is at the heart of many of the debates surrounding them—has been that of definition and purpose. In particular, it has not always been clear to what extent the new programmes are intended to be vocational, or applied, or to serve a more general educational purpose. The Government’s own standpoint on this issue appears to have changed over time. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools, Lord Andrew Adonis, referred to the new awards in May 2006 as “specialised vocational Diplomas”.²⁸ The DfES, on the other hand, has referred to them as “specialised Diplomas”²⁹ until the publication in March 2007 of the Green Paper *Raising Expectations*, when the ‘specialised’ part of the name appears to have been completely dropped and where all references are to “Diplomas” only.³⁰

31. The DfES, in its evidence to this inquiry described the Diplomas as a “highly valued mixed theoretical and practical route for young people which genuinely meets the needs of employers and provides a sound basis for progression into higher education (HE).”³¹ When we took evidence from the Minister on the issue of definition and purpose, he told us he saw the Diplomas as charting “a middle course between traditional academic and traditional vocational qualifications”.³²

32. We explored with other witnesses what they perceived the nature of the Diplomas to be. Ken Boston of the QCA told us that he saw the aim as being:

“the same as that of any other high quality educational programme and that is to exercise and grow the learning muscle which is in the head of every young person. For some that growth is stimulated by the study of an academic discipline. For others across the entire ability range it is better stimulated by a vocational-based curriculum. For many, the best learning experience involves both. This is education, not training for job readiness.”³³

However, the awarding body OCR imply that a confusion over purposes has led to a lack of consistency across the first five Diploma lines:

“Much emphasis is given to work-based and ‘applied’ learning, yet elsewhere we learn that Diplomas must provide a ‘broad general education’. Diploma development will be ‘employer-led’ yet the White Paper strenuously avoids linking the term ‘vocational’ to the Diplomas and stresses their importance as a route to Higher Education. The first five Diploma Development Partnerships have not demonstrated a common understanding of the nature of the Diplomas to which they are seeking to contribute, with some seeing them as heavily occupation-specific and others as a general preparation for working life or higher education.”³⁴

28 HL Deb, 22 May 2006, Col 581

29 See for example Department for Education and Skills memorandum to the Committee, Ev 53 ff.

30 *Ibid.*

31 Ev 53

32 Q 201

33 Q 1

34 Ev 107

33. Several of those from whom we received evidence warned of the potential for ‘academic drift’—i.e., that the practical and applied nature of the curriculum could be downgraded and replaced with more ‘classroom-based’ and theoretical activity, either through unfamiliarity with vocational teaching and learning methods, and/or as a consequence of a residual belief that ‘academic’ learning was the ‘gold standard’. Ann Hodgson and Ken Spours, of the Institute of Education, for example, told us that the Diplomas were very likely to occupy a ‘middle track’ between true ‘vocational’ qualifications, and more ‘academic’ ones such as A levels. They suggest:

“This is fuelling an ongoing debate as to the nature of the new awards, centring around the degree to which they will become more general, more applied or more sharply vocational. The latest draft of content of the first five Diplomas published in July 2006, possibly with the exception of Construction, looks as if the balance is tilting towards academic/applied rather than vocational/practical, casting doubt over whether these awards will eventually be labelled as vocational qualifications.”³⁵

34. Godfrey Glyn of Barton Peveril Sixth Form College observed:

“There is a long tradition within education of vocational qualifications being introduced [...] which have been diluted, become more academic almost, rather than vocational, in order to achieve some kind of respectability. For me, certainly in the context which I come from, schools are looking at this development with some anxiety, because they hope that it will be recognised by higher education as only then will it have credibility in their own little community.”³⁶

35. Similarly, the Association for College Management told us:

“if S[pecialised] D[iploma]s are not regarded as fully ‘vocational’ this raises the question of why employers are taking the lead in their development. In our view it is important that the new qualifications meet distinctly different learning needs than those met by A levels. We should not fall into the old trap of imagining that the only way to secure parity of esteem is to make the vocational side qualifications resemble academic side qualifications. Indeed we suggest that the parity of esteem debate is unhelpful: let us concentrate on developing first rate qualifications that offer all of our young learners an excellent, modern and accessible education.”³⁷

The 157 Group of Colleges made a similar point, suggesting: “It is fair to say that these Diplomas will have to be skilfully designed and positioned if they are not just to become a means of bolstering the academic route with the lightest of vocational seasoning.”³⁸

36. When the Secretary of State gave evidence to us, he told us: “this is not a vocational Diploma, it is not another form of job training, this is something really exciting”.³⁹ However, he later continued:

35 Ev 121

36 Q 94

37 Ev 94

38 Ev 202

39 Q 295

“[T]he whole point of these Diplomas is that they are vocational education. They do not lead to a vocational qualification. They are vocational education in the sense that they are designed by industry, they have an academic content to them as well, for people who want to go into engineering and go into level 4 they are a perfect route, but, similarly, they should never trap someone into a particular route, which is why you have to have all the options as well. So there is a large vocational element to this.”⁴⁰

37. It is far from clear that those in charge of developing the different Diplomas share a common understanding of the kinds of learning they will demand and the purposes they will serve. We welcome the introduction of more practical learning into the curriculum but there is a risk that the pressure over time will be to introduce more and more desk-based, theoretical material into practical, vocational curricula in pursuit of parity with academic qualifications. It is important that this is guarded against in the case of the Diplomas, and we will be looking for evidence that the new programmes contain sufficient practical content to motivate and appeal to learners who may be ill-served by academic courses.

38. We asked the DfES to state how they intended to explain Diplomas succinctly to interested parties, given the complex nature of what Diplomas were trying to achieve. Jon Coles, Director of 14–19 Reform, replied:

“Could I do this by way of an example? I think nowadays it is easy to go to schools and see young people in Key Stage 4, who are doing things which are clearly vocational training and they are spending perhaps half of their timetable doing something which is quite narrowly focused on, say, motor vehicles as a subject area. I would say two things about that. The first is that for 14 to 16 year olds to spend half or two-thirds of their timetable on that is too narrow. Secondly, what we see from young people who are doing that is that they are often much more motivated and much more focused on learning, and that is to do with the style of learning and the style of teaching; it is to do with place and where they are learning and the reality of what they are experiencing; and it is to do with subject matter as well—they are looking at something and doing something that they are interested in, engaged by and motivated by. So the point of the Diploma is to capture that motivation, that engagement which comes from style of teaching and learning, subject matter, place, environment, real subject experience, but to produce something which is broader, which develops people’s cognitive skills and is not just training for a specific occupation. So that is the key purpose.”⁴¹

We appreciate the sentiments behind this statement—which, it could be argued, is indeed an accurate description of Diplomas. However, it is also a highly technical, complex and lengthy explanation, and very far from being ‘media-friendly’.

39. The Minister sought to reassure us that the Government was aware of the importance of clear communications and was actively addressing this issue:

40 Q 307

41 Q 242

“the Chief Executives’ Group [...] identified from all of those chief executives the need to get this communication script right and alongside sharing each other’s risk management. At our meeting in February—so some time in the next few weeks—we will be pinning those down and agreeing amongst all of us what the communication lines are and to share our risk profiles as well as having a discussion on the Gateway. That is the agenda for the next meeting.”⁴²

40. The DfES describes Diplomas as charting a ‘middle course’ between traditional academic and vocational qualifications, combining the benefits of both. We see a risk that in the absence of clear communications about what this means, Diplomas could all too easily be seen as falling between two stools, rather than having a distinct identity of their own. **The DfES must ensure there is a real, shared understanding of the kinds of learning and teaching that Diplomas will involve among those responsible for their design, development and delivery. Consensus on this should have been established at the outset and the failure to do this it is a matter of deep concern to us. Secondly, and with some urgency, the Department must decide on a coherent and easily communicable definition of Diplomas. Communications must not further complicate what is already a complicated award, and must encapsulate what is different and distinctive about Diplomas, compared to existing routes.**

Timescales

Overall achievability

41. The Government’s plan is to develop and introduce Diplomas in three phases. Five initial Diploma Development Partnerships (led by Sector Skills Councils, with input from a range of other partners) were established in the last quarter of 2005. Nine additional partnerships have subsequently been formed to cover the remaining Diploma areas. The timetable for implementation is as follows:

- Diplomas in IT, Health and Social Care, Engineering, Creative and Media and Construction and the Built Environment will be available for first teaching in September 2008.
- Diplomas in Land-based and Environmental, Manufacturing, Hair and Beauty, Business Administration and Finance, Hospitality and Catering will be available for first teaching in September 2009.
- Diplomas in Public Services, Sport and Leisure, Retail and Travel and Tourism will be available from September 2010.
- By 2013, there will be an ‘entitlement’ in each local area for young people to have access to all fourteen Diploma ‘lines’.

42. The QCA told us:

“In ambition, scope, complexity and potential, the introduction of a Diploma qualification across 14 lines of learning and at three levels in each line is a major

national reform of secondary curriculum and qualifications, *currently without parallel in any other country*.”⁴³ (emphasis added)

43. Given the QCA’s comments, we were keen to establish what had been achieved to date, and whether the programme was on track to deliver according to the timetable which had been set. The DfES told us that:

“Progress to date has been good. The main milestones in the timeline published in the 14–19 Education and Skills Implementation Plan (DfES 2037-2005 DCL-EN) last year have been met or are on course to be achieved”.⁴⁴

44. In much of the evidence we received, there was a clear call to recognise the achievements which had been made. Nevertheless, in many of the submissions was an often explicit recognition that progress made had been very much against the clock. Most contributors, even those who sought to highlight what had been achieved, raised concerns about the feasibility and desirability of the timetables and deadlines which were currently being pursued. The Edge Foundation was categorical, saying “The current time-scales are unrealistic—some would say dishonest—and unless relaxed the Specialised Diplomas will fail as have very many similar initiatives over previous decades.”⁴⁵ Similarly, the Institution of Engineering and Technology argued that the Diploma development process had been rushed:

“Insufficient time has been set aside either for the creation of new course content, or to take and consider input and experiences from the wider group of stakeholders. Hence while we are actively supporting the development process we are withholding final endorsement until we see a completed Diploma structure.”⁴⁶

45. The National Association of Head Teachers told us “The timescale for the introduction of Diplomas has been inappropriately and unrealistically short, considering the magnitude of the new initiative”⁴⁷ while the Universities and Colleges Union argued:

“[T]he time line for the introduction of the first five of the fourteen lines of the specialist Diploma, with a subsequent roll-out of the remaining lines to 2013, is too tight. We believe it will not allow proper and realistic piloting and evaluation, publication and dissemination of syllabus content and supporting materials or workforce development to support teaching the Diplomas.”⁴⁸

46. The QCA has to date taken the main strategic and co-ordinating role in Diploma development. Ken Boston told us he thought the programme overall was achievable in the timeframe currently set:

43 Q 2

44 Ev 54

45 Ev 178

46 Ev 105

47 Ev 83

48 Ev 148

“I believe we can deliver this process on the current timescale with this structure. If it is not working, then it would need to be changed again and be flexible. [...] We are now confident we have a solution that will work provided we have, as undoubtedly we have, the commitment of all the parties, including the DfES, to manage this in a disciplined and strategic way, not defining who is doing what but monitoring who has done what, whether time lines have been met, whether targets have been met and whether accountabilities have been met, and calling bodies to account, if they have not.”⁴⁹

47. Some of those from whom we took evidence suggested that the introduction of the first five Diploma lines in September 2008 should be delayed. The University and College Union recommended that “the start date for the first five Diplomas should be postponed a year and that they should be introduced in September 2009, and the remaining Diplomas rolled out until 2014.”⁵⁰ Karen Price of e-skills UK said she was not definitely in favour of a delay, but that she did think “now is the time for a risk assessment on the timescales. I think we should have the courage to delay a year if that is required”.⁵¹

48. However, Ken Boston of the QCA did not agree with delaying the start of the programme beyond September 2008, arguing that such a move risked curtailing the enthusiasm of those who were already keen to start delivering the Diplomas:

“It is very important that we start this off in 2008. There is such an interest and pressure from schools and colleges. [...] [T]he qualification is there. There is no doubt the qualification will be available in detail from September 2007 with first teaching to begin in 2008. [...] It is not an issue about letting it out another year; I think there would be great disappointment and serious damage if we did that. We have to move ahead with it and do that but let us be measured and guarded with the roll out.”⁵²

John Rogers of Skills for Health seemed to agree at least in part with this, saying “there are risks in delaying and risks in going forward.”⁵³

Starting small and expanding slowly

49. One area where we have found almost unanimous agreement was the importance of a very small and controlled implementation of the first five Diploma lines in 2008, followed by a cautious expansion in subsequent years. Several witnesses pointed out that, historically, the introduction and rollout of new qualifications had tended to be rushed, with detrimental effects. The University and College Union told us:

“The fatal flaws in the introduction of both GNVQs and Curriculum 2000 led to a lack of confidence in such reforms amongst young people, parents, teachers and lecturers. A principal fault in the introduction of both sets of qualifications was the

49 Q 8

50 Ev 148

51 Q 19

52 Q 18

53 Q 21

speed with which they were started which did not give sufficient time for considered piloting, testing and evaluation. UCU fears that similar mistakes are being made in relation to the introduction of specialist Diplomas.⁵⁴

50. John Rogers of Skills for Health also saw a danger in making Diplomas too widely available in the initial stages:

"I suspect that the danger in this is if we do try a bulk roll-out [...]. It is far better to get a quality product right and grow it rather [...] than to try to get mass roll-out in that way".⁵⁵

51. The Sector Skills Council, Skillset, agreed saying:

"we need a small and structured pilot for 2008. The pilot needs to be controlled and managed and signalled as part of the development process so that we use the opportunity to continue to refine and develop the qualifications, approaches to learning and assessment and all of the support and delivery programmes that will be needed to make this work."⁵⁶

52. In the 14–19 implementation plan, the DfES stated "In 2008, our modelling suggests that we need to prepare for up to 50,000 young people taking specialised Diplomas".⁵⁷ We explored with witnesses whether this was a reasonable expectation. John Bangs of the National Union of Teachers told us:

"I do not want to say 'It hasn't got a cat in hell's chance,' I do not want to be that pessimistic, but I do think that it would not be good for those taking the Diplomas if there was a forced roll-out to get to that target. [...] I may be wrong but I do not think it is going to happen, and would not advise it anyway."⁵⁸

53. We asked the Minister whether he perceived any tension between getting the quality right, and securing enough enrolments in September 2008. He told us that of the two priorities, "The most important thing is quality; we place an absolute premium on that."⁵⁹ He also told us categorically that 50,000 was not a target for September 2008:

"we do not have a target [...]. If we had a target then people would believe that we were sacrificing quality in order to hit a target. The 50,000 was an indication of the sort of numbers because people always ask us how many people might be involved, so we give a ballpark figure, understanding, obviously, that as soon as you use a figure everyone thinks it is then a target; but it is not a target."⁶⁰

54 Ev 148

55 Q 14

56 Ev 132–133

57 Department for Education and Skills, *14–19 Education and Skills: Implementation Plan, 2037-2005DCL-EN, 2005*, p 54.

58 Q 110

59 Q 202

60 Q 207–208

54. It now seems highly unlikely that the first teaching of the Diplomas could be delayed. As one of our witnesses put it, there are risks in delaying and risks in going forward. From the evidence we have received, we believe that much could be lost unless there is partial introduction of the Diplomas in September 2008—in particular, the enthusiasm and commitment of the teachers and lecturers who are expecting to deliver them from 2008.

55. It is absolutely essential that the first Diploma cohort is very limited in size, and that thereafter expansion takes place at a slow and controlled rate, with sufficient time for development and assessment. Too often in the past, initiatives have been rolled out too quickly, with serious negative effects on quality. The Government says it will place quality above all other considerations, and intends to take a measured approach: we very much welcome this, and will look for evidence that this is happening in practice.

3 Design and development

Process

56. From the outset, it has been the Government’s intention that Diplomas should be employer-led, the contention being that the new awards should meet the demands of business, as well as those of higher education institutions. In the last quarter of 2005, five initial Diploma Development Partnerships (DDPs) were established.⁶¹ These “multi-organisational partnerships”⁶² are being co-ordinated by the relevant Sector Skills Councils and typically include employers, schools, colleges, representatives from higher education, professional bodies, and awarding bodies. Their role has been to develop the “skills, knowledge and understanding” which the Diplomas should cover.⁶³

57. The DfES describes the other stages of the Diploma design process, and the roles of other agencies, as follows:

“Once a DDP has determined the skills, knowledge and understanding required from each Diploma, the QCA is responsible for translating those requirements into regulatory criteria. It is then the task of accredited awarding bodies to develop units and full Diploma qualifications for endorsement by DDPs and, subsequently, accreditation by QCA. QCA, through the National Assessment Authority,⁶⁴ is also responsible for designing the systems and technical infrastructure capable of allowing the awarding of Diplomas from 2009. This project has been entitled “Minerva”.⁶⁵

58. During our inquiry, it became apparent that some people had serious concerns about the way the development process for the first five Diplomas had proceeded. Many of those at the heart of the Diploma Development Partnerships were keen to point out that very significant progress *had* been made; nevertheless, we were often left with the distinct impression that this had been against the clock and had demanded formidable effort from those concerned. We were keen therefore to explore the perspectives of key players on the design and development process to date.

Employer involvement

59. The Government says that a key selling point of the Diplomas is that they will be valued by employers, and that employers will have been fundamentally involved in their design. Karen Price of e-skills UK told us she thought that employers were indeed firmly behind the IT Diploma:

61 Subsequently, DDPs have been established for the remaining nine Diplomas: Land-based and Environmental; Manufacturing; Hair and Beauty; Business Administration and Finance; Hospitality and Catering; Public Services; Sport and Leisure; Retail and Travel and Tourism.

62 Ev 53

63 Ev 53

64 The National Assessment Agency was launched in April 2004 to “develop and deliver high-quality national curriculum tests and supervise the delivery and modernisation of GCSE and A level examinations.” (taken from www.naa.org.uk website).

65 Ev 54

“I think employers are extremely enthusiastic about the opportunity that they have been given to influence the curriculum so that it is relevant to the world of work in the 21st century. I think they are massively supportive of the Diplomas and have been involved in their development from the beginning.”⁶⁶

Ms Price went on to confirm that very many well-known employers had been involved in the development of the IT Diploma, including Cisco Systems, Microsoft, BT, John Lewis, and a range of small- and medium-sized enterprises. Similarly, John Rogers of Skills for Health told us in relation to his sector’s Diploma that: “Of all the work in which I have been engaged in terms of this age group, this is probably the best employer engagement that we have ever had.”⁶⁷

60. However, other evidence was more circumspect about the level of employer involvement in the Diploma design process—and particularly, about the ability of Sector Skills Councils to reflect the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises. For example, Mark Snee of Technoprint UK, a member of the Manufacturing Diploma development Steering Group says:

“The development of the Manufacturing Diploma cannot properly be said to be ‘employer-led’. SSCs cannot be regarded as a ‘proxy’ for employers. [...]It is stretching credibility to claim that the Manufacturing Diploma has been produced by employers. Whether the final content will have credibility with employers is open to question at present.”⁶⁸

61. Similarly, while the Institute of Directors told us it did not want to imply that consultation with employers on Diplomas had been poor, “a general concern does remain about any tendency to portray Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) as the ‘voice of business’, particularly of small employers. For instance, in a representative survey of 500 IoD members conducted in March 2006, less than a fifth (19%) had heard of the Sector Skills Development Agency or the Sector Skills Councils, and only a handful (3%) were active participants.”⁶⁹

Provider input

62. As noted above, the intention from the start has clearly been to give Diploma Development Partnerships—led by employers and their representatives—the initial steer—although as the DfES note in their evidence to us, Diploma Development Partnerships are expected to include other representation—particularly from the schooling and further- and higher-education sectors. Some argued that the initial decision to place employers in the lead was in itself questionable. John Bangs of the NUT told us that he thought it had been “a major, strategic mistake on behalf of the Government, [...] to say employers are leading,

66 Q 1

67 Q 1

68 Ev 176–177

69 Ev 197

the schools and teacher organisations are following up behind.”⁷⁰ A similar line was taken by Geoff Stanton of the University of Greenwich, who argued:

“The implication [of the current development process] is that the development of learning programmes takes place after the publication of the accredited qualifications, with the involvement of teaching staff being reduced to that of being the recipients of staff development programmes that will equip them to deliver the new products. Whilst some staff, particularly in secondary schools, will need considerable support, many staff, particularly in colleges, already have considerable experience in delivering and designing programmes of applied learning that work for both learners and employers. Firstly, it is wasteful to neglect their potential contribution to the development process. Secondly, it is highly likely that they will find themselves being asked to deliver qualifications that fail to provide a basis for the learning experiences that they would want for their learners and that the learners have been led to expect.”⁷¹

63. The National Association of Head Teachers also shared these concerns about the late involvement of education professionals in the design process, but nevertheless praised the QCA’s efforts at trying to rectify the situation, saying it had been “assiduous in involving schools, in some cases through the teacher associations and other bodies, which has helped to develop the Diploma to its current point [...] problems [...] however [...] remain and it is far from certain whether or not the Diplomas will be the successful project as initially envisaged”.⁷²

64. It appears that the failure to involve teachers and leaders at an early stage in the design process may also have led to some practical challenges for consortia members applying to the Gateways for permission to deliver the first tranche of Diplomas in September 2008. Speaking in January 2007, Dr Elaine McMahon of Hull College told us:

“we are still waiting, as colleges; we are keen to know how the content will translate into qualifications, specification and an assessment regime, and we are keen to revise our current curriculum offer along those lines. We still have a lot to learn and I think possibly we could have been engaged sooner in the discussion [...]. We are very keen, we are enthusiastic to engage with it, we see the relevance of it, but I think we do not have enough of the detail yet to work up effectively, and we have been working blind, to some extent, on some of that. [...] There are lots of things we are learning as it goes along and having to say quickly that needs looking at again, please”.⁷³

65. We relayed these concerns to the Minister. In response, he told us that if there was a perception that teachers and lecturers had been insufficiently involved to date, that was indeed “unfortunate”. He continued:

70 Q 124

71 Ev 160

72 Ev 83

73 Q 125, Q 133

“We think we have been involving them; we have schools and colleges on Diploma Development Partnerships; we have a stakeholder group that includes college principals; we take the issue of the development of the Diplomas on a regular basis to the workforce agreement monitoring group, so that all of our various social partners are involved in that. I am obviously aware that in the communications we are in a slightly awkward place at the moment where the workforce does not yet have the detailed specifications of the Diplomas and that until they have those they are frustrated because they want to have a better understanding of exactly what they will be teaching. It is inevitable that we will go through that process and in our communication programme and through this year we will try to overcome that and give a little more comfort and certainty to the workforce.”⁷⁴

Awarding Bodies

66. Evidence we received from awarding bodies made the point that they, as well as teachers, had not been involved in the Diploma development process until a very late stage in proceedings. OCR observed:

“The process of developing Diplomas has been heralded as revolutionary; it is certainly true that the DfES 14–19 implementation plan takes the standard process for developing a qualification and turns it on its head. [...] The Government has effectively created new bodies that believe, according to their own literature, that they were created to develop Diplomas without feeling constrained by the views of teachers or assessment experts. Whilst employers could and should play a greater role in defining what should be taught in schools and colleges, it is stretching credibility to say that they should do the spadework of developing a detailed curriculum for 14–19 year olds. Most DDPs kept awarding bodies at arms length until they were close to completing their detailed Diploma content.”⁷⁵

67. However, the Secretary of State indicated that he did not accept this, saying:

“Tomlinson said that industry should shape these Diplomas. There is no difference there with Tomlinson. The second point is, it is not industry on their own. The point about the Diploma Development Partnerships is you have got higher education institutions involved, you have got the QCA involved, you have got other bodies involved right across the piece and you have got schools and colleges involved on every single one, and you have got on these first five 5,000 employers involved, 1,000 for each of the five Diploma lines. So, it is not working that way where the industry goes off in a corner, works it out and then hands it over to the educationalists. If it did work that way, you would be right, it would be the wrong way, and that is not the way this is operating and it is going very successfully in the partnerships that have been formed through the DDPs.”⁷⁶

74 Q 255

75 Ev 108

76 Q 313

68. The approach to designing the first five Diploma lines was highly unorthodox, in that it granted a large degree of initial freedom to the Diploma Development Partnerships in terms of what they produced. This undeniably created problems further down the line, when the transition from content to workable learning programmes and qualifications was attempted. A key issue appears to have been the late involvement of teachers, lecturers and awarding bodies—with the result that their practical experience was not sufficiently harnessed in the earlier part of the development process. This meant that earlier specifications had to be revised and that, toward the end, the timetable has become very compressed indeed. The awarding body OCR told us:

“At the tail end of [the] process, OCR now finds it has less than five months to develop, and consult schools and colleges about, the qualifications which underpin—in Dr Ken Boston’s words—‘the most exciting and innovative educational reform taking place in the developed world’”.⁷⁷

69. **The Diploma development process has clearly been frustrating for many of those involved, and it is commendable that progress has been made in spite of this. The new Diploma development partnership approach—with Sector Skills Councils and employers in the lead—has been experimental, and also highly complex, on account of the number of players involved. At the same time, we are concerned that there appears to have been too little *direct* involvement in or feedback from small and medium-sized employers who have an important part to play in setting a climate of business acceptance of the new Diplomas. We recommend focused attention is given to involving them more prior to the launch of the pilots.** At times, there has been a lack of clarity about who is responsible for taking key decisions during the development process. What is more, it seems as if the risks involved in such a complex project may not have been fully appreciated at the outset by certain key players and particularly, by those with ultimate management responsibility for the programme—the DfES. It does appear that some lessons from the first Diploma Development Partnerships have been learned, so future developments are unlikely to be as fraught.

Existing qualifications

70. The Government says that the aim for Diplomas is to develop a ‘third ‘track’ between vocational qualifications, and ‘academic’ ones such as A levels. This raises questions about the role of existing qualifications which do not provide training for a specific job and are therefore not vocational in its narrowest sense, but nevertheless offer work-relevant, practical learning, combined with some elements of theory: examples would be the BTEC National and First Diploma awards, and the more recent OCR National awards. Edexcel (the owner of the BTEC suite of qualifications) told us that over the last year, the number of enrolments on their courses had “risen enormously” and growth in schools (i.e., among learners in the age-group that the Diplomas will be targeting) had been “particularly noteworthy”.⁷⁸ Some practitioners from whom we took evidence told us they did not want to see existing qualifications—particularly, BTECs—hastily withdrawn in pursuit of qualification rationalisation. Elaine McMahan of Hull College, for example, urged against

77 Ev 108

78 Written evidence from Edexcel [not printed]

“ditch[ing] any of the qualifications which parallel this Specialised Diploma whilst it is still embedding. I think it needs a careful, if you like, nurturing in.”⁷⁹

71. We raised this issue with the Minister, who clearly indicated that the Department held no timetable for the phasing out of existing qualifications. He told us that he envisaged a situation whereby existing qualifications would “wither on the vine, as the Diplomas win the argument really.”⁸⁰ Jon Coles of the DfES added that over time the challenge would be to ensure that the best of the existing qualifications came “within the Diploma framework.”⁸¹

72. In turn, this raises another issue: the degree to which knowledge gleaned in the development and delivery of existing programmes—such as BTECs—has been fed into the Diploma development process. Paul Hafren of Warrington Collegiate cautioned against any tendency to cast aside current qualifications and start again from scratch:

“Just to make a comment about the resilience of A levels and National Diplomas and First Diplomas, they seem to be the collective rock upon which the sea of CPVE, TVEI, GNVQs, OVCs, and so on, wash against, and what we are left with is some enduring qualifications. The BTEC National Diploma route into higher education is a well-trodden path. I think we need to reflect on that and understand what it is that is really good about the current arrangement, particularly around the National Diploma, First Diploma, and take from that the best, so that we do not throw out the baby with the bath water.”⁸²

73. Similarly, Edexcel cautioned against jettisoning existing qualifications and neglecting past experience:

“we remain concerned that Government papers tend not to recognise proprietary qualifications in their assessment of the skills framework, despite their proven contribution to raising skills. Over the last 20 years, 2.6m learners have gained a BTEC qualification and we estimate that there are similar numbers from other proprietary qualifications.”⁸³

74. The Government has told us that it does not intend to abruptly withdraw existing vocational qualifications, which may in some ways be seen as ‘competitors’ to the Diplomas. We welcome this. If they were to be withdrawn before Diplomas were properly established, this could act to reduce choice for those young people who do not wish to pursue A levels—a concern made more acute given the withdrawal of GNVQ qualifications in 2007.⁸⁴

75. The question remains as to whether more use could and should have been made of existing ‘tried and tested’ qualifications such as BTECs at the outset. What appears to

79 Q 96

80 Q 253

81 Q 253

82 Q 115

83 Written evidence from Edexcel [not printed]

84 See *GNVQ Withdrawal (final update)* published on QCA website at www.qca.org.uk.

have happened is that a ‘blank slate’ approach has been adopted, with the promise that convergence between the Diplomas and other awards would occur at a later stage. While we appreciate that the aim was to create something new and radical, this nevertheless seems wasteful to us and makes it likely that old lessons will have to be learned again. We urge DfES and the awarding bodies to develop urgently a strategy to make clear how existing qualifications can fold into and relate to the new Diplomas, and to spell out the equivalence and transfer possibilities of existing qualifications.

Qualifications and awards—where are we now?

76. We took evidence from Sector Skills Councils and the QCA in January 2007. Karen Price of e-skills UK told us then that the content of the first five Diplomas had largely been established, in consultation with employers. The current focus of activity was working with the awarding bodies to turn the content into examinations and schemes of work. However, she also drew attention to the scale of the work remaining:

“I still think there is a lot to do in very challenging timescales to achieve a quality output. My view is that the customers for the Diploma are employers, higher education and then young people and their parents. If we do not have a high quality product that delights those customers in 2008, we will have failed the economy and young people. There is a lot still to be done to achieve that.”⁸⁵

77. Ken Boston of the QCA, giving evidence at the same time, appeared keen to stress that much of the work was completed. He told us: “The qualification is there. There is not a great deal of scrambling around the content of the specification to be done within the next few months. The key issue is delivery.”⁸⁶ However, we were subsequently contacted by the awarding body, OCR, who said that this was categorically not the case, and that reassurances about the readiness of the qualifications had been premature. They told us:

“based on evidence presented to date, the Committee might easily under-estimate the enormity of the task still facing awarding bodies. We repeat the observation offered in our [original] written evidence that this is the shortest timescale that awarding bodies have ever been given to develop a significant suite of national qualifications.”⁸⁷

78. OCR went on to provide a list of sticking points, which include: a lack of work to date on what will be assessed; how precisely assessment will take place; and how standards are to be set and maintained over time. They conclude:

“In practice there is something of a chasm between the development of the lines of learning criteria, published by the DDPs, and the production of actual qualifications [...] OCR believes that, through Herculean efforts, it may be possible to develop the foundations of Diplomas, of a quality that all agree is essential, for delivery in 2008. We do not believe that the risks should be underplayed [...] to protect the interest of learners, the pilot should be of limited size with robust and careful monitoring and

85 Q 10

86 Q 8

87 Ev 115–116

management, involving input and support from awarding bodies every step of the way. We also feel it is essential that awarding bodies should contribute at a much earlier stage to the development of the other lines of learning so that the right relationship can be established between relevant content and sound assessment.”⁸⁸

79. The compressed nature of the later stages of the development process also raises questions about whether an adequate amount of time has been put aside for piloting elements of the new awards. The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA)—who have formed a partnership with City and Guilds to develop and deliver the units and overall awards for Diplomas—suggest this may not be the case:

“although [the] timetable is just feasible, it is tight and carries risks to the quality of the units as a result. Although the Extended Project Pilot tender has been let to AQA and another awarding body, it will not be completed until autumn 2008, after teaching begins for specialised Diplomas [...] the all important Functional Skills qualifications have undergone limited trials but pilots will not commence until September 2007 and will not report before teaching begins for specialised Diplomas. The inclusion of so many unpiloted components in a new portmanteau qualification produces a high level of risk. It will, therefore, be important for all involved to recognise the importance of evaluating the various aspects of the Diplomas in the light of operational experience and be prepared to make modifications to ensure that any lessons learnt are applied in practice.”⁸⁹

80. In our previous report on A level standards, published in 2003, we criticised the Government and the QCA for their failure to fully pilot the Curriculum 2000 reforms before pressing ahead with full implementation and in particular for not piloting the A2 exams before introduction.⁹⁰ In response to this, the Government told us:

“We recognise absolutely that there are lessons to be learnt for the future about the way in which we implement major reforms of this sort. Detailed planning and extensive trialling is essential [...]”⁹¹

In evidence, Jon Coles of the DfES confirmed that in respect of the functional skills elements of Diplomas, the full pilots would begin in September 2007 although they would not be *evaluated* before first teaching commenced in September 2008. He continued:

“In qualifications terms 2008 onwards are pilots, so they are real qualifications, they are live qualifications, people are taking them for real, but in terms of the qualifications, that is a period of piloting those qualifications.”⁹²

81. It is a matter of concern that awarding bodies have been given such little time to turn the specifications from the first five Diploma Development Partnerships into

88 Ev 115–116

89 Ev 168

90 Education and Skills Committee, Third Report of Session 2002–03, *A Level Standards*, HC 153

91 Education and Skills Committee, Third Special Report of Session 2002–03, *Government Response to the Committee’s Third Report: A-Level Standards*, HC 1026, p. 3

92 Q 322

workable qualifications which are tied to coherent learning programmes. As with teachers and lecturers, awarding bodies should have been more consistently involved in development work from an early stage; had they been, it is possible that some of the problems that later arose—for example, the unexpected reworking of Diploma content which was undertaken in order to bring about consistency across Diploma lines—could perhaps have been avoided.

82. As it stands, very complicated and detailed work has, in the case of the first five Diploma lines, been uncomfortably compressed. We very much hope that the learning programmes and qualifications which emerge will be of a high-enough quality to be accepted by the groups that matter: students, employers, HE and, of course, those who will deliver them—teachers and lecturers. Understandably given that awarding bodies began qualification development so late in the day, awarding arrangements and longer-term quality assurance procedures are not yet well-developed.

83. It also appears that although full pilots for certain elements of the Diplomas—such as the functional skills units—will have begun in September 2007, the full evaluation of the pilots will not be complete before first teaching begins in September 2008. This is a matter of concern given previous commitments the Government has made to this Committee about ensuring qualifications are properly piloted and evaluated before implementation. We would urge that when the evaluation of the pilots is complete, urgent consideration be given as to whether the current split of the proposed 14 Diplomas into three sub-sets of qualification level, making 42 in all, is likely to prove unduly complex and jeopardise acceptance by employers, universities and others.

Comparability and grading

84. Lorraine McCarthy of Moseley Park School told us that her school was planning to be involved in two Diplomas in September 2008—IT and Engineering. She was concerned about variability in terms of the demands of the different Diplomas: “It seems to me that there is a great difference in the levels in the different Diplomas and that there is no consistency, in terms of the levels, across the board, as far as I can see, on that first look.”⁹³

85. Amicus raised similar concerns about an apparent lack of consistency across Diploma lines:

“Diploma Development Partnerships are approaching their work in significantly different ways, undermining the commonality of style and approach learner and teacher expect to see in qualifications badged with a single title. Sector Skills Councils which themselves are new and disparate are struggling with their role here and are approaching it diversely. There are particular concerns that the degree of detail of specification and of depth of knowledge and understanding required differs across the work of the DDPs.”⁹⁴

However, Jon Coles of the DfES told us that he had confidence in the equivalence of the Diplomas:

93 Q 129

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“the regulatory criteria that QCA has published, does give consistency between the lines. There was an extensive piece of work done between June and November to make sure that that was the case. I have confidence that that is the case now across the five lines, so I would not be sitting here saying that there is another piece of work to be done on these five to make sure that that is the case.”⁹⁵

86. The Engineering Employers Federation, however, was not convinced that this had been achieved without the adoption of a ‘lowest common denominator’ approach—and without detriment to content. They told us:

“we have concerns that other sectors are not aiming so high in their development of level 3 S[pecialist] D[iploma]s, and that this may force compromise of the content and level of [the] Engineering [Diploma], simply to ensure equivalence.”⁹⁶

87. The issue of equivalence across all fourteen Diploma lines is a vexed one: on the one hand, some sector representatives have clearly felt at times that their particular requirements are being shoe-horned into a one-size-fits-all package not suited to sectoral needs, or that their original stipulations have been pushed aside; on the other hand, there is a clear need for equivalence for the students undertaking these courses—this is especially true if they do not choose, for whatever reason, to enter a particular industry sector.

88. Another issue linked to consistency and equivalence, which appears to still be ‘live’ is that of the grading of the Diplomas. Writing to us in March 2007, and in reference to earlier evidence given to us by the QCA and Sector Skills Councils, the OCR said:

“we felt it important to correct some potentially misleading impressions that may have arisen as a result of evidence the committee heard [previously]. [...] We would strongly suggest that, with the technical issues surrounding grading being far from ‘ticked off’, there are considerable limitations on our ability to progress Diploma development, despite a deadline which is now three months away.”⁹⁷

89. Similarly, the AQA told us that: “it is pertinent to record that all the awarding bodies are on record as being opposed to awarding Diploma grades because of the risks involved in terms of fairness to students and the credibility of the Diploma.” However, the awarding bodies’ recommendation appears not to have been taken up by the Government. The AQA suggest that grading should be based only on principal learning and on the extended projects, rather than on all the component parts of the Diploma (such as functional skills units). They argue that this more limited grading system:

“is crucial to reducing the risks involved in grading the Diplomas. Nonetheless, significant risks remain and it will be essential to monitor closely the achievements being recorded for the first Diploma students during their courses. This will enable the robustness of the proposed grading method and the utility of its results to be partially tested and confirmed before the first grades for the Diploma as a whole are issued. It is important to note that adjustments may still be necessary to the grade

95 Q 249

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standards set in the first years of the Diploma as information accumulates about the utility of the overall results.”⁹⁸

90. The OCR does say that in recent months, awarding bodies have been “invited to contribute more fully to developments. We have been pleased to see our contributions increasingly well received by DDPs, DfES and QCA. However, we do not believe this is enough and, for the first five Diplomas, it has come too late.”⁹⁹ **We are concerned that in relation to some aspects of Diplomas—for example, on the issue of grading—there does not yet appear to be consensus between partners on the approach which should be taken, or even what still remains to be done. We believe it is important that the higher education sector should be more closely involved in this process, so that the acceptance of diplomas as an alternative pathway for some into HE is not compromised.**

End-to-end oversight and risk management—the role of the DfES and Ministers

91. A clear concern in much of the evidence we received related to a perceived lack of end-to-end management of the Diploma reforms by the DfES. We understand that at the start of the Diploma development process, the programme was managed from within the DfES’s 14–19 implementation unit; ultimate management responsibility fell to the head of this unit, who was also in charge of all other aspects of the wide-ranging 14–19 reform programme. The Sector Skills Council Skillset, which has been involved in the creation of one of the first five Diplomas, told us:

“[A] major issue has been the separation between Diploma development, workforce development and communications in governance terms and reporting arrangements as this has resulted in a fragmented approach to this development and overall reform.”¹⁰⁰

92. Geoff Fieldsend of the Sector Skills Development Agency said that what was important was that the DfES retained complete managerial oversight of the Diploma project:

“the critical issue is that the senior civil servants in the Department for Education and Skills must be responsible for end-to-end management of a process and not just for policy dimensions of their areas of remit.”¹⁰¹

93. Ken Boston of the QCA said that in this respect, matters had improved in recent months:

“The QCA Board has made, over a period probably of 12 months, a number of suggestions and proposals to the DfES and to ministers about the way in which this might be managed. Those representations have been heard and they have been responded to. [...] Very significant changes have been made and were made in December. [...] We now have a structure that I think will work. It is a structure that

98 Ev 169

99 Ev 109

100 Ev 134

101 Q 3

can be made to work very effectively provided all of us who are involved in this are managing it in a disciplined, project management way, looking step-by-step, week-by-week at the developments, accountabilities and interdependencies between various bodies, between us, for example as QCA developing the qualification, and TDA [Training and Development Agency] and other bodies training the teachers to deliver the qualifications.”¹⁰²

94. The changes to which the QCA appears to be referring is the appointment of Chief Executives from several key agencies—including the QCA, Awarding Bodies and the Sector Skills Development Agency—to a Chief Executives group, which meets regularly and reports directly to the Minister in charge. Additionally, the Minister confirmed in later oral evidence that a senior permanent appointment had now been made within the DfES to a role with end-to-end management responsibility for the Diploma programme.

95. **It is unfortunate that, given the obvious scale and complexity of the Diploma programme, coherent end-to-end management, governance and reporting arrangements were not established within the DfES from the outset. We believe that there was a failure to appreciate the sheer scale and complexity of the challenge in hand. Our understanding is that now—five months from the point where the awards should be ready and workforce development is due to begin—a permanent project manager for the Diplomas has finally been appointed, who will have oversight of all management aspects. We also recognise that new arrangements have been put in place at the senior strategic and governance level, whereby Chief Executives of all the relevant agencies—including awarding bodies—meet regularly. It is crucial too that regular ministerial input and oversight of the new management arrangements should remain at the strongest and highest level possible, to ensure that the priority and delivery of diplomas within the Department’s overall workload does not slip.**

96. **Given all the concerns that have been expressed to us about whether the Diplomas are ready to be introduced, and the uncertainty about what the Diplomas are designed to achieve—whether they are vocational or practical or academic—the initial phase is vitally important. The Secretary of State said in evidence that 2008 is the “pilot stream.”¹⁰³ The Government needs to ensure that it is genuinely a pilot, and if problems are not resolved, or if further problems emerge, then the wider roll out should be delayed or reviewed in order to prevent the failure of the Diplomas.**

102 Q 8

103 Q 322

4 Implementation

97. Our concern in this inquiry has extended beyond the development of the actual Diplomas to the practical aspects of delivery. Many of those from whom we have taken evidence have shared this concern, with the Institution of Engineering Technology telling us, for example, that “At present (assuming no major change to the specification/qualification) delivery remains our number one concern.”¹⁰⁴ In this section, we discuss two main implementation issues which will have a central role in determining the success or otherwise of Diplomas: the development of collaborative, area-wide approaches to provision, and workforce development. The challenges in terms of both of these areas are significant, and will require enthusiasm and commitment from staff at the frontline, as well as sustained attention and investment from the Government. We also discuss the challenges which arise due to the multi-site nature of Diploma provision.

Collaboration and area-wide approaches to 14–19

98. The DfES has consistently made it clear that Diploma delivery will require schools and colleges to operate collaboratively, because one institution alone is highly unlikely to be able to deliver even a limited number of Diplomas, let alone provide access to the full 14, as will be required by 2013. Those from whom we took evidence were equally keen to stress the need for a joint approach. Peter Hawthorne, of Wolverhampton County Council argued that:

“[the] most important thing to do is, in each area, one has to establish what we call an infrastructure to facilitate an area approach to curriculum delivery, and I think that is the critical thing for the Diplomas. The Specialised Diplomas cannot be delivered by individual schools and colleges, or even small consortia; it requires an area-wide approach.”¹⁰⁵

Promoting more collaborative work has been the aim of several recent Government policies. In 2002, it was announced that the DfES would fund 39 *14–19 Pathfinder* partnerships, the purpose of which was to develop closer working relationships between schools and colleges in a local area, and to enable young people to follow courses at more than one local institution. The aims of the *Increased Flexibility* programme, introduced in 2001, were similar, but encouraged young people in schools between the ages of 14–16 to study part-time at a local college, often following vocational awards.

Local area partnerships—readiness

99. Collaborative working around 14–19 is therefore not strictly ‘new’, although our evidence suggests that while good practice does exist, the overall picture is a patchy one. Some, particularly those in areas with prior experience of joint working on 14–19, were relatively confident of their ability to deliver the Diplomas using a collaborative approach.

104 Ev 106

105 Q 86

Elaine McMahon of Hull College told us that her institution was part of a consortium hoping to offer the Diplomas from September 2008. She said:

“my staff believe they can and the consortium of which we are a part believe that they want to get on and get underway with this because they feel positive about it. I think they have got concerns but I do not think they are concerns that they feel they cannot overcome.”¹⁰⁶

100. The Local Government Association also emphasise the progress that has been made:

“The current extent of co-ordination between schools and colleges varies from area to area and also from course to course. Some subjects or course programmes may be more locally co-ordinated than others. However, the picture generally is one of much improved and closer linkages between schools and colleges, particularly in the context of previous inspection regimes which emphasised the 14–19 years phase and joint planning between institutions, the local Learning and Skills Council and the local authority. Further, a number of helpful lessons were learned by local authorities from the DfES’s thirty-nine 14–19 pathfinder areas. [...] many areas have developed highly innovative models of co-ordination between schools and colleges in devising new course programmes.”¹⁰⁷

101. However, the National Association of Head Teachers raised concerns that the positive experience of 14–19 Pathfinders was not widespread, and that many other areas of the country still had a very long way to go:

“Across the Local Authorities there is a huge variation in the levels of collaboration and the experience of working together. There is an alarming difference between those areas where pathfinders have been identified and the majority of the other Local Authorities. Setting aside the practical difficulties of collaboration, i.e. transport and travel difficulties as in rural areas and issues relating to joint timetabling, there are far too many areas where they lag behind the leaders in joint 14–19 provision.”¹⁰⁸

102. Recently, we have been informed that the National Audit Office will be undertaking research investigating capacity at the local partnership level to implement 14–19 reforms. The National Audit Office (NAO) scrutinises public spending on behalf of Parliament and is independent of Government. Following preliminary work to explore key issues concerning the 14–19 Reform Programme, the NAO is to undertake a study of the Programme which will investigate whether local partnerships are on track to deliver the 14–19 Reform Programme in all areas of England. The study is underpinned by four sub-issues:

- Is there full coverage and commitment from local partnerships?

106 Q 116

107 Ev 218

108 Ev 84

- Are partnerships developing the necessary governance capacity and leadership at local level?
- Are partnerships planning for sustainability and affordability?
- Is there sufficient national support and commitment to local partnerships?

The study is employing a range of methods and will review various sources of information about the local partnerships. Two of the main study methods will be in-depth case studies of six local 14–19 partnerships, and a national assessment of local progress through a survey of the Learning and Skills Council’s Partnership Directors. The study aims to make recommendations that will increase the likelihood of the success of local partnerships, given their importance to the overall success of the reforms.¹⁰⁹

103. We have been impressed by the dedication and commitment shown by those who are already well advanced with collaborative work. It will be extremely important that the lessons of areas already working in this way are fully absorbed and effectively disseminated if Diplomas are to be successful. What is more, it is preferable that only those areas with significant experience of joint working to date are involved in the early stages of implementation.

104. While good practice exists, it is clear that many local areas are some way away from the kinds of working that will be required to successfully deliver Diplomas—especially, those which have not been involved in 14–19 Pathfinders. The National Audit Office is currently undertaking a review to establish the scale of preparedness and the barriers to implementation in local areas. This is extremely welcome and we would encourage the LSC and the DfES to take full heed of the findings in planning for Diploma implementation.

A lack of incentives for collaboration?

105. The DfES note that evaluation of local 14–19 partnerships found the most successful were those which had the full involvement of all schools and colleges in their local areas.¹¹⁰ Many witnesses raised with us the importance of ensuring that a real cross-section of students undertook Diplomas, not just those perceived to be less able, and that a precursor of this would be the full and equal involvement of all different types of schools and not just schools in challenging circumstances. Karen Price of e-skills UK told us:

“It is absolutely imperative that schools across the whole range engage in this. That is very much a criterion of the Gateway process. Unless we have a cohort of all ability ranges starting in 2008, we will sentence this initiative to being for the less able and I think that would be an absolute crime.”¹¹¹

106. We agree: failure to involve all players risks casting Diplomas as the preserve of one type of institution and by implication, particular groups of young people, as opposed to a

109 Information supplied by National Audit Office.

110 Ev 55

111 Q 60

mainstream option. However, the universal involvement of all providers is far from certain. In particular, it appears that some schools may not be as aware or engaged with the Diploma reforms as might be hoped. John Bangs of the NUT told us:

“There is an extraordinary silence from our members, and it is confirmed by the LEACAN Report findings,¹¹² which says that schools really rather wish it would go away, and if they put their heads under the blanket then probably it will.”¹¹³

107. One particular problem commonly identified in the evidence we received was that the institutional drivers for becoming involved in collaborative arrangements were weak or absent, and tended instead to encourage institutional self-interest rather than collaboration and joint planning. Peter Hawthorne of Wolverhampton County Council told us that there was a track record of successful collaboration in his area, but “up and down the country people are less advanced, quite often. It is quite hard, because you are looking for a culture of collaboration where there are not any real incentives to create that; that is the hard part.”¹¹⁴

108. Paul Hafren, of Warrington Collegiate agreed, and expanded further:

“I think the model is predicated on people working interdependently when some of the systems are predicated on people working independently, and so there is a collision there. To some extent, the Diploma development is ahead of the systems that the individual partners have to work with, such as funding or inspection, performance, measurement, and so on and so forth. Those things need to be resolved, I think, to come more in alignment with the spirit of Diploma development.”¹¹⁵

109. One particular area of concern was that of the continued existence of performance tables, which measure individual institutions against one another on the basis of exam results achieved by registered students. The tables, it was argued, had been one factor promoting a culture of competition, as opposed to collaboration, between schools themselves and between schools and other institutions in an area. The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) argued:

“Undoubtedly the existence of performance tables has contributed to a degree of competition between schools, which are subject to those pressures, and colleges, which may not be. Certainly schools have been working hard to avoid losing less able students to colleges in their area, leading to the development of new courses in popular, emerging subjects which were formerly more often found in colleges (Psychology, Sociology and PE, for example).”¹¹⁶

112 LEACAN, *Current Developments towards implementation of 14–19 reform in local authorities*, August 2006.

113 Q 103

114 Q 158

115 Q 159

116 Ev 169

110. The issues raised by our witnesses regarding conflicting drivers have also been noted by the Nuffield Foundation in their most recent annual report on the 14–19 reform programme. They argue:

“policy proposals that come from outside the 14–19 reform arena [...] make collaboration much more difficult, time consuming, inefficient and potentially unstable. There are measures within the 14–19 Implementation Plan that are intended to address these issues: the statutory requirement for schools to provide learners with the full 14–19 Entitlement; the introduction of progression targets which make schools responsible for the destinations of all their Year 11 learners; the requirement for each area to have a 14–19 Partnership; and the provision of a joint area prospectus. However, these remain weak in comparison with the measures [...] that encourage competition.”¹¹⁷

111. Given the concerns outlined above in terms of perverse drivers in the system, we put it to the Minister that other than the willingness of institutions to work together for the collective good of their pupils, there was really very little in the system to positively encourage collaboration. Jim Knight responded:

“The [Diploma] Gateway has collaboration built into it and that is quite a strong lever. This notion of giving learner choice by them being able to learn at more than one institution is quite a strong driver, and obviously the entitlement that we are saying in all areas we are going to offer from 2013 is completely dependent on collaboration from 14–19. In the end, I think that starts to resolve the tension which here you quite rightly are concerned about around schools competing and, at the same time, collaborating.”¹¹⁸

112. Jon Coles of the DfES added that schools, like local authorities, had been placed under a statutory duty in the Education and Inspections Act of 2006 to “deliver all 14 Diploma lines [...] There is not a school in the country which could offer all 14 Diplomas at all three levels and do it with any degree of quality. In fact, it is not merely an incentive, it is somewhere close to being a requirement for them to work in that way.”¹¹⁹

113. It is vital that as many providers as possible in an area are actively and meaningfully involved in local 14–19 partnerships. The statutory requirement in the Education Act 2006 for schools to collaborate is very welcome for that reason. However, the effect of some other policy levers is contradictory. In particular, it is hard to see how individual institutional performance tables will offer a meaningful measure in a collaborative system, or immediately reward those that adopt a collegiate approach. If collaborative approaches to 14–19 provision are to become the norm, the Government needs to look again at the mechanisms for recognising achievements in collaborative provision. Existing tensions need to be resolved, or they risk seriously undermining the welcome messages in recent rhetoric about the importance of collaboration and the adoption of shared responsibility.

117 The Nuffield Review of 14–19 Education and Training, *Annual Report*, January 2007, University of Oxford Department of Educational Studies, Oxford.

118 Q 271

119 Q 272

Funding

114. Several of those giving evidence have pointed out that Diplomas are likely to be a costly option for a range of reasons, including the nature of the specialist facilities and practical learning involved, the costs of travel between sites, the running of smaller classes in some cases, and the administrative requirements of area-wide approaches. The Association of School and College Leaders urged: “the Government must recognise that collaboration costs money. Diplomas are an expensive option and this must be reflected in the funding of schools and colleges.”¹²⁰ Similarly, the University and College Union describe:

“concerns on the part of both schools and colleges around funding and its uncertainty. For schools the issues are around off-site delivery and the cost involved. For colleges the concern is especially the cost of non-teaching activities. The biggest issue overall is uncertainty. This includes concerns about the volume of future funding and the resources needed to sustain Diploma provision.”¹²¹

115. On the 7 March 2007, the DfES published a consultation document covering early years, school and 14–16 funding in the context of 14–19 reform.¹²² The consultation document explicitly states that the current funding system was “unlikely to be robust enough” to support the roll-out of Diplomas, and makes a number of proposals on how Diplomas for 14–16 year olds might be funded during the period 2008–2011.¹²³ Most importantly, it proposes funding Diplomas for 14–16 year olds initially through a discrete grant rather than through the Dedicated Schools Grant, and seeks views on three models for distributing this discrete Diploma funding to partnerships. These are:

- Option 1—the creation of a central funding pool, where funds would be retained by the local authority and distributed to providers to cover costs.
- Option 2—the creation of a central funding pool with partial delegation to schools.
- Option 3—the complete delegation of funding to schools.

The DfES proposes that the final decision on which particular model to use should be left to local authorities to decide. The consultation is due to close in June 2007.

116. Secondly, the consultation document suggests a model for estimating the actual costs of Diploma delivery. This, it is intended, would provide a basis for institutions such as colleges to charge partner schools for the costs they incur educating 14–16 year olds. The proposal here is to create ‘baseline’ national rates for elements of Diplomas—in effect, to set out a guaranteed ‘minimum’ of funding, while also building in mechanisms for a degree of local flexibility in calculating precise costs.

120 Ev 138

121 Ev 155

122 Department for Education and Skills, *Consultation on school, early years and 14–16 funding 2008–11*, March 2007.

123 Department for Education and Skills, *Consultation on school, early years and 14–16 funding 2008–11*, March 2007, para 145.

117. Additionally, the LSC has recently undertaken a consultation on funding arrangements at 16–19. This document took forward a previous Government commitment to develop a common funding system for all 16–19 year-olds, regardless of whether they were studying in college, school or at another training provider.

118. We are pleased that the Government is actively consulting on aspects of the funding arrangements for Diplomas, and has explicitly recognised that the current systems are unlikely to be sufficiently robust to support successful Diploma delivery. We are also pleased that the proposals to use a common funding model for 16–18 learners whether in schools or in colleges are being taken forward. We look forward to the outcomes of these consultations.

A single funding system for 14–19?

119. Currently, money for students up to the age of 16 is routed through local authorities, while funding for 16–19 year-olds is routed through the Learning and Skills Council. Given that 14–19 is now conceived of by the Government as a coherent phase in education, the question arises as to whether it would ultimately make sense to create a single funding system reflecting this. However, the DfES consultation on 14–16 funding published in March 2007 stated that this option was not being considered further. It explained:

“In broad terms, we propose to retain the current funding arrangements for pre- and post-16 provision over the CSR period [...]. Other options, such as the creation of a single 14–19 funding system or funding learners through the institution at which they spend most time, present very significant practical and legislative barriers.”¹²⁴

120. We asked the Secretary of State why this was the case, and whether it in fact made sense, in the long term, to maintain separate systems for 14–16 and for 16–19 funding. He told us:

“We do not see a case for changing the funding arrangements during that three-year period. There may be a very good case to changing the funding arrangements after that.”¹²⁵

121. Given the emphasis being placed on 14–19 as a distinct phase, and the centrality of funding in driving provision, we were initially disappointed that the option of creating a single 14–19 funding system appeared not to be being considered further. The creation of a single funding system for 14–19 learners may indeed present significant legal and practical challenges, as the Government asserts, but the potential rewards of a single system could also be very significant indeed. We therefore welcome the Secretary of State’s later clarification that a single 14–19 funding system may still be considered in the medium-term, after the next Comprehensive Spending Review period and recommend that they make an explicit commitment to analysing the likely benefits and costs of such an approach.

124 *Ibid.*, para 149

125 Q 290

16–19 expansion

122. The Education and Inspection Act 2006 introduced new powers for schools to expand ‘high quality’ provision for 16–19 year olds where there was demand from parents and students. A parallel ‘presumption’ toward expansion has been extended to FE colleges, where that expansion meets the needs of the new Diplomas. The DfES told us:

“Allowing the expansion of high performing schools and FE colleges to deliver post-16 provision will create a stronger and more robust system for delivering the new Diplomas. Choice is a powerful lever for driving up quality and we believe that it is best delivered by giving institutions greater autonomy in serving their local markets so that successful provision can expand and local strengths be fully exploited. Diplomas will stimulate the development of local partnerships of autonomous institutions, each contributing their individual strengths to create a high quality, broad-based offer that meets the needs of all young people in the area.”¹²⁶

123. However, other evidence we have received questions this. Some have suggested that the existence of two parallel presumptions may make local co-ordination of 14–19 provision more challenging, not less so, particularly in an era where there are likely to be falling rolls due to demographic contraction in the 11–19 age group. The Association of Colleges told us:

“The new presumption for expansion that now applies to colleges as well as schools creates another layer of complexity in the new approach to young people’s education, now that institutions need to work collaboratively to deliver the curriculum. It also presents an added risk to partnership development. Allowing more providers to expand does not necessarily have the effect of increasing choice, but can act in the reverse direction to diminish the range of options open to young people. [...] school sixth forms and colleges expansion can only dilute the volume of learners and make the management of their learning more problematic. Size does matter, in maximising the potential for viable groups, offering a wider choice of options and the spread of learning lines, from Apprenticeships to Baccalaureate. Recent research has shown that larger sixth forms perform better than those with fewer students. [...] The opening of new provision can have a significant disrupting effect, not just on one neighbouring institution, but on a whole area. And we are not persuaded that the presumption can be justified in that it always drives up quality—rather it could deplete the local supply of sector specialists and dissipate resources.”¹²⁷

124. We believe this is a valid point: there seems to be a direct contradiction between two different DfES policies. On the one hand, the ‘presumption arrangements’ seem to be based on the notion that expansion and contraction of provision should be driven primarily by user choice, and that decisions should be taken at the institutional level. Yet, the realities of the Diploma programme are such that areas are unlikely to be able to provide a sufficiently broad range of choice for learners without engaging in some form of rationalisation and joint capacity planning. **We remain unconvinced by the Government’s argument that**

126 Ev 55

127 Ev 147

the ‘choice’ and self-determination agenda gels completely with the more co-ordinated and planning-led approach necessitated by Diplomas.

Role of local authorities

125. The DfES was keen to emphasise in evidence to us that local authorities held a key strategic responsibility to secure collaboration, as well as a statutory responsibility, under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, to ensure coherent provision at 14–19.¹²⁸ We explored with witnesses the importance of the local authority role in relation to Diplomas (and 14–19 provision more generally), and examined whether they were currently delivering.

126. Several of those who gave evidence to us emphasised that strategic leadership at the local level was central to achieving coherent, co-ordinated provision at 14–19. Dr Elaine McMahon of Hull College told us:

“First and foremost, I think, over and above the things that we have been talking about, like staff development, etc., is leadership, and strategic leadership, in an area and across an area. By that, I mean, with Building Schools for the Future, aligning that with the support that the LSCs give and Government Office give to colleges with their capital bills. Unless we have an overarching capital resource for an area and an alignment which delivers this long term, we are going to get duplication and the use of public purse money to build a skills centre here and another skills centre there by different routes. Really it does all hinge on joined-up, strategic planning for a community and I think that is a big challenge, because institutions all have their own rationale and reasons for being. I think where it will work effectively is where people can see that they have to contribute to that bigger picture and that there is an incentive to do so.”¹²⁹

127. This raises the question of how local authorities are performing, as a whole in their role of promoting and facilitating collaboration. The DfES told us: “Evidence from regional conferences and Government Offices shows that L[ocal] A[uthoritie]s are taking an increasingly strategic overview of 14–19 provision in their areas.”¹³⁰ However, the University and College Union appeared to challenge this, saying:

“The Education and Inspection Act gives local authorities the statutory responsibility to deliver an entitlement to all 14–19 year olds to access the Diploma. But it is not clear what powers local authorities will have to enforce the entitlement or to ensure the introduction of all the Diploma lines within a local area.”¹³¹

128 Q 272

129 Q 142

130 Ev 55

131 Ev 148

Similarly, the National Association of Head Teachers, commenting on the assistance and guidance provided by local authorities and LSCs, claim that there is “a range of readiness, from hesitantly enthusiastic to frighteningly unaware”.¹³²

128. The DfES says it will be up to local authorities to ensure a joined-up approach, and that they have the strategic responsibility for ensuring coherence. Some have leapt at the challenge, and are effectively supporting joint working in their area. However, our evidence suggests that not all local authorities currently see themselves as having this role. The DfES needs to send a clear message that local authorities have the responsibility to co-ordinate local provision, and crucially, ensure they have the means to do so. We have said above that incentives in the system which promote competition must be revisited: it should not be up to local authorities, or a few particularly enthusiastic institutions, for that matter, to ‘square the circle’. The DfES also needs to monitor the effectiveness of LSCs in supporting partnerships, given its recent restructuring.

Involvement of employers in local partnerships

129. The DfES says it expects employers to be involved not just in the design and development of Diplomas, but also in local partnership arrangements:

“Employer involvement in the teaching of Diplomas is particularly important if the experience for the young person is to be materially different. This is partly about providing good quality work experience, but it is also about [providing] a stimulating curriculum through bringing employers into schools and colleges and generating industry relevant tasks and materials.”¹³³

130. The DfES also told us that it expected Sector Skills Councils and Education Business Partnerships to play a key role in engaging employers in local partnerships. Some of the evidence we have received suggests that currently, this may not be happening in practice. Dr Elaine McMahon of Hull College indicated that employers in her area were not currently putting themselves forward to become involved:

“Employers are not coming to us and saying “The Sector Skills Councils advised us and we’re keen to take this up and lead;” we are having to engage with our current employers, drip-feeding, as we are drip-fed, some of this, as to what it will mean. It will take a concerted effort from all parties engaged in this to convince employers that this new Specialised Diploma is going to do more for them than what exists at the moment.”¹³⁴

131. However, evidence from Sector Skills Councils themselves pointed to examples whereby productive links had been formed between providers and employers. E-Skills UK, for example, described an initiative whereby local employers and teachers had worked together to jointly establish extra-curricular ‘computer clubs for girls’, for learners aged 10–13, in 2,000 schools nation-wide.

132 Ev 85

133 Ev 55

134 Q 127

132. We agree with the DfES that employer participation in local partnership provision will be fundamental to success. However, it is not yet clear whether there will be the hoped-for employer engagement in support of local Diploma activity. Some successful programmes linking employers, teachers and learners do currently exist, but the required scale and quality of employer involvement will be much greater if Diplomas are to be a success. Close attention will need to be paid to the experience of the first Diploma pilot areas, and good practice needs to be widely distributed. We also hope that the report on partnership preparedness (referred to in paragraph 101, above) may take account of the extent to which employers are engaged in local arrangements—and the success or otherwise that Sector Skills Councils and Education Business Partnerships are having in brokering linkages.

133. A particular concern in relation to employer engagement centres on work experience placements. As part of their Diploma programme, learners will be placed with a ‘real’ employer in a relevant sector for a minimum of ten days. This is in addition to the requirement for 50% of principal learning to be spent in a ‘work-related’ environment. The challenge of finding sufficient high-quality work placements appears to concern many. The Institution of Engineering Technology comments: “[work experience] is fraught with difficulty and a number of issues need to be addressed not least: the availability of a sufficient numbers of placements; the quality, relevance, consistency and sustainability of placements; health and safety requirements; and administrative workload.”¹³⁵ Others expressed similar worries, especially concerning the possibility that health and safety regulations may in effect prevent younger learners being placed in some ‘real’ workplaces—for example, on construction sites.¹³⁶

134. Peter Hawthorne of Wolverhampton County Council described his experience of work placements and broader employer engagement as follows:

“you have got to incentivise engagement with the Diplomas by making it real for those small employers. That is the absolutely critical fact. I think that we will develop the engagement with employers from the operational background we have already got. [...] 20 per cent of our students doing Key Stage 4 do one day a week work-based learning with a training provider or an employer which is linked to, say, a BTEC in their taught curriculum. That can be relevant to an employer; an employer may have a student for one day a week for two years and they can make it work really, really well for them. It is understanding the agendas of the small employer which, to my mind, is the absolutely critical issue, because you cannot expect them to put their hands in their pockets to support the education system, as they see it. It has got to work for them; that is the really hard part.”¹³⁷

135. If the Diplomas are to take off in the way that the Government hopes, this will require a substantial increase in the availability of quality work placements for learners, as well as developing the capacity of teaching staff—particularly, those in schools—to liaise with employers and design placements that are mutually beneficial to learner and employer. Again, making use of the experience of those areas already well-advanced with the 14–19

135 Ev 106

¹³⁶ See for example memorandum from the Electrical Contractors Association, Ev 102

137 Q 122

agenda will be vital. This practical knowledge needs to be effectively shared with areas which have less experience in this regard.

Practical challenges—transport, timetabling and tracking

136. Multi-site provision will of course demand more movement between institutions for students and possibly staff, too. The *Increased Flexibility* and *14–19 Pathfinder* areas have been trialling approaches to making this a practical reality, although often on quite a small scale. Challenges identified in evaluation reports for both these projects include: co-ordinating timetables to ensure that young people can choose the options which suit them best; ensuring the availability of safe and cost-effective transport between sites; and monitoring performance, behaviour and attendance among a mobile student population.¹³⁸ Those from areas with experience to date of joint working were keen to emphasise the significance of these challenges, although they also stressed that a careful, systematic approach involving all parties in planning could bear fruit. Peter Hawthorne of Wolverhampton County Council told us:

“we have done a lot of work on timetabling and curriculum models, common understandings of standards, the area prospectus and electronic I[n]dividual L[earning] P[lans] and the policies, the protocols, the principles, to make it all work so that learners can benefit from specialist provision from specialist providers”¹³⁹

137. Lorraine McCarthy of Moseley Park School and also part of the Wolverhampton Partnership indicated that she was confident that their experience to date in dealing with the ‘practical’ issues of co-ordination would greatly help with Diploma implementation:

“we started doing common timetabling post-16 as a way of increasing post-16 retention and a wider offer for the students, and now obviously we are moving that down to pre-16. I would say [...] that the underpinning systems are absolutely crucial, that to get everybody working together and collaborating you have to have the systems in place to enable that to happen. Because we have got that in Wolverhampton, we feel that being able to deliver the Specialised Diploma should be an easy transition.”¹⁴⁰

138. The DfES has provided specific support and encouragement for institutions to manage the more mobile student populations that the Diplomas will create. In November 2005 it published a *Manual of Good Practice from 14–19 Pathfinders*. This contained “advice on collaborative working and developed case studies to show how any challenges around transport, timetabling and pastoral support could be tackled.”¹⁴¹ In 2005/06, it also established a programme of learning visits enabling those in areas which have advanced

138 See for example Department for Education and Skills, *Evaluation of Increased Flexibility for 14–16 Year Olds Programme: Delivery for Cohorts 3 and 4 and the Future*, RR 790, August 2006, (National Foundation for Educational Research); Department for Education and Skills, *Collaborative Approaches to 14–19 Provision: an Evaluation of the Second Year of the 14–19 Pathfinder Initiative*, RR 642, May 2005, (Higham, D. and Yeomans, D., University of Leeds)

139 Q 86

140 Q 91

141 Ev 55

quickly in terms of developing collaborative arrangements to share their knowledge and experience with those at a less advanced stage.

139. **The multi-site, multi-institutional nature of Diploma delivery inevitably raises significant management challenges around timetabling, transportation, and the monitoring of a mobile student population. These challenges should not be underestimated—particularly in rural areas where institutions may be located considerable distances apart and travel between multiple institutions may be prohibitively costly, or impractical. However, some areas—and particularly those which have been involved in the *Increased Flexibility* and *14–19 Pathfinder* programmes—now have significant experience of dealing with these challenges in constructive ways. It is vital that their experience is built on, and we see some positive signs that the DfES is doing this—for example, by facilitating ‘learning visits’ and the publication of best-practice materials. We also hope the National Audit Office’s report will suggest ways in which best practice from more advanced areas can be more effectively shared.**

The Diploma gateway process

140. In order to deliver the Diplomas, consortia must pass through a ‘Diploma gateway’. In effect, this is a screening mechanism designed to assess “the strength of partnerships [...] and the robustness of plans to appropriately resource Diploma delivery.”¹⁴² Gateway panels are convened on a regional basis, and contain representation from Government Offices, LSCs, and Diploma Development Partnerships. The deadline for the first round of gateway applications (for delivery of Diplomas in September 2008) was in December 2006. 342 consortia applied, and on the 28 March 2007 the DfES published a list of the gradings that had been awarded. 145 consortia, across 97 English local authority areas were deemed to have passed through the Gateway. There will be places for up to 40,000 students in September 2008.

141. Many of those giving evidence to us saw the primary function of the Diploma gateways as strictly controlling the roll-out of the programme, ensuring that only high-quality, experienced consortia were able to become involved in the first round of delivery. Ken Boston of the QCA argued: “it is the essence of the gateway process that it really in fact restricts the take-up of the Diplomas to areas where [...] partnerships are effective”¹⁴³

142. When we asked the Minister whether he thought it was important that the Diploma gateways functioned in this way—and what his response would be if the initial number of those passing through was consequently very small, he told us:

“I am very happy to tell the Committee that of the assessments going around region-by-region we are getting a feel now for the level of quality, and the question of a minimum does not really arise. Equally, the question of not being able to get to September 2008 on the basis of quality I do not think arises. We have much more confidence of that now that we have seen and been able to assess applications. But if it ended up with only half a dozen getting through—and, as I say, we know that is

142 Ev 56

143 Q 17

not going to be the case—then it would be half a dozen on the basis of quality, and that is the right judgment.”¹⁴⁴

143. The Diploma gateways, in principle at least, look likely to play an essential role in the success of the reform programme if they set consistently high standards which are independently applied, and they should also provide a safeguard against an overly hasty roll-out. We welcome the Minister’s emphasis that the Diploma gateway process needs to be rigorous, and set high quality thresholds. At the time of writing, the results of the application process have only just been announced. It is therefore still too early to speculate on the effectiveness of the gateways as arbiters of quality, but this is an area over which we intend to keep a watching brief.

144. During our inquiry, we took evidence from a number of providers who had been part of consortia applying for the first ‘round’ of the Diploma gateway. We were left with the impression that the process may not have been entirely satisfactory for them. Some raised the point that the criteria that consortia were being judged against had not been completely transparent—despite general guidance being issued on the areas that would be taken into consideration. Dr Elaine McMahon of Hull College told us in relation to her consortia’s application: “we have submitted on the criteria headlines, collectively, we have written it together, with the college leading, but we do not know what the selection criteria are. I do not know, anyway.”¹⁴⁵ Paul Hafren of Warrington Collegiate told us that in the long run he would like to see “a greater transparency about what the criteria are against which the proposals in the Gateway process are being measured.”¹⁴⁶

145. The Minister denied that there had been insufficient information provided to consortia, regarding the criteria and standards they would be judged against. He told us:

“the self-evaluation form that all of the partnerships had to complete works in five sections, with a local authority statement at the end, and they cover the basic criteria in which we want to see quality—collaboration, workforce development, facilities, information, advice and guidance and employer engagement. It ought to be clear, given that they all fill out this form and it is separated into sections on that basis with, I think, three questions under each of those headings, that those will be the criteria against which we will be judging them on a regional basis.”¹⁴⁷

146. This may be true, but it needs to be pointed out that criteria are not the same as standards. While consortia were provided with a list of essential and desirable criteria to write against, it does not necessarily follow that it was equally clear to them where the bar would be set or what weight of evidence would be deemed sufficient grounds for the granting of approvals. At the point when we took evidence, it appeared that there was still a degree of uncertainty about the standards which would be applied to determine whether bids were successful or not—although extended criteria were provided for bidders to write against. This situation was complicated by the fact that the final specifications for the

144 Q 217

145 Q 183

146 Q 106

147 Q 209

Diplomas were not known by the date that gateway bids had to be lodged. **After the announcement of decisions on the first round of applications to the gateway, the DfES committed to giving detailed feedback to particular areas on the reasons for their success or failure. We understand that this has now taken place. This is welcome, but more publicly available information on the criteria and standards which Diploma gateways are applying would be welcome, both to help potential applicants, and also to provide reassurance that gateways are setting consistent, and consistently high, benchmarks.**

Information, advice and guidance

147. The Diplomas are intended to increase choice for young people. The introduction of 14 Diploma lines, each offered at three different levels, clearly has the potential to complicate the decisions young people have to make at 14. Many of those from whom we took evidence were keen to impress on us the importance of action to improve the availability and quality of information, advice and guidance [IAG] in support of the Diplomas. Peter Hawthorne, of Wolverhampton County Council, told us:

“I think we have got to put a new emphasis on the aspirational side of the Diplomas, because I think they will be transformational if they can be personalised, and by personalising them we put learners into an incredibly complex myriad of local provision. Communication and guidance will be an absolute premium [...]”¹⁴⁸

148. The LSC told us that they would like to see “a package of workforce development [...] made] available for those pastoral managers, teachers, lecturers and guidance professionals who have a role in advising young people and will need to know more about the make-up of the Diplomas and possible progression routes in order to advise young people of career pathways.”¹⁴⁹

149. The DfES says that improvements to IAG are currently underway as part of the overarching programme of 14–19 reform. Proposals to develop a set of quality standards for Information, Advice and Guidance were introduced in the *Youth Matters* Green Paper, published in July 2005, and the standards are due to be published in April 2007. Additionally, responsibility for the Connexions service is being gradually transferred to Children’s Trusts and all funding for this service will be channelled through Trusts from 2008. It is less clear what other activity is taking place, particularly in terms of actual staff training, or whether the plans for improving IAG will be explicitly tied to the timetable for the introduction of the Diplomas. **The DfES needs to make clear what plans are underway to develop the capacity of those responsible for guiding young people through the many different options which will be available to them from the age of 14. It also needs to demonstrate that any programme of improvements to information, advice and guidance services planned as part of the wider 14–19 reforms is explicitly tied to the introduction of the Diplomas.**

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149 Ev 175

Workforce Development

150. In order to deliver the Diplomas, it will inevitably be the case that many of the staff in schools and colleges need some form of specialised training—whether in technical skills or teaching skills, or more generally in terms of the skills needed to make collaboration successful. The DfES has final responsibility for forming the strategy around workforce development for the Diplomas. Currently, responsibility for this is devolved to a six-organisation partnership, led by Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), the sector skills council for further and higher education, and the Training and Development Agency for schools. LLUK describe the main components of this programme in their submission:

- “Report on good practice in delivering 14–19 pathfinders and increased flexibility programmes, specifically looking at developing and supporting the workforce
- A Training Needs Analysis tool to support those centres that pass through the ‘gateway’
- Guidance as to the professional development needs of teachers delivering the Diplomas
- An Information, advice and guidance service on Continuing Professional Development and Initial Teacher Training for schools, colleges and training providers
- Industrial updating programme.
- An in-service route to QTLS (Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills) status available from 2008 for new teachers.
- 2.3.7 Review of the needs of support staff.”¹⁵⁰

151. We were concerned to explore the level of staff preparation that would be needed to deliver the Diplomas effectively, both in terms of the first tranche of Diplomas in 2008 and more generally as the national roll-out proceeds. Almost all the evidence we received stressed that there was still a very significant amount of work to be done. Ken Boston of the QCA remarked:

“There are of course teachers out there in FE and schools and people in industry who can deliver this work—they do not all have to be trained from the start—but there are not sufficient of them to take up the difference between what we now have as a 79 per cent participation rate and the 90 or 95 % participation rate we want. Those teachers are not there at the moment. They have to be created; they have to be recruited and trained, and that will take time.”¹⁵¹

152. Karen Price of e-skills UK gave us her assessment of current knowledge about workforce readiness, and suggested a solution for future development. On the issue of whether the workforce would be sufficiently well prepared in time for September 2008, she

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151 Q 17

told us that in her opinion “there is a risk it will not be” and continued that what was currently missing was an analysis of capacity levels in the existing workforce, and planning based on this:

“What we are looking for is a gap analysis of teacher skills between their readiness and the journey needed to deliver first teaching in 2008. If the gap is huge, the answer is obviously to devote more money to fewer teachers to get a quality programme. I think that is an essential part of the process now. If the gap is small, we can have more institutions delivering in 2008. That is our proposal.”¹⁵²

153. Godfrey Glyn of Burton Peveril Sixth Form College argued that even in relatively advanced 14–19 partnerships, the development needs were still significant:

“I think staff at all levels, including management, will need training and time, particularly time, to develop new ways of working together, because you are going to have to develop teams across colleges and across schools for it to work effectively. I spoke originally about the fact that we have got a consortium and in a sense it is a strong consortium, in relative terms, but it has still got an awfully long way to go in terms of its future development if we are going to deliver the dream. It will require staff to look differently at each other, to work with other people from different backgrounds, and there are all kinds of issues around contracts and rates of pay over that one.”¹⁵³

154. The DfES has proposed that the “essential package” of Continuing Professional Development would consist of three days’ face to face training, supplemented by other materials and coaching where appropriate.¹⁵⁴ We asked witnesses whether they thought this was adequate to develop the skills needed. Paul Hafren, of Warrington Collegiate, told us:

“[...] if we were spinning a fly-wheel and the three days was used to get it moving and then you had some more days which kept it moving and then it accelerated in its own way, because it is all going in the right direction, fine. If we are trying to create a revolution on the basis of three days’ worth of training, no, it is not, it is woefully inadequate; but I guess it is a start and that what we need to do is learn as we are going and adjust accordingly and keep at it. I think robust persistence will be needed if it is not to fade away like other initiatives have done.”¹⁵⁵

155. We put it to the Minister that the basic three day entitlement might be considered insufficient. He rejected this, saying:

“we have a workforce with the skills and, again, that is something that we are measuring through the Gateway. The process of the three-day CPD for the teaching workforce is to take those parts and add value by bringing them together to fashion this new culture of teaching and learning and, in some cases, to give some refresh to

152 Q 67

153 Q 139

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155 Q 144

what happens in the workplace, and one of the days would be in a workplace setting. So a certain amount of updating of what is practised at the moment. I am happy that we have it about right in terms of the three days.”¹⁵⁶

156. **The DfES says the essential package of workforce development will initially consist of three days’ face-to-face training. This seems to us—and to many of our witnesses—inadequate. It is true that the workforce is not a blank slate, insofar as there are skilled and experienced staff in both schools and colleges with relevant teaching expertise. However, we remain to be convinced that the workforce development requirements for the Diplomas have been effectively costed and that sufficient resources have been allocated on this basis. We ask the Government to supply us with information which proves this sort of underpinning analysis has been undertaken or is in progress.**

157. One of the key challenges for local partnerships is learning the new ways of working together—across institutions—that Diplomas will demand. Paul Hafren, of Warrington Collegiate, told us there were fundamental development needs around:

“subverting institutional self-interest in pursuit of the best for an individual pupil. That I think is a big challenge; that level of sophistication probably does not exist at the moment and needs to be developed. I am not aware of a development programme which has been worked up in the same way that a technical development programme is being worked up [...] The ways of working, working interdependently, are much more challenging, because the model that we exist in at the moment is predicated primarily on performance being measured at institutional level and what is emerging is a collective way of delivering to individuals.”¹⁵⁷

158. In many places, collaborative working is something staff have been coming to terms with for some time, but for many in areas where partnerships are still in their infancy, the scale of the challenge will be greater. **The workforce development needs relating to Diplomas go beyond obvious technical knowledge-base and pedagogy, and are especially acute around collaborative, cross-institutional working. We see little immediate sign of this being reflected in current workforce development strategies or plans, and would like to see this rectified.**

159. Another key issue relating to workforce development is the timeframe for the delivery of the various training packages, and also the target groups. Teaching for the first Diplomas is due to begin in September 2008. In the section above, on the development process surrounding the Diplomas, we suggested that a failure to involve teachers at an early enough stage in the process has left them to some extent in the dark regarding the final shape of the Diplomas. Clearly, time is now limited for remedying this.

160. The Association of Colleges points out that a ‘natural window’ for training and development activities was the end of the summer term 2007—at the time of writing, only three to four months away.¹⁵⁸ However, it appears that the workforce development activities proper will not begin until October 2007 at the earliest. The DfES told us that the

156 Q 258

157 Q141

158 Ev 145

tender for the delivery of the workforce development package had already been let to two companies.¹⁵⁹ In terms of actual courses:

“once we have made the decisions on the Gateway in March then the work begins from that point [...] So people are starting work now on the generic teaching materials. We would expect actual professional development to be delivered from October this year. Theoretically it will be available from September—September is not a great month, of course, for schools to be looking at professional development, so from October onwards. We would expect, as I say, in general the delivery to be two days of professional development probably in the period before Christmas and then a day subsequent to that.”¹⁶⁰

161. It is unfortunate that the delivery of formalised workforce development activities in support of the Diplomas cannot be started in the natural window which will be present at the end of the summer 2007 term. It is now imperative that the plans for workforce development delivery arrangements are clearly communicated, and information about when training will be available is communicated to those who will be expected to undertake it.

162. The DfES initially told us that resources for workforce development would initially be concentrated on those who pass through the gateway for first teaching in September 2008. Some of those from whom we took evidence were concerned therefore about what priority would be afforded to support and guidance for consortia which applied but failed to pass through the gateway, or to areas which did not apply and/ or have the furthest distance to travel. Lifelong Learning UK, one of the key partners in the workforce development activities surrounding the Diplomas recommended that: “support is put in place for those that fail the gateway to ensure that by 2010-13 they are ready to start delivering the Diplomas. This is particularly important in rural areas.”¹⁶¹ The LSC makes a similar call.¹⁶²

163. When the Diploma gateway results were announced, however, the DfES indicated it was now expecting to extend resources for workforce development also to those areas that had been judged not ready to begin delivery in 2008, but likely to be going ahead in 2009.

164. Initially, the DfES implied that workforce development support would be focused on successful gateway applicant areas. Subsequently, they have confirmed that support will be extended to those due to begin offering Diplomas in September 2009. This is very welcome. However, it is less certain what support will be extended to those areas with the furthest to travel—and the risk is that they could fall even further behind in relative terms. The DfES and partners need to produce, with some urgency, forward plans for specific, costed, and time-tabled actions to address the staff development needs in the least advanced areas if the entitlement in 2013 is to be deliverable.

159 These were Nord Anglia Education Ltd., and the Learning and Skills Network.

160 Q 263

161 Ev 92

162 Ev 175

Bunching of reforms

165. Alongside the introduction of the first five Diplomas in September 2008, parallel changes are planned to other parts of the school curriculum. These include changes to the GCE A Level framework and the introduction of functional skills units into Maths and English GCSEs, plus the launch of a revised version of the key stage 3 curriculum. The NUT told us that they were worried about this bunching of reforms and said that it was “unacceptable”.¹⁶³

166. We asked the QCA, which has responsibility for curricular issues, whether it foresaw problems following from the number of changes which were occurring at the same time. Ken Boston told us:

“2008 is shaping up as a pretty crowded year. We have the new specifications for A levels coming in with fewer assessment units with most subjects from six to four and with the introduction of the new A star. I believe it is perfectly achievable but there is no doubt that it will need to be well managed. One critical aspect of that management is monitoring and ameliorating the impact on schools. Not every school by any means will be introducing Diplomas but all of them will have changes coming to GCEs and GCSEs and the key stage three work. That will need to be managed very carefully and supported very carefully. That is a key issue at the moment both for the QCA board and for the DfES as a whole. Be in no doubt that if we felt that this was not going to be manageable and was going to lead to problems we would be the first to be saying we need to look at this again.”¹⁶⁴

167. The introduction of significant changes to qualifications such as A levels and GCSEs alongside the first Diploma lines needs to be very carefully managed if it is not to cause ‘initiative overload’, especially in areas that will deliver the first Diplomas. What is more, the crowding of curriculum revisions in 2008 seems to us another major justification for keeping the Diploma implementation on a small-scale initially, giving other changes a chance to bed down.

Planned communication programmes

168. As we noted in section one of this report, Diplomas already appear complicated in terms of their aims, objectives and structures, which would need careful explanation if they were to be a success. In this section, we therefore focus on the measures that are being proposed to ensure wider understanding, recognition and acceptance of the Diploma programme among schools, colleges, employers, higher education—and crucially, parents and learners.

169. With regard to support from higher education, the union Amicus (some of whose members work for awarding bodies involved in developing the Diplomas) suggest there is very little room for complacency, even at this early stage. They told us that they were “getting indications that only the former polytechnic universities will take it [the Diploma]

163 Ev 34

164 Q 69

seriously in terms of UCAS tariff.”¹⁶⁵ If proved true in practice, this would be very alarming. Early in our inquiry, Ken Boston of the QCA delivered a stark warning, saying that should Diplomas fail to appeal to the full ability range, they would not be accepted by universities and as a consequence “will fail”.¹⁶⁶ Very many others submitting evidence to us reached similar conclusions, including Godfrey Glyn of Barton Peveril Sixth Form College, who told us “It is the outside perspective of what students do that is so vital [...] If higher education rates these qualifications then the students will do them.”¹⁶⁷

170. As noted above, witnesses told us that in order to be a success, the Diplomas need to attract the full ability range, and not be seen as the preserve of those with lower attainment levels.¹⁶⁸ Much of the evidence we have received emphasises that communications strategies and activities need to be in place to reach parents and students, and the schools and college staff who often have an important role to play in steering young people’s choices. The AoC goes as far as to suggest this activity needs to be prioritised above other actions:

“publicity for the Diploma must define and clearly distinguish it from the applied GCSE at level 2 and applied A levels at level 3. The attributes of the Diploma route that make it distinctive and different need also to be emphasised in literature for parents, and must be in place ready for the Autumn term. Given the pressures to develop area prospectuses and common timetables and to start providing advice to young people and their parents in the Autumn term, this training and material needs to be prioritised even over practitioner development.”¹⁶⁹

171. The DfES told us it was planning a “major awareness raising campaign for young people and parents for the spring” when it knows where the Diplomas will be available in 2008.”¹⁷⁰ At the time of writing, the Gateway decisions had just been announced, and so it is to be presumed that the promotional activities will shortly be underway. This will be welcome, as is the decision to focus at first on promoting the Diplomas in areas where they will actually be available.

172. In December of 2006, the Government appointed four ‘Diploma Champions’, whose role it would be to “promote the Diplomas and wider [14–19] reforms with their sectors”.¹⁷¹ The appointees were:

For higher education: Prof Deian Hopkin, Chancellor, London South Bank University and Prof. Michael Arthur, Vice Chancellor, University of Leeds.

For schools and colleges: Sir Mike Tomlinson, former Chief Inspector of Schools and currently chair of the Learning Trust in Hackney

165 Ev 179

166 Q 17

167 Q 114

168 See, for example, Ken Boston (QCA), Q 81

169 Ev 145

170 Ev 54

171 “Diploma champions to drive forward reform of the 14–19 agenda”, DfES press notice 2006/0186, 12 December 2006

For employers: Sir Alan Jones, Chairman of Toyota

On the whole, our evidence suggests support for the appointment of the four Diploma champions to promote the awards. **We agree that in principle the appointment of the Diploma champions is a sensible step, and it is to be hoped they will play a positive role. Clear, consistent and timely communication will be a significant factor determining acceptance and uptake of Diplomas. This said, clever marketing cannot and should not be expected to make good any shortfalls in the quality or integrity of the Diploma programmes themselves. Ultimately, Diplomas will stand or fail on the quality of the awards, and the partnerships that deliver them. Diplomas, to some extent, need to ‘sell themselves’. Publicity campaigns—and also the appointment of the Diploma Champions—therefore only make sense in the context of a prior focus on rigorous quality assurance and exacting project management standards, to ensure a high-quality product emerges.**

Conclusions and recommendations

Background—Tomlinson

1. The disappointment many expressed after the Government decided not to fully implement Tomlinson’s proposals—which had strong support—has not yet dissipated. Like others at the time, we felt that the creation of the unified, overarching Diploma award proposed by Tomlinson held the promise of a less hierarchical, less complex, and ultimately more coherent qualification system for young people. We remain concerned that the Government’s decision to introduce 14 new discrete Diplomas, each at three different levels, has the potential to compound existing problems of over-complexity and stratification of qualifications, and may just cement existing hierarchies. (Paragraph 13)
2. One of Tomlinson’s achievements was establishing a large and pressing consensus for change. This still exists. Now the Government has embarked on its chosen route, most appear to be taking the pragmatic and positive stance that what is important is ensuring the Diplomas are of a high quality, and are a complete success. We understand and welcome that approach, but we believe that the changes to the 14–19 curriculum would have been better structured and more coherent had Tomlinson’s proposals been adopted. (Paragraph 14)
3. There is an enduring risk that a programme as complicated as Diplomas could face problems and it would have been disingenuous for the Minister to pretend that this was not the case. However, having made the decision to pursue the line it has taken, the very least that can be expected is for the Government to invest its full energy into making the reforms work. It is now imperative that ministers deliver strong leadership, by displaying the courage to intervene swiftly to address identified problems and showing public commitment to producing programmes of the highest quality. (Paragraph 15)

The Long-term future for Diplomas

4. Our view is that the Government’s decision to consider A levels in isolation in its 2008 review is a missed opportunity. More would be gained from considering A levels in their wider context, and in particular, in the light of experience of the Diplomas, which will have just started in September 2008. We would urge the Government to consider rescheduling the review and changing its terms of reference so that it can consider A levels in their wider context and after more is known about how Diplomas are working in practice. (Paragraph 26)

Nature of Diplomas

5. It is far from clear that those in charge of developing the different Diplomas share a common understanding of the kinds of learning they will demand and the purposes they will serve. We welcome the introduction of more practical learning into the curriculum but there is a risk that the pressure over time will be to introduce more and more desk-based, theoretical material into practical, vocational curricula in

pursuit of parity with academic qualifications. It is important that this is guarded against in the case of the Diplomas, and we will be looking for evidence that the new programmes contain sufficient practical content to motivate and appeal to learners who may be ill-served by academic courses. (Paragraph 37)

6. The DfES must ensure there is a real, shared understanding of the kinds of learning and teaching that Diplomas will involve among those responsible for their design, development and delivery. Consensus on this should have been established at the outset and the failure to do this it is a matter of deep concern to us. Secondly, and with some urgency, the Department must decide on a coherent and easily communicable definition of Diplomas. Communications must not further complicate what is already a complicated award, and must encapsulate what is different and distinctive about Diplomas, compared to existing routes. (Paragraph 40)

Timescales

7. It is absolutely essential that the first Diploma cohort is very limited in size, and that thereafter expansion takes place at a slow and controlled rate, with sufficient time for development and assessment. Too often in the past, initiatives have been rolled out too quickly, with serious negative effects on quality. The Government says it will place quality above all other considerations, and intends to take a measured approach: we very much welcome this, and will look for evidence that this is happening in practice. (Paragraph 55)

Process

8. The Diploma development process has clearly been frustrating for many of those involved, and it is commendable that progress has been made in spite of this. The new Diploma development partnership approach—with Sector Skills Councils and employers in the lead—has been experimental, and also highly complex, on account of the number of players involved. At the same time, we are concerned that there appears to have been too little direct involvement in or feedback from small and medium-sized employers who have an important part to play in setting a climate of business acceptance of the new Diplomas. We recommend focused attention is given to involving them more prior to the launch of the pilots. (Paragraph 69)
9. The question remains as to whether more use could and should have been made of existing ‘tried and tested’ qualifications such as BTECs at the outset. What appears to have happened is that a ‘blank slate’ approach has been adopted, with the promise that convergence between the Diplomas and other awards would occur at a later stage. While we appreciate that the aim was to create something new and radical, this nevertheless seems wasteful to us and makes it likely that old lessons will have to be learned again. We urge DfES and the awarding bodies to develop urgently a strategy to make clear how existing qualifications can fold into and relate to the new Diplomas, and to spell out the equivalence and transfer possibilities of existing qualifications. (Paragraph 75)

Qualifications and awards—where are we now?

10. It is a matter of concern that awarding bodies have been given such little time to turn the specifications from the first five Diploma Development Partnerships into workable qualifications which are tied to coherent learning programmes. As with teachers and lecturers, awarding bodies should have been more consistently involved in development work from an early stage; had they been, it is possible that some of the problems that later arose—for example, the unexpected reworking of Diploma content which was undertaken in order to bring about consistency across Diploma lines—could perhaps have been avoided. (Paragraph 81)
11. As it stands, very complicated and detailed work has, in the case of the first five Diploma lines, been uncomfortably compressed. We very much hope that the learning programmes and qualifications which emerge will be of a high-enough quality to be accepted by the groups that matter: students, employers, HE and, of course, those who will deliver them—teachers and lecturers. Understandably given that awarding bodies began qualification development so late in the day, awarding arrangements and longer-term quality assurance procedures are not yet well-developed. (Paragraph 82)
12. It also appears that although full pilots for certain elements of the Diplomas—such as the functional skills units—will have begun in September 2007, the full evaluation of the pilots will not be complete before first teaching begins in September 2008. This is a matter of concern given previous commitments the Government has made to this Committee about ensuring qualifications are properly piloted and evaluated before implementation. We would urge that when the evaluation of the pilots is complete, urgent consideration be given as to whether the current split of the proposed 14 Diplomas into three sub-sets of qualification level, making 42 in all, is likely to prove unduly complex and jeopardise acceptance by employers, universities and others. (Paragraph 83)
13. We are concerned that in relation to some aspects of Diplomas—for example, on the issue of grading—there does not yet appear to be consensus between partners on the approach which should be taken, or even what still remains to be done. We believe it is important that the higher education sector should be more closely involved in this process, so that the acceptance of diplomas as an alternative pathway for some into HE is not compromised. (Paragraph 90)

End-to-end oversight and risk management—the role of the DfES and Ministers

14. It is unfortunate that, given the obvious scale and complexity of the Diploma programme, coherent end-to-end management, governance and reporting arrangements were not established within the DfES from the outset. We believe that there was a failure to appreciate the sheer scale and complexity of the challenge in hand. Our understanding is that now—five months from the point where the awards should be ready and workforce development is due to begin—a permanent project manager for the Diplomas has finally been appointed, who will have oversight of all management aspects. We also recognise that new arrangements have been put in

place at the senior strategic and governance level, whereby Chief Executives of all the relevant agencies—including awarding bodies—meet regularly. It is crucial too that regular ministerial input and oversight of the new management arrangements should remain at the strongest and highest level possible, to ensure that the priority and delivery of diplomas within the Department’s overall workload does not slip. (Paragraph 95)

15. Given all the concerns that have been expressed to us about whether the Diplomas are ready to be introduced, and the uncertainty about what the Diplomas are designed to achieve—whether they are vocational or practical or academic—the initial phase is vitally important. The Secretary of State said in evidence that 2008 is the “pilot stream.” The Government needs to ensure that it is genuinely a pilot, and if problems are not resolved, or if further problems emerge, then the wider roll out should be delayed or reviewed in order to prevent the failure of the Diplomas. (Paragraph 96)

Local area partnerships—readiness

16. We have been impressed by the dedication and commitment shown by those who are already well advanced with collaborative work. It will be extremely important that the lessons of areas already working in this way are fully absorbed and effectively disseminated if Diplomas are to be successful. What is more, it is preferable that only those areas with significant experience of joint working to date are involved in the early stages of implementation. (Paragraph 103)
17. While good practice exists, it is clear that many local areas are some way away from the kinds of working that will be required to successfully deliver Diplomas—especially, those which have not been involved in 14–19 Pathfinders. The National Audit Office is currently undertaking a review to establish the scale of preparedness and the barriers to implementation in local areas. This is extremely welcome and we would encourage the LSC and the DfES to take full heed of the findings in planning for Diploma implementation. (Paragraph 104)
18. It is vital that as many providers as possible in an area are actively and meaningfully involved in local 14–19 partnerships. The statutory requirement in the Education Act 2006 for schools to collaborate is very welcome for that reason. However, the effect of some other policy levers is contradictory. In particular, it is hard to see how individual institutional performance tables will offer a meaningful measure in a collaborative system, or immediately reward those that adopt a collegiate approach. If collaborative approaches to 14–19 provision are to become the norm, the Government needs to look again at the mechanisms for recognising achievements in collaborative provision. Existing tensions need to be resolved, or they risk seriously undermining the welcome messages in recent rhetoric about the importance of collaboration and the adoption of shared responsibility. (Paragraph 113)
19. We are pleased that the Government is actively consulting on aspects of the funding arrangements for Diplomas, and has explicitly recognised that the current systems are unlikely to be sufficiently robust to support successful Diploma delivery. We are also pleased that the proposals to use a common funding model for 16–18 learners

whether in schools or in colleges are being taken forward. We look forward to the outcomes of these consultations. (Paragraph 118)

20. Given the emphasis being placed on 14–19 as a distinct phase, and the centrality of funding in driving provision, we were initially disappointed that the option of creating a single 14–19 funding system appeared not to be being considered further. The creation of a single funding system for 14–19 learners may indeed present significant legal and practical challenges, as the Government asserts, but the potential rewards of a single system could also be very significant indeed. We therefore welcome the Secretary of State’s later clarification that a single 14–19 funding system may still be considered in the medium-term, after the next Comprehensive Spending Review period and recommend that they make an explicit commitment to analysing the likely benefits and costs of such an approach. (Paragraph 121)
21. We remain unconvinced by the Government’s argument that the ‘choice’ and self-determination agenda gels completely with the more co-ordinated and planning-led approach necessitated by Diplomas. (Paragraph 124)

Role of local authorities

22. The DfES says it will be up to local authorities to ensure a joined-up approach, and that they have the strategic responsibility for ensuring coherence. Some have leapt at the challenge, and are effectively supporting joint working in their area. However, our evidence suggests that not all local authorities currently see themselves as having this role. The DfES needs to send a clear message that local authorities have the responsibility to co-ordinate local provision, and crucially, ensure they have the means to do so. We have said above that incentives in the system which promote competition must be revisited: it should not be up to local authorities, or a few particularly enthusiastic institutions, for that matter, to ‘square the circle’. The DfES also needs to monitor the effectiveness of LSCs in supporting partnerships, given its recent restructuring. (Paragraph 128)

Practical challenges—transport, timetabling and tracking

23. The multi-site, multi-institutional nature of Diploma delivery inevitably raises significant management challenges around timetabling, transportation, and the monitoring of a mobile student population. These challenges should not be underestimated—particularly in rural areas where institutions may be located considerable distances apart and travel between multiple institutions may be prohibitively costly, or impractical. However, some areas—and particularly those which have been involved in the Increased Flexibility and 14–19 Pathfinder programmes—now have significant experience of dealing with these challenges in constructive ways. It is vital that their experience is built on, and we see some positive signs that the DfES is doing this—for example, by facilitating ‘learning visits’ and the publication of best-practice materials. We also hope the National Audit Office’s report will suggest ways in which best practice from more advanced areas can be more effectively shared. (Paragraph 139)

The Diploma gateway process

24. The Diploma gateways, in principle at least, look likely to play an essential role in the success of the reform programme if they set consistently high standards which are independently applied, and they should also provide a safeguard against an overly hasty roll-out. We welcome the Minister's emphasis that the Diploma gateway process needs to be rigorous, and set high quality thresholds. At the time of writing, the results of the application process have only just been announced. It is therefore still too early to speculate on the effectiveness of the gateways as arbiters of quality, but this is an area over which we intend to keep a watching brief. (Paragraph 143)
25. After the announcement of decisions on the first round of applications to the gateway, the DfES committed to giving detailed feedback to particular areas on the reasons for their success or failure. We understand that this has now taken place. This is welcome, but more publicly available information on the criteria and standards which Diploma gateways are applying would be welcome, both to help potential applicants, and also to provide reassurance that gateways are setting consistent, and consistently high, benchmarks. (Paragraph 146)

Information, advice and guidance

26. The DfES needs to make clear what plans are underway to develop the capacity of those responsible for guiding young people through the many different options which will be available to them from the age of 14. It also needs to demonstrate that any programme of improvements to information, advice and guidance services planned as part of the wider 14–19 reforms is explicitly tied to the introduction of the Diplomas. (Paragraph 149)

Workforce Development

27. The DfES says the essential package of workforce development will initially consist of three days' face-to-face training. This seems to us—and to many of our witnesses—inadequate. It is true that the workforce is not a blank slate, insofar as there are skilled and experienced staff in both schools and colleges with relevant teaching expertise. However, we remain to be convinced that the workforce development requirements for the Diplomas have been effectively costed and that sufficient resources have been allocated on this basis. We ask the Government to supply us with information which proves this sort of underpinning analysis has been undertaken or is in progress. (Paragraph 156)
28. The workforce development needs relating to Diplomas go beyond obvious technical knowledge-base and pedagogy, and are especially acute around collaborative, cross-institutional working. We see little immediate sign of this being reflected in current workforce development strategies or plans, and would like to see this rectified. (Paragraph 158)
29. It is unfortunate that the delivery of formalised workforce development activities in support of the Diplomas cannot be started in the natural window which will be present at the end of the summer 2007 term. It is now imperative that the plans for

workforce development delivery arrangements are clearly communicated, and information about when training will be available is communicated to those who will be expected to undertake it. (Paragraph 161)

30. Initially, the DfES implied that workforce development support would be focused on successful gateway applicant areas. Subsequently, they have confirmed that support will be extended to those due to begin offering Diplomas in September 2009. This is very welcome. However, it is less certain what support will be extended to those areas with the furthest to travel—and the risk is that they could fall even further behind in relative terms. The DfES and partners need to produce, with some urgency, forward plans for specific, costed, and time-tabled actions to address the staff development needs in the least advanced areas if the entitlement in 2013 is to be deliverable. (Paragraph 164)

Planned communication programmes

31. We agree that in principle the appointment of the Diploma champions is a sensible step, and it is to be hoped they will play a positive role. Clear, consistent and timely communication will be a significant factor determining acceptance and uptake of Diplomas. This said, clever marketing cannot and should not be expected to make good any shortfalls in the quality or integrity of the Diploma programmes themselves. Ultimately, Diplomas will stand or fail on the quality of the awards, and the partnerships that deliver them. Diplomas, to some extent, need to ‘sell themselves’. Publicity campaigns—and also the appointment of the Diploma Champions—therefore only make sense in the context of a prior focus on rigorous quality assurance and exacting project management standards, to ensure a high-quality product emerges. (Paragraph 172)

Formal Minutes

Wednesday 25 April 2007

Members present:

Mr Barry Sheerman, in the Chair

Paul Holmes
Helen Jones
Fiona Mactaggart
Mr Gordon Marsden

Mr Andrew Pelling
Stephen Williams
Mr Rob Wilson

14-19 Diplomas

The Committee considered this matter.

Draft Report, proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Chairman's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 172 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fifth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman do make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That the embargoed copies of the report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

Ordered, That memoranda be appended to the Report.

Ordered, That the memoranda appended to the Report be reported to the House.

[Adjourned till Monday 30 April at 3.30pm]

List of witnesses

Wednesday 17 January 2007

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Dr Ken Boston, Chief Executive, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA),
Mr Geoff Fieldsend, Director of Workforce Development, Sector Skills
 Development Agency, **Ms Karen Price**, Chief Executive, e-Skills and **Mr John
 Rogers**, Chief Executive, Skills for Health

Ev 15

Monday 22 January 2007

Dr Elaine McMahon, Principal, Hull College, **Mr Godfrey Glyn**, Principal, Barton
 Peveril Sixth Form College; **Mr Paul Hafren**, Principal, Warrington Collegiate, **Ms
 Lorraine McCarthy**, Head, Moseley Park School, Wolverhampton, **Mr Peter
 Hawthorne**, Head of 14–19 Development, Wolverhampton County Council, and
Mr John Bangs, Assistant Secretary, National Union of Teachers (NUT)

Ev 35

Wednesday 31 January 2007

Rt Hon Jim Knight, a Member of the House, Minister for Schools and 14–19
 Learners and **Mr Jon Coles**, Director of 14–19 Reform, Department for Education
 and Skills (DfES)

Ev 60

Wednesday 18 April 2007

Rt Hon Alan Johnson, a Member of the House, Secretary of State for Education
 and Skills and **Mr Jon Coles**, Director of 14–19 Reform, Department for Education
 and Skills (DfES)

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Oral evidence

Taken before the Education and Skills Committee

on Wednesday 17 January 2007

Members present:

Mr Barry Sheerman, in the Chair

Mr David Chaytor
 Jeff Ennis
 Paul Holmes
 Helen Jones
 Fiona Mactaggart

Mr Gordon Marsden
 Mr Andrew Pelling
 Stephen Williams
 Mr Rob Wilson

Memorandum submitted by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Diplomas are the key to raising participation and attainment in post-16 education to the highest rank of OECD countries. They are the foundation for building the human and social capital of the nation over the next decade. The new qualification deserves widespread cross-party support.

The Diplomas use applied industry-driven curriculum as the foundation for an education programme designed to build higher order cognitive thinking and problem solving skills. The value of such curriculum has been demonstrated in competitor OECD countries, although not within an identical Diploma configuration. The Diplomas have the potential for much broader appeal than traditional academic programmes.

Key issues in the next phase of work are to communicate the core public narrative about the role and purpose of the Diplomas; to ensure that risks in their development and delivery are foreseen and managed; and to ensure that the Diploma Gateway functions effectively.

1. *The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority*

1.1 The QCA is a statutory authority with responsibilities, obligations and rights set out in the Education Act 1997 and other legislation. Its responsibilities relate to the development, regulation and provision of curriculum, assessment and qualifications. It provides advice to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on request or by decision of the QCA Board.

1.2 As a non-departmental public body, our programme of work is funded partly by core grant from the DfES, for our general statutory responsibilities; and partly by additional funds allocated to undertake specific work within our area of expertise. The balance between the two is negotiated annually with DfES. We are funded by Government; we provide advice to Government on the basis of our research and professional expertise; we undertake work for Government; we are responsible for delivery of elements of the Government agenda; but QCA is not a part of Government.

1.3 Our relationship with DfES is one of interdependence. QCA has no role as a public critic of government policy or practice, although the formal advice we offer to Government in due course becomes public, along with the Government response to that advice. As the national authority for curriculum, assessment and qualifications, with responsibility for regulating provision and assuring the maintenance of standards, we have however a significant role in leading public discussion of needs, priorities and directions in areas of education and training in which government policy is in development, or in which there is need for policy.

2. *The development of Diplomas*

2.1 At the initiative of the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA), the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) have convened Diploma Development Partnerships (DDPs). There is (or in due course will be) a DDP for each of the 14 Diploma lines of learning. Each DDP includes representatives of employers, higher education, relevant professional bodies, awarding bodies, and schools and colleges. The DDPs each have a quite explicit role in curriculum development: they determine, on the basis of extensive consultation, the knowledge, skills and understanding to be included in the principal and specialist learning in each Diploma, at each level.

2.2 The QCA has no role in determining the content of the principal and specialist learning—that is a matter for the sector-led DDPs. The other two components of the Diploma are the core or generic learning (which includes functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT; personal, learning and thinking skills; and the extended project) and the additional elements, which provide for a wide selection of optional choices. In these two areas, which are largely common across all Diplomas, the DDPs and QCA develop the curriculum jointly. The DDP is responsible for ensuring that the Diploma accurately reflects the sector it represents.

2.3 The role of the QCA is to translate the DDP requirements into regulatory criteria that will form the basis for awarding body qualification specifications, so that all Diplomas at each of the three levels have a similar structure; have a similar balance between core learning, principal learning, and additional and specialist learning; and represent a similar standard and level of demand.

2.4 Once this is done, QCA looks to the awarding bodies to develop units and qualifications that meet the regulatory criteria. These must have the support of DDPs before being submitted to QCA for accreditation. Along with all other qualifications, Diplomas will be included in the new Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), which recognises a wider range of achievement than the current National Qualifications Framework through the award of credit for units and qualifications. The QCF will provide flexible routes to gaining full qualifications, and allow credit towards a final qualification to be accumulated as component units are completed successfully.

2.5 A further responsibility of QCA is to develop the systems and technical infrastructure capable of allowing the awarding of Diplomas from 2009, across the numerous awarding bodies contributing units to them. This project is needed to facilitate the introduction of Diplomas. The area of QCA responsible for this work is the National Assessment Agency (NAA). Once built, the management of the systems and technical infrastructure will be the responsibility of the awarding bodies.

2.6 All partners are ensuring that work on the Diplomas is proceeding constructively and well, but this is very new territory. Some of the timelines have proved ambitious, and there have been some difficulties in defining roles and responsibilities. Such difficulties have been overcome primarily as a result of the good will, good sense and commitment of all partners. The recent Leitch Review will facilitate greater clarification of the role of SSCs in the demand-side approval of qualifications for funding, and the role of QCA in the development of regulatory criteria, the national accreditation of qualifications and the recognition of learner achievement through the QCF.

2.7 In ambition, scope, complexity and potential, the introduction of a Diploma qualification across 14 lines of learning and at three levels in each line is a major national reform of secondary curriculum and qualifications, currently without parallel in any other country. The success of the reform is profoundly important, because it is the key strategy to drive up participation and attainment post-16, and hence to raise our national performance from well below the OECD average. In the immediate future, attention will focus in particular on three important areas: communicating the core public narrative about the purpose of Diplomas; ensuring that risks in their development and delivery are foreseen and managed; and ensuring that the Diploma Gateway functions effectively.

3. *The purpose of Diplomas*

3.1 Like GCSEs, GCEs and the International Baccalaureate, the Diplomas have an educational objective rather than a training objective. Their curriculum however is very different because it is derived from industry, and at least half of the principal learning must take place in an industry-related environment. Like all good education programmes, the purpose of the Diplomas is to achieve growth in both the cognitive domain (what young people know, understand and can do) and in the affective domain (what young people are like eg team workers, self-managers, effective participators, independent enquirers, problem solvers). The Diplomas will give young people a fully rounded education, which equips them for both higher education and entry to employment. They will raise the level of participation and attainment in education, but they are not designed to provide job-specific training in order to make young people job-ready: that is the function of an apprenticeship or an occupational qualification. Diplomas will thus not meet national skills shortages directly, but they will provide a much sounder platform than at present on which the skills needed to meet those shortages can be built.

3.2 As our competitor countries much higher on the OECD table have shown so successfully, an applied curriculum derived from industry provides as much challenge, interest and rigour as a traditional general or academic curriculum. The higher order cognitive and problem solving skills inherent in industry-led curriculum in the Diplomas in Engineering, in Creative and Media, in Society, Health and Development, in Information Technology, and in Construction and the Built Environment, are no less challenging than those in traditional fields such as chemistry, modern foreign languages, geography and history—nor is the learning from them less productive. It is expected that the expanded choice of curriculum provided by the Diplomas will attract many young people who are not currently greatly excited by the general qualifications and would otherwise leave school, as well as many who will find that the Diplomas offer a more interesting and potentially rewarding qualification than GCSEs or GCEs.

3.3 There will be a suite of Diplomas available at each of levels 1, 2 and 3 and each suite will appeal to different students. At level 1, the Diplomas will, for the first time, offer a coherent educational programme for those young people who are not ready to progress straight to level 2, who may be under-achieving, or who have simply become disengaged from the traditional curriculum. Until now the only alternative to GCSEs for many of these students has been vocational training programmes, such as motor vehicle maintenance, construction or hospitality, which do not address the wider educational and skills needs of these young people. At level 2, the Diplomas will offer a coherent, bespoke educational programme as an alternative to the traditional GCSE curriculum, or the combination of GCSEs with GNVQs, BTECs and other qualifications. level 2 Diplomas will appeal both to those who are likely to perform better in these programmes than in GCSEs, and to high achievers who would perform well in GCSEs but are attracted by a more contemporary and applied curriculum. level 3 Diplomas are designed for all students across the full ability range, many of whom will have taken GCSEs rather than a Diploma at level 2. As with GCSEs and GCEs, the Diplomas will be graded, providing clear differentiation of achievement between learners.

3.4 The Diploma is a baccalaureate-style, coherent single qualification rather than three discrete and possibly unrelated GCE qualifications. The Diploma will signify to higher education and to employers that the holder has functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT; that he or she possesses personal, learning and thinking skills appropriate for further study or employment; that there is a unity and coherence in the principal line of learning, embracing both general, academic and applied learning; that the holder has demonstrated the skills of self-motivation and independent enquiry, which are inherent in the extended project; and that he or she has had real experience of the workplace as part of the learning programme. In comparison with A-levels, the level 3 Diploma will provide a broader, more coherent, more comprehensive and potentially more flexible programme of study, and signify an acceptable level of performance in all dimensions of the cognitive and affective domains.

3.5 It is important that the purpose, nature and function of the Diplomas is widely understood throughout the community. A major communications programme is being undertaken by DfES. The recent appointment of distinguished leaders in the fields of business, higher education, and schools and colleges to act as public champions and ambassadors for the Diplomas is a very welcome step forward.

4. *Identification and management of risk*

4.1 The design, development, introduction and implementation of a new Diploma qualification covering 14 lines of learning, each at three levels, with roll-out in three tranches in three consecutive years from 2008, is an extraordinarily complex process requiring exacting standards of project management and programme delivery. The design and development of the Diplomas requires complex and highly technical work on the definition of content; on sequencing the acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding; on definition of assessment criteria and the development of assessment methods which are fit for purpose; on determination of a common grading system and grade standards for all 14 lines of learning, and procedures for their monitoring and maintenance across Diplomas and linearly in time; and on the development of appropriate pedagogy and support materials. These educational issues are in parallel with a set of strategic and logistical issues which are equally complex and demanding: achieving buy-in from employers nationally, regionally and locally to support work-based learning; recruiting or training teachers with the appropriate industry background to deliver the principal and specialist learning, and targeting the available recurrent funding to support them; ensuring that the available capital funding supports the provision of industry standard facilities for learning; creating the necessary local collaborative arrangements between schools, colleges and employers; addressing the industrial, funding and logistical issues needed to make such arrangements attractive and workable; communicating the reforms; and putting in place strategies to ensure that the Diplomas attract students from across the full ability range.

4.2 A great number of agencies and organisations are involved in this work. They include several government departments, of which the lead agency is the DfES; a range of non-departmental public bodies, such as the LSC, QCA, SSDA, TDA, LLUK and QIA; other bodies such as the SSAT, the NCSL, the CEL, the local authorities and higher education; the private sector, most notably the awarding bodies and the employers represented through SSCs; and representative bodies, including employer associations and unions. It is important that the various partners have sufficient visibility of the total programme for the delivery and implementation of the Diplomas, and of the interdependent accountabilities that the other partners carry, as lack of such visibility would create a situation in which emerging risks might not be identified and ameliorated.

4.3 A number of changes and developments in the way the programme is evolving have helped to strengthen the arrangements and to provide greater visibility: the appointment of a DfES project director supported by external consultants; the addition of representation from awarding bodies and SSCs to the 14–19 Programme Board; refocusing the Diploma Board and the Diploma Advisory Group; and the establishment of a regular meeting, chaired by Ministers, of the chief executives of the non-departmental public bodies responsible for the various aspects of Diploma development and delivery. QCA is fully committed to working with DfES and all other partners to ensure that these arrangements are effective. It is important, for all partners, that there be a series of OGC Gateway Reviews over the lifetime of the project.

5. *The Diploma Gateway and quality assurance*

5.1 The success of the Diplomas will be dependent on their appeal to the full range of student ability from first introduction in 2008, and on their capacity to maintain and grow that appeal in the following years. The objective is that Diplomas should be the preferred qualification for many students who would otherwise take GCSEs, GCEs, or other qualifications from the wide and somewhat confusing array of vocational qualifications available for young people, as well as raise participation and attainment amongst those who would otherwise leave school early. The new qualifications must prepare both groups equally well for both higher education and employment. If however the Diplomas are aimed only at early school leavers, they will quickly be seen as second-rate and purely vocational qualifications, and will fail as other qualifications have done. We must learn from history if we are not to repeat it.

5.2 There is a potential risk that the national desire to drive up retention and attainment post-16 as quickly and as widely as possible could lead to Diplomas being offered in inappropriate places and circumstances, by teachers who lack industrial experience, or in partnerships between schools, colleges and employers which are less than fully satisfactory. If this were to occur, the Diplomas would be devalued from the beginning. The Diploma Gateway (not to be confused with OGC Gateway Reviews) has been established by DfES as a quality assurance process to ensure that the new qualification will not be compromised. The Gateway Process is the key to assuring quality of delivery, which must be given top priority even were it to be at the expense of not achieving projected enrolment targets in the initial years of introduction.

6. *The prize*

6.1 The Diploma offers the prospect of participation and attainment in education post-16 being raised in England progressively to the highest rank of OECD countries, thus providing a sounder foundation for the building of human and social capital than that which we have at present. For higher education, it provides a more rounded education in both the cognitive and affective domains of learning than the GCEs, and guarantees functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT, together with the personal skills and attributes needed to succeed at university. For employers, it has the same advantages: young people will enter employment with a much better understanding of the creative opportunities in the world of work, with positive attitudes and the will to succeed, and with the focus and capacity to raise the productivity of both their employing company and the nation through the acquisition of high-order job-specific skills. The Diploma has immense potential as the foundation for driving up national performance in education and skills, and it warrants the full support of business and the community, of higher education, of our political parties, and of all sections of the community.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA)

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 *Progress*

In general, progress on Diploma development has been very good. SSCs have in particular been successful at meeting the critical milestones set out in the project plan. But there has also been a tremendous amount of goodwill between partners who are all absolutely committed to making Diplomas work. It is this enthusiasm which has been the basis for the outstanding achievement of the process to date, namely the unprecedented number of employers who have been actively involved in the process either through consultation events or steering groups and sub-groups.

1.2 *Sticking Points*

The fundamental difficulty is that Diplomas are new, difficult and carry an enormous weight of expectation. "Sticking points" are inevitable given the combination of the ambition of the project, the wholly new process of qualification development adopted (which involved new partners and new ways of working) when this is all set against rigid and tight timetables. Whilst we believe that a longer period of preparation would have been helpful to agree the process and management arrangements in detail and ensure the whole project is underpinned by comprehensive guidance, this criticism should not be interpreted as suggesting that Diplomas will not succeed. A lot has been achieved, lessons have been learnt and all partners are working hard to make sure we have the transformation in our education system that we have been asked to deliver.

1.3 *The Role of the Sector Skills Councils and Employers*

Employers have played, and continue to play, a major role in the Diploma development process through their SSCs. The role of SSCs is to ensure that what employers want, in content terms, is ultimately what they get albeit contextualised within the framework of a high quality educational experience conferring equal status with respect to other routes. Employers continue to have a major role in implementation and delivery, within the Gateway process and the workforce development programme.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 *Management*

We recommend that there is one SRO in charge of the end-to-end Diploma development process, including qualification development, the Gateway, implementation and delivery processes. This SRO should be a high level and full time DfES official. The senior staff member should be a Diploma champion who has a good understanding of employers and is able to work closely with QCA and the Skills for Business network. It may be necessary for this SRO role to be supported (as is now the case) by a top level employer acting as public employer champion.

2.2 *Representation*

The Skills for Business network should have credible and adequate representation on all Boards and sub-groups in order to ensure the continuous presence of the employer voice in the Diploma development, throughout development, implementation and delivery.

3. INTRODUCTION

3.1 *The Skills for Business Network*

This memorandum provides input to the Education and Skills Committee inquiry into specialised Diplomas. The submission is by the Sector Skills Development Agency which is the umbrella organisation for and member of the Skills for Business network. The UK's Skills for Business network mission is to create a workforce with work-class skills contributing to the highest levels of business performance in all sectors of the UK economy. Employers own and lead the Skills for Business network, working through 25 independent Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) which is a Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB).

3.2 *Terms of Reference*

The Terms of Reference for the inquiry comprised a series of questions set out in three subject areas: "design and development of the Diplomas"; "teacher and lecturer training"; and "coordination between schools and colleges". This response focuses on these questions in sections 3, 4 and 5 respectively.

3.3 *Further Submissions by the Network*

Independent and separate submissions will also be made by one or more Sector Skills Councils.

4. DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF DIPLOMAS

4.1 *Progress to Date*

4.1.1 *Partnership Working*

4.1.1.1 Good working arrangements between the three "core" project management partners, SSDA, QCA and DfES, have been developed. New and successful wider models of partnership working between employers, SSCs, Higher Education Institutions and awarding bodies as well as the core partners have also been established in each Diploma area through the Diploma Development Partnerships. (DDPs).

4.1.2 *Employer Engagement*

4.1.2.1 There is a real sense of ownership of the content of the Diplomas by employers reflecting the extensive consultations with employers which have taken place. Across the first five lines of learning, SSCs have worked closely with numerous employers, for example:

- E-skills have 20 employers on their employer steering group involved in in-depth monthly meetings on content, support to Awarding Bodies etc. In addition some 630 employers have provided detailed telephone input into the design of the Diploma as well as an extensive number of employers who have received regular update on Diploma development via a registered website.
- For the construction and the built environment Diploma, some 1,200 employers responded to consultation and a further 80 employers were consulted directly through SSC meetings and visits. Six employers sit on the DDP Steering group: one from each SSC.

This model of employer engagement has been used across the five Diploma lines, amounting to well over 5,000 employers providing responses via consultation events and e-consultation. Many more employers have been kept informed and updated on progress.

4.1.2.2 To ensure overall employer buy in to the Diploma concept and its delivery, employer chairs from Phase 1 Diploma development meet on a regular basis to keep a watching brief on policy and strategy development. This resulted in employers making strong representations to the Secretary of State that their involvement should not simply begin and end with the content of the Diplomas but should be continued into successful delivery.

4.1.2.3 More recently the group has been joined by a further five employer chairs from Phase 2 development. Meetings have extended invitations to the DfES Director of the 14–19 Reform Group, the Under-Secretary of State for Skills and the Minister of State for Schools as well as the CEO of the Qualification and Curriculum Authority.

4.1.2.4 DDPs have nominated 28 Employer Champions, who have agreed to be direct contacts for press and media to provide personal perspectives on the Diploma. These are senior staff in high profile organisations across England and across sectors.

4.1.3 Management

4.1.3.1 The management of the process of developing “statements of content”, which has involved a close contractual working relationship between the SSDA and SSCs, has been very effective in ensuring extremely onerous milestones have been met in accordance with “descriptors” of these milestones agreed by the Project Board. This has also ensured good value for money and clarity about the level of expectation. However, the benefit of experience suggests that we will in future need a tighter “fit” between these responsibilities, especially the project management role of the SSDA, and the technical support provided by QCA.

4.1.3.2 The SSC led Diploma Development Partnerships are on course to achieve the critical, and stretching, milestones agreed with DfES.

- Phase 1 DDPs are working with QCA and Awarding Bodies on qualification development based on the content achieved with employers. Furthermore, Phase 1 SSCs are working with DfES and other partners on the “Gateway” process and workforce development programme.
- Phase 2 DDPs are developing their content through extensive employer consultation and HE engagement.
- Phase 3 Diploma development will be launched on 24 January.

4.2 *Sticking Points*

4.2.1 Timescales

4.2.1.1 The progress made has been very much against the clock. In certain circumstances, the discipline of a clear timeline can be a healthy spur to the maintenance of momentum. However, whilst recognising the need to bring in valuable changes as soon as practically possible, the complexity of development and implementation issues in such a new area was always going to throw up unforeseen problems. In hindsight, the lack of an up front period for the preparation of guidance and planning the process end to end as well as the absence of any scope for slippage all significantly increased risk.

4.2.1.2 Another difficulty was that, for DDPs to safeguard employer buy in, sufficient time needed to be built in to consultation with employers. Understandably, there were a number of times when fundamental policy decisions on structure and content of the Diploma had to be made within timelines that were too short for meaningful consultation with employers. DDPs have found it very difficult to respond effectively to changes in philosophy and policy at very short notice.

4.2.1.3 The Diploma development programme is one strand, albeit a significant one, within an overall 11–19 curriculum reform programme. The various strands straddle a number of boards and sub-groups, under the umbrellas of the 11–19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform Board and the 11–19 Local Delivery Board. As SSCs were not engaged in this wider infrastructure it was often difficult to see the bigger picture or to be properly engaged “downstream” of the design of content in such critical areas as teacher training and design of materials. The coordination between the different strands of Diploma development was also not always clear. Many of these issues have now been resolved but the principle of high level, end to end, overall coordination is still something we believe is critical to the success of Diplomas.

4.3 *The Role of the Sector Skills Councils and Employers*

4.3.1 The Sector Skills Councils form and head up the Diploma Development Partnerships. Principal activities involve the development of project plans and strategies for development, planning employer consultations, setting up and leading key working groups to determine the present thinking and practice on issues such as work-based learning, work experience, apprenticeship integration, delivery and HE recognition.

4.3.2 Diplomas cover broad sectors, and DDPs therefore may include one or more SSCs, depending on the sector. For example, the DDP for the IT Diploma is convened and led by one SSC, e-skills UK. In contrast, the DDP for Construction and the Built Environment is more complex and is convened by ConstructionSkills and supported by SummitSkills, Energy and Utilities Skills, Pro-Skills, the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board and Asset Skills.

4.3.3 DDPs are directed by a core group of employers from across the SSCs which have been supported in partnership with many stakeholders and government agencies, ranging from workforce development partners to UCAS and HEIs. As referred to above employer involvement in the delivery of the content for the Diplomas in Phase 1 has been extensive. Similar arrangements are in place for Phase 2 and will be put in place for Phase 3.

4.3.4 The extensive consultation with employers and other stakeholders that took place in Stage 1 of Diploma development to produce specification of content was subsequently further developed with QCA and Awarding Bodies, to agree blueprints for the Diplomas. QCA have overall responsibility for the coordination and development of qualifications on the basis of content guidance supplied by the Skills for Business network.

4.4 *Coordination and Development of Diplomas*

4.4.1 The DfES has overall responsibility for the successful design and delivery of employers. Within their overall remit, the DfES sub-contracts certain roles to other partners.

4.4.2 The Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) has essentially two roles in respect of the activities of SSCs. The first is to act as an effective conduit and influencer to promote the collective views of employers through their SSCs to government and its agencies across the UK. The second role is that of performance manager of the SSCs.

4.4.3 The DfES concluded that the SSDA was well placed to play a specific role in the development of Diplomas which was consistent with the above. Agreement was reached that the SSDA would be responsible for managing the process so that the project board could be assured that the work of the SSCs and their DDPs was proceeding according to the project plan. In specific terms, the SSDA role is to coordinate, manage and deliver the milestones in accordance with the DDP project plans.

4.4.4 Convening SSCs are responsible for producing and submitting project plans to SSDA. Subsequently a quality assurance panel with membership from SSDA, DfES and QCA assess plans and provide recommendations to the project board. Following approval, the SSDA raises contracts with the convening SSC based on the approved plans which are then monitored accordingly with detailed reports provided to each project board.

4.4.5 The SSDA is not a qualification development expert and relies for the Qualification and Curriculum Authority to provide advice and guidance on such issues. However, some additional expertise was brought in on a consultancy basis to support the SSCs in their work on Diploma design.

4.4.6 Diploma development is a completely new way of approaching qualification development, with new/different partners having key roles. Due to this quite innovative Diploma concept, it was never going to be easy to oversee the complete end to end process of qualification development and what would be needed and required in order to ensure the integrity of the Diploma concept and content.

4.4.7 Based on the Board's Lessons Learned Review in September 2006, new governance arrangements are now being put in place to ensure a structure that will look at the end-to-end process of the qualification development across all three Phases of the Diploma development. A newly appointed Programme Director will chair the revised Project Board which will now include representation by DDPs and Awarding Bodies. We welcome this new direction and will work with our partners to help ensure the success of this coordinated approach to the qualification development.

4.4.8 The Skills for Business network will also be represented at overarching Board level, and have representation on the 11–19 Qualification and Curriculum Board as well as the 11–19 Delivery Board. Employers, through the Skills for Business network, will therefore have representation at the right level of Diploma development and will be able to help ensure the integrity of the content of the Diplomas throughout qualification development, implementation and delivery.

4.4.9 We would welcome a further move towards a senior coordinating role which oversees the end-to-end process of the whole of the Diploma development, including implementation and delivery. There are as yet no clear operational structures in place that enable the network to engage in a joined up way and with confidence in the different/separate strands of development (for example, the Gateway Process, the Workforce Development activities and Resource development activities).

4.4.10 An option under consideration would be to appoint a full time SRO at a very senior level within DfES who is able to lead the end to end process and is wholly dedicated to Diploma Development. Given the constraints on civil service officials in a public role, it may be necessary for this role to be complemented by an employer who would be perceived by their peers as a credible and trusted champion for the concept of Diplomas and the central role of employers in the process.

4.5 *Accreditation and Awarding of the Diploma*

4.5.1 The accreditation and awarding system for the Diploma are under development. The process must ensure that qualifications continue to be approved by employers and the DDPs prior to submission to QCA in April 2007. This would ensure Diplomas work to the principles recommended in the recently published Leitch review of skills. DDPs are working with their respective Awarding Bodies to agree the details of this endorsement process.

4.5.2 One of the lessons learned in the Phase 1 development has been that policy development with respect to grading and quality assurance of the Diploma should not be divorced from the process of developing Diploma content and that employers and other stakeholders should have continuous involvement in such policy considerations.

5. TEACHER AND LECTURER TRAINING

5.1 *Lifelong Learning UK*

Lifelong Learning UK is the Sector Skills Council working with DfES on developing the workforce to deliver the Diplomas, as one of six key workforce development partners. It is providing its own submission to the Select Committee on its role within the partnership.

5.2 *The Skills for Business Network*

5.2.1 The role of the DDPs and employers has been agreed under a protocol between DfES, workforce development partners and DDPs. The joint working under this protocol has only just started and will be crucial to ensure continued endorsement of employers for the delivery of the Diploma. Most teaching and lecturing staff are unlikely to have relevant industrial/employment experience and it is therefore essential that new staff development programmes are based on gap analyses and in-depth evaluation of what is required with full and active support provided by the Skills for Business network.

5.2.2 The workforce development programme must be synchronised with the Gateway process, in that the latter must indicate the gaps and needs so that development plans can be put in place based on identification of such needs.

5.2.3 The role of the Skills for Business network in the Gateway process should be that of ascertaining whether or not partnerships have the right facilities as well as the capacity in the line of learning sector to deliver according to the requirements of the Diploma.

5.2.4 As recommended above, these implementation and delivery processes should be led by a Diploma champion who works in partnership with the key stakeholders, including employers.

6. COORDINATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

6.1 This is not in the direct domain of the Skills for Business network to comment on. In their separate submission to the Committee Lifelong Learning UK is providing more detailed input under this section. It should however be noted that in some sectors such as Construction there is already good co-ordination via curriculum centres that bring schools and colleges together to deliver learning in an industry context.

Memorandum submitted by e-Skills UK

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Progress (see section 3)

1.1 Progress on Diploma design and development has been excellent in many regards. Highlights include:

- The level of employer support and the significant added value contributed to the design and development process by employers.
- The level of Higher Education support.
- The creation of a new model of partnership working between employers, Higher Education, Awarding Bodies, DFES and QCA.
- The delivery of high quality Subject Criteria, in line with the vision of the Diploma Development Partnerships and agreed in detail with Awarding Bodies.

Issues (see section 4)

1.2 However, the speed of development has caused particular issues. Specifically:

- Work which would have more easily and logically been undertaken sequentially has had to be delivered concurrently.
- It has been very challenging to implement in a quality manner a number of policy decisions which were made relatively late in the development process, in particular those affecting Diploma structure which were made in October 2006. There has been insufficient time to assess appropriately the implications of many decisions prior to those decisions being made (for example policy decisions which could compromise employer or HE support for the Diploma or which could affect the range of students likely to be attracted to the Diploma).
- The Diploma is breaking new ground in the way the various partners work together to achieve outcomes, yet it requires time to establish trust and effect culture change.

1.3 Very late in the process came a strong drive for consistency across Diplomas, which has given rise to a particular strategic concern. Consistency will tend to force all Diplomas into a common ground in terms of positioning in the market (for example, in relation to student cohorts and Higher Education perception), whereas, in fact, the needs by sector are very different. Some sectors (such as IT) recruit predominantly at graduate level or higher, while others have a significant intake at level 3 or level 2. A desire for consistency which does not account for these sorts of differences remains one of the biggest risks to success of Diplomas.

1.4 Communications are too often focusing on the “increasing participation” objectives of the Diploma at the expense of other purposes; this presents significant risks in terms of retaining employer and Higher Education engagement.

Recommendations (see section 5)

1.5 There are currently three major risks to success in terms of the Diploma in IT:

- The qualification could still drift away from the DDP vision, and thus fail to ensure employer support.
- Insufficient teacher skills and inappropriate delivery strategies could compromise the quality of implementation.
- Diploma brand positioning and the drive for consistency could compromise the ability of the Diploma in IT to meet its target market (which includes future potential IT professionals, entrepreneurs and business leaders).

1.6 We make the following recommendations to address these risks:

- (a) Undertake a review of governance and programme management of the end-to-end activities for Diploma introduction, to ensure:
 - Clear overall accountability and exemplary programme management across the whole, through to, and including, successful introduction.
 - Clarity of accountabilities, with levers in line with responsibilities, including ensuring one senior individual is responsible for Diploma communications and branding across all partners.
 - Effective risk management, with particular focus on risks concerning employer support, HE support and quality of delivery.
- (b) Ensure that the leadership role of the SSC is supported throughout; SSCs represent the voice of employers and Higher Education and lead the DDPs which bring together the key partners. In order to retain the engagement of these partners, they must (via the SSC) be sufficiently influential in all key areas, including the development of grading strategy; policy concerning Functional Skills and Additional Specialist Learning; the implementation of Personal, Learning and Thinking

Skills; and the implementation of the Gateway and Centre Approval processes. Without this influence, the Diploma is drifting away from the DDP vision and could ultimately fail due to lack of employer and HE support.

- (c) Ensure effective support for the employer-led DDP role in terms of endorsement of qualifications, clearly communicated to all parties (for example establishing that public funding will only be available for qualifications which have been endorsed by the DDP).
- (d) Identify the Critical Success Factors for 2008 implementation, specifically considering the outstanding technical and policy matters,¹ the needs of students and schools and colleges, and the requirements to ensure continued support from employers and HE.
- (e) Undertake a comprehensive assessment of the complete range of teaching and learning materials, delivery mechanisms and teacher upskilling activities required to ensure successful delivery for each line of learning.
- (f) Undertake a full risk assessment and create appropriate risk mitigation plans, including risks emanating from grading decisions, the very short qualification development timescale and workforce development needs.
- (g) Control volumes and timing to ensure that implementation will be of consistently high quality. Depending on the outcomes of the risk assessment, this is likely to involve either a very small, tightly controlled introduction in 2008 with extensive hands-on support or else a delay until 2009.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 This memorandum is to provide input to the Education and Skills Committee inquiry into 14–19 Specialised Diplomas. The submitter, e-skills UK, is the Sector Skills Council for IT & Telecoms. e-skills UK is responsible for the development of the Diploma in IT, one of the first five Diplomas which are due for first teaching in September 2008. The vision, mission and Board Membership of e-skills UK is attached in the Annex (*not printed*).

2.2 The terms of reference for the inquiry set out a series of questions, categorised into three subject areas: “Design and Development of Diplomas”; “Teacher and lecturer training”; and “Co-ordination between schools and colleges”. e-skills UK provides input here to the questions raised within the first two of these subject areas.

2.3 Section 3 below provides factual information relating to the questions raised. Section 4 highlights issues arising and Section 5 suggests specific recommendations for consideration by the Committee.

3. INFORMATION

Design and development of Diplomas

Q: *What progress has been made on the development of Diplomas to date? Where have been the sticking points?*

3.1 Progress on Diploma design and development has been excellent in many regards. Highlights include:

- The level of employer support and the significant added value contributed to the design and development process by employers.
- The level of Higher Education support.
- The creation of a new model of partnership working between employers, Higher Education, Awarding Bodies, DfES and QCA.
- The delivery of high quality Subject Criteria, in line with the vision of the Diploma Development Partnerships and agreed in detail with Awarding Bodies.

3.2 The Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) responsible for leading the development of the Tranche 1 Diplomas established an employer-led Diploma Development Partnership (DDP) for each “line of learning”² and commenced work in the 4th quarter of 2005. The primary output of the first phase of the development work was to produce a “Statement of Content” for each Diploma line of learning by the summer of 2006. All Statements of Content were delivered on schedule.

3.3 Each DDP followed a similar process. For the IT line of learning, the work began with an analysis of employer skills needs and Higher Education requirements, moved on to a definition of the desired structure and balance of the Diploma, and then to a definition of learning outcomes that would meet the needs of employers and Higher Education. These were encapsulated in the “Statement of Content” for the Diploma in IT which was delivered on 31 July 2006.

3.4 It had been our expectation that these Statements of Content would provide the basis for qualification development (led by the Awarding Bodies, working in partnership with the DDPs). However, on 26 July, the DDPs were advised that a new step would be inserted in the process in order to help achieve greater

¹ Including those relating to Grading, Functional Skills, Additional/Specialist Learning and Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills.

² Each Diploma Development Partnership including Employers, Higher Education, Further Education and Schools, Awarding Bodies and other partners.

consistency across the Diplomas. QCA would appoint a new team for each line of learning, involving Awarding Body writers and a QCA technical writer, with the responsibility for creating “Subject Criteria” for the line of learning. These Subject Criteria would be based on but would replace the Statements of Content as the starting point for qualification development, and they would be delivered by 30 September 2006.

3.5 The creation of the Subject Criteria proved to be very challenging, as in some lines of learning there started to be significant deviation from the original employer vision for the Diploma. On 25 September, in a meeting involving DfES and QCA, it was agreed that the SSC writers should pick up the work and complete it to deliver a consultation draft which would retain the support of the employers and wider DDPs. These were all delivered on schedule by 30 September 2006. At this point, the intention was that the final draft Subject Criteria would be published on 31 October 2006.³

3.6 During and following the delivery of these Subject Criteria consultation drafts, a number of new policy decisions were made. These concerned the structure of the Diploma, the size of units within the Diploma, the size of the project at level 3, assumptions about the treatment of Personal Learning and Thinking Skills, and criteria for Additional/Specialist Learning options.

3.7 The most significant change was concerning structure. On 12 October 2006, DDPs were advised that a common structure for each level must be applied to all lines of learning.⁴ For some lines of learning, this would involve significant work in creating new content along with restructuring of existing content. This would in some cases involve major changes from the Statements of Content which had been produced in detailed consultation with employers and the rest of the DDP over the preceding months. It was clear that it was not feasible to deliver DDP-endorsed, high quality Subject Criteria documents which incorporated these new rules by the end of October, and the decision was made that these would now be delivered by the end of November. To minimise the impact of this decision, QCA decided to compress their accreditation period (from April–June 2007 to May–June 2007) so that the time available to the Awarding Bodies for qualification development would not be affected. However, there was still very little time to deliver major content revision due to the change in policy direction, and no time to assess the implications of the decisions on students or Higher Education.

3.8 For the Diploma in IT, a new development team was established, building on that appointed by QCA but also including other DDP members (in particular employers, HE and FE experts) as well as Awarding Bodies. This team worked intensively to complete the necessary re-works of the Subject Criteria to meet the new requirements, and the final draft Subject Criteria for the Diploma in IT was delivered to QCA on 24 November.

3.9 Awarding Bodies are now working on qualification development, having agreed the principles of the process by which they will work with the SSCs and DDPs. The purpose of this process is to ensure that the qualifications continue to meet the vision of the DDPs and thus can be endorsed by the DDPs prior to submission to QCA at the end of April 2007.

3.10 Information on issues arising from the process to date is provided in the Section 4.

Q: What role have employers and Sector Skills Councils played in the development of Diplomas?

3.11 Employers have been central to the development of Diplomas to date. Sector Skills Councils have led the development, representing the voice of their employers and leading the Diploma Development Partnerships.

3.12 Taking the Diploma in IT as an example, employers have led the strategy and design. At the outset of the work, e-skills UK established a Diploma Employer Steering Group for the Diploma. This included senior managers representing organisations including: Vodafone, IBM, Oracle, Cisco, Microsoft, LogicaCMG, EDS, BT, CA, John Lewis, Centrica, the Government and the MOD as well as Small and Medium Enterprise representation. This group physically met regularly (typically monthly) as well as contributing extensively outside of meetings. In addition, more than 600 employers, statistically valid by size and geography, contributed to the design through detailed telephone interviews.

3.13 Through this design work, employers were able to clearly articulate, at a sector-wide level, the key principles they would like embedded within the Diploma in order for it to be a valued qualification and a boost to student employability. This included, for example, the centrality of improved standards in skills in English and maths and how this could be achieved through engaging, work-relevant contexts, and innovation in the development of the Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills, which employers often value more in new recruits than specific subject matter expertise.

3.14 Employers also want to seize the opportunity to radically improve the IT-related curriculum for 14–19-year-olds through exciting, up to date content delivered in an innovative way. The Diploma in IT is, in response to the overwhelming view of employers, based on the three themes of Business, People and Technology. Academic learning will be brought to life through applied real-world contexts such as the transformational potential of the internet and mobile communications; the exploitation of technology in the

³ “Final draft” refers to the documents against which qualification development would commence. The final version would be produced in January 2007, to take account of Grading and Assessment strategies which are currently under development.

⁴ Previous guidance had allowed for differences between the various lines of learning.

music industry; or the integration of computing, design and art in multimedia projects. Employers envisage supporting the delivery of such content through an interactive resource bank of up to date materials, case studies and challenges.

3.15 In addition to the Diploma Employer Steering Group, the Board of e-skills UK is also offering support to Diploma development. They see the Diploma as the opportunity to make IT-related education fit for purpose in the global economy, to transform uptake of IT education and careers, and to address the gender divide which plagues the sector. E-skills UK Board members include the CEOs of IBM, Cisco, Cable & Wireless, Vodafone, Oracle, EDS, LogicaCMG, Accenture, Microsoft, HP and BT Global Services and the CIOs of BA, Centrica, Royal Mail, Unilever, CPS, Innocent Drinks, Carphone Warehouse, UK Government, UBS, Whitbread and Reuters.

3.16 Whilst designed to be particularly appropriate for the technology professionals, entrepreneurs and business leaders of the future, employers were particularly keen to ensure that the Diploma in IT will open doors for all students, by equipping them to work effectively in a professional environment, deliver successful projects and understand how technology can contribute to business success in any sector.

3.17 In terms of the role of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), E-skills UK, as the SSC for IT & Telecoms, is responsible for the development of the Diploma in IT. The company established and leads the DDP, providing strategic direction, employer engagement and HE engagement. E-skills UK also established and led the operational Diploma development team including experts from industry, education and awarding bodies. The company represents the voice of the DDP for the Diploma in IT at the many meetings on Diploma both operational and strategic, and acts as a member of the Skills for Business Network (cross-SSC) team in bringing together collective DDP views. The CEO of e-skills UK, Karen Price, represents the collective voice of Sector Skills Councils at meetings including the Diploma Project Board.

Q: Who is responsible for the co-ordination and development of Diplomas?

3.18 The DfES has overall responsibility for the creation of Diplomas, but different organisations—in particular Sector Skills Councils, Awarding Bodies, QCA and workforce development partners—perform different leadership roles within the overall programme of work.

Q: Is there a case for a stronger co-ordinating role for one of the agencies involved, or for the appointment of a senior responsible officer or champion?

3.19 We believe it is essential that an extremely senior individual has overall responsibility for the success of Diplomas. This person should have the responsibility for strategy and the ability to make policy decisions and direct operational activities end-to-end (design, development and delivery). He or she should come from an industry background (in keeping with the employer-led nature of the qualifications); have the explicit backing of Ministers; and have the programme management expertise to direct and ensure successful delivery of a highly complex, collaborative programme.

Q: Is there a clear system for accrediting and awarding the Diplomas?

3.20 This is being developed. As set out at 3.9, Awarding Bodies have agreed the principles of the process by which they will work with the SSCs and DDPs. The purpose of this process is to ensure that the qualifications continue to meet the vision of the DDPs and thus can be endorsed by the DDPs prior to submission to QCA at the end of April 2007. We are currently working with Awarding Bodies to agree the detail of this endorsement process. Awarding Bodies which become Diploma Awarding Bodies will need to put in place the systems and processes for awarding the Diplomas.

3.21 The Grading strategy for the Diploma is still under development. The finalisation of this is an essential element of the critical path as qualification development needs to be aligned with the grading approach to be adopted.

Teacher and lecturer training

Q: What are current levels of teacher/lecturer training activity in preparation for Diplomas? Is this sufficient to make Diplomas a success?

3.22 The Diploma in IT is significantly different from current 14–19 IT provision. Specifically, it focuses on IT professional (rather than IT user) skills, and it demands an integration of IT and business skills (rather than focusing only on IT technical matters). E-skills UK is very concerned about how workforce development requirements will be met; unless delivery is of a sufficiently high quality, students will suffer and the major employers currently engaged with and supporting the Diploma would choose not to be associated with it.

3.23 Most teachers and lecturers of this Diploma, although highly experienced in their disciplines, are unlikely to have relevant (IT professional) industry experience. To help overcome the consequent lack of subject matter expertise, we would like there to be serious consideration of innovative, e-enabled delivery models for the Diploma.

3.24 We believe that the following is essential:

- An assessment of typical teacher skills levels in different types of consortia.
- A gap analysis between this and what is needed for the Diploma to be successfully delivered.
- The development of a costed implementation plan which includes the complete range of teaching and learning materials, delivery mechanisms and teacher upskilling activities required to ensure successful delivery for this line of learning.

3.25 This evaluation of needs and solutions must be executed in step with the Gateway process so that the output of that process does not end up out of kilter with a realistic implementation plan.

4. ISSUES ARISING

4.1 Whilst progress has been excellent in many regards, the speed of development has caused particular issues. Specifically:

- Work which would have more easily and logically been undertaken sequentially has had to be delivered concurrently.
- There has often been insufficient time to assess the implications of decisions prior to those decisions being made (for example policy decisions which could compromise employer or HE support for the Diploma or which could affect the range of students likely to be attracted to the Diploma).
- Although the Diploma is intended to be SSC-led to ensure the voice of employers is at its heart, decisions have often been made very quickly with insufficient consideration of SSC input. This presents significant risk in terms of employer and HE support.
- The Diploma is breaking new ground in the way the various partners work together to achieve outcomes, yet it requires time to establish trust and effect culture change.

4.2 This was essentially an iterative development process; certain work had to be undertaken in order to make well informed decisions, and those decisions then require rework which needs time allocated. All parties agree that the development process would have run more smoothly had some of these decisions referenced in paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7 been taken much earlier. Whilst there are undoubtedly lessons to be learned from the process of development, much of the impact of late decision making is now history—key decisions have now been made and following tranches will not face the same difficulties as the first five in terms of the practicalities of implementing late policy changes.

4.3 However, there are some outstanding concerns in terms of the implications of policy decisions, many of which were made to drive consistency across Diploma lines. For example, the implications of decisions on assessment strategies have not, to our knowledge, been assessed in terms of Higher Education acceptance of the Diploma; the decision regarding the volume of Principal Learning at level 2 has not been assessed in terms of attractiveness to different cohorts of students; and decisions in terms of the handling of Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills have not yet been assessed in terms of delivering value to employers or the HE sector.

4.4 The drive for consistency has also given rise to an important strategic concern. Whilst we endorse the need for consistency of underpinning policy principles across the Diplomas, an over emphasis on consistency of structure and content at the expense of appropriateness to the industry context will be counterproductive. Consistency will tend to force all Diplomas into a common ground in terms of positioning in the market (in relation to student cohorts and Higher Education perception), whereas, in fact, the needs by sector are very different. The IT sector, for example, recruits predominantly at graduate level or higher. For the Diploma in IT to be relevant to prospective future employees in the sector, it must therefore be attractive to, and appropriate for, high achieving students, including those aspiring to the most challenging degree courses. Other sectors however have a significant intake at level 3 or level 2. A desire for consistency which does not account for differences in typical student cohorts remains one of the biggest risks to success of Diplomas in some lines of learning.

4.5 As an example, throughout the design and development process, e-skills UK has become increasingly concerned that communications have focused predominantly on one particular objective of the Diploma, which is its contribution to the “increasing participation” agenda. It is clear to us that the Diplomas will only succeed overall if they are built, delivered and consistently positioned as a mainstream offering which is as appropriate for the most academically able as well as those who are disengaged with the current system. Different lines of learning are likely to appeal to different types of students. However, if “increasing participation” is perceived to be the primary objective, then the Diploma brand will be seen as predominantly for students unlikely to succeed in GCSEs or A levels. If this is not addressed, it will cause industry disengagement and will marginalise the Diploma from a Higher Education perspective.

4.6 Other outstanding risks at this stage of development include the following:

- The endorsement of the qualifications by DDPs is central to the promise that these qualifications are underpinned by employer support. However, this requires the introduction of a new way of working in partnership between SSCs and Awarding Bodies and timeframes are very tight. There is a risk that lack of time to establish and implement new mechanisms could cause difficult tensions during the coming four months and could, if not addressed properly, lead to the unacceptable situation of Awarding Bodies having invested in development which DDPs are not happy to support.

- The grading strategy is still in development. This makes the current qualification development work of Awarding Bodies challenging as they will need to accommodate decisions late within their work.
- Functional Skills are central to the Diplomas at levels 1 and 2. However, the content of Functional Skills and their relationship to GCSEs is not yet clear. Further, there are significant issues yet to be addressed regarding the role of Functional Skills and Additional Specialist Learning in terms of grading and Diploma achievement.

4.7 Finally, this is a complex collaborative programme of interdependent projects, which requires effective, interdependent working of numerous organisations whose expertise is essential to its success. It is breaking new ground, and demands new styles of working and management. In particular, it needs a single point of leadership across the whole programme and effective programme management across all aspects of work on which its success depends.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 There are currently three major risks to success in terms of the Diploma in IT:

- The qualification could still drift away from the DDP vision, and thus fail to ensure employer support.
- Insufficient teacher skills and inappropriate delivery strategies could compromise the quality of implementation.
- Diploma brand positioning and the drive for consistency could compromise the ability of the Diploma in IT to meet its target market (which includes future potential IT professionals, entrepreneurs and business leaders).

5.2 We make the following recommendations to address these risks:

(a) Undertake a review of governance and programme management of the end-to-end activities for Diploma introduction, to ensure:

- Clear overall accountability and exemplary programme management across the whole, through to, and including, successful introduction.
- Clarity of accountabilities, with levers in line with responsibilities, including ensuring one senior individual is responsible for Diploma communications and branding across all partners.
- Effective risk management, with particular focus on risks concerning employer support, HE support and quality of delivery.

(b) Ensure that the leadership role of the SSC is supported throughout; SSCs represent the voice of employers and Higher Education and lead the DDPs which bring together the key partners. In order to retain the engagement of these partners, they must (via the SSC) be sufficiently influential in all key areas, including the development of grading strategy; policy concerning Functional Skills and Additional Specialist Learning; the implementation of Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills; and the implementation of the Gateway and Centre Approval processes. Without this influence, the Diploma is drifting away from the DDP vision and could ultimately fail due to lack of employer and HE support.

(c) Ensure effective support for the employer-led DDP role in terms of endorsement of qualifications, clearly communicated to all parties (for example establishing that public funding will only be available for qualifications which have been endorsed by the DDP).

(d) Identify the Critical Success Factors for 2008 implementation, specifically considering the outstanding technical and policy matters,⁵ the needs of students and schools & colleges, and the requirements to ensure continued support from employers and HE.

(e) Undertake a comprehensive assessment of the complete range of teaching and learning materials, delivery mechanisms and teacher upskilling activities required to ensure successful delivery for each line of learning.

(f) Undertake a full risk assessment and create appropriate risk mitigation plans, including risks emanating from grading decisions, the very short qualification development timescale and workforce development needs.

(g) Control volumes and timing to ensure that implementation will be of consistently high quality. Depending on the outcomes of the risk assessment, this is likely to involve either a very small, tightly controlled introduction in 2008 with extensive hands-on support or else a delay until 2009.

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⁵ Including those relating to Grading, Functional Skills, Additional/Specialist Learning and Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills.

Witnesses: **Dr Ken Boston**, Chief Executive, QCA, **Mr Geoff Fieldsend**, Director of Workforce Development, Sector Skills Development Agency, **Ms Karen Price**, Chief Executive, e-Skills and **Mr John Rogers**, Chief Executive, Skills for Health, gave evidence.

Q1 Chairman: May I welcome Ken Boston, Karen Price, John Rogers and Geoff Fieldsend to our proceedings. We are always very grateful when witnesses give of their time to appear before this Committee. As you know, we are embarking on a major inquiry into skills. Before we set full course on that, we thought there was some urgency for us to look at the level of preparedness for the new Diplomas. We intend not only to take evidence on the new Diplomas briefly today but in another ministerial session and write a short Report because we believe, in the Committee, that it is better to produce that on its own and as quickly as possible. We would be grateful to hear anything you can say today to help us in writing that Report. Would any of you like to say something about the state of preparedness of the Diplomas, taking a couple of minutes each?

Dr Boston: Might I say at the beginning that this qualification, the specialised Diploma, is the most important reform in which I have ever been involved in 40 years in education. It is the key strategy to raise participation and achievement in education post-16; that is the international league table against which we are performing quite poorly. It captures the essence of Tomlinson. It embodies a radical but internationally proven approach to learning by drawing on a curriculum that reflects not only the traditional academic disciplines but the disciplines of contemporary British business and industry. It is a curriculum constructed by employers. The purpose is to drive us forward as an internationally competitive knowledge nation. From 2008, the objective is that some of our 14-year-olds in work-related settings, not traditional classrooms, will study at level 1 topics such as: computer-aided engineering; introductory electronics; air-conditioning and refrigeration; designing the built environment; enterprise and entrepreneurial activities. At level 2, 14–16, young people might be: constructing electronic and electrical systems; applying the principles of design and the use of different materials; producing multi-media technologies; preparing risk assessments within health and social care. Again, at the age of 16–18, in the workplace or work-related settings, the curriculum could include: advanced software development; use of technology in the creation of new business; instrumentation and control engineering; site surveying; production planning and scheduling, and so on. At the same time, each of those young people at the three levels will acquire guaranteed functional skills in maths, English and ICT as the essential tools needed for higher education and employment and the personal and interpersonal relationship skills needed for success. I would put it to the Committee that the aim of the Diplomas is the same as that of any other high quality educational programme and that is to exercise and grow the learning muscle which is in the head of every young person. For some that growth is stimulated by the study of an academic discipline.

For others across the entire ability range it is better stimulated by a vocational-based curriculum. For many, the best learning experience involves both. This is education, not training for job readiness. We do not teach French or history to 16-year-olds to prepare them for a living as professional linguists or professors of history, although that might turn out to be the case; rather, the purpose is to grow their minds, skills and imaginations by immersion in aspects of our culture. Similarly, the objective of teaching introductory electronics, software development or production planning and scheduling is not to prepare young people for careers in those fields, although that might turn out to be the case, but to exercise and grow their minds, skills and imaginations by immersion in aspects of our contemporary culture and economy. The focus then is on the creation of higher order skills in both the cognitive domain, which is what young people know, can do and understand; and in the effective domain, and that is what they are like, whether they are team workers or problem-solvers or independent learners, and so on. This qualification addresses the needs which employers and teachers in further education and universities have identified so clearly, the national consensus that Mike Tomlinson captured so well. The main challenges before us at the moment are: to create national understanding of the role and purpose of the Diplomas before their introduction from 2008; to manage and resource their delivery; and to assure the quality and standard of their delivery from the point of introduction. The end point, the prize of all of this, is a vastly better platform than we have at present on which to build the skills needed to meet current skills shortages, to drive up participation and achievement in education and training and hence to grow the investment in our national stock of human and social capital.

Ms Price: I have not prepared an opening statement, although we did submit written evidence.¹ I would like to build on what Ken said, if I may, and particularly to give possibly a perspective from employers, and we are responsible for the development of the IT Diploma. I think employers are extremely enthusiastic about the opportunity that they have been given to influence the curriculum so that it is relevant to the world of work in the 21st century. I think they are massively supportive of the Diplomas and have been involved in their development from the beginning. Very much building on what Ken said, they do not view this as a vocational option; it is very much what one of my employers described as the career oriented option for those young people who clearly want to develop the skills that will mean that they can hit the ground running when they enter the world of work. I think it is an ambitious programme. We all hold high aspirations for it. There are a lot of things that we need to make sure happen so that there is a quality programme in 2008 but employers are very much behind this.

¹ Ev 9

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Mr Rogers: Like Karen, I have not prepared a formal statement in terms of introduction. I echo everything that Karen has said about employer engagement in this. Of all the work in which I have been engaged in terms of this age group, this is probably the best employer engagement that we have ever had.

Mr Fieldsend: I thought I might start by explaining that the SSDA is an NDPB and, together with my colleagues in the sector skills councils, we formed something called the Skills for Business Network. That is why the evidence we have submitted appeared in that form and under that name. I have three other points to make. I do think the SSCs have done an amazing job in a very difficult process and against a very tight timescale. The level of employer input into the Diploma design and content has been unprecedented. I would echo the words of my colleagues that what we are all after here is parity of standard. A lot of people are talking about parity of esteem in relation to the various offerings from schools and colleges but I think it is extremely important that standards are maintained and that people see that from the outset. Finally, because of that, it is extremely important that we manage this process carefully. A lot has been said about the management of the programme. I think it has been very well handled in many ways, but there are risks involved. The critical issue for us in all of this is to make sure those risks are minimised and we have a high quality product that is valued by parents, young people and employers alike.

Q2 Chairman: Thank you all for those introductory remarks. If it is all so inspirational, and many of us who followed the Tomlinson saga—the report and the Government’s reaction to that report and so on—still hold the faith that this will be a very real new beginning for a different kind of learning in our schools, in a sense it meshes very well with the inquiry on which we are coming to a conclusion, and that is Building Sustainable Schools and looking at Building Schools for the Future. It becomes more and more apparent that if we are going to build schools for the future, they have to be ones with a very different kind of learning and teaching experience within them. If everything is so wonderful, Ken Boston, why is there so much worry and concern that we might not deliver a high quality product on time?

Dr Boston: The issue is the complexity and scale of this work. It is a very big reform and a very important one. I believe it is manageable but it does need to be managed very effectively. What we are looking at is really not one Diploma but 14 Diplomas at three levels each. There are 42 qualifications. Introducing those across the country within the desirable time span beginning in 2008 is a major task. If we are saying people are concerned, I think people are increasingly understanding that we have a big task on our hands. We need to identify all the dimensions of that and manage them properly and well. I think that is the issue. I do not think we are taking on anything which is not

achievable but we are taking on something which is a serious and large piece of work that requires us all to roll up our sleeves and get on with it in a seriously managed and deliberate way.

Q3 Chairman: Being seriously managed is really at the heart of it, is it not. For serious management, if we are looking at it in a forensic way, the trial must lead straight back to the Department for Education and Skills. Geoff Fieldsend, you work closely with the Department. How confident are you that there is the right quality of management in the Department for Education and Skills to make this a success?

Mr Fieldsend: I have no doubt that Jon Coles, who I assume that you will be interviewing, is a first-class civil servant and I think he has managed a very complex partnership extremely well. As we reflect on the process to date, because the timescales were so short, it was extremely difficult for anyone to put together that partnership without some risks that there might be difficulties in relation to all the different agencies working well together. There has been some reflection on how things have worked so far. That reflection has led to what I think are sensible proposals on how we move forward. If I may just say one thing about the Department for Education and Skills, the critical issue is that the senior civil servants in the Department for Education and Skills must be responsible for end-to-end management of a process and not just for policy dimensions of their areas of remit. Sometimes there has been a tension in relation to those aspects of their work. In the main, I think they have been handled extremely well but certainly for the future we have all agreed that there needs to be a particular focus on that management within the DfES which, after all, are ultimately responsible for the success of the Diploma as a whole and for organisations like mine playing the right part in that process.

Q4 Chairman: Are we sure that there is the management quality and commitment in the Department?

Mr Fieldsend: The process at the moment is that there is a temporary civil servant taking the reins in that particular role and that vacancy is up for grabs. A whole new system, which has given a lot more say to other bodies involved in the process, is being put in place. We are still in discussions about that, but I am confident and hopeful that what we will have in place is the right type of management mechanism for the future.

Q5 Chairman: What is the temporary civil servant doing?

Mr Fieldsend: The temporary civil servant is managing a project board, which will comprise all the key players, including the sector skills and awarding bodies.

Q6 Chairman: What keeps coming back to us, all of us who have worked closely in the educational sector, is that there was not a strong enough

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and senior enough management team in the Department earlier. If this is as ambitious as Ken Boston has described so eloquently, it is a very big change process. Can you remember the last time the Department launched a new curriculum as part of the educational system?

Dr Boston: The last previous big change was Curriculum 2000 and the introduction of the change to A levels.

Q7 Chairman: How would you assess that in terms of the magnitude of the task compared to this one?

Dr Boston: It is difficult to compare them because this is an entirely new area of curriculum, not the modernisation and reshaping of other curricula. I would think this is a bigger task.

Q8 Chairman: Should a bigger team be there in the Department?

Dr Boston: Perhaps I could comment on that? Mr Chairman, as you are aware, the QCA and the QCA Board in particular have been interested of course in the way in which this process has been managed and delivered. We have, over a period of time, had representations made to us by awarding bodies, by sector skills councils and by others about the way in which this might be managed and should be managed as we move into the process of development and implementation. It is all very new territory. Everyone obviously is aware of the importance of it and aware of the need to make sure it happens effectively. The QCA Board has made, over a period probably of 12 months, a number of suggestions and proposals to the DfES and to ministers about the way in which this might be managed. Those representations have been heard and they have been responded to. One of the things we were pushing for was very much stronger public leadership of the Diplomas. We now have the four champions appointed; they will be taking a very public role in explaining to different constituencies what this is about. There is now a single programme board where there was not previously. There is now a project director. The current appointment is temporary. I understand a permanent appointment is to be made. That person will have an overview of the entire thing from beginning to end and will be responsible for managing it. There has been increased representation put on various developmental bodies from the awarding bodies and from the SSCs. That is very important and was absent previously. Very significant changes have been made and were made in December. I think that was in response to representation from the QCA and others. We now have a structure that I think will work. It is a structure that can be made to work very effectively provided all of us who are involved in this are managing it in a disciplined, project management way, looking step-by-step, week-by-week at the developments, accountabilities and interdependencies between various bodies, between us, for example as QCA developing the qualification, and TDA and other bodies training the teachers to deliver the qualifications. If we can

get all those ducks in a row, the interdependencies of the various bodies both inside government and outside government, like the awarding bodies and the SSCs, look particularly at risk. The way in which we are going to manage risk is by clearly identifying risk and then dealing with it. I believe we can deliver this process on the current timescale with this structure. If it is not working, then it would need to be changed again and be flexible. I think there is every indication, from the changes that have been made in December, that Government is prepared to listen to our concerns and to respond to them in a flexible and proper way. Yes, the QCA Board has been concerned about this, as its minutes show. We are now confident we have a solution that will work provided we have, as undoubtedly we have, the commitment of all the parties, including the DfES, to manage this in a disciplined and strategic way, not defining who is doing what but monitoring who has done what, whether time lines have been met, whether targets have been met and whether accountabilities have been met, and calling bodies to account, if they have not.

Q9 Chairman: Do you believe that ministers have been sufficiently engaged in this process? Are ministers aware of the immensity and the importance of the task?

Dr Boston: Yes. Jim Knight and Phil Hope are jointly now chairing a meeting of chief executives of the Government and non-departmental agencies involved. We are focusing quite directly on identifying risk and dealing with it beneath or perhaps alongside the structure which the Department also has for the 11–19 programme or the Diploma Development Board on which there is now, as I said, thankfully, awarding body and SSC representation.

Q10 Chairman: Can any of you tell me how prepared this all is in terms of how finite now are the first five Diplomas? How finely-tuned are they and how ready to go are they?

Ms Price: At the moment, we are at the point where we have worked both with employers and higher education to define the context. We are now in the process of working with awarding bodies to turn it into a qualification; that is going to happen over the next few months. The next two variables are in preparing the teaching workforce and the centres that are going to offer it for delivery. I still think there is a lot to do in very challenging timescales to achieve a quality output. My view is that the customers for the Diploma are employers, higher education and then young people and their parents. If we do not have a high quality product that delights those customers in 2008, we will have failed the economy and young people. There is a lot still to be done to achieve that.

Q11 Chairman: When will they be ready or fit for purpose?

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Ms Price: The qualifications will be on the statute books in the summer of 2007, which is a year before they are due to be awarded.

Q12 Chairman: Are you confident that all five will be ready?

Ms Price: We are committed to that.

Q13 Chairman: Geoff Fieldsend, do you think that is going to happen?

Mr Fieldsend: We are on course. We have effectively absorbed some timeline slippage which occurred during the summer and our evidence explains some of the reasons for that. I think we are now on course, but many a slip and all that. We have some months to go and we need to monitor, as Ken says, the process carefully from here on in.

Q14 Chairman: The Diplomas will be in their final shape by the summer. How much resource will be put into this and how quickly can we train the teachers? This is very new. Ken Boston has introduced this and it is a very sophisticated and new way of teaching a whole new syllabus across a large number of very different sectors. Where is the capacity to train those teachers and get them ready and fit to teach the Diplomas?

Mr Rogers: There is a critical issue in terms of how this is rolled out as to whether it is small and growing or whether we try a mass roll-out. One of the things that we have just done is through a gateway process, which is part of the normal process for this, looking at centres' readiness in terms of delivery. Within health and social care, we have looked at over 230 centres in terms of their readiness. Our judgement on that is that there are probably 33 centres that will be prepared by 2008 to run and deliver a quality product if we work with them and everything else alongside that. I suspect that the danger in this is if we do try a bulk roll-out in terms of a mass roll-out. It is far better to get a quality product right and grow it rather than to try to get mass roll-out in that way.

Q15 Chairman: To date, the Government has been committed to a full roll-out and not a pilot?

Mr Rogers: It depends what you describe as "pilot" in many ways.

Q16 Chairman: They are talking about 50,000 students in the first year. That is not a pilot, is it?

Mr Rogers: I think that will be challenging in terms of a quality roll-out.

Q17 Paul Holmes: Going back to some of the discussion we have already had, it was said that the last thing that was done on this scale was Curriculum 2000 and that this one is much bigger than that. I was head of sixth form and a history teacher the first year of Curriculum 2000 and it was a shambles. Textbooks were not written and printed on time; schools did not have the money to buy them anyway; the guidance on how coursework was going to be assessed only arrived

after Easter 2001 when students had already done the first piece of coursework. The whole thing was a shambles. It was rushed and botched. It worries me that, from what we are hearing, we are in danger of the same sort of thing. Geoff Fieldsend was saying that civil servants and the politicians who oversee that should not just be pressing a policy button; they should be seeing the thing through end-to-end. That is clearly not what happened with Curriculum 2000. Are we in danger of that happening again on a much bigger scale with this project?

Mr Rogers: To reiterate my last answer, I think we have a fantastic product here. The potential for it is enormous. The critical thing is to make sure that we deliver quality on the ground first and then expand later.

Dr Boston: I think the key to this really is the management of the roll-out in a very deliberate way so that in effect we are building on what has occurred to date and we are managing really a pilot introduction. The key to all of this is effective working relationships at the local level between schools, FE colleges and business and industry workplaces. There has been a great deal of success with the IFP, the flexibility programme. Some very good partnerships have been built up. That has to be the locus for beginning these Diplomas, and indeed it is the essence of the gateway process that it really in fact restricts the take-up of the Diplomas to areas where these partnerships are effective. There are of course teachers out there in FE and schools and people in industry who can deliver this work—they do not all have to be trained from the start—but there are not sufficient of them to take up the difference between what we now have as a 79% participation rate and the 90 or 95% participation rate we want. Those teachers are not there at the moment. They have to be created; they have to be recruited and trained, and that will take time. I think the key to success is to build this thing slowly and, as John says, to give priority to quality and standard of delivery rather than massive take-up quickly. The cohort is 600,000 in each year. Given that at AS and A2 there are only 250,000 students at the moment enrolled, there is potentially a lot of slack there; 50,000 over three levels is not a huge number, given that dimension but, even so, if we cannot deliver that amount in the first few years without compromising standards and quality of delivery, then we should go for quality and standards rather than seeing the Diploma as a sort of silver bullet that will suddenly drive us to the higher levels of the OECD league tables. If we do that and the Diploma does not appeal to the full ability range from the start, then this qualification will fail. Phased, managed, deliberate roll-out, certainly in three tranches—2008, 2009 and 2010—but really not full delivery finally until 2013 must be the way in which we see this. I came in, of course, at the end of the 2002 issue, but clearly we have to learn from the lessons of that. There was rushed delivery and inadequate preparation and it caused failure. We are not going to have the same thing occur with this qualification.

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Q18 Paul Holmes: You have identified two themes in what has been said so far. One is the issue of timescale and the other of management. Staying with timescale for a moment, the NUT has said that the timescale for awarding bodies to turn Diplomas to specifications is very tight. The Federation of Awarding Bodies has said that five months is the shortest timeframe within which awarding bodies have ever attempted to develop a major national qualification. The Institution of Engineering and Technology has said that the introduction of the Diplomas has been rushed. Everybody concerned, including what you have said today, seems to be saying that the timescale is impossible, that it is not going to be a quality product and it is not going to work if we try to stick to that timescale. Are you saying that the Government has got to abandon their initial timescale?

Dr Boston: It is very important that we start this off in 2008. There is such an interest and pressure from schools and colleges. The constituency that Mike Tomlinson built is the expression of that. I think we can hit the timescales. The qualification is there. There is no doubt the qualification will be available in detail from September 2007 with first teaching to begin in 2008. The key issue is the scale of that first teaching. It is not an issue about letting it out another year; I think there would be great disappointment and serious damage if we did that. We have to move ahead with it and do that but let us be measured and guarded with the roll-out.

Q19 Paul Holmes: The University and College Union has said that it should be delayed a year so that we can do it correctly rather than do it on time.

Dr Boston: They have but I think it is critical that we meet the 2008 deadline for some delivery and I am certain that we can.

Ms Price: May I add, certainly from the point of view of the employers, that I think the quality of the first roll-out is the key criterion if they are going to remain engaged and therefore I do think now is the time for a risk assessment on the timescales. I think we should have the courage to delay a year if that is required because to have what you have just described fills me with terror, quite honestly.

Q20 Paul Holmes: You would disagree with Ken. You think we probably should wait a year?

Ms Price: No, I am saying it is time to do a proper risk assessment across all the constituencies to look at readiness, and now is about the right time to do it.

Q21 Chairman: Geoff and John, you are nodding. Do you agree with that?

Mr Rogers: I very much agree with Karen on that. Basically that is not indicating that we are definitely saying that we think we should delay but certainly the risk should be analysed. Basically there are risks in delaying and risks in going forward.

Ms Price: The prize is so great in terms of the ambition for this qualification.

Dr Boston: May I add that the qualification does not become an entitlement until 2013. The roll-out can be managed without the notion that it has to be a ubiquitously available qualification before that time. Each development phase has three full years of evaluation, both of the qualification, its assessment and grading, its delivery, its curriculum and so on as this roll-out occurs, so that we will be monitoring and assessing performance as this is unpacked. To me, that is the sort of brake, along with the gateway project, on excessive galloping forward and then finding that we have lost the plot.

Q22 Paul Holmes: To go back to the management question on the timescale, I know there was a lot of concern, certainly last autumn, that the management just was not happening; there was nobody in charge and making sure the thing went forward in a coherent way and to time. As recently as just in the last few days, the BBC have reported that the QCA had this flagged up as a "red risk" programme. You have been slightly more optimistic. You said that you have made these representations and the Government has heard and responded to that and you have four champions. Has it all turned around in the last two or three months? Are you confident that you have a grip on the management now?

Dr Boston: There was a very significant change in December as a result of representations, not only by QCA but by others. Those changes have occurred. I believe that that will work. It is not everything that everyone was recommending, including what the QCA was recommending, but the Secretary of State has made a decision in relation to it. The structure we have now been shown and we are now involved in delivering and participating in I think will work provided, as I said, we all focus on the issue not of defining what our roles and descriptions are but increasingly and overwhelmingly on the risk: how does my organisation relate to these two organisations, Geoff's organisation, the awarding bodies, City and Guilds and OCR and other people who are doing part of this work? Those interdependencies have to be visible, and we all have to be accountable. We all have to have time lines and deliverables to meet. I think that can happen through this structure. We were much less confident about that some months ago.

Q23 Paul Holmes: Do we need a Diploma tsar, the person who carries the can for this?

Dr Boston: We have four people. I am not sure how one describes four. There are four people who are the public face of all of this. Presumably they will have a very serious interest in the delivery of it.

Mr Fieldsend: I think it is very important that we have the public face representing the commitment of employers. That would be extremely useful. Equally, the Department for Education and Skills is responsible for this. I would not want to see a situation where somebody was brought in ostensibly with responsibility whereas in fact it is

the DfES machine which has to manage the process. We should certainly see the DfES as being accountable for the overall managements.

Chairman: The buck stops in Sanctuary House?

Q24 Paul Holmes: It has been said that we have this incredibly tight timetable of five months to produce a major new Diploma. Do we know what that Diploma structure should be? Ken said it should be more about the thinking skills, whereas many people out there, politicians and businessmen, might say that a Diploma is about vocational skills. We have the same problem with advanced GNVQs. My school was one of the first 30 in the country to offer them when they were introduced. All the way through the route to GNVQs there was this dichotomy: is it about thinking skills being the equivalent of A level or is about actually learning a vocation. You are saying quite clearly it should be for skills.

Dr Boston: On the issue of five months, we are not starting from scratch. We have been working on this for well over 18 months to two years. We now have criteria for all of the five Diplomas on the website. This is the qualification: it tells you the size, content, what students will study (I gave some examples of that in my introductory statement), number of guided learning hours, and the balance between principal learning, the generic learning specialist and additional learning. Of course this is a series of qualifications of the same size and standard as a result of the work which has been done. The qualification is there. There is not a great deal of scrambling around the content of the specification to be done within the next few months. The key issue is delivery. As for the actual purpose of it, I think there is unanimity amongst the sector skills councils and the awarding bodies that the fundamental purpose of this is to use a business driven or employment driven curriculum for educational purposes; it is vocational education not vocational training. We are producing a qualification that will prepare youngsters for life and not necessarily to go out and lay 100 bricks in a straight line in an hour because that is the purpose of an apprenticeship. They will be using a curriculum which has great involvement in the workplace. Half the possible learning at least has to be done in a work-related environment. What they do will be very hands-on, but the key objective is, as I said, growing and exercising that learning muscle up here. All learning is hand-mind-eye co-ordination and reasoning, judging, doing, whether it is in the area of solving an equation, writing a sonnet, producing a fine piece of furniture, designing a website or working in automated practice. Education is about thinking, judging, reasoning and doing. By expanding the range of curricula which we are now offering, as many countries well ahead of us on the OECD tables have done, although not necessarily within a baccalaureate or a Diploma structure, we will have many students who are currently taking existing qualifications finding a programme which is more interesting to them, and many students who are

dropping out of existing qualifications finding a set of activities and a new set of disciplines in which they can engage and keep going. Although the Diploma is new, the actual use of industry-driven curricula for fundamental education rather than training purposes is not new. It is a characteristic of all those countries like Belgium, Holland, Germany and the Scandinavian countries that are well ahead of us on the OECD tables.

Q25 Paul Holmes: Are employers quite clear that Diplomas are not an apprenticeship in bricklaying or becoming a software programmer but a higher level qualification?

Ms Price: I am absolutely confident, and I speak of all five Diplomas. The interesting thing that the employers have identified is that what they are looking for is a strong foundation for employability. Therefore, one of the things they like about the Diploma brand is the emphasis on the functional skills in English and maths and also the personal learning and thinking skills, the softer skills that they are always talking about, being embraced within Diplomas. This is about a strong foundation for employment. There is an extraordinary synergy between the requirements expressed by higher education and employers. I am confident that the higher education institutions that have been involved in the development of the first five are comfortable with the content of the foundation for degree programmes.

Mr Rogers: I support what Karen and Ken have said. That is the case. This is about applied learning and employment readiness, not job readiness.

Q26 Mr Pelling: I want to draw this issue about timing to an end with two short quotes from responses we have received. The Institute of Engineering and Technology has said that the introduction of Diplomas has been rushed. Do you think that was a polite and timid description of what has happened and would you accept what they say about it?

Ms Price: I think the original timescales as set out in the White Paper did not take account of the radical reform we are now talking about. I am absolutely confident that the IT Diploma is going to be radically different to anything that has been offered in IT education in schools. From the beginning to where we are now, the scale of the task before us has grown. I think that has put pressure on the timescales. Had it been merely a tweaking of the system, we would probably all have been very comfortable. That is why I think it is timely to take another look at the timescales.

Q27 Mr Pelling: The University and College Union recommends that the second and third wave of Diplomas be delayed. Do you feel that is a good recommendation?

Ms Price: I would not understand the logic of that. The second and third waves, to the best of my knowledge, are proceeding extremely well because they have a policy environment in which to work

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and a lot of learning has gone before them. The lessons will have been learnt for the 2009 and 2010 roll-out and structures will be in place for that.

Mr Fieldsend: It is an entirely new process. The first five have gone through a new process and how the process should work has bedded down now. Nobody had worked out before exactly what would happen when you brought in employers and started to think about the content they wanted and then tried to convert that into qualification and curriculum material. Having learnt the lessons of how that works, we are much clearer now about how long it takes. They have had a longer timeline to do their work. That probably would not be a sensible suggestion. The real focus is on whether the system will be ready for the first wave.

Q28 Chairman: Three of you are nodding your heads about the need for a risk assessment urgently. Ken, are you for a risk assessment but not delay?

Dr Boston: I do not want delay. I will come to risk assessment. The essential thing about the time line is that there is no full entitlement till 2013. If the understanding was that every school and college in the country would be able to offer these things in 2008, 2009 and 2010, it would be undeliverable, but if it is managed in such a way that we are working to a full entitlement in 2013, it is achievable. On the risk assessment issue, I think that the constant assessment of risk is absolutely critical. In our submission we make the point that the OGC gateway review process is a very good process and we use it in the QCA always on major procurement exercises. I am sure the DfES people will agree because I have discussed it with them. We should be having, as we move through to 2013, regular, independent, OGC gateway assessments of our performance and report publicly on how this is proceeding. It is absolutely critical that that is done.

Q29 Mr Marsden: I would like to probe further how the development process is going to be managed and developed. I turn to you first, Ken Boston. In the context of what we have just been hearing about timelines, I was interested in the concern about delay and other things. I think you emphasised the point that this is not just a single Diploma but 14 Diplomas at three levels and 42 separate qualifications, if my note is correct. In the light of the concerns that are being expressed about roll-out, timelines, deadlines, call them what you will, is that not perhaps too many?

Dr Boston: No, I do not believe so. The three levels are very closely related to each other. They are a progressive and sequential set of qualifications. We do not anticipate that the numbers taking the qualifications at level 1, at least initially, will be high but there could be substantial numbers at level 2 and level 3, or people wishing to take it at level 2 and level 3. Provided again, as I said, that the gateway process works effectively, I think the implementation can be managed and the development of the Diplomas through the SSCs at these three levels is in fact there. Each of these

documents which sets out the criteria specifies what the content and the size is at each of those three levels. The awarding bodies still have a great deal of work to do to deliver all of that but we are certainly on target and on course with that.

Q30 Mr Marsden: You said at the beginning that you do not think there is much difference between the various levels. What about the actual range? We have heard from witnesses just now about how important it is, and you yourself said this, that these are not seen as bespoke training Diplomas. With 14, is there not a danger that, even if they are not that, to the outside world, to colleges and employers, they may be seen as such, simply by virtue of the numbers?

Mr Fieldsend: One of the confusions here is between occupations and sectors. These are sectorally based qualifications; they are equipping people for a range of different occupations but they are quite broad. The construction industry is quite broad and at different levels. We did a lot of work to try to think through the right configuration of these Diplomas. From all the people with whom we consulted, I think 14 is about right.

Q31 Mr Marsden: Please understand that I am not saying that they are not right. I am saying there is a danger about what the perception of the outside world, when they are presented with something as novel and radical as has been described, will be. You are going to need to make a very clear effort to bring across the points that you, Ken, and others have made.

Mr Fieldsend: There is a huge communication issue.

Dr Boston: Could I add that while there are these 14 lines of learning, 14 different Diplomas, not all the content is different from Diploma to Diploma. The core learning, the requirement for maths, English and ICT and the personal learning and thinking skills which make up the core, are common to all these Diplomas at each level.

Q32 Mr Marsden: Will that be clearly delineated to employers and to people looking at this?

Dr Boston: Yes. The additional learning is a matter of choice. A student could, for example, in the additional learning at level 3, take an A level or some units of an A level qualification within it, so there is flexibility there. The principal learning and the specialist learning are the particular elements that distinguish the 14 parts.

Q33 Mr Marsden: Geoff Fieldsend, I wonder if I could return for a moment to the issue of capacity, which obviously we have talked about. We have talked about the level of management in DfES, the need for someone to be there, whether we call them a tsar or whatever, to manage the process end-to-end. I am slightly concerned, no matter who this paragon eventually turns out to be, whether there is going to be enough capacity in the Department

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for all the day-to-day, nuts and bolts stuff. Are we not in danger of having not enough Indians as well as perhaps not having a permanent chief?

Mr Fieldsend: I do not know exactly the number of people that they will have dedicated to the Diploma work. It is also important that people who are dedicated to Diplomas are not responsible for other issues. Certainly capacity in all of the key agencies, including the DfES, has been part of the review that was carried out, but I cannot comment on that.

Q34 Mr Marsden: I accept that and I am not asking you to do that. Would you not accept that if we agree—I think the Chairman said that the buck stops in Sanctuary House—that that is the case, then it is crucial that the capacity for delivery for just chasing things up below that co-ordinating civil servant should be sufficient, precisely because we are on extremely tight timelines?

Mr Fieldsend: I absolutely agree that we should never under-power any new initiative of this sort.

Ms Price: I come from a business background. As the Chairman has said, this is a huge change management programme. Certainly, from a business perspective, this would be manned by a large team of highly capable and qualified people. We must not underestimate the capacity issues. If there is recognition of what we are trying to do and address, then we will stand a much better chance of success.

Q35 Mr Marsden: I would like to continue with you, Karen, and talk about some of the issues on the balance between the various Diplomas. You said in your written evidence to us that the creation of the subject criteria had been very challenging. One or two of the people who have sent us written evidence, including the NUT, have expressed concern about the balance between the various different Diplomas. I think the NUT for example in their evidence to us said, and this in terms of volume, not necessarily in terms of the level: “The Creative and Media Diploma, for example, seems to be very heavy in content compared to the IT Diploma.” I am obviously not asking you to comment on which Diploma is heavier in volume. I am interested to know—maybe John Rogers wants to say something about this as well—what co-ordination and discussion there has been between the various sectors in terms of developing the Diploma to make sure that there is a reasonable degree of comparability in terms of volume and density, or however you want to call it, which is one of the issues to which the NUT is drawing attention.

Ms Price: My answer to that is yes, there has been coordination across the first five and there should be now consistency across all five in terms of weighting because we have the policy framework to work against in terms of weighting and hours et cetera. It is probably a misperception if it is seen that there is greater volume in one than others but nonetheless what I would argue for is that we must not let the drive for consistency across all of these

14 Diplomas deny the inevitable sectoral differences and flexibilities. My employers are very clear in terms of what they are looking for from the Diploma. It will be different for other sectors. If we do not take on board that requirement employers will disengage and, if they disengage, the young people will not be well served.

Q36 Mr Marsden: It is a balance between coordination and making sure you do not end up with the lowest common denominator. Is that your perception?

Mr Rogers: To a certain extent, you probably have to look at where various people are in terms of the actual information that they are commenting on. There has been a lot of work between the Diploma partnerships across the different sectors in terms of looking across and probably I would point the question more towards Ken in many ways in that the responsibility of the Qualification Curriculum Authority is to make sure that this, as a national qualification, has broad equivalences across. I think that work has been done and we have done a lot of work with the QCA and colleges on that.

Q37 Mr Marsden: You will have seen from the thrust of my questions earlier on the concern that I am trying to articulate. There might be seen to be too many elements of this. Looking at it from the outside, a number of us have joked many times about having a diagram to explain the various qualifications and links in the skills sector. Is there a perception out there that this is a process that has had too many cooks spoiling the broth?

Dr Boston: The Diplomas?

Q38 Mr Marsden: Yes.

Dr Boston: It is key to this new qualification that it does draw on a number of different partners. Unlike, for example, the area of National Curriculum tests or the general qualifications, the QCA has absolutely no curriculum role in relation to this. It rests with the sector skills councils, with business, and the expression of it is through the DDP. Our curriculum role is restricted to working with the SSCs in relation to the core skills, not in relation to the principal and specialist learning, which is the bulk of this work. Inevitably through that there have been other partners coming in which in other qualifications there would not be. When you go across 14 sectors you have 14 sector skills councils, each of which is an agglomeration of different businesses and employers so it is very complex. Our task has been to ensure consistency. We are responsible for if you like the template into which the qualification fits. We have to make sure that the balance between the core skills, the principal learning and the specialist and additional learning is the same, that the level of demand being made across the qualifications is the same so that level 3 means a level 3 across all of them and a level 2 means a level 2 across all of them. That consistency has been a constant goal. There is also—and this is the richness of the qualification—

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the bespoke nature of the principal learning and that is reflected in the different ways in which the criteria have been put together.

Q39 Mr Marsden: Do you think because it involves all the various elements you have talked about, the bespoke elements and the various different contributors, the employers' priorities will change and develop sometimes very rapidly? Does that mean that we are looking at Diplomas that are going to need more rapid revision than traditional qualifications?

Dr Boston: I think that is absolutely true. They will need revision and development. They will need to remain responsive to the needs of industry. It is clear that we will need to have something like the Diploma Development Partnerships, whatever they might be called, as ongoing monitoring. One of the beauties of this qualification being modular is that you can update different modules without having to recast the whole qualification.

Q40 Fiona Mactaggart: Geoff said this is an absolutely new process. Ken said, "We have got a way of doing this." I read e-Skills's very clear account of the slightly frustrating iterative process you have been through in developing it. There has been quite a lot of anxiety about the development process from the range of evidence that we have received. Do we know how to develop these programmes now? What is different now to what it was in the beginning? Have we got a system properly worked through for future ones and can someone describe it to me?

Dr Boston: The answer is yes, we do know now how to do this thing. We have been developing new territory because this is entirely new. For example, the issues of grading the units, awarding the units in the Diploma, assessing them, whether we are going to grade the Diploma as a whole or not. That was a big question 12 months ago. We had some very good work done under the leadership of Cap Gemini on that. That is ticked off. We know we are going to grade the Diplomas. We know how we are going to arrive at those grades. We know how we are going to arrive at the units. We know how we assemble the qualification into its three components of core, principal and specialist and additional. We have determined the balance between the guided learning for each of those elements and the size of the Diplomas at levels 1, 2 and 3. That is standard. For the next tranche we will not have to go through all that work again; nor with the one after. We have established a process. What we have not yet fully established is the process for delivery of it. We have the Gateway process but it is the roll-out, delivery and management of risk during implementation which is the new ground now to be broken. We have learned an enormous amount, talking to the QCA alone, although it has been a partner in all of this. We have, between the various partners, achieved an enormous amount in two years. An enormous amount of learning has occurred and

that learning will not have to be repeated. It will just be applied as the new qualifications in the subsequent tranches roll-out.

Mr Fieldsend: We had six months to turn this content around. I will be entirely honest. I think I underestimated just now much difference there would be between the different Diploma lines. When you think about it, it is quite obvious in hindsight why that would be the case. Sectors are different. Their entry points to employment are different. Some would be more focused on progression; others might be more focused on people leaving school at an earlier age. An equivalent might be to get people to sort out a curriculum for ancient Greek, physics and art in a six month period and expect them to all look very similar. They obviously came through in very different shapes and sizes. What we then recognised is that, because of the pressures of timescales, there needed to be some work done on Gordon's point about shaping and sizing the Diplomas to make sure that there was an equivalence in terms of level and the weight of learning et cetera that was required. That was a particular challenge for us. We have had to absorb some of the slippage that occurred as a result of that but I think we now have a much better understanding about how this process would work.

Q41 Fiona Mactaggart: How significant in developing that has been having an understanding? I can hear that one thing that has been significant is understanding the employer as a consumer. I have not heard work about understanding the needs of the student as a consumer or the teacher as a consumer of these products. I would like to know how that has been built into this development process.

Ms Price: Perhaps I can describe the structure that has overseen the development of where we are, which is something called the Diploma Development Partnership. That is an over-arching group in our case, if I can use it as an example. We have about eight different subgroups contributing to the Diploma, one of employers, one of higher education institutions, one of school teachers, one of further education. The Diploma Development Partnership includes the whole cohort of stakeholders that need to make this a success. Certainly we have consulted with and involved a reasonable cohort in terms of representing the interests. Obviously it is a communications exercise now to talk to every school and young person.

Mr Rogers: Added to that is that certainly within our sector the employers that we have been engaged with are a lot of the employers who were already actively engaged with schools and colleges, with apprenticeships or similar programmes, and therefore there is already that engagement and knowledge in terms of working with those partners.

Q42 Fiona Mactaggart: Have you done any research into the attitudes of students?

Mr Rogers: The answer is no for us.

Ms Price: We have a young persons' interest group but I think there has been research conducted by the Department which has been shared with us in terms of attitudes across a cohort of young people in focus groups.

Q43 Fiona Mactaggart: Has it influenced the development of these? It does not sound to me as though it has. I am not blaming you for that but it is clearly not a big factor in your thinking, is it?

Ms Price: It is in our thinking because in terms of the content we have let that quite rightly be driven by higher education and employers because ultimately, if they do not take these young people on, we have failed. The input of young people has been very much focused on how delivery needs to change, how we can produce teaching and learning resources that are exciting, innovative and stimulating. That is where they have influenced that stage of it.

Dr Boston: At one level, the QCA does consult with students. We have some consultative bodies that contribute to thinking about schools and the curriculum. I cannot say that they have directly designed and shaped the Diploma, but we talk to them about the issues concerned with schooling. We also in a more rigorous, systematic way monitor what is happening in schools in relation to curriculum, delivery and achievement. It is clear that the key issue that is of great concern about the students themselves is the drop out at age 16. When you talk to students about that, their reasons for it are that the curriculum is boring, irrelevant, they do not want to work in that sort of environment; they do not like the rigour which traditional schooling, they might think, imposes and want something else. The response to all of this has arisen from the need to find a more exciting and interesting curriculum for many of those youngsters and extend them in their learning and grow the mind, as I have said before. It is clear that this sort of approach works. In my own background, I was involved at one stage with a series of schools in which there were clearly some young people who were failing to cope in mathematics. They were branded as failures. These children could not do maths. They were cast into the outer darkness. They were put into a vocational programme in surveying. They spent their time outside the school, learning to use dumpy levels and theodolites. The surveying in this case was an area of coastline, producing contour maps from the survey points. They did this work for a whole term. By the end of the term these youngsters, who were no good at maths and branded themselves no good at maths, were working in areas of quite advanced trigonometry and had dealt with issues of space, dimension and geometry, fundamental to mathematics which they were no good at. If they had been told they were doing maths, they would have thrown up their hands. The reality is they were given a curriculum which grew their minds through practical work, reasoning, judging, doing, hand, mind and eye coordination in the field. They

grew. That is the sort of thing the monitoring of students and schools is doing, being told by schools and colleges what they need.

Q44 Fiona Mactaggart: That is a powerful account of how you can shift both cognitive and effective attitudes amongst students, which is the challenge that you have with these new Diplomas. I recognise that the groups who have been involved in developing them are enthusiastic about them and that is good. You have all been quite honest about the anxiety which you have about putting this into implementation. I imagine that the person who led that team of disaffected young people with the theodolites was someone who was completely very interested in the subject, who had confidence and so on. One of the things that makes me anxious about this is do we have the characters in our teaching institutions who are going to be able to deliver this kind of thing? Is there time between now and when they have to deliver it for us to get the benefits that the students you are referring to have from what was then a pretty unorthodox approach on a quite wide scale? Is it going to happen?

Ms Price: I would like to illustrate it by a case study because the employers involved in e-Skills UK are currently delivering a programme called computer clubs for girls which is for 10–13-year-old girls, out of school clubs, operating in 2,000 schools in England at the moment. It is really re-engaging the disengaged. They are learning IT without knowing it. What has made the difference is the employers have put their efforts behind developing really innovative e-learning resources that the teachers find so easy to use, plus the employers are offering development programmes for the teachers. The teachers are going to the employers' premises plus it happens in reverse. The employers are going to support the teachers. We can do that in 2,000 schools and I think it has made a change. That should be our aspiration for Diplomas.

Q45 Mr Wilson: Employment engagement and recognition for these new Diplomas, I think we are all agreed, is pretty critical to their success. The Institute of Directors has made a submission to the Committee and its membership is made up of a cross-section of the business spectrum. They have told this Committee that they have very little information about the Diploma Development Partnership or its work or facilitating employer input into the composition of the Diplomas. Does it surprise you that a key employer organisation has effectively been excluded from this process?²

Dr Boston: It certainly surprises me because we have had a lot of contact with Miles Templeman. On one occasion quite recently, Mary Curnock-Cook and I addressed a meeting of all their regional chairs precisely on Diplomas. I would have thought that the IoD as a whole had, at a senior level, including regionally, some understanding of where we are heading. I do not know to what extent

² See also response from IoD, Ev 200

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IoD members have been involved in Diploma development partnerships. Others might have that information.

Q46 Mr Wilson: They say there is very little involvement.

Dr Boston: From the point of view of the qualifications development, we have seen it as very important to talk not only to the Institute of Directors but also Richard Lambert and the CBI and make it very clear where we see this reform heading.

Ms Price: We have spoken to the IoD and are liaising with both the IoD, the CBI and the trade associations relative to IT. In terms of the process of development, we have involved over 600 employers in the development of the qualification and that has been a robust sample of organisation, geographic and by size of organisation. They have been fully involved in developing it. There are 97,000 companies in our footprint but I am confident that, as MORI can introduce 1,000 people and get the temperature check on the nation, the content of the Diploma is fit for purpose, will be embraced by employers and recognised by them. Our job now is to communicate that out there and enable the local delivery which is the relationship between the small businesses and the IoD members and their local schools.

Q47 Mr Wilson: You are telling the Committee this morning that there has been a full attempt to include the Institute of Directors in the development and the content of the Diplomas?

Ms Price: My answer to you is that we have certainly been in dialogue and made them aware. I am not sure that I could fully commit to saying there had been a full attempt across all five lines, but they have been a constituent partner.

Q48 Mr Wilson: Do you not think it would be a significant oversight if you have not fully engaged one of the major employer organisations in this country in what is supposed to be a huge development in education in this country?

Ms Price: Yes. I do not think they have not been engaged.

Mr Wilson: What concerns me is if—I am not saying they would for a moment—the IoD came out against these Diplomas and said they did not like what was in them or something of that nature, it would be a crushing blow to the whole development of these Diplomas, would it not?

Chairman: Are you alleging that the director general of the IoD is saying they were not consulted on these Diplomas?

Mr Wilson: I am not alleging it. I have a letter that was sent to the Committee from the IoD that says exactly that.

Chairman: The director general said they were not consulted?

Mr Wilson: I do not know who it is signed by because it does not have a signature on it, but it is a submission.

Chairman: We have to be clear on this because we do not want another false story on the front page of *The Times* like the one on schools for the future. We want to nail down the facts. If there is an allegation that the director general of the Institute of Directors says he was not consulted on this, that should be dragged into the open. Also, if that is not the case, we should know about it.

Mr Wilson: All I can tell you is that I asked whether any submissions had been made to this Committee by employer organisations and I was given a letter about ten minutes ago from the IoD, which does not have a signatory on it. I am asking questions based on that letter.

Chairman: I am just drawing it out so that our witnesses can respond.

Mr Wilson: I cannot believe that the Institute of Directors would submit a document without a full—

Q49 Chairman: Absolutely. Ken Boston, let us have an answer then.

Dr Boston: At the senior level we have addressed the IoD people. I do not have with me immediately what other contact we have had with them but I have just been given, for example, our 14–19 hospitality case range, the Diploma development panel. We have on it Ian Campbell, director of hospitality services with the Institute of Directors. He is directly involved in the committee doing this work. There may well be other examples which we could find if they are there but clearly, in putting this expert panel together, we have gone out to get the appropriate people we need to be represented on it. If that is the view of the IoD, we really do need to start talking to them again and making it clear to them where the involvement has been and what we have been seeking to do.

Q50 Mr Wilson: They also suggest that they have a concern about the tendency to portray sector skills councils as the voice of business, particularly of small employers. Do you have any feeling that you are portraying sector skills councils as the voice of business?

Mr Fieldsend: I think sector skills councils are set up for that purpose, are they not? The difficulty here is that of course the IoD and others need to be involved and consulted fully but the task and the process was one where SSCs were set up to do what they do best, which is talk to their employers that they are responsible directly, not via intermediaries. From my point of view I was fully satisfied with the engagement with employers in the way that Karen outlined. It was absolutely typical and unprecedented. There is always a difficulty, is there not, because there are a number of organisations around that are responsible for representing employer views and clearly they need to be part of the picture but this process was not about using them to get to their members. This was a process of engaging directly on the ground with the employers that the SSCs meet on a daily basis.

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Q51 Mr Wilson: To be successful you do need their engagement and support. Would it surprise you that in a sample of 500 of their members conducted less than a year ago less than a fifth had heard of the Sector Skills Development Agency or sector skills councils and only 3% were active participants in them? These are senior people we are talking about.

Ms Price: Yes, it does surprise me because I meet regularly with Miles Templeman and we have a number of initiatives where we are working together. I am sure that is common across a lot of the 25 sector skills councils. I think sector skills councils work directly with employers and wherever they can get strong partnerships going with other employer organisations. This is not about a turf war; it is very much about working in partnership so the needs of all employers, small and large, across the UK are addressed. We invest a lot of time in partnership working with employer organisations.

Q52 Mr Wilson: I am sure you do but I am just making sure it is all employer organisations.

Mr Fieldsend: There are IoD members on SSC boards. Richard Wilson, a skills specialist with the IoD, was on the board until recently of Improve, which was involved in the manufacturing Diploma.

Q53 Mr Wilson: Would it surprise you to know that 94% of IoD members had either very little knowledge or no knowledge at all of these Diplomas?

Ms Price: No. In terms of a survey, it would not surprise me because quite often it is dependent on who you ask and who has been involved. In terms of who we work with inside employer organisations, it is typically the people who are directly responsible for recruiting and training young people. They might not have been part of the sample survey. We are yet to go fully public on Diplomas and we have made a conscious decision not to communicate our Diplomas until we are absolutely ready and it is appropriate across our whole cohort of employers in terms of a marketing and communication exercise. We need to have very positive messages.

Q54 Mr Wilson: We heard from Ken that there are going to be 50,000 young people starting Diplomas in 2008. That is going to require training for 5,000 teachers. Is that possible to do in the timescale that you have set yourselves?

Dr Boston: If the teachers are not there, it will not get to anything like 50,000. That is the whole point of the Gateway process. If we get a solid take-up—I do not want rapid take-up—there is going to be a demand for more teachers and they will have to be trained and recruited over a period of time. I certainly would argue very strongly that if it is a balance between hitting a target of 50,000 in the first year or maintaining standards right from the start we would go with standards. We must not

compromise on this. If 50,000 is not attainable because the teachers are not there, it will not be reached.

Q55 Mr Wilson: Everything I have heard this morning suggests that there are strong doubts about how much you can deliver on time against the targets you set yourselves. Would that be a fair reflection of the evidence we have heard this morning?

Dr Boston: No. 50,000 is not a target. It is the figure that the Department has come up looking at the scope of the resources that are believed to be available out there and the scope of the funding which is available to the Department to deliver. Notionally, there is a view that 50,000 might be a reasonable, achievable target but it does not have priority over quality.

Chairman: The Department seems only able to think in big, fat, round numbers, does it not, whether it is a 50% higher education target or 50,000 of these and 500,000 apprentices?

Q56 Mr Wilson: I want to gauge how much time you are expecting these young people to spend with employers as part of their Diplomas. Is there going to be a large work-based element to them?

Dr Boston: In every Diploma, there is a fortnight's work experience in the workplace. At least half of the principal learning must be done in workplaces or work related facilities. The nature of a work related facility will vary from Diploma to Diploma, depending upon the nature of it. In FE colleges, as you know, there are very clearly industrial type facilities which might not be in a commercial firm in which this work will be done but replicate it exactly. The weighting is heavily on the teaching of principal learning in facilities that are industry standard and there is the explicit requirement that there be 10 days' work experience in the workplace itself.

Mr Wilson: The scale of employer involvement in this to make it work therefore is going to be huge. If that is going to be achieved, you really do need to engage with the major employer organisations in this country. It is a major oversight that the IoD seems to have been excluded from the process so far, so I hope that if you take anything away from this morning's session you will go back and fix that problem as soon as you can.

Chairman: Perhaps the lesson might be that the IoD ought to get its act together.

Mr Wilson: They did not come up with the Diploma idea.

Chairman: Perhaps Mr Templeman should be moving on.

Q57 Jeff Ennis: According to my information, you established a Diploma employer steering group which included Vodafone, IBM, Oracle, Cisco, Microsoft, Logica, EDS, BT, CA, John Lewis, Centrica, the Government and the MoD and SMEs. That seems to be quite extensive. The one category that is missing from that group as far as I am concerned, Karen, is local authorities. In my

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constituency local authorities are a very big employer. What engagement have we had with local authorities, for example?

Ms Price: We have a virtual network of over 600 employers involved and we work very closely with local authorities because we are very cognisant of what is needed. One of the employers that is not listed there is Hampshire County Council. They are on our small employer steering group as well. I take the point they are incredibly important.

Q58 Jeff Ennis: That is local authorities in general as well as local education authorities?

Ms Price: Yes.

Q59 Jeff Ennis: This question is to do with the work placement element of Diplomas and the work experience situation. In my area, quite often local employers will put up stumbling blocks like health and safety issues and data protection issues not to take on young people for work experience. Is the new Diploma going to be able to work around issues like that in terms of engaging the local employers with taking young people?

Ms Price: I think we are going to be highly reliant on organisations like education business partnerships to help facilitate that. Nonetheless, I do not want to see too much emphasis put upon work experience in our understanding of it to date. What we are talking about is employer engagement in the curriculum in a radically different way. At the moment we have a group of employers who are working on national teaching and learning resources and they are pooling all their intellectual property rights, working with educationalists to provide the tools at real time. They are also looking at how they can develop teachers and how the employers can go into schools and get the young people into their premises, not necessarily for two weeks' work experience. I think we have not even begun to tap the potential of technology in terms of supporting that as well.

Q60 Jeff Ennis: I must admit I am a big supporter of the principle of Diplomas and it is obviously very important that we do get it right, particularly at the launch date, and make sure that we engage employers and the education specialists from day one. With that in mind, how much appeal do you think Diplomas will have across the whole secondary school range? Will all secondary schools be interested in undertaking Diplomas or will it just be schools in challenging circumstances that will want to get engaged with Diplomas?

Ms Price: It is absolutely imperative that schools across the whole range engage in this. That is very much a criterion of the Gateway process. Unless we have a cohort of all ability ranges starting in 2008, we will sentence this initiative to being for the less able and I think that would be an absolute crime. My job is to ensure that employers are very clearly saying, "We are going to prefer Diploma students" and also to get higher education, if I can, to say exactly the same thing. That will be a very strong lever on decisions of young people and parents.

Mr Rogers: In terms of the Gateway process and the response, that has been very positive across a wide range of schools. There have been a lot of schools and colleges coming forward saying, "Yes, we proactively want to do this" so it would appear that the demand is there.

Q61 Jeff Ennis: Under the present system schools in challenging situations are now using the BTEC system to improve their A-Cs and I am fully supportive of schools doing that. The best performing school in my constituency is a specialist engineering school, one of the first five regional schools at Scawsby in Doncaster. They have a specialism in engineering. I guess it would be easy for schools like that, that have a specialism in engineering, to incorporate the provision of Diploma courses, still having a very good record of academic achievement. Will it appeal to the schools that are purely and simply majoring on academic achievement through the normal stream? How can we engage those better in the new process?

Ms Price: We have to and we have to provide the incentives that they will need to encourage them to do it. One of the things that we are currently looking at across the sector skills councils is how can we get employers and higher education to make public commitments to Diploma students. I am going to use John as an example. He probably will not thank me for this but let us imagine he could get ten medical schools to earmark some places for people who do the health Diploma. What a strong message that would send out. That is what I think we should aspire to do.

Q62 Jeff Ennis: On the same theme, what is going to happen to the BTECs when the Diplomas come in? Are they just going to be wiped out overnight or are the courses going to run in tandem for a certain length of time?

Dr Boston: The qualification will continue. It is a good qualification. What they are envisaging is there is a market of qualifications. In due course it may well be that the BTEC or elements of the BTEC become incorporated in the Diplomas. There could well be good sense in that.

Q63 Jeff Ennis: How long is the transition period going to be, roughly, in your opinion?

Dr Boston: It is hard to speculate on that but bear in mind this qualification is not a full entitlement until 2013, so there is time for this to change and develop. In relation to your other main point, there does seem to be a great deal of interest in the Diplomas from selective and grammar schools. We had a recent conference in Buckinghamshire where there was intense interest from schools which have 70% A*-C achievement rates at GCSE. There is also strong interest from lower achieving schools but the point is that this qualification will have to earn its spurs. It is in a market place. It has some extraordinary strengths, as I have described. That is why it is so critical right from the start that this is delivered to a very high standard because, if it is

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not, it will become a qualification that is seen to be targeted at a particular group, which is not the case.

Chairman: That is the theme that has been running through all your answers.

Stephen Williams: Dr Boston, you started the session and said this is the biggest thing that is going to happen in the educational world since Curriculum 2000. My colleague, Paul Holmes, who has just darted in and out of the room, said that Curriculum 2000 for him was a disaster or a shambles because of lack of consultation and involvement of the teaching profession. In the written evidence that has come to us, the National Union of Teachers have already expressed concerns that they do not think the teaching profession has been involved enough in the design of this Diploma. You might expect them to say that but do you have any sympathy with their viewpoint?

Q64 Chairman: We do not often get the IoD and the NUT in the same session.

Dr Boston: There has been intense consultation with teachers and with teacher unions over a long period of time. This qualification is carrying forward the essence of Mike Tomlinson's work. That work involved an enormous amount of consultation with schools and colleges. The difference with this qualification—and I have discussed this with the teacher unions; it may well be the same point with the IoD—is that the curriculum is developed by industry, not by teachers. It is by specific industries, assembled as SSCs, not with representative teacher unions or representative business groups. It has been predicated on actually going to the people who know the nuts and bolts stuff and can write the curriculum. We did not get the NUT into a room and say, "Give us your ideas on what the content should be in a Diploma on construction and the built environment" because they are not the experts in that field; nor is the IoD as a representative body. We went to the SSCs, the employers who work in that field and got added to them people from representative organisations with particular expertise like the example I gave of the guy from hospitality who is an employee of the IoD. I have had frequent meetings with John Bangs and others and all the other teacher unions regularly. We have a scheduled meeting and the development of the Diplomas is always on the agenda. We have five or six meetings a year with all the teacher associations on this and they are senior people.

Q65 Stephen Williams: Both the NUT and the Institute of Directors are perhaps misleading us slightly about the level of engagement in this. As I understand it, schools and colleges have to apply to deliver this Diploma, so it is almost a bottom up process. How many schools and colleges have come forward and how do you have engagement with them? Have you encouraged particular schools and colleges to apply or have you just left them to their own devices?

Dr Boston: The DfES has figures now on how many have come forward. I do not have those figures at my fingertips but the bids from local groups of schools, colleges and business have now come in and we are beginning to go through the Gateway process in relation to them. Everyone involved in this has been encouraging the partnerships which have been in the Pathfinder Programmes and the IFP programmes which have been very successful in local associations between business, colleges and schools to come forward with proposals for Diplomas.

Q66 Stephen Williams: Apart from Pathfinder schools, are you expecting particular schools and colleges to come forward? Might they be the specialist schools that already exist and maybe other schools will not be interested? Is there a risk of that?

Dr Boston: No. You will get better information from the department that has received the data, but I think we will get applications and interest from schools and colleges across the board. I do a fair deal of talking to teacher groups throughout the country and there is interest right across, not only in the urban areas but in the rural areas. Not only do they want a Diploma but how are they going to do it; how can we get these associations going in areas that are pretty remote.

Q67 Stephen Williams: Karen, some cold water has been poured on the NUT's reservations. Nonetheless in the submission from e-Skills, your organisation, you have identified the risk that there may be of under-preparedness amongst the teaching profession. Is that something you could elaborate on? Are you seriously worried that the teaching profession will not be ready by September 2008 to deliver the first five Diplomas?

Ms Price: There is a risk that it will not be. We have an influence upon part of the Gateway process which is being led by the Department for Education and Skills so they are accountable and responsible. What we are looking for is a gap analysis of teacher skills between their readiness and the journey needed to deliver first teaching in 2008. If the gap is huge, the answer is obviously to devote more money to fewer teachers to get a quality programme. I think that is an essential part of the process now. If the gap is small, we can have more institutions delivering in 2008. That is our proposal.

Q68 Stephen Williams: Both IT and health are going to be in this first tranche. Mr Rogers, do you have worries that the profession will not be ready by 2008? Do you think there might be a divergence between what employers want, your representative organisations, and what the teaching force can actually deliver?

Mr Rogers: No. I would reflect Karen's view in that I think what employers want is a quality product at the end of the day. Therefore, we have to make that judgment once the submissions come in, in terms of what that gap is. I fully endorse what

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Karen says. We have to get it right quality wise which means that if the gap is large we have to investigate that.

Q69 Stephen Williams: The NUT in their submission referred to 2008 as being a cliff face in the educational world because there are reforms, stage three levels and a new GCSE functionality being built into maths and English. Are we expecting too much of our teaching profession to have three big bangs in one year?

Dr Boston: 2008 is shaping up as a pretty crowded year. We have the new specifications for A levels coming in with fewer assessment units with most subjects from six to four and with the introduction of the new A*. I believe it is perfectly achievable but there is no doubt that it will need to be well managed. One critical aspect of that management is monitoring and ameliorating the impact on schools. Not every school by any means will be introducing Diplomas but all of them will have changes coming to GCEs and GCSEs and the key stage three work. That will need to be managed very carefully and supported very carefully. That is a key issue at the moment both for the QCA board and for the DfES as a whole. Be in no doubt that if we felt that this was not going to be manageable and was going to lead to problems we would be the first to be saying we need to look at this again.

Q70 Helen Jones: If I am right in thinking that to make these Diplomas work properly teachers and college lecturers will have to have skills that are very up to date in particular areas, how is the DfES going to assess the training gap? Are there people in the DfES whose skills in those particular areas are up to date enough to decide that other people's are not?

Mr Fieldsend: They are using other agencies to undertake that work, working with the Training and Development Agency. LifeLong Learning UK are involved in the process but I am not fully aware of exactly how they are managing this.

Q71 Helen Jones: Is anyone aware?

Ms Price: I find it difficult to answer on behalf of the Department. Were they here, they might be able to answer that question specifically but nonetheless I agree that what we are talking about is industry relevant skills. I am having a conversation with the employers and they are making offers to support that teacher development. What I have to do is that dating exercise to make sure the Department is aware of that opportunity.

Q72 Helen Jones: I understand that and I understand the opportunity. What I am concerned about is whether you can assess whether the skills are up to date when you have people in the DfES doing it whose contact with industry in past years and in other sectors has probably been fairly minimal. Can I move on to the core learning? Ken Boston referred to that and he gave a very good example. Does that not also require a lot of work in developing the skills of people in education

because the way those subjects traditionally have been taught is not the way they would be taught in the Diplomas? Who is doing the assessment of that and have we the training in place to deal with that?

Dr Boston: The development of the content of the core skills and the personal learning and thinking skills rests with the QCA and the sector skills councils but will be translated into specifics of course through the awarding bodies. That work is in train. On the question of whether the training is in hand for teachers to deliver this in relation to your previous question, I am told that it is but I do not have final accountability or full visibility of that at this stage. Clearly, those are two questions that you will want to put to the DfES, where the accountability lies.

Q73 Helen Jones: If you are told that it is, who is telling you it is and where is it happening?

Dr Boston: The overall coordination and management of this rests with the DfES, the Programme Board and the project coordinator. That is where the accountability resides and that is where I go with questions seeking answers.

Q74 Helen Jones: When this Gateway process is put into being, how will you be assured that people going through the Gateway to provide the first wave of these Diplomas have sufficient training to be able to deliver them to the sufficient standard of quality that we would want? Let me give you an example. The school could say, "We have plenty of English teachers to do this." I am an English teacher. I could do a great course on James Joyce. I would be hopeless at delivering this without training. Who is going to make sure that that is in place before you decide who delivers the first Diplomas?

Dr Boston: The key criteria for the Gateway process include direct assessment of the facilities and the staff capacities in the schools and colleges in question.

Q75 Helen Jones: By whom?

Dr Boston: There is an assessment of what funding is available for training where it is needed and how and when that might be delivered. Unless the boxes to those questions are ticked that particular school, college or whatever and its associates will not get through the Gateway process.

Q76 Helen Jones: Who does that assessment?

Dr Boston: The assessment is done by a panel, a group of people set up to consider each of the submissions made to the Gateway. Those people have gone through a training process. I do not know the details of that training process but they have been provided with training. QCA, amongst other bodies, is represented on those panels. We will be wanting to see not only that the criteria related to the qualifications are met, which is our responsibility; we will also want assurance that all the other requirements are in place for effective delivery if we contribute to a vote that says that school goes through the Gateway.

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Q77 Helen Jones: I am not reassured by that because I think it depends on the questions you ask and it is something we will probably want to pursue in the next session. Even with all that, there is a vast amount of training which is going to be required if these Diplomas are going to be delivered properly. Now, bearing that in mind, can anyone tell us as we embark on this, was there anywhere any overall look at the training, the workforce training and development which would be required to deliver these Diplomas properly? Has there been any proper assessment of the workforce that we have got out there and what we need to do to update their skills?

Mr Fieldsend: There certainly has been, but I am just not aware of the detail, although I have just been looking through my papers and you have had evidence from Lifelong Learning UK which is a sector skills council and they describe a process of six partners working with the DfES on developing the workforce to deliver the 14–19 Diplomas and then a set of actions which they are undertaking with partners around that, so there is a story to tell about how that is being done.

Q78 Helen Jones: With respect, you have to assess what you have got before you can do your development programme.

Ms Price: Perhaps I could answer that question. I think there has been a generic assessment, but I do not think there has been any assessment of skills against the specific lines of learning and I think that is the key focus. Perhaps I can also say that I do think that employers, in terms of their support for teacher development, mine do not just talk about technical skills, but they obviously run team-working courses in a lot of the core skills as well, so they are very interested in a total package. One suggestion I would like to make is perhaps the DDPs and the employers could define the training programme and certify the teachers to deliver Diplomas.

Q79 Helen Jones: That is very helpful, thank you, but bearing in mind those answers, Ken Boston, can I go back to something you said earlier where you said it was “crucial” that this should start in 2008. I do not think we ever got an answer as to why 2008 was crucial, so would you care to tell us why it is?

Mr Boston: I think that there is just an immense appetite and enthusiasm in schools and colleges for a different sort of qualification that addresses needs which have been clearly identified in the Tomlinson Report. There is real enthusiasm for this to proceed. We do have the capacity to deliver it. We have the qualifications developed and we have the capacity, but not universally across the country. Where we do have that capacity, then we would think we should be doing it as quickly as we possibly can because we are, as a country, still well below the OECD average for participation and non-attainment. We have recently risen a little because in 1998 only Mexico and Turkey were below us, whereas we now have seven countries

below us out of 30, but we are still below the OECD average, and the need is urgent. However, we must not compromise the quality of the new qualification in the interests of that urgency, hence I am saying let us go for 2008 and do not let us move from that, but let us make sure it is really a pilot only where we have got the facilities and the teachers who are really equipped to deliver this and let us achieve success in 2008 and build on that through the five years to 2013 when this thing becomes an entitlement.

Q80 Helen Jones: But you would accept, would you not, that if we did not have all our ducks in a row, so to speak, the enthusiasm for these qualifications would evaporate rapidly?

Mr Boston: I think the enthusiasm for the qualifications will be built by a record of success and steadily increasing numbers. It will be destroyed by a sudden rush of numbers in 2008 and 2009 and the qualification is seen as not appealing to the fullability range, delivered by people without the training, delivered by disaffected teachers to disaffected students. If we have that, it will fail.

Chairman: We have to ask these probing questions though as we want these Diplomas to succeed and we have every confidence that they will, given a fair wind and a determined management.

Q81 Mr Chaytor: Ken, you have stressed the importance of improving our post-16 retention rates and you have placed these Diplomas firmly in the context of improving post-16 retention. The QCA’s written submission to the Committee stresses the importance of attracting an all-ability intake to the Diplomas and this is a point which Karen Price also made. How do you reconcile those two different points of view? Surely, either the Diplomas are geared at an all-ability intake or the Diplomas are primarily designed to improve post-16 retention by recruiting those students who are most disaffected from the traditional school curriculum?

Mr Boston: I certainly would want them geared at the all-ability range. I do not think that those who are continuing or who are taking A levels or other qualifications or training, the 79%, are necessarily the higher level of the ability range. I think that we have got youngsters of great ability who are dropping out of education and training and I think the qualification can target them as well as those of similar, higher or even lower ability range who are continuing with A levels, but who might find this qualification, because of its breadth, its scope and its emphasis on an applied, temporary curriculum, much more attractive to take.

Q82 Mr Chaytor: Do you think that the task of attracting an all-ability intake would have been easier had the Government adopted Mike Tomlinson’s original proposals in total?

Mr Boston: Well, I do not know. A decision has been made on that and we are now proceeding with implementation, but there is certainly a market. This qualification will run side by side with the

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GCE and of course with other qualifications, such as the International Baccalaureate and, as I said, it has to earn its spurs in that market. Our wish is that this qualification should be so good that it will be highly competitive and may in due course become the mainstream qualification for students to take both to go to university and into employment.

Q83 Chairman: What has been the reaction of higher education because that is going to be vital in the acceptance of these Diplomas? I know that we have got two champions, interestingly, from the vice chancellors, but what has been your view of the reaction and the welcome that higher education has given it?

Mr Boston: From the reaction that I have had with universities in my contact with universities, vice chancellors and admissions tutors, there is immense interest in this qualification. There is some concern from some of them about the narrowness of the A level and the fact that it does not include maths and English as compulsory elements and that it does not have the personal learning and thinking skills within it. It has many other attributes of course as an internationally famed qualification, but, having said that, having vice chancellors being warm and

fuzzy about it, vice chancellors are also hard-headed and need to be and they will not be taking people with this qualification unless it is genuinely appealing to the fullability range and is genuinely growing that learning muscle in the head in the way I have described. That is another key reason for us not rushing this, it is another key reason for making sure right from the start that this is a top-quality qualification which is competitive with anything else which is on offer.

Q84 Chairman: The aspiration of the Government not to let any child get out of education or training until the age of 18, are these Diplomas going to help?

Mr Boston: I think the Diplomas will help that ambition. I think that this provides the sort of curriculum which will be much more attractive and keep young people on in school, but it is certainly not a curriculum which has been developed in order to meet that policy objective. This has been on the books of course for some time.

Chairman: Well, it has been a very good session. Will you please remain in contact with the Committee and, if there are areas which we have covered where you do not think you had a sufficient chance to come back to us, be in touch with us. Thank you very much indeed, it has been a very good session.

Monday 22 January 2007

Members present:

Mr Barry Sheerman, in the Chair

Mr David Chaytor
Jeff Ennis
Paul Holmes
Helen Jones
Mr Gordon Marsden

Fiona Mactaggart
Mr Andrew Pelling
Stephen Williams
Mr Rob Wilson

Memorandum submitted by the National Union of Teachers (NUT)

1. Teachers were insufficiently involved in the “Curriculum 2000” reforms of post-16 education, with the result that there were problems of examination manageability for students and their teachers. They should be seen as key partners in reform and not passive deliverers of an externally determined model. Teachers will be motivated to work towards a new system of Diplomas over a development period only if they are instrumental in developing curriculum models, modes of assessments and approaches to learning and teaching. The role of teachers has not been made explicit in the designing or the delivery of the new Diplomas. This will not inspire teachers’ confidence to deliver imposed curriculum specifications/courses.

2. If other qualifications, such as the International Baccalaureate, are not to become the admissions threshold for universities with oversubscribed courses, it is essential that the Government ensures that all universities accept and acknowledge the new Specialised Diplomas.

3. Research, undertaken by Exeter University into the 14–19 Pathfinders, has shown that there is a lack of capacity in institutions to deliver “vocational education and limited availability of work-based placements”, mean that, as vocational programmes expand, schools and colleges will face major resource and training demands.

4. There is little information about how schools and colleges will be prepared to deliver the new qualifications. The NUT is extremely concerned, therefore, that consortia are being asked to put in “expressions of interest” for Specialised Diplomas that are yet to be designed as well as indicating how many learners might be likely to take them.

5. The timescale for Awarding Bodies to turn the Diplomas into specifications is very tight. The NUT would emphasise that it is essential that Awarding Bodies and teachers/lecturers are involved in the development of the second tranche of the Diplomas at an earlier stage of the process. There also needs to be further work and consultation between stakeholders on the implications of students learning in a range of different institutions. Common methods of assessment and recording student achievement, funding, co-ordinating pastoral support and health and safety issues will need to be explored further.

6. The Diplomas should not replace existing vocational qualifications, including qualifications such as the BTEC, until it is demonstrable through thorough evaluation that better qualifications have been developed.

7. The NUT has yet to be convinced that local authorities are sufficiently prepared for the 2008 reforms of Diplomas. The NUT would endorse the findings of the Nuffield 14–19 Annual Report 2005–06, which said that in terms of collaborative partnerships:

“Partnerships have enabled the establishment of vocational and applied learning opportunities, particularly for 14–16-year-olds. But the ‘drivers’ for institutional collaboration are not as strong as the ‘drivers’ for institutional competition, such that the system in England could still be described as ‘weakly collaborative’ with weak governance at the local level. The swift pace of reform may make implementation more difficult.”

8. The Nuffield report concluded that policy “busyness” has meant that the pace of education reform and problems are rarely evaluated. The report concludes that:

“The professional role of teachers in the moral deliberations referred to and in the consequent development of the curriculum needs to be forcefully reaffirmed, together with the need for the continuing professional development that enables them to take on this professional responsibility. The staffing of the vocational courses (eg Specialised Diplomas) requires urgent consideration, especially the training or retraining of teachers and the promotion of teaching assistants with relevant expertise and experience”.

9. The “academic” and “vocational” divide seems to have been encouraged by the Government’s decision to award lead responsibility for Diploma development to the Sector Skills Councils. Commitment by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to consult with teachers’ associations on the Diploma content is welcome, but much more is needed. The introduction of the specialist learning lines themselves should have

been subject to consultation with the teaching profession. As it is, the Government's determination to put "the employers in the lead" within the Sector Skills Councils can only lead to the conclusion that the teaching profession will play "second fiddle" in curriculum development to the employers.

10. The fact that the Sector Skills Councils and the Diploma Development Partnerships have developed the Diploma so far has meant that there has been little input from practitioners on whether the content is relevant to teachers. It is regrettable that the teaching community has, at the moment, very little knowledge of the learning programmes within the Specialised Diplomas.

11. There is an issue also of the volume contained in some of the Diplomas. The Creative and Media Diploma, for example, seems to be very heavy in content compared to the IT Diploma. The NUT would emphasise that comparability between the Diplomas is crucial for effective teaching and learning. The NUT also has reservations about the quality of provision for Level 1 of the Diploma. More information is needed about the opportunities that will be available for progression through the three levels of the Diploma for all learners.

12. Teachers need to know that quality assurance is in place so that the Foundation Learning Tier and Level 1 is appropriate for young people with learning difficulties. The proposed Foundation Learning Tier is made up of individual qualifications for learners working below Level 2. This will not be a motivating programme of study for disaffected learners as it is not integrated into the main Diploma system. It is difficult to recognise, therefore, where the progression opportunities are from the Foundation Learning Tier to Levels 1 and 2 and above.

13. It is important that the new Diplomas have built into them clearer progression routes for students at all levels of the Diplomas. It is vital that achievement below the proposed Intermediate level is recognised positively. The Foundation Learning Tier should not replicate the perception of failure attached to D–G grade achievement at GCSE level.

14. The NUT endorses the view of the Nuffield Review 14–19 Education and Training Annual Report 2005–06 which stated that:

"The fact that Specialised Diplomas will co-exist with GCSEs and A levels; that they do not embrace apprenticeships; the lack of vocational capacity in schools casts doubt on the ability of these new awards to fill the ambitious aims that the DfES has for them. Moreover, there is an ongoing debate about the nature of the proposed Diplomas, centring on the degree to which they become more general, more acquired and more sharply vocational."

15. If the Diplomas contain more general learning rather than applied learning, then there will be "academic drift" occurring within these qualifications which made the GNVQs and Advanced Vocational Certificates of Education (AVCEs) problematic. More able students will continue then to take A Levels or the International Baccalaureate, leaving the Specialised Diplomas as uncertain and ambiguous qualifications. 14–19 education will become even more fragmented with schools and colleges being subjected to a plethora of examinations.

16. If schools are to be motivated to offer the Specialised Diplomas, they have to have the appropriate facilities and staff to do so. The Government has said that working with the national agencies, it will put in place arrangements to provide teaching and learning resources, local training and coaching opportunities in the 2007–08 academic year for staff involved in delivering the Specialised Diplomas for 2008.

17. The changes facing schools and colleges in 2008–09 appear particularly dramatic. The first tranche of the Specialised Diplomas will be introduced in that academic year, as will the first year of the revised Key Stage 3 National Curriculum. In addition, the Government intends to require Awarding Bodies to provide specifications to schools and colleges by September 2008 for revised English and ICT GCSEs as well as conducting a full national pilot of functional skills. The extended project will be available for first teaching in September 2008.

18. Teachers and their representatives have very little knowledge about what training and coaching opportunities will be available from the Training and Development Agency (TDA), the Academies and Specialist Schools Trust or the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA). There has to be more detailed information available now on what professional development will be available to enable teachers to take on this area of professional expertise. These organisations all need to work in collaboration to ensure that school, colleges, and other providers are receiving the information, advice and support that they need.

19. In addition to this bunching of reforms, there is nothing in the DfES 14–19 Implementation Plan, which quantifies the amount of money which will be available to individual schools for professional development in preparation for the introduction of the new Specialised Diplomas, nor the amount of time available within the school day for the lead-in to their introduction. The NUT has urged the Government to conduct an audit of financial and training implications of the introduction of Specialised Diplomas and training for the introduction of the new Key Stage 3 Curriculum. Such an audit should be conducted openly with all those organisations with an interest in the successful introduction of 14–19 reform, including school communities, Awarding Bodies, employers, both inside and outside Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).

20. The 14–19 Implementation Plan says that professional development will be in the form of teaching and learning materials which will be made available and in functional skills and the Specialised Diplomas.

Such materials are not enough in themselves to equip the teaching profession to deliver these proposals. Training to oversee the Specialised Diplomas cannot be simply “bolted on” to everything else that schools are expected to carry out, particularly in the context of other initiatives due to be implemented in 2008.

21. The bunching of reforms facing secondary schools and colleges leading up to the academic year 2008 and 2009, is unacceptable.

22. The NUT would propose that the Government establishes a 14–19 Qualifications Implementation Body. It has made this proposal to Government before, but it now has an increased urgency. The Implementation Body should include a broad range of representation from teacher and support staff unions, the TUC, the Learning and Skills Council, universities and industry, as well as the QCA, Government and representatives of the Parliamentary Party in England.

23. Any reforms to the 14–19 phase faces a number of a major operational changes, not least the teaching profession’s weariness with imposed reform. Since 1997, the post-16 examination system has been through almost continuous upheaval. The 2008 14–19 reforms should not cause the turbulence and disruptions that were caused by the Curriculum 2000 reforms. Lessons should have been learnt since then.

24. For these reasons, the NUT has argued consistently that a set of principles should govern any further examination and qualification reform. The NUT believes that the adoption of such principles cannot be optional or subject to “cherry picking”. They were submitted initially to the Tomlinson Review. The NUT urged that the Government to adopt the following principles prior to the roll-out of the 14–19 reform.

- The teaching profession should be leading partners in the reform process.
- There must be a proper, thorough piloting period prior to the introduction of new qualifications.
- There must be sufficient funding for the preparation and introduction of a new qualification.
- There must be proper training for teachers which should not involve additional workload.
- Existing examination specifications should not be discarded wholesale.
- There should be a minimum 10-year lead-in period for the introduction of any new qualification.

CO-ORDINATION BETWEEN COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS IN LOCAL AREAS

25. There is a strong case for collaboration between schools and colleges to best meet the needs of some young people. One area of concern, however, is the implications of the differences in terms of salary and conditions of service of teaching staff in schools and FE sector colleges, which is particularly significant especially if the Government’s anticipated target of 350,000 14–16-year-olds to be enrolled on Specialised Diplomas is to be met.

26. The Government appears also to be unaware that young people’s experience of schools and colleges can be very different. Many young people are unprepared for the different, less structured environment of colleges. Travel times would have to be taken into account, and collaborative systems of monitoring attendance, assessing achievement and viring funding would have to be developed.

27. It is local education authorities which have the capacity for developing partnerships between schools and colleges. They can ensure that such collaboration does not lead to inequities of provision. National performance tables and targets distort and underpin, however, the capacity of schools and colleges both to work together and to provide qualifications which have value for all students.

28. It is essential that the teacher associations at local level are consulted fully by local authorities and the Local Learning and Skills Councils (LLSCs) about the development of the 14–19 prospectuses. It will be difficult for the 14–19 prospectus to be developed without the local authority conducting an audit of the range of provision and any gaps in that provision prior to final decisions on a prospectus. Local authorities should conduct such audits prior to decisions on the prospectus and consult teacher, lecturer and support staff unions and organisations on any gaps that they believe exists.

29. Local authorities should establish 14–19 Implementation Forums, including representatives from schools most likely to operate Diplomas from the first five specialist Diplomas. All teacher, lecturer and support staff unions should be presented on those forums. Local authorities should also audit and cost the professional development needs of secondary schools as soon as the specifications of the first five specialist Diplomas are published. The results of the audit and costing exercise should be considered by each forum and advice given to the local authority on the best way of providing professional development.

30. The NUT is concerned that, despite the fact that the 14–19 National Entitlement will have a statutory basis, it is unclear what powers local authorities will have to enforce it to or to ensure the implementation of all Specialised Diplomas lines within a local area. Schools, colleges and work-based learning institutions are fairly autonomous and may have their own incentives to pursue, such as their own school specialism, performance measures and a consideration of funding they receive. Institutional competition still exists between institutions at local level. This mitigates strongly against a collaborative model of 14–19 education.

Witnesses: **Dr Elaine McMahon**, Principal, Hull College, **Mr Godfrey Glyn**, Principal, Barton Peveril Sixth Form College, **Mr Paul Hafren**, Principal, Warrington Collegiate, **Ms Lorraine McCarthy**, Head, Moseley Park School, Wolverhampton, **Mr Peter Hawthorne**, Head of 14–19 Development, Wolverhampton County Council, and **Mr John Bangs**, Assistant Secretary, National Union of Teachers, gave evidence.

Q85 Chairman: Can I welcome, from left to right, Elaine McMahon, Paul Hafren, Lorraine McCarthy, Godfrey Glyn, Peter Hawthorne and John Bangs. I am delighted to have such a good spread of the talent in our education sector, from different parts of the country. This is supposed to be the most depressing day of the year. I said to my team here, I am dedicated to cheering them up with this amazing session we are about to embark on; so we all have a job, to enlighten the world and make it the happiest day of the year. That sounds like Ken Dodd, does it not? I am not going to ask all of you to say much, in terms of an introduction. There are two of you from Wolverhampton, so, Lorraine, Peter, who would like to say a few words about what the situation is in your neck of the woods, in terms of the introduction of the new Diplomas?

Ms McCarthy: I think Peter should do that.

Q86 Chairman: Peter, do you want to start us off then; in two minutes, will you tell us how it is in your neck of the woods?

Mr Hawthorne: I am Head of 14–19 Development in Wolverhampton. I was a head teacher; now I facilitate collaboration in the city. We were a Phase One Pathfinder and now we do quite a lot of pilot work for the QCA and the Department for Education and Skills with regard to the Diploma. I believe that the most important thing to do is, in each area, one has to establish what we call an infrastructure to facilitate an area approach to curriculum delivery, and I think that is the critical thing for the Diplomas. The Specialised Diplomas cannot be delivered by individual schools and colleges, or even small consortia; it requires an area-wide approach. For that, we have done a lot of work on timetabling and curriculum models, common understandings of standards, the area prospectus and electronic ILP and the policies, the protocols, the principles, to make it all work so that learners can benefit from specialist provision from specialist providers, be it a large FE college, specialist schools, or now we use a large number of voluntary organisations and training providers. I believe they will be absolutely critical for the success of the Diploma, because we will require a lot of diversity, a lot of choice and a lot of specialism when we come to threading our way through the progression routes. If we can do that, I think we can be extremely successful.

Q87 Chairman: Thank you for that, Peter. Elaine McMahon, would you like to comment, in the light of your varied and interesting experience? Now you are in Hull, via the United States and Salford, I understand, and you are trying to make up your mind which side of England you want to settle in?

Dr McMahon: I am here also representing the Association of Colleges and I would like to remind everybody that every year over four million people are trained in colleges. Whilst a partnership approach, in the area I work in now and every area

I have worked in, is the best way of delivering any innovation, and particularly innovation of curriculum of this nature, I believe strongly that colleges understand the principles of this reform and are very much at the forefront of the practical expression of it. In Hull, and East Riding itself, which I am representing specifically here today, in a college in Goole, in East Riding, and Hull College, we have been very much involved in increasing flexibility, that project. That has given us a very strong foundation for delivery, I believe, of the Diplomas, because it is a very strong partnership, it involves employers, thousands of employers in the area involved in various ways, in connection with that programme. Also it includes colleges and schools, every college, every school in the locality, and we are building on the good practice which has been developed already, I think, through that programme, and other programmes, because we join together on the apprenticeships and piloting of that. The Diploma I think is very much welcomed in the localities I work in; also we see it as an opportunity to break down, once and for all, hopefully, the academic and the vocational divide, which still exists unfortunately in this country. This is another way of tackling that and we will work hard to ensure that happens.

Q88 Chairman: Thank you for that, Elaine. I would be in terrible trouble, Paul, if I did not ask you to say something, because I am sitting next to the Member of Parliament for one of the Warrington seats: Paul?

Mr Hafren: Our context is that we have a general further education college, which is Warrington Collegiate, and a very successful sixth form college, Priestley College, working with 12 schools in the Warrington Borough. We are working from a tradition of having a successful, increased flexibility project, which is the project which helps 14–16-year-olds access college courses already. As a college, we have about 600 pupils in any given year accessing our programmes. That has led us, as a consortium, a partnership, to put forward a proposal to the Gateway process, so we are looking to be obviously in the forefront of delivering the Diplomas. What is interesting, from our point of view, is that we are rebuilding the whole college, we have just moved into what is a capital investment of about £27 million, and as a college we have committed fully to being a vocational college; so that is what we do, that is our expertise. I guess the interesting proposition for us, as a college, is how our expertise can be used best by the schools, so that we get a very coherent set of pathways through, which enables the best of the facilities, the resources and the staff expertise to be used. We have got a number of issues, the same as Wolverhampton, in terms of timetabling and prospectuses, and so on and so forth.

Q89 Chairman: Thank you for that, Paul. Godfrey Glyn?

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Mr Glyn: I am Principal of Barton Peveril College in Hampshire, it is in Eastleigh, and I am here, with Lorraine, representing ASCL; a sixth form college with 2,200 students, alongside a general further education college at Eastleigh. We have been in a consortium since the days of TVEI and when the funding for that stopped we decided we would subscribe to our own consortium, so we have got a long track record of working together. Hence the development of the Diplomas is something which attracts us greatly. We have moved already beyond students moving into the general FE college from schools to students being bussed around on a common timetable one day a week, at the moment on a small scale. It is to explore the practical realities of delivering a common curriculum across a range of ten schools, some of which are out in the more rural areas of our catchment area and some which are in the more urban area of our catchment.

Q90 Chairman: John, they have all been so succinct that as long as you are brief I am going to back to Lorraine and give her an opportunity. John; your go?

Mr Bangs: I will be succinct. Chairman, I do not want to raise the ghost of Tomlinson or return to it. The NUT wants the Specialist Diplomas to succeed. We have some very deep anxieties about the operational introduction of Diplomas, clashing as it does with a range of other government initiatives, including the Key Stage 3 revised curriculum and new functional units in GCSEs. We have got practical proposals which we think the Government ought to adopt to implement the new Specialist Diplomas. We have a lot of sympathy with the QCA and their need to retain a high-quality Diploma and the tension which is created between that objective and the 50,000 target the Government has set out, in 2008. Chairman, I would like to address those issues later on.

Q91 Chairman: You will have a chance to do that, John. Lorraine; after saying we would not have time for all of you, here we are?

Ms McCarthy: I am Head of one of the largest secondary schools in Wolverhampton and I was there for the previous five years as a Deputy, so I was pretty involved, in terms of the operational structures across the city. Common timetabling: we started doing common timetabling post-16 as a way of increasing post-16 retention and a wider offer for the students, and now obviously we are moving that down to pre-16. I would say, alongside what Peter said, that the underpinning systems are absolutely crucial, that to get everybody working together and collaborating you have to have the systems in place to enable that to happen. Because we have got that in Wolverhampton, we feel that being able to deliver the Specialised Diploma should be an easy transition.

Q92 Chairman: Thank you for that. Let us get down to the questioning. First of all, I had the impression from last week's evidence, from our witnesses,

particularly Ken Boston, that he was very reluctant for anyone to talk about these new Diplomas in terms of a vocational offer, but you did use the "V" word. Would you give us your thoughts on the Ken Boston view on this? He is very worried that, if these become branded as a vocational offer, as opposed to a broader Diploma, they will be seen as kind of the other thing that people do if they do not do an academic course. Is not that something which worries you, using the "V" word?

Mr Hafren: No. About three years ago, we decided to stop offering A levels, as a college, because we could see clearly that the local sixth form college and the local schools did that a lot better. Our expertise was in vocational preparation, vocational education and vocational training, with a particular focus on preparing people for careers which broadly they had some idea they were going to choose and with a bias towards a blend of theory and practical. We had anxieties that would denude our 16–19 recruitment; in fact, it did not, it reversed it. I have heard that story told several times by colleges, that committing to the core of what you do and what you do best actually makes life a lot clearer for students and clients. Probably I have a greater anxiety, that there is ambiguity preserved about this, in a way kind of to balance out the "A" word, so that the distinction, I think, in many ways, needs to be made clear rather than made fudged.

Q93 Chairman: Lorraine, what is your take on that? As you said, you are the Head of a big comprehensive school; what is your view on that balance between the vocational and everything else in the Diplomas?

Ms McCarthy: We would see it that the Specialised Diplomas could be delivered alongside. I do not think it would be post-16. I do not think we would be likely to get many students, for instance, doing an A level and a Specialised Diploma, although it would be possible. Pre-16, obviously, we would be going for a three-day/two-day split, so the Specialised Diploma was delivered on two days, to give a broad curriculum for the students. Until there is an academic/vocational, I think it offers an alternative, and to give the broad curriculum would be of benefit to all the students.

Q94 Chairman: Do you go along with that, Godfrey?

Mr Glyn: I think I know where Ken is coming from in this, in terms of this has got to be accepted, bluntly, by higher education if it is to have credibility in the English education system. There is a long tradition within education of vocational qualifications being introduced 11–18, not just post-16, which have been diluted, become more academic almost, rather than vocational, in order to achieve some kind of respectability. For me, certainly in the context which I come from, schools are looking at this development with some anxiety, because they hope that it will be recognised by higher education as only then will it have credibility in their own little community.

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Q95 Chairman: That is at the heart of it then. John Bangs, what is your view on this? First of all, anyone starting to talk about vocational Diplomas was hushed, and I think they had three descriptions. Now we are calling them Specialised Diplomas; once they were called Practical Diplomas, were they not? What is the politically-correct term now, do you know?

Mr Bangs: I think Specialised Diplomas is the politically-correct term. I see as well where Ken Boston is coming from and I think what he is trying to say is that we do not want to see these Specialised Diplomas ghettoised under a particular bracket, and we agree with him. Unfortunately, he is up against a set of other developments, and we all are, including the development of a general Diploma, which has not been put to rest and to bed, which I consider to be utterly divisive, the continuing existence of GCSEs, A2 and A, which will have to continue, plus the other genuine vocational qualifications, such as BTEC. Also the development of the foundation tier, which is very necessary, by QCA, which is about capturing those youngsters who are not getting four to five GCSEs, who are the “not in education/training” group. In a sense, I suspect what QCA is trying to do is define the quality of the Specialised Diploma and actually putting down a marker in terms of that quality, but saying also “We want a lot more youngsters, other than those bracketed in the ‘vocational’ group, taking them up.” The problem with the 14 learning lines though, unfortunately, is that there are great swathes of the curriculum which are left out, including, incidentally, modern foreign languages, which is a real anxiety.

Q96 Chairman: Can I ask Elaine McMahon, with her experience of several institutions, what is your view, in terms of the state of readiness across the piece, going to conferences and talking to other people in the AoC? The real panicky kind of note we heard in people’s voices in October/November was that this was a huge operation, much greater than the introduction of Curriculum 2000, much greater, a much greater challenge, and a lot of people saying “It isn’t going to happen in that timeframe.” What is your view on that and did you share that view back in October/November and have you changed your mind?

Dr McMahon: I think the devil is in the detail and we have not got the detail yet, and there is always that gap when there is more work to do and to know exactly what it is going to look like, I think. I believe that we should stick to the timeframe. I think it is important that there is a parallel though of this new Specialised Diploma coming in whilst BTEC National and A levels, *etc*, continue, and the Baccalaureate, if that is coming in, as well. I think we should make sure that we do not ditch any of the qualifications which parallel this Specialised Diploma whilst it is still embedding. I think it needs a careful, if you like, nurturing in. If that happens, I think the timescale is manageable. In Hull, we are leading on the five that are coming in, if we get through the Gateway, and we are very happy to do

that. I think we have a different view perhaps from that of some of my colleagues here, in that we have nearly 4,000 16–18-year-olds full time in college and they do A levels alongside a BTEC National, so they have an academic and vocational offering already, in many cases, and I hope this Specialised Diploma will enable us to put that all under one Specialised Diploma in the future.

Q97 Helen Jones: You said you were quite comfortable with all these different types of qualifications staying in place—A levels, Baccalaureate, if that comes in, Specialised Diplomas, or whatever—but really is that a coherent system? How is a parent, or young person, to find their way through that kind of system?

Dr McMahon: I think, in the short term, you are looking at the Specialised Diploma coming in whilst you have got these other qualifications parallel. Ultimately, I can see that there will be a merging, but I think, at the moment, whilst you are still encouraging the Baccalaureate and Specialised Diplomas to be developed and to be encouraged as offers, it would be even more confusing if suddenly there was a merging too quickly of the framework for qualification offering.

Q98 Helen Jones: Does not that just perpetuate the vocational/academic divide, which has bedevilled English education throughout its history, almost? If we are going to get really good vocational education, does not that have to be integrated into a system of qualifications, rather than existing out there somewhere on its own, which is what Tomlinson was trying to do, of course?

Dr McMahon: It depends on how you look at it. I think it depends how flexible the qualifications are. At the moment, as I understand it, with the Specialised Diploma, they are developing a core, and one with the other, to pick and mix from those core elements. If we can get to the point where we have a core, underpinning knowledge which can be used for several qualifications, because certainly that is how we operate in my college, across the board, particularly at the higher-level education at the moment, we have some core elements in qualifications which can be accessed by a range of disciplines. Ultimately, it depends how flexible we want to make this. In my college, at the moment, we have academic and vocational students accessing some elements of core already, together.

Q99 Helen Jones: I am sorry, but can you just give me your comments, because this seems to be a constant problem? You talk about academic and vocational students, everyone does; what are law and medicine except vocational qualifications, yet we view them very differently. Is it not time that, if we are going to get to a proper system of education, which plays on students’ strengths, we get rid of that kind of divide altogether and have one overarching Diploma with specialist lines within it?

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Dr McMahon: I think it means that, if you use the word “specialist”, ultimately that could override what we mean by vocational or academic; it could mean, I agree with you, a professional route, but at the moment it is shorthand, is it not?

Q100 Helen Jones: What do you mean by “specialist”?

Mr Hafren: The unfortunate problem, I guess, is that “academic” also has connotations of being bright, does it not, and being non-academic has connotations of not being bright. In fact, a BTEC National, an Edexcel National Diploma, is entirely academic, in the sense that it has a lot of theory but it has a blend of theory and practice, focused on a particular job or a cluster of jobs. I am with you, on this, Helen. I think, in some ways, we are compromising, dealing with a compromise, and simplicity in the system I think would be highly desirable.

Q101 Chairman: Let us keep Lorraine on the same topic. You are Head of a comprehensive school, what has changed for you in looking at this range of qualifications and routes? Is that something you see as difficult; would you prefer the simple life?

Ms McCarthy: I think it is all down to the guidance that is offered to the students. I think partly it is to do with how the Specialised Diploma is marketed, and I think that is a little bit beyond us, as institutions. It goes back to Godfrey’s point about how the employers and the higher education institutions will see the Specialised Diploma. I think all those are crucial in how successful it will be in the future. If we go back to the point about the guidance, it will mean quite a lot of work in talking to students about how they see their futures, the progress that they are making in certain areas and helping them to make the right choices; that will be key.

Chairman: Jeff Ennis is going to lead the questioning on the significance of Diplomas and the timescales of Diplomas.

Q102 Jeff Ennis: Thank you, Chairman. The first question follows on from the line of questioning we have just been pursuing, in terms of the potential transition that will need to take place from the existing vocational courses, like BTEC, *etc.*, to the full implementation of the Specialised Diplomas. Are we envisaging that transition, say, up to 2013, when we are supposed to be having the full implementation of Diplomas, or can the transition take place in a shorter timeframe?

Mr Hawthorne: I think the timescales are already ambitious and I think we should do this properly and do it well. I think it is important that the Specialised Diplomas are a success in 2008, 2009 and 2010 and therefore the entitlement in 2013 is a realistic proposal. I believe that, for schools certainly, probably many departments of FE, the move from traditional to BTEC to Diplomas is a stage-by-stage development. We have got to give time to bed in the collaborative cultures and things of that nature, so my own view is that we should start

small and ensure they are successful and hit that timetable in 2013 and congratulate ourselves if we have been successful at that point.

Q103 Jeff Ennis: Thank you, Peter. Quite a few of the witnesses whom we interviewed last week referred to the Diplomas as being probably the most important development in education for quite some time. Do you concur with that, John?

Mr Bangs: Potentially, I do, but I do not think they are at the moment and I think the Government needs to say simply, and recognise the reality, that the Diplomas are a small-scale pilot for 2008. For all the reasons that have been given by other witnesses, they have got to work in the consortia of schools and colleges which know and understand the nature, the specifications and how they come out in practice. If the Government wants to pursue its 50,000 target by 2008, there has got to be a whole set of things put in place. There is an extraordinary silence from our members, and it is confirmed by the LEACAN Report findings, which says that schools really rather wish it would go away, and if they put their heads under the blanket then probably it will. I am afraid that view is brought about by the fact that local authorities, and I am afraid the Government, have not done much to put into place the operational procedures and opportunities to enable schools to understand the implications of what is a very, very important development. I have called for consistently, and Steve Sinnott, our General Secretary, has, in the 2007–08 academic year, at least a one-day awareness, a professional development day, for secondary schools, to give a further day of closure so that at least local authorities, secondary school head teachers and staff can get together to understand what the Diplomas are about. We have heard nothing at all about that. Neither do I understand that the capacity of most LAs, and obviously they are leading LAs, has been evaluated to look at how the Diplomas might roll out in the first, second and third tranche. I do not have any impression that the majority of local authorities are aware of how important it is, as you say, Jeff, this particular approach. What I would like to see is a much more inclusive involvement of schools, teachers and their representatives and local authorities at local level to audit what the capacity of schools is, including what the training needs are of staff, and to get a discussion going about the nature of Diplomas themselves. It feels at the moment rather a remote prospect, owned by a small number of people.

Q104 Chairman: John, you are introducing a sort of “big bang” theory, whereas the Government, I presume, is wanting to introduce it discreetly from a smaller scale; is not that the difference between you?

Mr Bangs: I did not introduce the “big bang” theory. I am afraid it is the Government that has introduced the “big bang” theory. I am all in favour of a bit of incremental development over a decent, ten-year time-line and making sure things work before they move on to the next one. I agree absolutely with Ken

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Boston, who said several times that certainly he wants to see these things work. That is the most important, top priority. We cannot have another Curriculum 2000. I would run away from the “big bang” theory. I know my name comes up in this, Chairman.

Q105 Jeff Ennis: Following on from the point you have just made, John, do you agree with the suggestion, which some witnesses made last week, that the DfES should carry out an urgent risk assessment of the implementation programme, just to make sure that everybody is on side, as it were?

Mr Bangs: Absolutely; certainly I do and I think it is very wise to put a red tag against the development of the Diplomas. There are a number of things. We have got close contact with the Sector Skills Council delivering the Engineering Diploma, and Graham Lane, who is the Chair of that, has maintained very close contact. I have to say, that is not the case with the other development consortia. The DfES does not talk to the NUT over operation and delivery and I regret that. We have written to Jim Knight, we wrote to him at the end of November, setting out our concerns, the initiative overload in 2008, never mind the content of the Diplomas themselves; we have not had a reply. What I would say to the Government is enter into discourse not only with the NUT but with all those other organisations which have a stake in the success of the Diplomas. The reason for that obviously is that you want young people to own it, for parents to be confident, for higher education to know that it is a quality qualification, and get away from what I believe to be a bunker approach to the development. You can have a quiet approach and it is not very important, or you can have a big roll-out because it is very important. It seems to me, there is a choice and we are falling between two stools.

Q106 Jeff Ennis: Can I ask if any of the other witnesses agree with that line, about having a risk assessment carried out: I will ask Paul?

Mr Hafren: A practical way perhaps of conducting that risk assessment would be to ask, I think it is, the Government Offices, which will be doing the assessment in the Gateway process, to make the criteria absolutely clear as to what they are assessing against. By that measure, we will know what the quality mark is, if you like, and what the standard is and then you can see whether the proposals are meeting those quality criteria or not. Clearly, if a lot of the proposals are not meeting certain quoted criteria, there is your risk. I would like to see, and perhaps you might wish to push on this, a greater transparency about what the criteria are against which the proposals in the Gateway process are being measured.

Q107 Jeff Ennis: We have all agreed that this is a very important development for the future of the education system in this country. What are the consequences, if the Diplomas fail, on this occasion,

to be delivered: Lorraine? Bringing me back to where I used to teach, by the way, Mr Chairman, at Aston Hall Junior School.

Ms McCarthy: A lack of confidence in all government initiatives, if it fails. I think I would agree that there needs to be a lot more training opportunities for the deliverers, because at the moment the structure is loosely in place but the training has not been put in place and I think that is very important. If it fails then you have got both the parents and the teaching force losing confidence in new initiatives.

Q108 Jeff Ennis: Even though we are trying to establish, Lorraine, parity of esteem, for want of a better expression, between an academic route and a vocational one, a specialist vocational route, is it not even more important to make sure that we have all the bases covered and we get this particular initiative off the ground, because of the importance of trying to establish that?

Ms McCarthy: Yes; we are trying to ensure that all students, of all abilities, have access and therefore we have got to make this work.

Mr Glyn: I think it has got to work; it is fundamental to the future of the country, I accept that totally. I think it would be a total disaster if we abandoned this development because I think it has got something which has been missing for an awfully long time. The problem with it, and I alluded to it earlier, the reservations which I think a lot of teachers have about this development, is that there is a long list of vocational initiatives which have been allowed to wilt and fail in the mainstream education system, and that cannot happen again.

Q109 Mr Chaytor: Just on this point, Chairman, I want to ask about evaluation, because the discussion so far today and in our previous session has been about ensuring the successful launch of the Diplomas, but whether they work or not surely depends on an evaluation of the first cohort which goes all the way through. Realistically, if 2008 is going to be a very small pilot, in 2009 it might be a slightly bigger pilot, there is not going to be a substantial first cohort possibly until 2014, but the national roll-out is due to start in 2013. Do you think it is possible, is it realistic, to have a thorough evaluation of the project without having a full cohort go all the way through the Diploma from 14–19?

Mr Bangs: I think it is an important question. The fact of the matter is that when Tomlinson was rejected, as a single national Diploma, the ownership of the Diploma by a very large constituency disappeared; it became a Specialised Diploma, people felt then that they had to make it a success for the sake of youngsters. In a sense, if you are going to drive forward a reform then you need everyone pointing in the right direction enthusiastically, and you had that with Tomlinson. You do not have that with the Specialised Diplomas, apart from those who have been involved integrally with the 14–19 Pathfinders, local authorities and colleges, which I

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suspect are more up-to-date with the developments than are schools. I think what the Government has got to do is reassess the time-line for its introduction and scale down the expectations of the Specialised Diplomas. I think also it has got to inject some vision and hope into the notion of a national Diploma with its review in 2008, and that has got to be a substantive review. It has got to say, "Actually, the 14 Diploma lines aren't the end of the story; we hope that if these are successful we can move on to more curriculum areas and" do what Helen Jones is saying "start getting rid of this invidious academic/vocational divide." To answer your question, you will evaluate the pilot, but you will not have evaluated a massive programme. What might be a very good part of the evaluation is to say "Where did we go wrong, in terms of proposing such an ambitious programme which it's quite obvious is not going to be delivered on that scale?" Hopefully, though, the small-scale pilot will be delivered successfully.

Q110 Mr Wilson: I would like to probe you on something a bit further, because we are talking about 50,000 students, I think, in 2008, which as I understand it will require—and this is to you, John—5,000 teachers to be trained properly to do it. Do you believe there is any chance at all of reaching that number of teachers being trained to deliver that in the first year of its operation; if not, how many do you think can be achieved in that time period?

Mr Bangs: I was reading the transcript of the evidence session last week and I think one of the witnesses said that it was very challenging, which is always a metaphor for "It hasn't got a cat in hell's chance." I do not want to say "It hasn't got a cat in hell's chance." I do not want to be that pessimistic, but I do think that it would not be good for those taking the Diplomas if there was a forced roll-out to get to that target. I do not think it would be good and I do not think it is going to happen. I may be wrong but I do not think it is going to happen, and would not advise it anyway. What I do think is that the enthusiastic colleges and consortia who know what they are doing should be allowed to get on with it and then evaluate that as a pilot. I would say also, in terms of the evaluation, that needs to be as open as possible. I do not think it should be one of those quiet, department, DfES-type evaluations, which is internal. I think there has got to be an independent evaluation. I missed a bit of your question, I think.

Q111 Mr Wilson: What sorts of numbers do you think? You are saying what cannot be done; have you any perception of what can be achieved?

Mr Bangs: I think that is a question of counting the number of up and running consortia, and I am not going to pick a figure out of the air, and that kind of counting process needs to be done, but I suspect it is considerably lower than 50,000.

Q112 Mr Wilson: A half; a quarter?

Mr Bangs: I am not going to make a guess, Rob.

Dr McMahon: I think there is a better chance of reaching any number, whatever it is, if there is ring-fencing of funding to consortia, led by colleges, in some cases, under the increasing flexibility, excellent consortia which are doing school and college training for delivery of whatever, but which already exist. That funding will disappear at the end of this year, and a lot of the consortia effective at working across, in some cases, city council boundaries, which is another point which has to be looked at. I think if that could be revisited and that could be ring-fenced and moved further into the consortia which work and hit the Gateway but also are existing consortia which are proving themselves to work collaboratively together for the benefit of learners, then there would be a chance of not throwing everything out but building on the good practice which exists already in many areas in the country and taking it further forward. It does mean revisiting the ring-fencing which has been going on already, the funding which has been going on already for those consortia. If it is all disbanded and we start again, there is going to be real difficulty in achieving any of the targets which have been set.

Q113 Paul Holmes: Godfrey, you said we must not repeat the previous mistakes that we have made involving various vocational initiatives. I seem to recall, when we introduced intermediate and advanced GNVQ, it was supposed to be one of the things that the Diploma was supposed to do, parallel esteem to the academic route, and all the rest of it. How are Diplomas different from GNVQs, or have GNVQs failed and Diplomas are another attempt?

Mr Glyn: I think they have got to be a lot more exciting, they have got to be relevant and they have got to make use of real, vocational work in their delivery, and that is where the key lies. I was involved back in the golden days of CPVE and other such qualifications as that; frankly, it was fantastic for those of us who did it well, but it did not succeed because people did not recognise it as being of equal worth. If you take GNVQ, certainly we were very successful at my college at introducing GNVQ, both at advanced and intermediate levels, and that was within the context of a sixth form college. What became noticeable was that it became more and more like GCSE or more and more like A level because it was not deemed to be rigorous enough by society outside, rather similar to the introduction, you mentioned Curriculum 2000, and the total disaster; frankly, in many colleges and schools it has been a great success, but there are certain things which have gone radically wrong. I would introduce the idea of Key Skills. When we introduced Key Skills in Curriculum 2000, we introduced it totally integrated into what the students were doing. I know that because my daughter was in the first cohort to go through.

Q114 Chairman: I think Jeff Ennis might have called it a disaster. I did not.

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Mr Glyn: Often people say it was, and I get quite cross about that. However, Key Skills was introduced, it was integrated, and students were picking up the skills that we believed employers wanted in higher education. For us, the death knell came when the first year cohort of students went off to higher education and asked admissions tutors what they thought of Key Skills, and almost to a man, or a woman, they turned round and told our students they did not take any notice of Key Skills, so the students came back and said, "Well, why should we be doing them?" It is the outside perspective of what students do that is so vital. I go back to what I said earlier on. If higher education rates these qualifications then the students will do them. A student said to me once, "I want to be a doctor; shall I do GNVQ Health and Social Care?" I am sure that the course would have been fantastic for her, but, frankly, no medical college would have looked at her with that qualification. That trickles its way right the way down through the education system, to students who have no aspirations to go to university. Their curriculum is being determined by that kind of attitude and we have got to produce a qualification which overcomes that, so it has got to be absolutely fantastic.

Q115 Paul Holmes: If one of the problems with GNVQ was that it became too academic to overcome some of these attitudes, how do we deal with Diplomas then, because, when Ken Boston, last week, was saying that there have got to be more general training and thinking skills, they are not actually a vocational course but how do we square the circle between the two?

Mr Glyn: They have got to have vocational relevance and I think they have got to be, at least in terms of their delivery, delivered by staff who have good, up-to-date vocational experience. That may not be first-hand, from actually doing the job, but it has got to be relevant to the real world and it has got to be relevant to the students who are going to study it. I heard Ken Boston say "We teach GCSE history to lots of students who don't necessarily go on to become historians." I think the whole of the 14 lines of a Diploma could be seen in that light, but it is a big job to persuade the country as a whole that is how they should be seen.

Mr Hafren: Just to make a comment about the resilience of A levels and National Diplomas and First Diplomas, they seem to be the collective rock upon which the sea of CPVE, TVEI, GNVQs, AVCEs, and so on, wash against, and what we are left with is some enduring qualifications. The BTEC National Diploma route into higher education is a well-trodden path. I think we need to reflect on that and understand what it is that is really good about the current arrangement, particularly around the National Diploma, First Diploma, and take from that the best, so that we do not throw out the baby with the bath water.

Q116 Paul Holmes: Elaine, most of the witnesses last week have been rather worried starting the full-blown thing in September next year and said at most it should be a small-scale pilot. You seem to be a bit more positive in what you have said about "Oh yes, we can start next year." Why is that?

Dr McMahon: Only because my staff believe they can and the consortium of which we are a part believe that they want to get on and get underway with this because they feel positive about it. I think they have got concerns but I do not think they are concerns that they feel they cannot overcome. Just to echo what Paul has just said, I believe that they feel, if the base can be the BTEC National, BTEC First, and it is developed from that, rather than throwing everything out, there is a real chance of building on what is already good. You talked about what is going to make this work; well, we knew what we struggled with in the GNVQs, we have learned that lesson, and one of the elements which have to be there, we know, is good, practical experience. For example, Construction and the Built Environment, next year, if that were to be just purely theoretical, purely the theoretical and mathematical building of a bridge, without ever laying a brick, you would lose the students. I think the staff have gone through a lot of change in the last decade, they understand the curriculum a lot better than managers like myself, and that is where I feel positive, it has come from the grass-roots.

Q117 Chairman: Does Lorraine feel as positive?

Ms McCarthy: I still maintain that there needs to be a lot of training put in place for those people who are delivering it, and it is not just the schools and the colleges, it is also the training providers that we are bringing on board as well. They need to understand exactly what the Specialised Diplomas are all about and that training is not there yet.

Chairman: We will be coming back to that in "workforce development". Gordon is going to open the questioning on development of Diplomas.

Q118 Mr Marsden: I want to ask about people's views of the aims of the Diplomas; if I can ask Paul and Lorraine on this one. We have heard some discussion obviously about the involvement of employers and the involvement of the FE sector. Can I ask you both what your view is of the current employers, local employers with whom you have links, of these Diplomas and what their view is; are they enthusiastic for them, how do they see them?

Mr Hafren: I think a number of employers in our patch still refer to O levels, so their ability to keep up with educational change, I think, is that understandably it is not their priority. I think the key for us is really an engagement with the Sector Skills Councils, firstly, that there is an endorsement, if you like, at the sector level. Then what we have established, in Warrington, is what we call Sector Skills Networks, where the practitioners plus employers are invited to look at the development

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issues and then jointly try to move that forward. It is difficult though, at the moment, to get sufficient employers engaged in that process.

Q119 Mr Marsden: I am sorry to interrupt but we have come across this in other areas as well, in this inquiry. People say to us “It’s all very well talking to the Sector Skills Councils but it’s not the Sector Skills Councils, at the end of the day, where you’re going to do the detailed, on-the-ground deals that are going to put together a college and its students with the employers.” Are you telling me that the actual engagement of the employers with whom currently—currently—you have agreements with this programme is very poor?

Mr Hafren: As a college, we have some fantastic employer engagement examples. We do air cabin crew training and we provide a steady stream of workers for Servisair, who service Manchester Airport. What we would be anxious about is really that kind of good practice being undermined by introducing a new qualification which the employer might not fully understand, that it has some reservations about; that is our anxiety really.

Q120 Mr Marsden: The better the devil you know; is that it?

Mr Hafren: Absolutely; that was why I made the point about the resilience of National Diplomas and First Diplomas. When all things are said, employers do understand those qualifications and have done for many, many years. That I think is what we need to work from, what is understood by employers, what is valued by them, what they say they want and then make sure that is evident within the Diploma framework.

Q121 Mr Marsden: Lorraine, can I ask you, the employers that you are working with, via your school, do they see these new Diplomas as educational or specifically vocational? How are you hoping to engage them with it?

Ms McCarthy: Obviously, we have done some work with employers, more the training providers, I suppose, but some work with the employers. I think that probably Peter is better placed to answer that question than I am.

Q122 Mr Marsden: Peter, would you like to comment on that?

Mr Hawthorne: In Wolverhampton, not untypically, the only large employers are the Council and the Health Service, so the critical problem is dealing with small employers, who have got no HR department, no training capacity, or whatever, and you have got to incentivise engagement with the Diplomas by making it real for those small employers. That is the absolutely critical fact. I think that we will develop the engagement with employers from the operational background we have already got. Work experience has gone now, more or less; 20% of our students doing Key Stage 4 do one day a week work-based learning with a training provider or an employer which is linked to, say, a BTEC in

their taught curriculum. That can be relevant to an employer; an employer may have a student for one day a week for two years and they can make it work really, really well for them. It is understanding the agendas of the small employer which, to my mind, is the absolutely critical issue, because you cannot expect them to put their hands in their pockets to support the education system, as they see it. It has got to work for them; that is the really hard part.

Q123 Mr Marsden: On that basis, assuming that you agree with the position which Ken Boston outlined to us, that these are not very specific vocational qualifications but that they are broader educational yet industry-relevant programmes, how do you see your ability to sell that view of these new Diplomas to the small and medium-size employers whom you describe?

Mr Hawthorne: I do not think it is problematic because the Diploma is a really large qualification and our capacity to succeed with the Diploma lies with our capacity to personalise it for students and for small employers. There will be lots of diversity and choice of activity, different types of experiential learning within different Diplomas for different people, and the same Diplomas for different people, so we can incentivise in the same way as we have done in the past for small employers.

Mr Marsden: Chairman, I would like to move on to the involvement of schools and colleges in the design, which we have touched on briefly already; perhaps if I can come to you, John Bangs, on that. You have made it very clear what your view is, that there has not been enough involvement in this, that and the other, you were going through it. I want to ask you a slightly different question, which is one I put to Ken Boston when he came last week. We have got 14 Diplomas, we have got three levels of Diplomas; have we got too many?

Q124 Chairman: You have been holding back so far, John. Let us really hear it?

Mr Bangs: I do not know if we have got too many. I think the curriculum is quite narrow in the Diplomas and I think that any attempts to define some of the Diplomas as academic or vocational is a kind of Holy Grail affair. How you define Creative and Media as academic or vocational is beyond me, and there are other Diplomas like that, including IT. What I think is necessary to understand about the Diplomas is that there is a mystery surrounding them, I suppose it is necessary, the mystery, because the Sector Skills Councils have delivered their reports only to the awarding bodies and they have got to hammer out specifications from those reports. What is clear though, and I think was a major, strategic mistake on behalf of the Government, was to say employers are leading, the schools and teacher organisations are following up behind; that was a mistake. I am not blaming the Sector Skills Councils; as I say, some of them, one of them anyway, the Engineering one, has made a positive effort to get hold of us. I do not see in any of that equation any conversation at regional or local level, for instance,

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with the TUC, who have, incidentally, at local level, enormous capacity to link into small and medium-size employers, also to link into some of the training programmes which have been put together in conjunction with some of the unions, which are not education-based but actually have an interest in the training of their own workers. None of that actually seems to have happened. I refer back to the previous question, also to answer it. I do not see any of that stimulation of conversation between head teachers, teachers and staff within schools and local employers so that awareness-raising can take place. I do not think that most employers know what Diplomas are, I just do not think they know what they are, and I do not think they are going to know what they are in the medium term, never mind the short term. There has got to be a mechanism put in place for awareness of what is on the table and for discussion about how that contact might appear in reality and how schools and employers jointly can promote it, but I do not think we are even at first base with that yet.

Q125 Mr Marsden: Elaine McMahon, how does it seem from your position, both as a college head but also you referred to your involvement with the AoC, I think, at the beginning? The AoC, in their written evidence to us, suggested that they thought the development of the Diplomas had been too theoretical, so far. What is your view on that, and again this word, and indeed the engagement with employers which John Bangs has just talked about?

Dr McMahon: I think we are still waiting, as colleges; we are keen to know how the content will translate into qualifications, specification and an assessment regime, and we are keen to revise our current curriculum offer along those lines. We still have a lot to learn and I think possibly we could have been engaged sooner in the discussion, and, as was referred to by Paul, we do not know even the criteria for going through the Gateway. We have written our proposals but we do not know what we are being assessed against, so there is still a lot of knowledge that colleges need really to grasp this; so to some extent we are a little in the dark still. We are very keen, we are enthusiastic to engage with it, we see the relevance of it, but I think we do not have enough of the detail yet to work up effectively, and we have been working blind, to some extent, on some of that.

Q126 Mr Marsden: You have emphasised the optimism but what about engaging the employers?

Dr McMahon: In terms of employers, as colleges we have already particularly very sound relationships, both in terms of all aspects of the work we do and, I suppose, possibly I see it in terms of foundation degrees. Those have been employer-led, with a very cohesive working relationship with employers to get the foundation degrees off the ground, and we have seen and discussed with our employers the similar approach that will be the way we go forward, whatever the level, that is level 4 but it would apply to level 1 equally.

Q127 Mr Marsden: They are trusting you to lead them through the labyrinth, are they?

Dr McMahon: Employers are not coming to us and saying "The Sector Skills Councils advised us and we're keen to take this up and lead;" we are having to engage with our current employers, drip-feeding, as we are drip-fed, some of this, as to what it will mean. It will take a concerted effort from all parties engaged in this to convince employers that this new Specialised Diploma is going to do more for them than what exists at the moment.

Q128 Mr Marsden: Lorraine, my understanding is, again from your CV, that you have been actively involved with the development of the Engineering and IT Diplomas. What is your view of the quality of the Diplomas which are emerging, or indeed of the quality of that course, because, again, both in oral and written evidence, some previous witnesses have suggested that there is a great disparity between how detailed and involved the content of some Diplomas courses are shaping up to be, as opposed to others?

Ms McCarthy: I have been involved in terms of the school and those are the two that we are going to be involved in for the pilot. It seems to me that there is a great difference in the levels in the different Diplomas and that there is no consistency, in terms of the levels, across the board, as far as I can see, on that first look.

Q129 Mr Marsden: That is a bad thing, is it?

Ms McCarthy: If you are going to have a level 2 qualification, it needs to be consistent across all of them.

Q130 Mr Marsden: Have you begun to get those points across; has there been any ability to modify them? As people involved in those two particular Diplomas, are you able to engage with other people in your area who are contributing perhaps in other ways?

Ms McCarthy: Across the city, we have networks which are looking to deliver all of them.

Q131 Mr Marsden: Forgive me for saying so, it does not sound, to me, like you are terribly confident that there are going to be changes. You are saying you have got problems with it, you think they are not consistent; it does not sound, to me, as if you are terribly confident they are going to be resolved. Would that be fair?

Ms McCarthy: Probably that would be fair. As I have said, I have not been involved actually in the writing or the planning of it, just in terms of the school, being part of delivering it. Across the city, there are some issues there.

Q132 Stephen Williams: Just to follow on from what Gordon was asking and perhaps to start with Elaine, for the Association of Colleges. From the earlier evidence session we had, as well as today, it seems that the QCA and employers with Sector Skills Councils are the primary drivers so far at putting together the content of these Diplomas. Do you

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think there has been enough involvement of the education sector itself? We are told, in your own AoC submission, that you are going to lay on a workshop, later on this year, to inform college principals; is that an admission, in fact, that the professional sector which is going to deliver them has not had enough of an opportunity to influence the content or the curriculum so far?

Dr McMahon: I think, that content, in terms of specification and the assessment regime, if we are involved in how that now starts to be rolled out and written up then that is fine. To date, as I said earlier, I think colleges would have welcomed more involvement sooner because of the timeframe. Not that we cannot move fast, but with 2008 looming we need to be clear what feedback we get from the Gateways and quickly start to have the staff development which is needed across schools, colleges and with employer involvement in how we can roll this out. No, I do not think we have been engaged early enough perhaps; that is not to say that it is too late, but I think colleges generally would have liked more knowledge earlier of how things were progressing.

Q133 Stephen Williams: Chairman, the Leitch Report, which we have had just recently, suggests that the model of the future is going to be about many courses, in fact, being employer-led, so the system could be more flexible, as the Government would put it. If this is an early trial of that, do you think that some fine-tuning is needed before we roll it out in a wider sphere?

Dr McMahon: Fine-tuning is a good word, is it not? Quite a bit of fine-tuning, I think, is needed at the moment; we have not enough of the detail at the moment. There are lots of things that we are aware of, for example, functional skills I have a concern, if I can use that as an example. With Key Skills, in an area like I am involved in, where, in Hull, maths and English are very poorly delivered or taken up in the schools, we are bottom of the league in GCSE maths and English, and therefore the college has to ensure that students retake at 16, when they enter the colleges, maths and English. At the moment, with Key Skills, we are able to put somebody who has got the ability to go on to a level 2 but has not got a level 1 Key Skill, we are enabled to do that. As I understand it, with the functional skills, that has not yet been worked through sufficiently, because at the moment if you are going to engage in a level 3 qualification you have got to have a level 2, in terms of a functional skill. I can take people with a level 1 at the moment and put them into a level 3, because in that time when they are with the college they get that GCSE A–C, and they get the Key Skill right up to the level they need, and we will not have that flexibility. There are lots of things we are learning as it goes along and having to say quickly that needs looking at again, please, because it could stop a lot of youngsters who are able to get there but will not be there from getting on the right level soon enough for the main qualification. There is lots of tweaking there.

Chairman: Fine-tuning and tweaking; it gets more and more interesting.

Q134 Stephen Williams: Can I put more or less the same point to John Bangs, from the schools sector?

Mr Bangs: I am reminded of the fact that every year my organisation and other teacher organisations are involved in an examination of the success or failure or the particular problems which arise from examination papers; it is called a Standing Joint Committee and they are attached to the Examination Boards. Actually it is a little-known process and it is very interesting and very thorough, when you put those examination papers in front of members and they are asked to comment, and there is a very big commenting system, I think, for example, Edexcel find it very, very valuable, so does the AQA. I do not see any machinery like that in place at all in relation to the Specialised Diplomas, and I would have thought that was axiomatic, the experience of what it feels like on the ground, neither do I see any levelling process, as takes place with the National Curriculum tests, I do not see any of that either. Maybe that is going to come over the hill, but the body and depth of what Examination Boards do and what teacher organisations do does not seem, to me, to have materialised yet. That is why perhaps teachers are just waiting for it to go away, because in a sense they have not got the sniff, the smell and the feel of what a genuine examination process is like, they have not seen it yet. It seems to me that those are the operational pieces which need to be put in place.

Q135 Chairman: John, very briefly on that, you seem to be far more negative and despondent about all this than the people who are delivering on the ground; is that a fair point, do you think? They are coming back saying, “Come on, we’ve done this before, we’ve got partnerships on the ground, we can do this;” you seem to be more worried about it all?

Mr Bangs: No. I think what colleagues have been doing is arguing for a good, verifiable, small-scale pilot instead of the very overambitious expectations attached to it; and I think it is unfortunate if overambitious expectations are attached to a project. I have been making practical proposals, for example, putting in place at local authority level an implementation body of schools, colleges, employers and teacher and support staff organisations, I have also been saying let us have an awareness day, involving all secondary schools. I have been saying let us put the machinery in place and let us hear what the Examination Boards have to say. Chairman, if that is negative then I am sorry that it comes over like that. We are trying to be positive and practical. The concern I have, and I have said this before, is that a number of key organisations, such as ours, have not been allowed to say those things directly to the DfES.

Chairman: A point well and strongly made. We are moving on to ‘workforce development’.

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Q136 Fiona Mactaggart: You have spoken about this a little, in some of the contributions that you have made in response to earlier questions and I am trying to think what kind of teaching we are going to need here. We have had the statement from the DfES that employer involvement in the teaching of Diplomas is particularly important if the experience for the young person is to be materially different. We have seen volunteered from e-Skills UK that employers are offering directly to assist the school and college workforce in preparing and developing their skills to deliver Diplomas. I am just wondering, is it true that these Diplomas are likely to require a different type of teaching from current teaching practice, particularly in the case of schools; so perhaps, Lorraine, you would like to tell me, is it going to be different?

Ms McCarthy: Yes, I think it is different. I think that it follows on from the BTEC First courses which we are following currently, and that has required the staff to teach differently. I think that these Specialised Diplomas are going to have the same thing. Also I think it means that we are going to have to start earlier, way back into Key Stage 3, in terms of learning, to learn programmes for the students and finding vehicles and ways of getting the teachers to get that across so that the students are becoming more independent and are being able to make choices earlier on. I think that is going to need some sort of workforce development.

Q137 Fiona Mactaggart: Colleges will not have the students earlier, so how is it going to affect you?

Dr McMahon: In my college we have 1,700 14–16-year-olds that we are involved in various delivery for the schools on, and so we are already engaged in it, in a way. The schools use us particularly for the vocational element because we do have a lot of school centres that are construction, engineering, they are industry standard centres, often with a lot of support from employers and a lot of equipment that is given to us from employer environments. I think, already, to some extent, we have got that understanding, that the colleges can use their professionalism in that element which is specialist. What we are working on is a strategy which is cross-boundary with the East Riding and Hull, where we can benefit from all the providers, the colleges, the schools and training providers, where the facilities are particularly good, that we maximise the use of that particular location and those particular specialist staff for the Specialised Diploma. That is taking a lot of strategic overview and a lot of discussion about what it will look like, and I am not saying we are there but certainly we are engaged in that and it is quite a thorough debate, at the moment, in my patch.

Q138 Fiona Mactaggart: You are taking me into slightly different territory than the teacher preparation but can I just follow the place to which you have taken me to ask about whether there is competition to hang on to some of these students? If this process suggests that this is the right place for

some student to do a particular piece of work, do you then end up with the present funding mechanism causing a bit of a tussle about people who do not want to let go of the student, necessarily?

Dr McMahon: I think the funding mechanism needs looking at, in terms of 14–19; yes, I think that would help, to be reviewed again. Maybe to go back to your point about staff and how they are engaged with, currently we have a 14–16 qualification which is run by the college and is shared with other colleges, which is Edexcel-approved and which QIA are looking at, at the moment, which actually is joint staff development for staff in schools and in colleges for the vocational route. It is a qualification which, for example, the college staff engage in because they need to understand what the 14–16-year-old needs are, and they have a lot to learn from the staff in the schools, because a lot of the staff in colleges are qualified only for post-16, and it works both ways. There is a qualification that all the staff in the college who are engaged with the vocational route have to take, and staff in the schools also are engaged in that programme. In the area, we already do a lot of work which we are building on and seeing ourselves building on for this vocational Specialised Diploma. It is already pulling together what we have been doing for the last few years.

Q139 Fiona Mactaggart: Godfrey, do you think your staff are going to have to learn to teach differently?

Mr Glyn: Yes. I think it is more fundamental than that, in a sense. I think staff at all levels, including management, will need training and time, particularly time, to develop new ways of working together, because you are going to have to develop teams across colleges and across schools for it to work effectively. I spoke originally about the fact that we have got a consortium and in a sense it is a strong consortium, in relative terms, but it has still got an awfully long way to go in terms of its future development if we are going to deliver the dream. It will require staff to look differently at each other, to work with other people from different backgrounds, and there are all kinds of issues around contracts and rates of pay over that one. Actually, one of the fundamental changes will be the training which is needed to be able to provide the very best opportunities across a range of institutions as one, and that is a new game for many schools and for many heads and senior staff. It is not something we have had to do in the past, it is always much easier to do it on your own, is it not, than to co-operate with other people to deliver something to the common good, and that is a big area of development, I think.

Q140 Fiona Mactaggart: One of the things you are saying is it is not just about teaching approaches and teaching skills, it is about working approaches and working skills?

Mr Glyn: Yes, because I think, from that working together, pooling the energies, the enthusiasms and the professional abilities of different colleagues and

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different institutions, that is from where the richness of the curriculum will be derived. The fundamental thing about the Diplomas and the great strength of them, in fact, I think, for the future of the education system, is that they cannot be delivered by one single institution, it needs institutions to work together and staff to work together.

Q141 Fiona Mactaggart: Peter, your job is to make people work together and I have been trying to say have we got the right teaching skills, and I am hearing that, in a way, teaching skills comes after a new way of working. As I understand it, the DFES says that in-service training is likely to be three days of face-to-face training, online materials, and things like that: is that going to be enough?

Mr Hawthorne: I agree with Godfrey. The Diplomas are about experiential learning and, in a sense, that is the easy bit, because we can build on what we have learned from BTECs and training and skills in the past. We are going to need multi-providers and those are going to be specialists, so those will be people, training providers, colleges, schools, that know that business. Where we are going to have to work very hard is, first of all, in the integration of functional skills, PLTS, etc, because that is very, very difficult to do; in the multi-provider environment it is going to be even harder. The points which Godfrey made, about communication quality between those multi-providers is very, very important and there is going to be a very high premium on guidance as well for learners and communication about guidance between the professionals who deal with the learners. I think we have got to put a new emphasis on the aspirational side of the Diplomas, because I think they will be transformational if they can be personalised, and by personalising them we put learners into an incredibly complex myriad of local provision. Communication and guidance will be an absolute premium and that will mean what we call the infrastructures, the ways of working, will be at a premium.

Mr Hafren: I think that is an interesting line of inquiry for you to pursue around the kinds of skills and attitudes that are required that are not technical but are to do with subverting institutional self-interest in pursuit of the best for an individual pupil. That I think is a big challenge; that level of sophistication probably does not exist at the moment and needs to be developed. I am not aware of a development programme which has been worked up in the same way that a technical development programme is being worked up.

Q142 Fiona Mactaggart: It seems to me that the workforce development programme is being produced by Lifelong Learning UK and the Training and Development Agency. What you seem to be saying is actually that is not the most important bit, in a way, that there should be a workforce training priority on partly advice and guidance, so actually helping the student to navigate the system, that seems part of it, and

partly new ways of working so that you can use the context of new working to get the best educational outcome. Have I summarised you appropriately, or are there other things which you think should be priorities in this training? I have tried to include the things that a number of people have said.

Mr Hafren: I think your summary is accurate, that the technical skills are probably the simpler set of skills to develop. The ways of working, working interdependently, are much more challenging, because the model that we exist in at the moment is predicated primarily on performance being measured at institutional level and what is emerging is a collective way of delivering to individuals.

Dr McMahon: First and foremost, I think, over and above the things that we have been talking about, like staff development, *etc*, is leadership, and strategic leadership, in an area and across an area. By that, I mean, with Building Schools for the Future, aligning that with the support that the LSCs give and Government Office give to colleges with their capital bills. Unless we have an overarching capital resource for an area and an alignment which delivers this long term, we are going to get duplication and the use of public purse money to build a skills centre here and another skills centre there by different routes. Really it does all hinge on joined-up, strategic planning for a community and I think that is a big challenge, because institutions all have their own rationale and reasons for being. I think where it will work effectively is where people can see that they have to contribute to that bigger picture and that there is an incentive to do so.

Q143 Paul Holmes: Everybody is agreed that this is quite a revolutionary way that teachers are going to teach; you cannot, as an A level teacher or a BTEC teacher, just switch over to the new Diploma. The DFES are suggesting that there will be three days of face-to-face training, of which one day will be in the workplace; is that enough to revolutionise the way? I was teaching for 22 years, and if someone had said to me "You're going to do it entirely differently and you've got three days' training," it would seem a bit inadequate to me.

Mr Bangs: No, I do not think it is, and I thought Fiona Mactaggart's questions were very important. Good pedagogy is good pedagogy and it derives from deep subject knowledge, it derives from understanding interactive questioning between yourself, as a teacher, and the student, or the group of students, it is about learning from students, it is about being secure in your own knowledge base, and all the rest of it. You cannot apply a delivery model to anything, actually, in terms of what is new, but certainly not to this, which says, "Well, we've run it by you for a day and you've observed this and therefore you're up to speed." All the evidence that we have in the schools sector is that effective professional development is embedded by experts from outside working with teachers, those teachers working in the classroom and seeing what

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works and what does not and then coming back and discussing it. What I do not see is an embedded understanding of the nature of that professional development, in terms of subject knowledge or in terms of pedagogic practice. The thing which concerns me slightly is this, that probably there are two different sets of skills at FE college and school levels, although there is a lot of interaction already taking place, but the reality is that the pressure on schools to keep their students in school, my hunch is, is much greater than it is at FE level. It may well be that there are different approaches to teaching, different styles of pedagogy, which will have to be resolved and which, in a sense, will trigger the need for a good, strategic approach to quality professional development.

Q144 Paul Holmes: Does anybody think that three days is enough?

Mr Hafren: I think, if we were spinning a fly-wheel and the three days was used to get it moving and then you had some more days which kept it moving and then it accelerated in its own way, because it is all going in the right direction, fine. If we are trying to create a revolution on the basis of three days' worth of training, no, it is not, it is woefully inadequate; but I guess it is a start and that what we need to do is learn as we are going and adjust accordingly and keep at it. I think robust persistence will be needed if it is not to fade away like other initiatives have done.

Q145 Paul Holmes: When should the initial three days, which is what the DfES are talking about at the moment, of training start; this Easter, next Easter, this summer, or next summer?

Mr Hafren: I would say, as soon as possible really, so that people can get engaged with the detail as soon as it is available.

Q146 Paul Holmes: Can you start this training before you see detailed sample syllabuses, detailed sample exam questions; because this was part of the shambles of Curriculum 2000, as I recall it? I was teaching in 2000.

Mr Hafren: That is a good point. If there is insufficient detail available, people will just simply ask for it, will they not, and the training will be on their mind.

Q147 Paul Holmes: Is there any evidence that the DfES have got a timetable in mind of when the syllabuses will be available, when the sample exam questions will be, or when the training will start?

Mr Bangs: No, there is not any. I do not have any evidence; schools do not have evidence on that. I think it has to be after the specifications are looked at and you follow up from the specifications, in terms of the implications, what we need in books, materials, equipment and professional development. Neither do I have any impression that the Training and Development Agency has any locus, whether it should do indeed, and that question has not been asked either.

Q148 Paul Holmes: The Training and Development Agency are going to spend £50 million on developing material for this; is there any sign of that or has anybody been consulted on this?

Mr Bangs: No.

Q149 Paul Holmes: There is a worrying blank in response to all of these questions?

Mr Bangs: Not so far from our end. There is a CPD Strategy Group and we have not seen anything yet.

Q150 Paul Holmes: Elaine, you are enthusiastic about this but you are still not saying, "Oh, yes, we know what's happened"?

Dr McMahon: As I said at the start, the detail is not there yet, we have not enough of the detail and we are waiting to hear the outcome of the Gateway process.

Q151 Chairman: You do not know even if you are going to be in a pilot yet, do you?

Dr McMahon: No.

Chairman: Some of you are preparing for something that might not happen.

Q152 Paul Holmes: What are the dates for knowing whether you will be accepted as a pilot?

Dr McMahon: I do not know.

Mr Hawthorne: February or March.

Q153 Chairman: Have you got any of the curriculum for these; the first six are through, are they not?

Dr McMahon: Five. We have got the content; we have got enough to have worked up to go through the Gateway process.

Q154 Paul Holmes: My last question is not strictly on workforce development but arises out of some things a couple of people were saying. If this is being done part in college, part in school, part in workplace, who gets the credit, or otherwise, in their league table results; how is that going to be overcome?

Ms McCarthy: That is a big question. Within Wolverhampton, a number of our students move round different schools for different courses and the arrangement that we have is that if these are your home students then you are credited with the result, whichever institution teaches them.

Chairman: We are going to move on to look at local co-ordination; we have been dipping into this quarter already.

Q155 Mr Wilson: I would like to get some sort of reassurance this afternoon that we are not heading for a car crash, because I do not feel reassured at the moment, by anything you have said, that we are not heading for a bit of a disaster. Perhaps the colleges could sketch out for me what are the challenges they are facing in co-ordinating all the different bodies together within their local areas?

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Mr Hafren: I hope we are not heading for a car crash because I would want to be swinging the wheel around a bit really to try to avoid things like that. I guess what is driving us, as an institution, is a real desire to see this work, because we see it as an important curriculum change which will give due cognisance and acknowledgement to the kind of work that colleges do, in preparing people for employment, so it is in our interest really to see this work. However, I think my anxiety, in terms of a local partnership, is that probably there is insufficient recognition at a local level given to the history, tradition, resources, staff expertise, and so on, that we have, as a college. That is for understandable reasons, in a sense, in that the LA has been particularly keen to make sure that schools are not disinclined to work on this initiative. The role of the college has had to be balanced, to some extent, against the need to have schools heavily involved and leading, even though at times the leadership of a curriculum area is rather difficult to understand when we have a major presence in this kind of curriculum area. We are doing quite a lot of work behind the scenes with the LA to try to encourage them to take a view which recognises the strengths that we have and the strengths that we can bring to bear, but the LA is also concerned that it is not actually disengaging the schools. That is one of the challenges that we have.

Q156 Mr Wilson: One of the barriers that the National Association of Head Teachers feels is quite important, in terms of local co-ordination, is the feeling that schools and colleges are within a system currently where they are competing with each other for pupils, because of falling rolls, shortages of teachers and other things. Perhaps, Lorraine, you can comment on that?

Ms McCarthy: I think probably we are in a privileged position in Wolverhampton, as the college is a partner, in the education of the students, with the schools.

Q157 Mr Wilson: I think you are ahead of the game, in Wolverhampton, are you not?

Ms McCarthy: Yes, I think so. We took the decision, and Peter can confirm this, that the college would be part of the partnership, and that worked successfully, so we do engage with the college, in terms of they have some of the school students and deliver some of the programmes, but it is as a partnership.

Q158 Mr Wilson: Maybe I should broaden it out, and I do not mind who answers this. How advanced do you think the local partnerships are, looking across the country; does anyone have an opinion on that?

Mr Hawthorne: We deliver a lot of learning visits for the DfES, so I have been to 40 other local authorities in the last 18 months. Obviously, there is an insatiable desire to learn from other partnerships, and in Wolverhampton we are always

learning from other people as well. Quite clearly, what has got to happen in each area is that there has got to be some leadership, some management and then some administrative arrangements to make co-operation work effectively; it is as simple as that. There is not a neat hierarchical arrangement, because we have got local authorities, we have got Learning and Skills Councils, we have got incorporated colleges, and so on. We have developed ours through the learning partnership and we have developed it through operational success; up and down the country people are less advanced, quite often. It is quite hard, because you are looking for a culture of collaboration where there are not any real incentives to create that; that is the hard part.

Q159 Chairman: Paul, you are nodding sagely there; because you agree?

Mr Hafren: Yes, absolutely. I think the model is predicated on people working interdependently when some of the systems are predicated on people working independently, and so there is a collision there. To some extent, the Diploma development is ahead of the systems that the individual partners have to work with, such as funding or inspection, performance, measurement, and so on and so forth. Those things need to be resolved, I think, to come more in alignment with the spirit of Diploma development.

Q160 Mr Wilson: Do you think sharing students at the age of 14 presents difficulties as well around the schools and colleges?

Mr Hafren: Yes, absolutely. I think there are all the systems issues and the institutional self-interest issues, but equally for a 14-year-old to be thrust into a very complex environment, where they could be wearing the school uniform of one school and spending a lot of time in another and then off to a college and spending time on buses. Actually it is quite a complicated system, which we need to be careful we do not make complicated to the client, or the pupil, because I think they will find this really a hard pill to swallow.

Q161 Mr Wilson: Going back to the National Association of Head Teachers, they say, in their submission to us, that, co-operation and co-ordination, the range of readiness ranges from what they say is hesitantly enthusiastic, maybe Wolverhampton is ahead of the curve on that, to frighteningly unaware. Where do you think the majority lie in that spectrum?

Dr McMahon: I think it depends on the composition you have in your area. In Hull, mostly it is two sixth form colleges and a general FE, with a whole plethora of training providers, but not sixth forms in schools, so we will have a different relationship, training providers and colleges, with the schools, and I think that has been helpful. When I look at collaboration, you have to have it because it has to be there for 14–19 to work, whether we have got Specialised Diplomas or not.

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What exists now, to make it work, you have to have a collaborative approach, with a win-win approach, for the people who are existing in that locality. However, in East Riding, where we also have a college, we are making it work, it is perhaps more difficult but we have got there equally working with local schools on post-16. I think it is more of a challenge, where you have got sixth forms in schools and you have got general FE and sixth form colleges; where there is complexity in an area you have to work harder at it.

Q162 Chairman: You are already working hard. Godfrey, we have not given you a chance; he is in a different part of the country. I think you were smarting when we said everybody else was ahead of the curve?

Mr Glyn: Paul made the point that there are very few drivers for collaboration and that is the key. I am in a tertiary model in Hampshire, most of the post-16 provision in the state sector is in colleges, and that has been interesting since incorporation for us to work together and come up with a way which allows us to function to the best needs of the students and I think we have achieved that after a long period of time. If I take my scenario of ten partner schools, all of which have specialist college status, some of which are applying now for their second specialism, they are being encouraged when they apply to put down that they want a sixth form. My colleagues, working with their teaching staff in order to deliver a programme 14–19, come back to me and say, quite honestly, “They want a sixth form; why are we doing ourselves out of a job?” That hardly encourages the attitude that we need to deliver the 14–19 curriculum, and there are a number of other factors which mitigate against collaboration and I think they need to be looked at very carefully.

Q163 Mr Chaytor: Who is encouraging them at the point of applying for the second specialism, as I understand it; is it the Department or is it the colleges and specialist schools?

Mr Glyn: As I understand it, it is the Specialist Schools Trust adviser who was suggesting that we ought to put down that we want a sixth form.

Q164 Mr Chaytor: Is this done formally, in writing, or is this done in a sort of nudge-nudge, wink-wink way?

Mr Glyn: I have not seen anything in writing.

Q165 Mr Chaytor: You are prepared to put it on the record that this is happening?

Mr Glyn: That is what I have been told, yes, and certainly that is the feeling which hangs around.

Q166 Chairman: If you have an academy proposal, you are a sixth form in most cases, are you not, anyway? Not that you have an academy, but that is true, is it not?

Mr Glyn: Yes.

Q167 Mr Chaytor: In all the legislation, there is a presumption that schools without a sixth form which apply to expand to a sixth form will be given it, because of a parallel presumption that colleges which apply to expand will also be given approval. Is it possible to have two parallel presumptions which would lead to a neutral, contradictory outcome, do you think?

Mr Glyn: I think so.

Q168 Mr Wilson: It does seem that we are unearthing that parts of the system seem to be working against each other. Does not this need to be sorted out before we get to the point where we are launching this in 2008?

Mr Glyn: Absolutely.

Q169 Mr Wilson: What do you think is the process to deal with it; is that in the hands of the DFES, or some other organisation involved in this?

Mr Hafren: I think some of the issues are so profound that to ask a local area to try to resolve them is not adequate because I think there are bad policies.

Q170 Mr Wilson: Who should be resolving this, do you think; is it the Department for Education and Skills that should be resolving it?

Mr Hafren: I cannot think of anybody else that would have that responsibility.

Q171 Chairman: As was said in the last session, the buck stops somewhere in the Department, does it not?

Mr Hafren: Absolutely.

Mr Bangs: I wrote a thesis on local authority co-operation when the Inner London Education Authority had its tertiary education boards. I have to say, it works, and comments by colleagues about sorting out students' travel times, for example, it is not marginal, it is central to students' sanity. I have seen colleges, special schools, employers, the local authority, sitting down, looking at courses and working out what was the best optimum course, and that was when CPVE was in place, for particular students, to remove those travel times, and to look at where the pastoral support and the tutorial support might be. Local authorities do not know that they are in the driving-seat when it comes to local organisation; there are mixed messages. Local Learning and Skills Councils are fading out, you have got the Further Education Bill in Parliament, which is going to remove them, but the consequence of that is that, local authorities, all they have got in terms of additional funding is probably one principal officer and an administrative assistant, if you divi-up £15 million. They do not know that they should have the capacity to draw all those people together, there is not that message in the system and that is what I have been trying to say consistently, Chairman.

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Q172 Chairman: They have not yet come to terms with their new strategic role?

Mr Bangs: No; certainly not.

Q173 Mr Wilson: It may not be a car crash but it may be something close to a car crash and this may end in tears. What incentives do schools and colleges have to become involved in these local partnerships and the Diplomas?

Mr Glyn: The needs of the students, frankly.

Mr Hawthorne: We can provide a much richer curriculum which will improve continually, I think, attainment and inclusion, participation of schools, undoubtedly by working together.

Chairman: We had better move on.

Q174 Jeff Ennis: Peter, have all the providers in your area been keen to get involved in the 14–19 agenda, or have some been a bit more lethargic, shall we say, than others, and, if so, which ones, in general terms?

Mr Hawthorne: What we have tried to do is create what we call an infrastructure to facilitate collaboration, to make it possible, and leave the decision-making in the hands of the heads and governors of those institutions. Everyone in Wolverhampton participates, everyone uses the infrastructure, college, all schools, special schools, training providers, the lot, because it is elective, so they are doing it to serve their own agendas. They do not compromise and sacrifice their institutions, so they can do it out of self-interest. That is the trick; that is to circle the square.

Jeff Ennis: Have any of our witnesses got any experience of the so-called local LSC-appointed co-ordinators and is there a need for this particular kind of role to promote the development of the Diplomas?

Q175 Chairman: Has anybody got experience of local LSC co-ordinators; they exist in some parts?

Mr Hafren: I have got experience of a co-ordinator, I think they were appointed jointly between LA and LSC, and that should have been a force for good, I am sure.

Q176 Jeff Ennis: The LSC provided the funding.

Mr Hafren: They might well have done. Particularly because this person has been new to the area, they have come at it with a fresh pair of eyes and that has been quite useful really just to challenge some of the habitual ways of thinking.

Mr Hawthorne: I think the leadership, wherever it comes from, needs legitimacy in the eyes of the principals and the head teachers in the area. There is too much low-level co-ordination, which gets rubbished by senior managers.

Q177 Fiona Mactaggart: Paul was talking earlier about how you create a culture of collaboration where collaboration is not rewarded. John said that the answer is to give this responsibility back at a strategic level to the local authorities and let them know it. I wonder if everybody else would offer me

just one thing they would change to reward collaboration; has anyone got a proposal, a thing you would change to make a better reward for collaboration? Elaine, have you got an idea?

Dr McMahon: Funding direct to the colleges for 14–19-year-olds would sort it out.

Q178 Fiona Mactaggart: Give the money to the colleges and they will sort it out, is their solution?

Mr Hafren: A radical solution would be to give the funding to the collective.

Ms McCarthy: I think I would agree. Give the funding, in our case, to Peter to sort out and he helps us then to drive it forward.

Mr Glyn: I would agree; funding to consortia, or whatever arrangement it is at the time.

Q179 Chairman: Peter has been spoken for, has he?

Mr Hawthorne: I would say that all the providers in an area have to have a collective responsibility for all the learners in that area.

Mr Bangs: I agree about re-examining the funding system. It should go to the collective and it should be allocated according to the board or the group of representatives of the institutions and providers. I would also do something else, which is, it came up earlier, school performance tables in this area really are redundant and they ought to be reviewed and another form of institutional measure put in its place, which is not so crude.

Chairman: We are moving to our very last subject, the Gateway process.

Q180 Stephen Williams: Also how students and parents perceive this qualification and how its affects their future progression. Can I start, Chairman, with Elaine, from the Hull perspective. We understand that your college is involved in a consortium in Hull; presumably you are leading it. How many providers take part in that consortium?

Dr McMahon: It is over 20, at the moment, and then the schools, of which there are 14 on top, so there is a whole range. For example, in some of the training providers, there is a consortium representing hundreds of training providers but there is a regular group which meets, of about 20.

Q181 Stephen Williams: There is Hull College, the schools, training providers, so there could be, if I have added up correctly, 35 lead providers in your consortium?

Dr McMahon: Yes, that is right.

Q182 Stephen Williams: You have got your application in to go through this Gateway; how has the assessment process worked, in practice?

Dr McMahon: In terms of the Gateway, we do not know the assessment process; that is the problem.

Q183 Stephen Williams: Is not the Government going to announce by March who has got through this Gateway?

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Dr McMahon: Yes, that is right, but we have submitted on the criteria headlines, collectively, we have written it together, with the college leading, but we do not know what the selection criteria are. I do not know, anyway.

Q184 Stephen Williams: Is not that rather strange; it sounds very strange, to me, anyway. You sat this collective exam to which 35 of you contributed but you have no idea how you are being assessed?

Dr McMahon: That is the right perspective, I may be wrong but that is how it looks to me; we do not know, in our area.

Q185 Stephen Williams: Is that how it looks from Eastleigh?

Mr Glyn: Yes.

Q186 Stephen Williams: Wolverhampton?

Mr Hawthorne: There are extended criteria to write against.

Q187 Stephen Williams: You know what criteria you need to meet, but you do not know, do you have any feedback, when the results are going to come out, in March 2007, as we expect, whether you are going to be told why you met the criteria, whether you did not meet the criteria, any expectations around that?

Mr Hawthorne: Quite clearly, the DfES have said that they do not know how many partnerships will meet the standards, so to speak, but there is not a clear definition of standards. Then there is the intention that unsuccessful partnerships will be given some feedback and some guidance and some support and training to prepare for the 2009 Gateway.

Q188 Stephen Williams: We have heard though, Chairman, that the Government's target is roughly 50,000 students to go through in the first five Diploma lines, in September 2008, so that must lie behind that, a certain number of consortia around the country. Do we have any evidence of how many people have applied from around the country, and will they all pass or will not enough even have applied; has the Association of Colleges collected any data on this?

Dr McMahon: I am not sure, at this point in time, whether they have; there may be some. Maybe I can just liaise with them.

Q189 Chairman: You are saying that you are not getting any feedback from the Department yet; you put in your submissions and you get no feedback at all?

Dr McMahon: I am sure the Government Office, who are overseeing regionally the submissions that have gone forward for the five in the first round, will give us feedback, it is obviously just not clear at the moment, to me, in particular, at this point in time, what the shape of that feedback will be or how it will be cascaded.

Chairman: What is it out there, that five have met the criteria, do you think five out of all the submissions have fully met the criteria; is that what we know? Is not that a worrying thought? You do not know; all right.

Q190 Stephen Williams: Can I come back to Hull then, to Elaine; 35 training providers are taking part in your consortium. I do not know enough about the structure of education in Hull; is that a broad cross-section of schools across the city?

Dr McMahon: All schools have been encouraged to be engaged and about half of them are engaged in the first tranche, if we get through, and working on how we will work together on that.

Q191 Stephen Williams: I am afraid I do not know anything about the structure of education in Wolverhampton. I am trying to find out whether this is the sort of thing that the residual grammar schools or private schools are likely to have any interest in at all for their students; is there any evidence on that which any of you have picked up?

Mr Hawthorne: I do not think they will, in the short term, but I think they will in the medium term and the longer term.

Q192 Stephen Williams: They would like to see the experiment in the state sector first, perhaps?

Mr Hawthorne: Yes.

Q193 Stephen Williams: If I can move on from schools then to students themselves, we have heard that, to some extent, amongst the sector, there is not enough information out there even about what the Diplomas are; we heard from Warrington that some employers even talk still in terms of O levels. Do you think the fact that these Diplomas are on the way has actually seeped through to students; perhaps John could start with that?

Mr Bangs: No, I do not think it has because I do not think schools are aware of the Diplomas or their implications. Outside the penumbra of good practice in the 14–19 Pathfinders, those at the leading edge, I think most students do not know about the offer that is available to them; they could not take a judgment neither could the teachers in the school. As I have said before, I think there is a need for a discussion, involving all secondary schools at local level, on the intention and purpose of Specialised Diplomas and it should be led. There have been regional conferences obviously, but what you get at that level are the keen principals and head teachers who will go along to that, and the local authority personnel. That will not get to what one might call invisible schools, the schools that are just simply trying to get on with the job, and they are the majority.

Q194 Stephen Williams: Where are these 50,000 potential students going to come from then, in the first tranche?

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Mr Bangs: I was asked earlier about whether or not we will hit 50,000 and I was asked to ascertain whether it will be a quarter or a half. I could not say a quarter or a half. I do not think they will hit 50,000. It will come from those consortia of institutions and providers who are ahead of the game, who have been in discourse with the DfES and the QCA and who have got through the Gateway process, but certainly it will not be 50,000.

Q195 Stephen Williams: In Hull, if we can get down to the detail of that, what sorts of students do you think will be attracted by these Diplomas, what are they doing now that they will not do, what will they give up in order to take these Diplomas instead?

Dr McMahon: As we said earlier, if it is built around good practice and the BTEC Nationals and developed further forward, I think it will be those who chose the BTEC National and possibly an AS and an A level at the moment, giving them the three equivalent A levels to go through to university. I think it will be that student, who wants that more practical approach, who wants more opportunity to get into the employer's working environment, as part of a learning package, that innovative student who wants that practical experience as well as the academic, underpinning knowledge, it is that route which attracts that type of student. I think gradually it will replace what we offer now in a BTEC course and BTEC Nationals.

Q196 Stephen Williams: What does the Government Department need to do in order to increase awareness of this new opportunity amongst students? We have got the sorry example of the higher education funding changes, whatever political differences we might have about that. It is a fact that the awareness campaign has failed most amongst the people it was most designed to reach, the people who do not participate in higher education, social classes D and E (in old terminology) groups, whereas the people who got the adverts and got the message are the people who were always going to go to university anyway. Is not there a danger that the same thing will happen here, that the Government advertising will not reach the people it is meant to reach?

Mr Bangs: It has got to set up the structures at local authority level, or indeed consortia of local authorities, and fund those structures such that principals and the head teachers in secondary schools and in colleges and representatives of organisations, not just teacher organisations but representatives of other unions through the TUC, own what is going to happen. Those structures are not in place. The best people to promote at local level are the organisations and the schools which have got a stake in it, and there is no structure in place at local level which is going to be generalised across the country.

Q197 Stephen Williams: It is like I said in the earlier questions I asked; it is perhaps the first stage of employer-led qualifications. Do not employers

perhaps have the key role in this, in making these a qualification, "We want you to get this qualification; a good-quality job awaits you at the end"?

Mr Bangs: Yes, I think so. I think employers have a real role and I think the Sector Skills Councils, but at the moment they have been told they are leading on the development of the qualifications, everyone else follows up behind; they are not encouraged to be in partnership with those who have to deliver those qualifications. There is simply not the kind of concept of, first of all, doing the audits of need, how they feed into the prospectus, there has been advice on that but it has not been backed materially and politically, and that there are the structures to follow it through. I think it is beholden on the DfES actually to put those structures in place and issue firm guidance to local authorities to be the co-ordinators of those structures.

Q198 Stephen Williams: I have a couple of questions on progression into higher education. The Chancellor announced some "skills champions" in his Pre-Budget Statement, and one of them was Deian Hopkin, who is the Vice Chancellor of London South Bank University, to be the specific champion for these Diplomas. I do not know whether he has been in touch with any of you yet but, either Hull or Wolverhampton, have you been in touch with your local vice chancellors and got some feedback as to how they will receive these Diplomas in the future?

Dr McMahon: Hull, as a college, already has over a thousand higher education degree students, so we see ourselves as the natural feeder into particularly our foundation degrees. Also, obviously, we have made our partner universities aware—there are four universities in our locality—that we are engaged in this development and we are seeking their advice as well.

Mr Hawthorne: One aspect of the Diploma development pilot work is linking with HE and progression into HE and we have got three or four very interesting and very successful projects, so I think the universities are keen to work with sixth forms and ensure good progression rates.

Stephen Williams: Chairman, have you got this as well; I got a notice today of the latest report from the Higher Education Policy Institute, which is called *Vocational A levels and university entry: is there parity of esteem?* to give it its full title. The key statistic in this short report is that 51% of the students who take what were Advanced GNVQs go on to university, compared with 84% of students who take traditional A levels. There is a big gap currently between the future progression of students, and are we confident that we might be able to narrow that gap with students who take this Diploma in that we have still got A levels, unlike what Tomlinson recommended, continuing alongside them?

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Mr Peter Hawthorne and Mr John Bangs

Chairman: Does one of you want to answer that?
Stephen Williams: That is a risk.

Chairman: This has been a very good session. Can I thank you; it has been extremely good. It is quite difficult, we have never had a committee session with six, but I think we have managed quite well

and you have managed very well to impart to us the fact that you welcome the new qualification but you have some doubts and worries and concerns about how we are going to deliver it on the timetable that is scheduled at the moment. Thank you very much for giving your time.

Memorandum submitted by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

PURPOSE

1. This memorandum sets out the rationale for the Government's policy to introduce new Diploma qualifications as an entitlement for all young people from 2013; the design and development process; plans for its successful delivery by schools, colleges, work-based learning providers and others; and the structures in place for the leadership and management of the project within the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

THE RATIONALE FOR THE DIPLOMA

2. The 14–19 Education and Skills White Paper (Cm 6476, February 2005) set out the Government's plans to improve secondary, further and higher education. The introduction of specialised Diplomas is a key element. We aim to create, for the first time in this country, a highly valued mixed theoretical and practical route for young people which genuinely meets the needs of employers and provides a sound basis for progression into higher education (HE). This is necessary because, at present, too many young people are failing to achieve their full potential which is impacting negatively on the skill base of the country. The Diploma will allow young people to learn in a different way and therefore appeal to all those, whatever their ability, who enjoy a different learning style. Young people will be motivated and stretched in a way that the current curriculum does not consistently achieve. The Diploma initiative will, therefore, help to boost participation in learning both by improving attendance at the compulsory school age and by encouraging staying-on post-16. The Government has set ambitious proposals to tackle low post-16 participation, with the aim that participation at age 17 should increase from 75–90% over the next 10 years.

3. There will be 14 Diplomas, brigaded by broad employment sector, at each of levels 1, 2 and 3 in the National Qualifications Framework. In addition, there will be an award for part-completion of the level 3 Diploma.

4. The introduction of the Diploma is one of a series of related curriculum and qualification reforms set out in the White Paper including making A levels more challenging, changes to some GCSEs, and revising the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum. The key purpose of the Key Stage 3 reform is to ensure that time is available to ensure that all young people are literate and numerate as they enter their teenage years. Because the basics are so critical to young people's chances, a further planned reform is the introduction of new Functional Skills qualifications in English, Maths and Information Technology. Young people sitting GCSEs in these subject areas will need to pass the related functional skills elements in order to achieve an A*–C grade in the GCSE. Achieving functional skills will be a pre-requisite for attaining a Diploma qualification. Further features of the Diploma include a compulsory project and inclusion of Personal Learning and Thinking Skills which employers and HE providers increasingly look for in new recruits. These require learners to be independent enquirers, creative thinkers, reflective learners, team workers, self-managers and effective participators.

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF DIPLOMAS

5. The programme of work to develop and deliver the Diplomas reflects the scope of the Diploma's ambitions and the scale of the challenge.

6. At its heart is the Government's determination to secure twin objectives: that the Diploma should meet the needs of business and that it should be respected and accepted by universities and other HE providers for the increasing number of young people progressing to HE. To secure those objectives, the Government, through the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA), established multi-organisational partnerships, convened by Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), to design and develop a Diploma for each employment grouping. These are called Diploma Development Partnerships (DDPs). Membership of each DDP includes employers and representatives from HE, professional bodies, schools, colleges and awarding bodies. The role of each DDP has been, through wide consultation, to determine the skills, knowledge and understanding which needs to be contained in its Diploma, at each level. This work has been carried out under guidance from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) which has been remitted to design

the shape and structure of the Diploma, and has a statutory function to regulate its delivery to ensure high standards and consistency. DDPs also have important roles to play in communicating the reforms and in building employer capacity for delivery.

7. Once a DDP has determined the skills, knowledge and understanding required from each Diploma, the QCA is responsible for translating those requirements into regulatory criteria. It is then the task of accredited awarding bodies to develop units and full Diploma qualifications for endorsement by DDPs and, subsequently, accreditation by QCA.

8. QCA, through the National Assessment Authority, is also responsible for designing the systems and technical infrastructure capable of allowing the awarding of Diplomas from 2009. This project has been entitled “Minerva”.

9. Progress to date has been good. The main milestones in the timeline published in the 14–19 Education and Skills Implementation Plan (DfES 2037-2005 DCL-EN) last year have been met or are on course to be achieved (these are set out at Annex A). In addition, DDPs have secured real interest from their sectors and commitment from key figures. The Diplomas have very significant support from some of the UK’s largest companies, such as Vodafone and Rolls Royce, and leading universities.

COMMUNICATING THE REFORMS

10. We have embarked on a major programme of communications tailored to each of the different groups that the 14–19 Reforms will affect; employers; schools, colleges, training providers and other local partners; HE providers; young people and their parents. As part of this, leading figures from the HE, business and education sectors will act as Champions for the new Diplomas and wider 14–19 Reform programme, to raise awareness of the reforms, support the implementation and increase take up of the new qualifications. The employers champion is Sir Alan Jones, Chairman of Toyota. Sir Mike Tomlinson, currently chair of the Learning Trust in Hackney, will act as Champion for Schools and Colleges. Two Champions have been appointed to cover the HE sector; Deian Hopkin, Vice-Chancellor, London South Bank University and Professor Michael Arthur, Vice-Chancellor, University of Leeds.

11. We have a number of current and planned communications activities, focussed on the main audience groups:

- Our priority over the last six months has been to raise the awareness of practitioners within schools and colleges, and partner organisations, who will be delivering the reforms. Nine regional conferences for schools, colleges, training providers, local authorities (LAs) and other partners took place in the autumn attracting over 1,000 people. These have been supplemented with contributions to a large number of other events, a termly newsletter and a range of other products.
- We recently launched a series of activities to raise awareness within HE providers and are running regional conferences for HE, which are attracting senior personnel, including Vice Chancellors and Pro-Vice Chancellors as well as admissions tutors and directors of study.
- We will be running a number of major events for employers in the New Year. These build on the work of DDPs in raising awareness in their sectors. The SSCs have undertaken large consultations and they are gradually raising the awareness of employers as to the significance of the reform programme and the opportunities it presents them with.
- Finally, we are planning a major awareness raising campaign for young people and parents for the spring, when we know where the Diplomas will be available in 2008.

SUCCESSFUL DELIVERY

12. The Government plans to phase the introduction of the Diploma (see Annex B). From September 2008, five Diplomas will be available rising to all 14 by September 2010. The Education Act 2006 provides for the Diploma to be an entitlement to all young people. The Government’s current thinking is that the effective date should be September 2013 by which time capacity will have risen to meet expected demand, and the impact of the Diploma will have been fully evaluated.

13. If delivery is effective, schools, colleges and work-based providers need to collaborate in effective local consortia, and the workforce needs appropriate and timely professional development.

Developing Local Partnerships to underpin delivery

14. In developing the Diploma, the Government is building on strong foundations for the type of school-college coordination that will be required. There is a wealth of evidence from practice over the last three years to provide confidence that the system has developed models of effective and excellent practice and there is also a real desire and enthusiasm to learn from the areas that have developed this excellence.

15. Until 2005, the joint DfES/Learning and Skills Council (LSC) 14–19 Pathfinder programme tested local delivery of 14–19 education in a range of settings, building on the increasingly distinctive specialisms of local schools, colleges and training providers. The 39 Pathfinder areas were a key means of identifying and spreading good practice and have also helped to assess the scale and costs of new patterns of 14–19

provision. In addition, the Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP) has been the catalyst for establishing partnership working between post-16 and pre-16 education providers. Since September 2002, approximately 290 partnerships have been created between FE colleges, schools, training providers and other agents. The IFP has involved around 2,000 schools and over 90,000 pupils.

- Our analysis of the Pathfinder and IFP programmes show there are five key characteristics that are needed for the development of successful partnerships:
- *A shared sense of ownership*: The most effective 14–19 partnerships are typically comprised of all key local stakeholders including schools, colleges, training providers, employers and IAG services.
- *Strategic leadership and vision*: Clear strategic leadership at a senior level, with dedicated operational support, brings together the range of different interests to ensure coherence and a grasp of the bigger picture.
- *Clear objectives and organisation*: Local steering groups, with the authority to take executive decisions and commit resources, provide a clear sense of purpose and direction.
- *Recognition of individual strengths*: Different providers need to focus on what they do well and recognise the contribution others can make.
- *Access to professional advice*: 14–19 partnerships may need to draw on the help of expert practitioners from outside their immediate area.

16. Good partnerships bring together a range of bodies to collaborate to provide a strong range of quality programmes, including those which give young people the chance to experience areas and develop skills not normally accessible through the traditional school curriculum. They include employers and, on occasion, HEIs as well. We are encouraging the continued development of this multi-partner approach. Employer involvement in the teaching of Diplomas is particularly important if the experience for the young person is to be materially different. This is partly about providing good quality work experience, but it is also about providing a stimulating curriculum through bringing employers into schools and colleges and generating industry relevant tasks and materials. SSCs and other partners such as Education Business Partnerships have a key role in securing the involvement of employers to support local delivery.

17. Evidence from regional conferences and Government Offices shows that LAs are taking an increasingly strategic overview of 14–19 provision in their areas. They have a key role to play in assessing local need and ensuring that plans for supply and demand are matched and are on course to meet the 14–19 Implementation Plan target that every area will have a local prospectus by September 2007. They are also explaining and communicating the purpose behind the reforms, brokering relationships between providers and facilitating self-assessments of strengths and weaknesses in providers. In addition, LAs are working closely with new LSC partnership teams; their responsibility for the planning and funding of all post-16 learning, including the statutory entitlement, makes them the primary partner in the emerging picture of a growing number of LA led partnerships.

18. The development of local partnerships is being supported by additional funding from DfES. We have provided £15 million per year in 2006–07 and 2007–08 to support 14–19 partnerships in meeting the administrative and logistical costs of local collaborative working to deliver 14–19 reform.

19. The DfES has developed ways of spreading good practice from the best of these programmes. The *Manual of Good Practice from 14–19 Pathfinders* featured advice on collaborative working and developed case studies to show how any challenges around transport, timetabling and pastoral support could be tackled. We have also introduced a programme of Learning Visits which enables leading practitioners from schools and colleges, together with strategic planners from LAs and LSCs, to visit areas that have progressed quickly in delivering collaborative arrangements. To date, 115 LAs have attended introductory Learning Visits, and feedback from attendees has been extremely positive. An increasing number of areas are also taking up the option of a more in depth follow up planning visit with the area they visited initially.

20. To support the capacity building by local partnerships, the DfES aims to create 50,000 new post-16 places by 2008. Capacity building measures include:

- the ability for high performing schools to establish sixth forms where there is student and parental demand to extend quality and choice (the “presumption” arrangements);
- a parallel “presumption” for high performing FE colleges (including sixth form colleges) to expand their provision for 16–19 year-olds in order to deliver the Diplomas;
- local competitions, where significant numbers of new places are needed, to open the market and encourage a diversity of bidders;
- a new 16–19 capital fund to permit coherent investment in new 16–19 provision.

21. Allowing the expansion of high performing schools and FE colleges to deliver post-16 provision will create a stronger and more robust system for delivering the new Diplomas. Choice is a powerful lever for driving up quality and we believe that it is best delivered by giving institutions greater autonomy in serving their local markets so that successful provision can expand and local strengths be fully exploited. Diplomas will stimulate the development of local partnerships of autonomous institutions, each contributing their individual strengths to create a high quality, broad-based offer that meets the needs of all young people in the area.

22. We have made £40 million available in 2006–07 and a further £70 million in 2007–08 through the Dedicated Schools Grant to support practical learning opportunities for 14–16-year-olds. This funding will cover the additional core costs of delivery including teaching, curriculum planning, resource and equipment and relevant fees.

23. The capital needs to support 14–19 reform is being increasingly integrated into the wider Departmental capital strategy. Areas now applying for waves of the Building Schools for the Future programme (BSF) need to demonstrate how 14–19 plans are part of their local strategy. Relevant LSC capital streams will also be integrated into this overall strategy to ensure a joined up approach to capital expenditure. In addition, an additional £40 million will be made available in 2007–08 for consortia preparing to deliver Diplomas from September 2008. This funding will be available as capital grant for investment in buildings, equipment or IT infrastructure, to be used across partnerships to enhance the delivery of the 14–19 Reforms.

Developing the workforce

24. Our approach to workforce development is to provide national support which partnerships can incorporate into local professional development plans in line with their approach to rolling out the Diplomas in their area and other workforce development activities they are undertaking.

25. We are investing £50 million over the financial years 2006–07 and 2007–08 to create a programme of support and have brought together a cross-sectoral coalition of workforce agencies with proven expertise to develop this, working with other partners including DDPs. This will enable teachers and lecturers to get free access to packages of support to help with Diploma delivery from September 2007.

26. There is range of initiatives in the programme:

- The Training & Development Agency (TDA) and Life Long Learning UK (LLUK) are developing and implementing routes for initial teacher and support staff training (including Higher Level Teaching Assistants) to meet the needs of the new qualifications. To encourage new staff into the system, the Government has a new system of golden hellos and bursaries for the school and FE sectors, which include functional skills and Diploma subjects. LLUK and TDA are also developing an industrial/commercial updating programme that will be linked to the “Business Interchange” Programme. The programme will be open to all existing teaching and support staff.
- The Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) and Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) are producing a subject specific resources pack for each of the Diplomas and setting up regional professional development networks. They have recently let major contracts to Nord Anglia Education plc and the Learning and Skills Network, both of whom have significant experience in this area. We envisage that the essential package will consist of three days of face to face training, with a third of this taking place within a work-related setting, supplemented by online resources which can be used locally in a wide variety of ways to support further professional development. To bring this together for partnerships we are funding full-time regional co-ordinators and coaches in every area.
- The National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) will be promoting leadership capabilities, management development and partnership working through coaching and mentoring, seminars and other means of sharing best practice, and online support.
- The Department is also supporting exams officers, via the National Assessment Agency. This support will involve face to face assistance, access to best practice and awareness-raising for local exams officers.

27. These initiatives are complemented by related activity to prepare the workforce for functional skills. The QIA and Secondary National Strategies contractor are developing teaching and learning resources and continuing professional development in this area.

Securing quality delivery

28. Diplomas are innovative qualifications, which will demand new ways of teaching and learning. So as well as fostering the capabilities of partnerships through the initiatives detailed above, we want only those schools, colleges, and other providers who are ready to deliver them to the high standard demanded to do so in the early years. To ensure that the critical elements for successful Diploma delivery come together to support high quality programmes from September 2008, we have set up a Diploma Gateway through which consortia must pass.

29. The Gateway is designed to look at the strength of partnership arrangements, drawing on what we already know about the characteristics of successful delivery models, and the robustness of plans to appropriately resource Diploma delivery. The Gateway process requires local partnerships to assess their own preparedness to offer Diplomas and identify groups of providers who will work together in consortia. These judgements will be validated by Regional Panels, including representatives from Government Offices, LSC regional offices and DDPs. They will set the standard high as it is important to protect the interests of the first young people to undertake Diplomas.

30. Gateway decisions will be supplemented by awarding body approval processes. As with other qualifications, consortia must be able to demonstrate that they have the right facilities and that their staff have the right skills to offer all or part of a Diploma.

MANAGING THE DIPLOMA PROGRAMME

31. Due to the important role that different parties have to play, the Diploma programme was set up as a multi-agency project, with an executive board jointly chaired by senior officials in DfES and the QCA. Membership included representatives of the SSDA and of the SSCs leading the Diploma work. The Senior Responsible Owner for the project is the Director of the 14–19 Reform Programme in DfES. He, and his staff, are ultimately accountable to Ministers for the delivery of all the parts of the programme that will lead to a successful roll-out. Issues relating to delivery and workforce development have been managed by a parallel process, again reporting to the 14–19 Director. There has been a steering group which comprises the wider stakeholders who have an interest in the Diploma. In addition, the Diploma project, as part of the wider 14–19 reform programme, has been discussed on two standing bodies: an external advisory group, chaired by DfES Ministers, and a stakeholders group, chaired by the DfES 14–19 Director.

32. As the first set of key milestones have been secured, and the project has expanded to include the development of the 2009 and 2010 Diplomas, the DfES commissioned an external health-check of the project management structure. In the light of its findings, it has been decided to appoint a new, dedicated Project Director for Diplomas, who will be responsible for the “all-through” process of delivering Diplomas—from design through to delivery—making sure that all the appropriate connections are made and interdependencies are managed. This postholder is employed by the Department, at a Senior Civil Service grade, and will be supported by a team in DfES but she is working with all partners in this very complex programme to ensure they are working together effectively to deliver the results we need. Thus the co-ordinating role of the Project Board will be supplemented by an individual who works directly to the SRO. The new structures are set out at Annex C.

CONCLUSION ON 14–19 SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS

33. The Diploma initiative is one of the key priorities of DfES Ministers. It is a highly innovative project requiring co-operation between a wide range of stakeholders at national, regional and local level. The DfES has established a leadership and governance structure which, to date, has delivered on key milestones. Ministers will continue to take a close and regular interest in progress, but are confident that the first set of Diplomas will be delivered on time and will, over time, make a significant impact on learning and achievement.

Annex A

14–19 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN: DIPLOMAS KEY MILESTONES

SSC led DDPs have already been established and are working to define the content of the first five Diploma lines. These are: engineering; health and social care; ICT; creative and media; and construction and the built environment.

The first set of learning objectives will be produced by summer 2006:

- QCA will advise the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) on the remaining key issues, including assessment, grading and awarding arrangements by spring 2006.
- DfES will start communicating to young people, parents/carers, teaching staff, employers, higher education institutions (HEIs), and wider stakeholders about the new specialised Diplomas in spring 2006.
- In spring 2006 DfES will provide information to schools and colleges setting out how they can get involved in offering the specialised Diplomas in 2008. We will encourage centres wishing to offer the Diplomas to join the national functional skills pilot from 2007.
- By summer 2007 awarding bodies will have turned the content of the first five sets of Diplomas into qualifications that can be taught.
- By September 2007 the first five sets of Diplomas will be accredited and available in schools and colleges that wish to offer them, so that they can plan and prepare their curriculum and advise students about choices.
- Teaching of the first five sets of Diplomas will begin in September 2008.
- Employers, supported by SSCs, will need to increase capacity to deliver work experience for specialised Diplomas, particularly focused on experience relevant to the first five lines for 2008.
- DfES will be working with partners, including the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), SSCs and regional agencies, to help employers, schools, colleges and training providers to drive up the level and quality of work placements. Education business link organisations may be well placed to take a lead role in delivering regional and local strategies, and the LSC will be consulting on wider reforms of the education business link work that it funds, including on the all-important local brokerage role.

-
- HE Providers are involved in DDPs and need to be ready to accept Diplomas towards entry to HE from 2010.

This process will be repeated for the next five lines of specialised Diplomas (land based and environment; manufacturing; hair and beauty; business administration and finance; and hospitality and catering), then the final four (public services; sport and leisure; retail; and travel and tourism):

- Skills for Business Network will establish the next five DDPs in January 2006, and the final four in January 2007.
- The qualifications will then be developed by DDPs and awarding bodies for the second five Diploma lines from April 2006 to May 2008, of which the first year is primarily DDP content development. For the final four this same process will run from April 2007 to May 2009.
- QCA will accredit and publish the qualifications for the second five Diploma lines by June 2008; and for the last four Diploma lines by June 2009. They will then be available in schools, colleges and work-based learning providers that wish to offer them.
- The next five Diploma lines will first be available for teaching in September 2009 and the final four in September 2010.
- Each Diploma line will be evaluated rigorously over a three-year period from introduction, ready for national entitlement from 2013.

Source: 14–19 Education and Skills Implementation Plan [2037-2005DCL-EN], Chapter 2, pp 30–31

Annex B

SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS

ROLL OUT TIMETABLE

<i>First Teaching</i>	<i>Line of Learning</i>
September 2008	ICT Engineering Health and Social Care Creative and Media Construction and the Built Environment
September 2009	Land-based and Environmental Manufacturing Hospitality and Catering Hair and Beauty Business Administration and Finance
September 2010	Retail Sport and Leisure Travel and Tourism Public Services

ANNEX C
DIPLOMAS PROGRAMME STRUCTURE FROM DECEMBER 2006

- Existing 11-19 Programme Boards continue as governance and forums for final escalation
- Mandates and membership may need to be revised to improve alignment and decision making

11-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform Board

11-19 Local Delivery Board

Final issue escalation routes for Diploma Project

- DIES Diploma Design & Delivery PMOs
- QCA Diploma PMO
- SSDA Diploma PMO

14-19 / Diploma integration

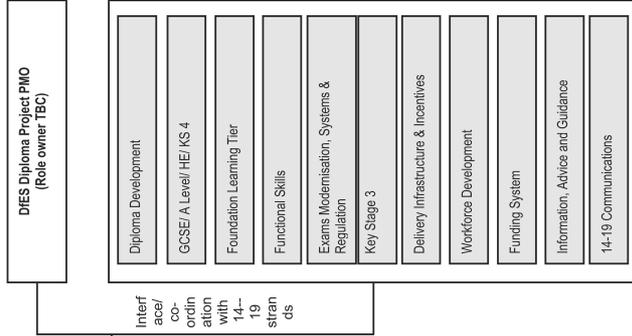
Diploma Advisory Group (Membership TBC)

- DIES Diploma Project SRO
- DIES 14-19 Programme Director
- QCA Diploma Project SRO
- SSDA Diploma Project SRO
- Senior delivery partner representatives
- Senior AB representatives
- Senior employer representatives
- Senior HE representatives
- Senior BSF representative
- Senior Academies representative

Diploma Project Director

Diploma Qualification Development Board

- 4 DDP Chairs
- 2 SSC Chief Executives
- 4 AB Qualification Development Directors
- QCA Diploma Programme Lead
- SSDA Diploma Project Lead
- DIES Delivery Lead
- DIES Awarding Infrastructure Lead
- HE representative



Wednesday 31 January 2007

Members present:

Mr Barry Sheerman, in the Chair

Mr David Chaytor
Jeff Ennis
Paul Holmes
Helen Jones

Mr Gordon Marsden
Fiona Mactaggart
Stephen Williams

Witnesses: **Rt Hon Jim Knight**, a Member of the House, Minister for Schools and 14–19 Learners and **Mr Jon Coles**, Director of 14–19 Reform, Department for Education and Skills, gave evidence.

Q199 Chairman: Minister, can I welcome you. We have just had a very good session with your colleague, Bill Rammell.

Jim Knight: Excellent.

Q200 Chairman: And it is nice to see Jon Coles here as well; he is always welcome. We want to get into pretty rapid-fire questions and answers because we know we have an hour and that is how long we are going to take. Could I very quickly say to you that I think it would be remiss of this Committee not to say to you this morning that we have just heard in the Ofsted report that there has been quite a sharp increase in the number of schools in special measures, and the figures I have is a 70% rise of schools in special measures, 25% increase if you look at primary, and that has gone from, overall, 208 to 243 schools. That looks quite surprising on the face of it. What is your reaction?

Jim Knight: My reaction is, again, that Ofsted have raised the bar in respect of the standard that has to be gone through; that these figures compare August to December, and it is normal for the numbers in special measures that Ofsted report to be low in the summer and higher at the end of the autumn term. So there are some statistical niceties there. But it is still the case that the number of schools in special measures has halved over the last ten years; that it represents about 1% of schools; and that it is right that the standards in our schools is right and that we should continue to raise the bar as we did with the GCSE results, including English and maths, earlier on this year; that created the headlines of record GCSE increase crisis, and we are now hearing yet more hyperbole from our friends in the media. But the basic message is that the number of failing schools is continuing to reduce in secondary schools—we have a slight increase in primary in percentage terms, and that is something that we will continue to address, as we continue to address the numbers of failing schools.

Q201 Chairman: We always give the Minister a chance for two minutes if he wants it, but you tend to want to go straight into questions, do you not, Jim?

Jim Knight: Yes. We have very limited time. All I would say in respect of the Diplomas is that it would be easy to lose sight of the genuine excitement that there is out there to make this new set of qualifications work, responding to a very

important need, both from employers and from universities, to charter a middle course between traditional academic and traditional vocational qualifications. It is an ambitious programme but we are hitting all of our major milestones and I am delighted that you want to question the two of us on how it is going.

Chairman: Fiona very much wants to ask her question because she has to go to the hospital, so I will ask her to open the questioning.

Q202 Fiona Mactaggart: Thank you, Chairman. I wanted to start with a broad question. Is it more important for the success of this programme to have a significant tranche of students in place in 2008, or to have a quality product available at that point? And is there any tension between those two ambitions?

Jim Knight: The most important thing is quality; we place an absolute premium on that. The vision behind the Diplomas is very much in response to a number of things. To the numbers who are not staying on—and we need to create an attractive set of qualifications to encourage people to want to stay on—it is a pre-condition—and this is what the Chancellor is talking about today—that we make the qualifications attractive to learners as well as the learning environment. It is that demand from employers for more employability skills and the use of functional skills and, to some extent, it is demand from universities as well. If it is going to be credible with learners, their parents, with employers, with the universities it has to start from day one on the basis of quality. I do not see a tension because there is quite a lot of quality out there already, and when we look at the early assessments that we are making of those that have applied to go through the Gateway—and 361 consortia applied to go through the Gateway in England—we can see that we do have the quality out there to be able to offer to a significant number of learners the first five Diplomas in September 2008.

Q203 Fiona Mactaggart: Is that going to be a pilot or is it going to be an implementation?

Jim Knight: I am cautious about using the word “pilot” because people think then that we might mean a prototype and we are experimenting on a

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cohort of learners, and I do not want people to think that at all because we are investing a large amount of resource, both human resource and financial resource. We have this huge enthusiasm coming through from the various institutions that have applied as partnerships to go through the Gateway, and we will start on the basis of quality and credible qualifications from September 2008. Those early years will just be years when it will not be a universal entitlement, and when we will make sure that we have a very active feedback loop to ensure that we are maintaining quality and learning any lessons as we go along. But we can be absolutely confident through the Gateway process that those very first learners have an important and credible qualification.

Fiona Mactaggart: Thank you.

Q204 Helen Jones: Whether you call it a pilot or not, Minister, there are clearly going to be lessons that have to be learnt from the first tranche of Diplomas. What procedures does the Department have in place for doing that? How are you going to assess, monitor the quality, learn any lessons that need to be learned and make sure that those lessons are then transferred to other people as further Diplomas come on stream?

Jim Knight: We are already making sure that we have a process that is not only strongly programme-managed with very strong talents in the Department, such as Jon, working on the project and leading the project, but also that we are learning lessons as we go along, and we are using some independent analysis from outside, Cap Gemini, for example, and we are going to ask the OGC (Office of Government Commerce) to give us a gate zero review over the spring, so that we can be sure that the project management continues to be working well. Then as it implements from 2008 and the teaching stance in 2008 we will ensure that there is feedback through into the programme board; and we are looking at what intelligence we can get from the ground from all the various agencies and bodies that are involved in the partnership and represented on the programme board so that we are learning, as you say, the lessons as we go along.

Q205 Helen Jones: You still have Cap Gemini in place?

Jim Knight: Cap Gemini is still working with us, yes.

Q206 Chairman: The information that the Committee had is that the contract had been terminated.

Mr Coles: No, the contract has not been terminated, we have Cap Gemini working in QCA and working in the Department for us under contract.

Q207 Helen Jones: Can we look at what will happen in September 2008 because there is some confusion about the numbers that are expected to take up Diplomas? We first heard about 50,000 as

a target and then when Ken Boston came to us he said 50,000 is not the target, he said it is the figure that the Department has come up with, looking at the scope of the resources that are believed to be available out there and the scope of the funding which is available to the Department to deliver. Do you have a target for the number of students that you want to take Diplomas when they are introduced in September 2008? And if you have what is the evidence to show that that is a reasonable and achievable number to settle on?

Jim Knight: No, we do not have a target.

Q208 Helen Jones: You do not have a target at all?

Jim Knight: It goes back to Fiona's question around quality. If we had a target then people would believe that we were sacrificing quality in order to hit a target. The 50,000 was an indication of the sort of numbers because people always ask us how many people might be involved, so we give a ballpark figure, understanding, obviously, that as soon as you use a figure everyone thinks it is then a target; but it is not a target.

Mr Coles: Could I just add to that? In the Implementation Plan, paragraph 3.31, we first quoted the 50,000 figure and the precise words we used were, "In 2008 our modelling suggests that we need to prepare for up to 50,000 young people taking specialised Diplomas, which suggests that we will need to train in the region of 5,000 teaching staff." On the question of what level of interest we have, the 361 consortia and 143 authorities who have come forward saying that they want to do Diplomas in year one, if all of those were to go through the Gateway then we would be looking at in the region of 160,000 young people doing it. So the level of interest is certainly there because, as the Minister says, the point of the Gateway is to ensure that only where Diplomas are going to be delivered at the right quality will they be allowed to go forward.

Q209 Helen Jones: Can we have a look at the Gateway because I think that is rather important? One of our witnesses, Paul Hafren, who is from my own college, asked for a greater transparency about the criteria in which the proposals in the Gateway process are being measured. Are you satisfied that those criteria are transparent and that they are understood by those partnerships that are trying to go through the Gateway?

Jim Knight: Obviously I would hope so and through the stakeholder group and through others we continue to try and get feedback as to how people interpret them on the ground, but the self-evaluation form that all of the partnerships had to complete works in five sections, with a local authority statement at the end, and they cover the basic criteria in which we want to see quality—collaboration, workforce development, facilities, information, advice and guidance and employer engagement. It ought to be clear, given that they all fill out this form and it is separated into sections on that basis with, I think, three questions under

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each of those headings, that those will be the criteria against which we will be judging them on a regional basis.

Q210 Helen Jones: Are you satisfied that the regional panels that judge these proposals have the right make-up to make effective judgments?

Jim Knight: Yes.

Q211 Helen Jones: For instance, who will represent the government offices in the regions and will they have the right qualifications to make the judgments on the new Diplomas?

Mr Coles: If I might respond to that? The panels are chaired by the Directors of Children and Learners in the region, so the lead government office educational specialist. They will all include representatives of the Diploma Development Partnerships and they will all include the Learning and Skills Council and a range of people who do understand what is happening in those particular local areas. So, for example, children services advisers in the government office, so they will have both local and national in there.

Q212 Helen Jones: It depends how you define local, does it not, Mr Coles? We are talking about a government office for the northwest. I am not convinced from my dealings with government office northwest that if they told me today was Wednesday I would not want a second opinion!

Jim Knight: It is Wednesday!

Helen Jones: We can confirm that, can we! That is a very wide area to cover, and I just use that as one example, the huge variations within the region. Are you really confident that you have the people there who are going to be knowledgeable about what is happening on the ground, who are going to be able to judge, for instance, what is happening in Cumbria, as opposed to what is happening in Manchester?

Q213 Chairman: Blackpool! Particularly Blackpool; we seem to have lost Blackpool!

Jim Knight: Obviously we are judging this on the basis of quality and we need to ensure that the assessment is on the basis of quality and not on some form of lottery, if I dare mention that in the context of Blackpool!

Q214 Helen Jones: It is a gamble!

Jim Knight: As I have gone around the country making the various visits to schools and colleges I try and meet up with those Directors of Children and Learning from the government office, and I have always been very happy with their knowledge in terms of how they are briefing me and their understanding of what is going on in each local authority area. It may be that they have become briefed in order to brief me, but equally they would ensure that they are briefed in order to oversee the process of assessing the Gateway. I have that confidence, in direct answer to that question. Jon?

Mr Coles: The one other thing to say is that we have run through the government offices the progress check process, through which we have actually

examined area-by-area performance in each local authority in relation to 14–19 against a range of very specific indicators. So they have that evidence base to draw on and that is based on a dialogue between the government office and the local authority in question, so they do have quite a strong evidence base on which to draw.

Q215 Helen Jones: That is interesting but I think some people would remain to be convinced following our own dealings with government offices, but we shall see how it rolls out. Can I move on to something else? The DfES has suggested that some partnerships would be allowed through the Gateway with additional support, even if they have significant work to do to make their partnerships viable. How does that fit in with your determination to make these Diplomas a quality product? Are we not then risking quality for quantity?

Jim Knight: Basically there will be three possible responses that will be communicated with those who have applied to go through the Gateway. There is unconditional approval—and these are done on line by line, Diploma by Diploma; it would not necessarily be that the partnership would get approval for all of the Diplomas they have applied to do, it will be one by one. So you could have unconditional approval. You could have conditional approval, so as long as they satisfy these various areas where we say they need improvement, but we have made an assessment which says that it is possible for them to do the work to get the quality that we want, they can get that conditional approval and that approval can be withdrawn if they do not meet the conditions. Then there are those who have not managed to pass through the Gateway but that we will work with so that they can get through the Gateway in 2009 or subsequent years. They have more significant areas of weakness but we do not want to leave them high and dry believing that they are failures; we want to work with them to ensure that they are a success in the near future.

Q216 Helen Jones: The ultimate test would be, would it not, if there were only very few partnerships that passed through the Gateway, would you be—I will not use the word “happy”—satisfied with that knowing that that was at least an indicator of quality, or would you be rather concerned about it?

Jim Knight: I had a discussion this morning about minimum numbers because I had a feeling that we would get into numbers!

Q217 Helen Jones: Surely not!

Jim Knight: I am very happy to tell the Committee that of the assessments going around region-by-region we are getting a feel now for the level of quality, and the question of a minimum does not really arise. Equally, the question of not being able to get to September 2008 on the basis of quality I do not think arises. We have much more confidence of that now that we have seen and been able to assess applications. But if it ended up with only half a dozen getting through—and, as I say, we know that

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is not going to be the case—then it would be half a dozen on the basis of quality, and that is the right judgment.

Helen Jones: Thank you very much.

Q218 Chairman: Minister, we have to move on now but can I ask you briefly about the forensics of where these Diplomas came from? We all know where the original inspiration came from, do we not?

Jim Knight: From last week's questioning I should have genned up on the history again because we had some discussion about the history of these, did we not? It began with the White Paper and then it was added to with the Implementation Plan a year later. As I said before, I am very clear about what the motivation was for this and the thinking around the need to respond to poor staying on rates in this country. The learning that we have had is from the increased flexibility programme and from the high quality that apprenticeships are now bringing that there is a bunch of learners out there that are much more engaged with work related learning and enterprise education equally, and people of all abilities, with some of them more motivated, but the history I am less clear on.

Q219 Chairman: What about the “T” word, Minister?

Jim Knight: Him!

Q220 Chairman: Yes.

Jim Knight: We are implementing a large amount of what Tomlinson talked about but there are obviously one or two much talked about areas that we decided against. I am comfortable that that is the right judgment, and I am delighted that Mike has agreed to be one of the Diploma champions working with schools, colleges and workplace trainers to champion the Diplomas as we have designed them, rather than championing something that his group wanted and that we decided to vary away from.

Q221 Chairman: We have coaxed you into saying the word “Tomlinson”, have we not?

Jim Knight: Yes!

Q222 Chairman: The reason that we were enthusiastic in some ways about Tomlinson, all the research on that period shows that it was the most inclusive process—yes?

Jim Knight: Yes.

Q223 Chairman: People talk about 300, 400 people in working parties that were involved in the process and with a Minister for Schools actually attending most of the proceedings, so it was one of the most interesting processes of how you get to a policy.

Jim Knight: Yes.

Q224 Chairman: Many of us were impressed by that. What you said is that it is Tomlinson minus, but how much minus? How much of Tomlinson is in these new Diplomas?

Jim Knight: He talked about the need for a strong core to all young people's learning, increasing stretch and challenge at all levels, a radical transformation of vocational pathways available to young people, and we are delivering all of that. You have this question that rumbles on occasionally, that I think most people now are moving on from, around the A levels.

Q225 Chairman: But some people are saying that this is really the stepping-stone to Tomlinson; you actually achieve all of Tomlinson by this and then the next step. Is that how you see it?

Jim Knight: I still see a future for the A level. I think we have a good offer in the entitlement in 2013, a three-pronged offer, broadly, between the traditional vocational route with the expansion of apprenticeships; the traditional academic route with the GCSE, A level, IB¹ option; and then in the middle of that something which builds on the strengths of both to offer a different form of teaching and learning that is more grounded within the world of employment as well as very strong academic strands so that people will still be able to use it to go to university, and be valued by it.

Q226 Chairman: So how much of Tomlinson—10%, 20%, 100%, 50%? Come on, give me a figure.

Jim Knight: I have not done my own assessment and, again, once I use a figure it becomes set in stone, does it not? I would say that we are much of the way there and we have the strengths of Tomlinson whilst hanging on to the strengths of A level.

Q227 Chairman: I think you ought to check out with some of your colleagues who are going around saying 90% of Tomlinson. But you would not agree with 90%?

Jim Knight: I would rather not be drawn on a figure; I would say that we have taken what we think is very strong—

Q228 Chairman: We do not want a headline, “Ministers fighting over percentages”!

Jim Knight: No, obviously not, but we have the strengths of Tomlinson, we have Tomlinson backing what we are doing and championing what we are doing and we also have the strength of A level, which we are continuing to strengthen.

Chairman: Thank you for that.

Q229 Jeff Ennis: On the same theme—and I am glad you have brought me in now, Chairman—Jim, I am a politician, you are a politician, right?

Jim Knight: Correct.

Jeff Ennis: I cannot remember who the Secretary of State was at the time that Tomlinson was given a remit—it will probably be Charles Clarke—you will probably be able to answer this question, Jim, and tell me who it was.

Chairman: Charles Clarke and the work was done by David Blunkett.

¹ International Baccalaureate.

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Q230 Jeff Ennis: Was it Charles Clarke?

Jim Knight: Charles Clarke gave him the remit.

Q231 Jeff Ennis: Charles Clarke is a politician as well, by the way!

Jim Knight: Correct.

Q232 Jeff Ennis: When he had the initial discussions with Mike Tomlinson and said, "Mike, I am going to give you a very difficult brief; here is your remit to transform vocational education and, by the way, I am fully behind the 14–19 Diploma agenda," and he gave him this remit to go to, goes through all the public consultation process with all and sundry, and he goes back to Charles Clarke and says, "Right Charles, this is the report, I have the full support of everybody in vocational education, I have the full support from all the educational institutions involved in vocational education and I have more or less the unanimous support of the Education and Skills Select Committee, as a politician, Jim, I would have snatched his hands off. Why did we not do that?"

Jim Knight: I was not in the Department at the time—

Q233 Jeff Ennis: No, I appreciate that—it's the other shifters we say in Barnsley!

Jim Knight: I simply say that, Jeff, because I cannot act as a direct witness to those discussions; I can only presume, as we can all presume, that the decision was made that the A level was something with which people were familiar, that people felt confident with and that it was something that should be retained.

Q234 Jeff Ennis: Despite all the unanimity amongst the sector?

Jim Knight: Despite everything that you have said, Jeff!

Q235 Chairman: The word on the street was that you ran scared of the CBI and Digby Jones on that, but then that is water under the bridge; he is now Arts and Skills champion—that is an interesting change, is it not?

Jim Knight: Yes, we have some excellent champions working with us at the Department.

Q236 Chairman: Some of us heard him this morning. He did not seem to be quite as robust this morning, so perhaps we can have him in front of the Committee to give him a bit of lift!

Jim Knight: I am sure he would be delighted!

Chairman: Moving on to aims and content of Diplomas development process, and Gordon is going to lead us.

Q237 Mr Marsden: Minister, you will not be surprised to know that obviously one of the things we ask people when they come before this Committee is, how would you describe these Diplomas? I have to say that so far we have had a rather pick and mix collection. The Principal of Warrington Collegiate said he thought that they should be described as vocational and that the distinction between them and more traditional

academic ones needs to be made clear. Ken Boston was absolutely clear that they should not be understood as vocational training and, "I think there is unanimity amongst the Sector Skills Councils that the fundamental purpose of this is to use a business driven or employment drive curriculum for educational purposes; it is vocational education not vocational training." Your Department in its memo said, "Diplomas are a highly valued mixed theoretical and practical route for young people," which rather brings to mind the pop song title, *Definitely, Maybe*. Which is it? I am sorry, my colleagues have just informed me, by the way, that it is an album, not a song!

Jim Knight: It is an album.

Q238 Mr Marsden: A Manchester band!

Jim Knight: A fine Oasis album! I guess you probably do not want to mention Manchester either! As I said in response to the Chairman, I see it as being betwixt the vocational and the traditional academic; that it is getting the strengths of both. What excites me most about it is a new form of teaching and learning that excites learners in the way in which we have seen the beginnings through the success of the increase in the flexibility programme, through some of the enterprise education work that is going on in schools and through some of the apprenticeship learning, where you engage a set of learners of all abilities. The danger of talking about it purely as vocational is that we have a psyche in this country which thinks that vocational people are less able, but we have very strong evidence that people of all abilities can be more motivated to learn if they see the practical application of it, if they see how it works in the real world, and a new form of teaching is developed through these Diplomas that makes the most of that.

Q239 Mr Marsden: I accept that as a description, but you will know, Minister, as a politician, that it is one thing to describe something; it is another thing to sell it.

Jim Knight: Yes.

Q240 Mr Marsden: What I would like to ask Jon Coles, because you are leading this programme, are you not, Jon?

Mr Coles: Yes.

Mr Marsden: Let us imagine that I am a generalist journalist and I come for an interview with you about this and I ask you for a one-sentence description of what these Diplomas are intended to do, what would you say?

Q241 Chairman: It is a pleasure to have a full trained teacher working in the Department at high level; it is a very refreshing change.

Mr Coles: Thank you. If you were a journalist I would refer you to our Press Office of course, but leaving that aside for the moment—

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Q242 Mr Marsden: I hope they would be well briefed. What would you tell your Press Officer to tell us?

Mr Coles: Could I do this by way of an example? I think nowadays it is easy to go to schools and see young people in Key Stage 4, who are doing things which are clearly vocational training and they are spending perhaps half of their timetable doing something which is quite narrowly focused on, say, motor vehicles as a subject area. I would say two things about that. The first is that for 14–16-year-olds to spend half or two-thirds of their timetable on that is too narrow. Secondly, what we see from young people who are doing that is that they are often much more motivated and much more focused on learning, and that is to do with the style of learning and the style of teaching; it is to do with place and where they are learning and the reality of what they are experiencing; and it is to do with subject matter as well—they are looking at something and doing something that they are interested in, engaged by and motivated by. So the point of the Diploma is to capture that motivation, that engagement which comes from style of teaching and learning, subject matter, place, environment, real subject experience, but to produce something which is broader, which develops people's cognitive skills and is not just training for a specific occupation. So that is the key purpose.

Mr Marsden: I would accept that as a description. I am not going to pursue this point *ad nauseam* but there is a very specific reason why I do press it and that is that we have heard, for example, considerable concerns that unless this Diploma is accepted in the HE area, and if it is not accepted by significant employers, all your good work in terms of getting these programmes through the Gateway and all the rest of it will be set at naught. What is the Department going to do to communicate that clear message—and I am sorry, Jon, but one of these days you will be cornered by a journalist and you will not be able to refer him to your Press Office. Minister?

Chairman: Through the Chairman, please.

Q243 Mr Marsden: Sorry, Chairman.

Jim Knight: That is, in many ways, why we have engaged the champions—that is precisely why. We understand that it is quite difficult for us to accurately get out our message through the media, and even when we manage to speak directly to employers or direct to university Vice-Chancellors, as politicians we are not as credible as people listening to their own. So Alan Jones, Chairman of Toyota, heading up the engagement with employers, Mike Tomlinson with schools and colleges and work-based, learning providers, and then two Vice-Chancellors, Deian Hopkin and Michael Arthur, are credible voices who will work closely with us, will understand the programme and how it is developing and will perhaps do a better job than we are able to do for you now in succinctly and pithily putting the benefits to their sectors.

Q244 Mr Marsden: I understand that and they are all, as you say, good and worthy people. But, again, what are you going to do—and I am not suggesting that they are all going to go off on one—to make sure that the message that they give is a coherent and consistent one? Are you sitting down or is someone in your Department sitting down with them on a month-by-month basis and saying, “Do we all agree what the message is? Do we agree what the challenge is?”

Jim Knight: Yes, and one of the new features that we have introduced in the last six months has been the Chief Executives' Group, which brings together the chief executives of the various bodies upon which we are dependent for the successful delivery of the Diplomas, and the first meeting that we had—and these meetings are chaired by myself and Phil Hope—identified from all of those chief executives the need to get this communication script right and alongside sharing each other's risk management. At our meeting in February—so some time in the next few weeks—we will be pinning those down and agreeing amongst all of us what the communication lines are and to share our risk profiles as well as having a discussion on the Gateway. That is the agenda for the next meeting. Obviously the champions will inform that discussion on communications and be able to away what we agree and run with it.

Q245 Mr Marsden: Through you, Chairman, I just want to ask a bit about how that process of these Diplomas is going to mesh in with existing or previous qualifications, because you have a big job to do out there.

Jim Knight: Yes.

Q246 Mr Marsden: One of the issues with A levels, particularly with employers, is that they may not necessarily have known what they were designed to do but they have been there for a while and that was one of the reasons why they accepted them. The Principal of Hull College said to the Committee that she thought it would be preferable for existing qualifications, like BTECs, to be retained in the medium term while the Diplomas became embedded. Do you have a view on that?

Jim Knight: We do not have the powers to turn off BTECs. If the awarding bodies want to carry on offering them and institutions want to carry on offering them and learners want to take them then they can do that, but obviously our ultimate aspiration is to have Diplomas.

Q247 Mr Marsden: So what is the phasing out period that you envisage? I accept that you cannot wave a magic wand but what is the phasing out period?

Jim Knight: I do not know. Have we put a timetable to it?

Mr Coles: It is certainly the case that we would not start phasing anything out until 2013 and the national entitlement, and I think one of your earlier witnesses who you referred to was saying that you

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would need a period of parallel running beyond that, and I think that is right; that you would need to do that and to be phased out over that period.

Jim Knight: One of the other reasons for doing the Diplomas is because there has been quite a lot of confusion amongst employers about the various range in vocational qualifications and that one of the strengths of the approach of putting the Sector Skills Councils in the driving seat of the initial development of the qualifications is that they have been carrying out extensive consultation with employers about the content of the Diplomas—of the initial five we have 1,000 employers for each Diploma being consulted, 5,000 employers in total.

Q248 Mr Marsden: A very quick question, through you, Chair. On that specific point—and I am familiar with the work that the Sector Skills Council has been doing, but we have heard views expressed from members of the Sector Skills Council to this Committee that there are concerning imbalances in terms of content between the first five Diplomas and that there may not be an easy mechanism at the moment as to how to resolve those imbalances between the various groups. It comes back a little to the earlier point about communication to ensure consistency in terms of the content of those first five tranche Diplomas.

Jim Knight: We had a period in late summer, early autumn of last year, where on those first five there was a negotiation that, at times, had quite a degree of friction between the Diploma Development Partnerships and QCA. QCA has a role to ensure that there is consistency and that the bar is set in the same place across all of the Diplomas so that employers understand roughly what a level 1, level 2, level 3 Diploma is worth in terms of the learners.

Q249 Mr Marsden: You have three sections to each one, of course, that is the point.

Jim Knight: Yes, that is right. So it is quite complicated and, inevitably, when you get something that is led by the five sectors in terms of the content they would balance what is in the principal learning tier with what is more specialist and what is in the work related sections of the three out of the four slightly differently, and then QCA have that job to create that consistency, and that is an ongoing challenge for them as a regulator.

Mr Coles: Could I add very quickly that I would have confidence that the line criteria, the regulatory criteria that QCA has published, does give consistency between the lines? There was an extensive piece of work done between June and November to make sure that that was the case. I have confidence that that is the case now across the five lines, so I would not be sitting here saying that there is another piece of work to be done on these five to make sure that that is the case.

Jim Knight: And having done it for the first five it is much easier for the remaining nine because we have an agreement.

Chairman: Paul, in many of these things, is our secret weapon with his long experience of teaching, and he has been very patient. Paul Holmes.

Q250 Paul Holmes: I was interested in trying to define one sentence for a journalist, and equally thinking back to my experience as a teacher and head of sixth form, in one sentence how would you describe to a college lecturer, a teacher, a parent, a student what exactly is the difference, the advantage that a Diploma has over GNVQs or BTECs?

Jim Knight: The advantage they have is a new engaging form of teaching and learning that not only offers practical work-related skills but the motivation for academic strength.

Q251 Paul Holmes: If the student or the parent said, “But there are three different things on offer, how do I know which one to pick; why are you running three together?”

Jim Knight: You mean three different Diplomas?

Q252 Paul Holmes: The GNVQ, BTEC, Diplomas?

Jim Knight: Again, you would say that those more traditional vocational qualifications are what I have just described them as—traditional vocational qualifications. The Diplomas are something new because of the strength of their academic content, and if you want to progress with strong level 2 qualifications, strong level 3 qualifications and a good balance of academic and skill base learning then the Diplomas are uniquely the right choice for you.

Q253 Paul Holmes: But you would envisage that by 2013 or whenever the Diplomas are going to replace all the other alternatives?

Jim Knight: I guess I would say to you that I think over time the others would wither on the vine, as the Diplomas win the argument really.

Mr Coles: I think one of the other things that we need to secure over the period between now and 2013 is that as those qualifications change, which they do on a much more regular basis than GCSEs and A levels, for example, that they evolve in the direction of Diplomas, so that in due course the best of what is on offer comes within the Diploma framework, so that we are also not losing very specific things from the qualifications.

Q254 Paul Holmes: The Minister said earlier on that it would be too easy to lose sight of the genuine excitement of people involved about what Diplomas offer, but certainly listening to the witnesses we have had so far, all of whom are people who are generally excited about Diplomas and want to be in the first wave of delivering them, they are also very, very concerned about lack of clarity, lack of information, lack of involvement, and a number of people have talked about the comparison to Curriculum 2000, which, when it was first introduced, was a bit of a disaster, where the people delivering it in schools did not know until very late on how it was going to be assessed, and so on. You have read what the witnesses have said to us so far; do you think that they have been alarmist?

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Mr Coles: I think there are really important differences with Curriculum 2000 because in that case there were changes to pre-existing qualifications with which people were familiar; there were changes that were going to be universally applied from day one in every school to every learner who had taken those qualifications, and there was not a quality Gateway process to be gone through. We are confident in the Department that we have learnt the lessons from that, from the mistakes that were made, and QCA equally have done so, and so that we are not introducing these on a universal basis there is a really strong quality threshold that people have to go through to ensure that from day one these qualifications work.

Q255 Paul Holmes: The teachers and lecturers, for example, who gave evidence to us on 22 January, which is Monday of last week, were all from colleges and consortia that wanted to be in the first wave but they were saying that they did not feel they had the chance to be involved so far properly at all in developing these Diplomas.

Jim Knight: Obviously that is unfortunate. We think we have been involving them; we have schools and colleges on Diploma Development Partnerships; we have a stakeholder group that includes college principals; we take the issue of the development of the Diplomas on a regular basis to the workforce agreement monitoring group, so that all of our various social partners are involved in that. I am obviously aware that in the communications we are in a slightly awkward place at the moment where the workforce does not yet have the detailed specifications of the Diplomas and that until they have those they are frustrated because they want to have a better understanding of exactly what they will be teaching. It is inevitable that we will go through that process and in our communication programme and through this year we will try to overcome that and give a little more comfort and certainty to the workforce.

Chairman: We will be moving to workforce development in a minute, so if we do not go into that too much now. I think what Paul is pushing on is that John Bangs had felt particularly unloved and un-embraced by the Department and thought that unions generally had not been included in what was going to be a workable curriculum for this new qualification. Is that right, Paul?

Q256 Paul Holmes: That was one of the witnesses, but the ones from the colleges and the schools who were bidding to be involved had much the same concerns. Equally, with the employers' side, the Sector Skills Councils gave evidence and they were concerned about some of the pasting over but they thought that there was a good involvement from employers, but we have had evidence submitted from individual employers saying that they think there is a problem. For example, Mark Snee of Technoprint PLC in Leeds is an employer member of the Manufacturing Diploma Development Partnership steering group, so he has been in from day one. He has written in to give evidence saying

he thinks that you certainly cannot say that these are employer-led; that the Sector Skills Councils cannot be regarded as a proxy for employers.² Tight timescales mean that employer consultation and discussion has been inadequate, the project is dominated by people with a training provider background, HE, FE, *et cetera*, and that proper employer engagement and debate are only likely to take place if the timescales for developing the Diploma are relaxed. His Diploma is not due to come in until 2009 but a lot of the other witnesses have said that even the 2008 date might need to be relaxed if you are going to do this properly instead of going off at half cock like Curriculum 2000 did.

Jim Knight: I certainly do not think we are going off half cock and I am certainly very confident about September 2008, particularly as we are looking at the results of the Gateway. There is a degree of inevitability that there will be some tensions between the Sector Skills Councils, and Lord Leitch in his report clearly signalled the importance of Sector Skills Councils representing employers in respect of skills development, so I think they are the right body to be using. But there will be some tensions between those who have their clear vision of what they want as an output and those with the experience of designing qualifications and teaching qualifications who will provide the educational input. Sometimes there will be some disagreement and we and QCA, our regulator, have a job to negotiate that and to make sure we have something that in the end is credible between the two, and there have been times when there have been tensions because of that difference, but I think we getting more aligned now. Jon, do you want to add to that?

Mr Coles: Just to say that particularly in relation to schools and colleges, of course it is true that we have not engaged every single one of the 3,200 secondary schools or the 400 colleges in the development work, and that is not something we have ever set out to do or thought was feasible at all. On the communications point, we have taken a very clear decision that it is not sensible for us to go out and market to young people or parents or in very detailed ways to individual teachers the benefits of Diplomas before we are clear who has got through the Gateway. We need to go and do that when we are clear who is going to be offering the Diplomas in year one, and actually get the message across to those people who are offering Diplomas in year one and the young people in those areas, rather than setting out a false prospectus to young people that, "you can do this in year one," when actually we know that it is going to be a clear minority of young people who have that opportunity in year one. So we judge that as really part of the communication, not to oversell at this point, but to communicate very clearly and in a very focused way once we are clear who is through the Gateway. So that has always been in the plan.

Q257 Paul Holmes: As I say, most of the witnesses we have had are people who are bidding to be involved in the early stages, and they are saying

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that they do not know exactly what the criteria are that they are going to be judged on to see whether they get through the Gateway in the first place, and if they do not even know that detail they certainly do not know any of the detail of what comes next, and that is rather alarming given that we are already half way through the first development stage.

Mr Coles: I do feel that the guidance that went out with the assessment for the Gateway, and what the Minister has already described in terms of what they have had to fill out in the form, does give them a very clear idea about what are the criteria for getting through the Gateway. It is those five areas; it is answers to the three questions under those five areas; that is the basis of the assessment. So what they have submitted is the basis of the criteria and there is nothing hidden; there is no further secret assessment process about which we have not told people, and if people were worried about that that is really not the case.

Chairman: We should move on to workforce development, and Stephen is going to lead us on that.

Q258 Stephen Williams: Thank you, Chairman. This is quite a big innovation, is it not, in the educational world? It will require some new skills for the teachers that will have to deliver the programme and then assess it. The Department has said that there should be an essential three days worth of training, but is three days going to be enough to make sure that this pilot or first tranche in 2008 is going to be a success?

Jim Knight: I think three days is broadly enough in respect of that element of the teaching force, and that is what the CPD, the TDA and LLUK are leading for us, given that we are building on existing skills because we do have the academic qualifications currently being taught, we do have the vocational qualifications being taught and taught successfully. So we have a workforce with the skills and, again, that is something that we are measuring through the Gateway. The process of the three-day CPD for the teaching workforce is to take those parts and add value by bringing them together to fashion this new culture of teaching and learning and, in some cases, to give some refresh to what happens in the workplace, and one of the days would be in a workplace setting. So a certain amount of updating of what is practised at the moment. I am happy that we have it about right in terms of the three days.

Mr Coles: I just want to add that John Bangs described in his evidence to you or in his appearance before you a model of professional development, which is to say some input from external experts, the opportunity to go and observe practice and the opportunity to have feedback on your own practice and further external input, and that is precisely the model of professional development which underpins what we are doing. So, yes, there are three days' training, and we deliver two at the start; there is a network of support from expert practitioners who will come in

and provide support in the classroom and they will be able to be observed and they will observe practice and have conversations about practice. There is a further day of professional development at the end of that process and it is all supported by a set of online materials upon which teachers can draw at a time that is appropriate for them.

Jim Knight: In the TDA and LLUK three day CPD offer there is the work that NCSL with CEL are doing on leadership; there is the work that SSAT—

Q259 Chairman: Could you spell those out for Gurney's!

Jim Knight: The National College for School Leadership and CEL is the Centre for Excellence—it is the pre-16, post-16 split. They are doing the leadership work. SSAT, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and QIA, the Quality Improvement Agency are doing the work on the resources subject by subject, and then the Quality Improvement Agency again and the National Strategies are doing the work for us on functional skills. So it is important to understand that this is not just about the three days, there is quite a lot more on offer for workforce development than just that.

Q260 Stephen Williams: So it sounds as though quite a lot of development work is going on. Who is going to be delivering these courses? Is it going to be a bidding process for training providers to provide the content?

Mr Coles: In fact the contract has already been let for the main piece of Diploma development work to Nord Anglia who are going to be the contractors delivering the materials. The Special Schools and Academies Trust will be providing the network of professional support based on their existing networks.

Q261 Chairman: They are celebrating their 20th anniversary at the moment; it seems almost to be a mini-department. Who calls the shots to them?

Jim Knight: The SSAT?

Q262 Chairman: Yes. Who is the Minister in charge of that lot?

Jim Knight: Both myself and Andrew have regular contact with SSAT and I think the Secretary of State last week was with the SSAT at the Guildhall. So all three of us have a strong relationship with Cyril, Liz and the team.

Q263 Stephen Williams: When will the professional staff actually be able to access these courses? Obviously they are keen to know what the courses are going to involve and get their teeth into them, so how soon will they be able to pick up on training?

Jim Knight: Once we have made the decisions on the Gateway in March then the work begins from that point, does it not, Jon?

Mr Coles: Yes. So people are starting work now on the generic teaching materials. We would expect actual professional development to be delivered

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from October this year. Theoretically it will be available from September—September is not a great month, of course, for schools to be looking at professional development, so from October onwards. We would expect, as I say, in general the delivery to be two days of professional development probably in the period before Christmas and then a day subsequent to that.

Q264 Stephen Williams: So as soon as the applicants for the Gateway process know whether they have got through that stage it will be October and then they can start accessing the training?

Mr Coles: Yes.

Q265 Stephen Williams: This one day of the vocational part of it all, the hands-on part of it, is that really enough? I was thinking about something like health and social care, and I do not know what the content of the Diploma is going to be, that is a huge area in itself, covering everything from doctors' surgeries to district nurses, old peoples' homes and so on, but is one day at the start really going to give the teachers enough of a feel for what the real world, if you like, is like?

Jim Knight: I think it is important to bear in mind what I have said about building on what is already there, and that many of those people, the people doing the teaching and the instructing around skills where it is most important to have that industrial experience will have that already. Some of those that are then doing some of the core skills and some of the specialist elements that perhaps are not as related will benefit in terms of developing the right culture of teaching and learning from that day's experience, but we would expect those that go through the Gateway to have good industrial experience already.

Q266 Stephen Williams: On this point of building on what is already there, does that rather imply that the people who are likely to get through the first tranche, through your Gateway, are going to be the sort of colleges that do very similar work to this at the moment, so it is not going to be new providers?

Jim Knight: You must remember the saying "similar is the same" because I know the way some people think. Some of the elements within the Diploma will be very similar to what they are doing at the moment, but we do want to ensure that we have got this different style of teaching and learning which is both academic and work-related, and a lot of what we are trying to do with the CPD is to create that.

Mr Coles: I think it is fair to say that in the assessments going through the Gateway process, because one of the key criteria is about workforce, we do need to see either that there is an existing workforce, which is getting close to what is needed to deliver, or there is a very credible plan for acquiring that workforce quickly. I think in direct answer to your question, it is likely that a significant proportion of those coming through the Gateway will be consortia which have got some

kind of quite strong track record in related areas; that is inevitably going to be the case. There will be some, though, who have got rather further to travel but have a very strong plan in that area and, of course, there will be people who have got such strengths in other areas that we can be confident that they will deliver in the workforce area as well.

Q267 Stephen Williams: What I was driving towards was building on what Jeff Ennis was alluding to earlier. If this is going to succeed, it is going to be something which needs to be delivered in every community in the country, is it not? We are now going to have a separation of schools which teach GCSEs and A levels and other consortia which teach this Diploma. I am slightly worried when you say we are building on what is already there that we are not going to have this Diploma available in every single school, every single college in the country, and we are going to have this separation of sheep and goats which has bedevilled British education since 1944.

Jim Knight: That is why we have got a period of five years for those first Diplomas, and obviously that reduces slightly as the others come through. It is quite a significant gap for 2013 for us to work with those partnerships across the country to ensure that their entitlement is on the basis of quality when it is fully available in 2013.

Q268 Mr Chaytor: Minister, the introduction of the Diplomas reflects an unprecedented co-ordination of the curriculum, but the structures for delivering this reflect an unprecedented fragmentation through the proliferation of small sixth forms. My question is what assessment has the Department made of the economics of more small sixth forms as against an expansion of colleges? What assessment has the Department made of the performance of small sixth forms as against larger sixth forms or colleges?

Jim Knight: In the specific context of Diploma delivery or in general terms?

Q269 Mr Chaytor: What I am saying is, what is the evidence the Department has about the educational performance of very small sixth forms of which you are now promoting more? What evidence does the Department have about the cost of educating young people in small sixth forms as against larger institutions?

Mr Coles: Our position on expansion of post-16 learning is expansion on the basis of success and quality, and that is what informs both the presumption for new sixth form expansion but also the FE presumption which is coming in this year.

Q270 Mr Chaytor: But merely because a school is successful at 11–16 does not necessarily mean it can replicate that success with a very small sixth form and within a very narrow curriculum which the small sixth form would be providing.

Jim Knight: One of the things I guess I am hoping to see as a result of this Diploma programme is a stronger development of collaboration at 14–19.

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One of the five criteria they will be assessed as they go through the Gateway is on the strength of that collaboration so the schools and colleges can play to their strengths and then small sixth forms can have a role offering their learners some A levels, but those learners might go to other institutions. As we have clearly articulated with the Diplomas, there will be learners going to more than one institution for their learning and that can apply to all forms of qualification.

Q271 Mr Chaytor: How do you match the rhetoric of collaboration when all the financial incentives are for institutions to hold on to those students? What incentives are there in the system for collaboration other than ministerial rhetoric, which is very welcome?

Jim Knight: We have got more and more use of the Gateway. For example, we are not going to offer support for the IB unless the institution has successfully been through the Diploma Gateway. We are using that as a really important guarantor of quality. The Gateway has collaboration built into it and that is quite a strong lever. This notion of giving learner choice by them being able to learn at more than one institution is quite a strong driver, and obviously the entitlement that we are saying in all areas we are going to offer from 2013 is completely dependent on collaboration from 14–19. In the end, I think that starts to resolve the tension which here you quite rightly are concerned about around schools competing and, at the same time, collaborating. We want a range of good schools. We want all schools and colleges to be good, to be offering their own specialisms, and then the offer and entitlement to be playing to those various specialisms and strengths.

Mr Coles: To add to that with a specific example. You spoke to Peter Hawthorne about Wolverhampton, and I think it was clear in what he said that he regards the collaborative model they have got, which is one of the strongest collaborative models we have got in the country, as based entirely on institutional self-interest, and institutions which were initially somewhat sceptical have joined that collaborative grouping precisely because they can see it is in their interest. It is in their interest for a number of reasons: one, because it drives up participation; two, because learners will choose to be part of that sort of collaborative grouping because of the choice it offers them; and three, because it does enable them to stop running groups which are not viable in size. Whereas a single institution acting in isolation as a small sixth form would often try and retain curriculum breadth by putting on small groups of a wide variety of subjects, instead they can focus on what they are good at knowing that just down the road there is another provider who can provide access to the thing which they are particularly strong at, and that increases the economy of the system.

Q272 Mr Chaytor: The Education and Inspections Bill gives new strategic powers to local authorities, but what incentives are there for local authorities

to follow the model that Wolverhampton, for example, has developed to increase this collaboration?

Mr Coles: Ultimately, of course, the Education and Inspections Bill says it will be a requirement to deliver all 14 Diploma lines and puts duties on both local authorities and schools in that regard. There is not a school in the country which could offer all 14 Diplomas at all three levels and do it with any degree of quality. In fact, it is not merely an incentive, it is somewhere close to being a requirement for them to work in that way.

Q273 Mr Chaytor: Has the ending or the phasing-out of the increased flexibility funding weakened your attempts to develop this collaboration?

Jim Knight: I think the Increased Flexibility Programme has been a real success but the aspiration and the ambition was that it would be embedded into practice between schools and colleges. Because it has been a success, I am confident that it will continue with the delegated non-ring-fenced funding which we all know has been increasing and been so welcomed by schools and colleges up and down the country.

Q274 Chairman: Jon Coles, one last point for you and the Minister. We have been talking about workforce, what about your workforce? Have you got a good enough team? Is your team overall up to this job?

Mr Coles: Yes.

Q275 Chairman: I mean do you need any more resources? You have already got Cap Gemini, you are now going to bring in Nord Anglia? What worries us sometimes is you have used so many consultants, do you keep a core of competence within the Department which can deliver?

Mr Coles: Yes. There are about 120 civil servants who work full-time on 14–19 reform. I have got an excellent team who I am absolutely confident will deliver this. Yes, we do need other organisations because as civil servants we are not the sort of people who are going to be the right people to go out and train teachers, of course, and we need our partners to do that for us, but I am confident we have got the team to do it.

Q276 Chairman: You do not need any more resources to deliver?

Mr Coles: No, I think we have got the team we need.

Jim Knight: Chairman, what I would say is six months ago or so when I was talking to external organisations about this programme I heard no criticism at all about the capability and quality of the programme management internally within DfES. The criticisms which you will have heard as well were around the extent to which we were able to get all of the external players all lined up together in a row and co-ordinating them, and that is what we have sought to address through things like the chief executive.

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Q277 Chairman: There was another criticism that said, it seemed to outsiders that there was no-one in the Department, Minister or senior civil servant, who would lose sleep over this because they would be worried if it was not going to go off at 100%.

Jim Knight: I can absolutely assure you that I would lose sleep, Phil Hope would lose sleep, Alan Johnson, who now has a 14–19 meeting on a fortnightly basis to progress chase us on the various issues involved, would lose sleep, and Jon Coles and I both lose hair over this! It may be that some people would like just one person.

Chairman: No, we are quite happy to have several people losing sleep!

Q278 Mr Marsden: And hair!

Jim Knight: If you are happy with several people losing sleep and hair over this then you have got them!

Chairman: Minister, it has been a very interesting session, we have learned a lot and, as usual, thank you very much for your attendance. Thank you also, Jon Coles.

Wednesday 18 April 2007

Members present:

Mr Barry Sheerman, in the Chair

Mr Douglas Carswell
Mr David Chaytor
Jeff Ennis
Paul Holmes
Helen Jones

Mr Gordon Marsden
Fiona Mactaggart
Mr Andrew Pelling
Stephen Williams
Mr Rob Wilson

Witnesses: **Rt Hon Alan Johnson MP**, Secretary of State for Education and Skills, and **Mr Jon Coles**, Director of 14-19 Reform, Department for Education and Skills, gave evidence.

Q279 Chairman: The Secretary of State is on a very short timetable. This is the first time we have ever been kind to a Secretary of State, and that is because we thought this was going to be a double-hander, Mike Tomlinson followed by the Secretary of State, so he has benefited from a late start, but he has to get away sharpish, so it is going to be a fast-running session. Secretary of State, given those circumstances, can I appeal to you? You know what ministers are like, they like to talk a lot sometimes, so we are going ask short questions and we hope for punchy answers.

Alan Johnson: Okay, good.

Q280 Chairman: Can I welcome you, Secretary of State. It is a pleasure to see you here again. How long have you been in the job now?

Alan Johnson: Almost 12 months.

Q281 Chairman: How much longer do you think you will be there?

Alan Johnson: The next 10 years, I should imagine.

Q282 Chairman: It does worry this Committee sometimes, Secretary of State, that the turnover at the top in the Department for Education does not do anyone any good, does it, and you are not likely to be here after a reshuffle, are you?

Alan Johnson: It is beyond my power. I would very much like to be here after a reshuffle.

Q283 Chairman: Would you like to keep the brief?

Alan Johnson: Absolutely.

Q284 Chairman: Even if you were elected as Deputy Leader?

Alan Johnson: I think Ken Baker in his biography said that moving from the Department for the Environment to Education—this was in the eighties—was like being a football manager leaving Arsenal and being sent to Charlton. Charlton was then in the third division, which gives you some indication of how the Department for Education was seen in those days. It is not seen like that now, it is in the premiership now and I am going to stay here. I think it is a great Department.

Q285 Chairman: If the rumours are right and you became Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, would you be able to do education with that job?

Alan Johnson: Yes; absolutely.

Q286 Chairman: Okay, that clears that out of the way. Let us get started. Do you want to say anything to get us started on Diplomas?

Alan Johnson: No.

Q287 Chairman: Straight into questions?

Alan Johnson: Yes.

Q288 Chairman: Good. We are looking at skills in their entirety because it is an issue that this Committee, over the years, has tried to push up the political agenda, and I am pleased to see that there is much more attention on skills than there has been in the past. It used to be the Cinderella of the Department for Education and Skills in terms of attention, in our view. You are doing Diplomas which many of us thought were a real breakthrough, although, of course, you know the history of disappointment that Tomlinson, amongst many others' comments, is not being delivered in full. Do you think it is fair that some of your ministerial team insist on saying that new Diplomas are 90% of Tomlinson?

Alan Johnson: I think it is fair, yes. Whether you could be as precise as 90%, I think I may have been the one of my ministerial team who said this, I am not sure, but the message we were getting over was to try and get round this argument of constantly referring back, "Is it pure Tomlinson or is it not?", and if you look at what Tomlinson was recommending, the Extended Projects, the concentration on functional skills, the baccalaureate style of the Diploma, amongst lots of other things he said, the reason why we published the league tables with maths and English, five GCSEs with maths and English, was because Tomlinson suggested we do that. The reason why we are looking to stretch and we are looking for an A* at A level is because it was in Tomlinson's report. So, there is an awful lot of his report (which was, of course 14-19) that we are actually doing and I think you can equate it, as near as damn it, to about 90%.

Q289 Chairman: You know that the current environment, the landscape, of 14-19 is complex, is it not? There are so many products out there. There is even a product that many employers, many people trust a great deal, and that is BTEC, but it is a

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market place. If the new product is not attractive it will not flourish and it will not survive, will it? Why do you think this particular product will flourish and survive?

Alan Johnson: I think it will, because it is the bit that is missing and has been missing from our education system historically. We have had, on the one side, theoretical study and, on the other side, workplace training, job training, and there has been nothing that mixed the theoretical with the applied to any great degree. There has been some attempts at this, but I am talking generally, and that is what excited people about Tomlinson and that is why I think this really is revolutionary; and you are quite right to say, Chairman, that it is very complex and it is very difficult, but that is why people shied away from it in the past. This has to be the major change, Graham Lane, I think, said in the last century, in education, and I think he is right.

Q290 Chairman: Can I ask you one more question before we move to general questioning. Why push ahead with a review of A level next year at a time when everything is changing? On the one hand everything is changing, at the same time I am looking at a report that has just come out from you, the consultation on funding on the CSR period, and I read the first sentence of paragraph seven where it says, "In broad terms, we propose to retain the current funding arrangements for pre- and post-16 provision over the CSR period and to facilitate coherent planning by 14–19 partnerships through changes to the funding arrangements. Other options, such as the creation of a single 14–19 funding system, or funding learners through the institution in which they spend most time, which present very significant practical and legislative barriers, are not being considered further." So, there are two points. On the one hand, you have got a complete review of A level. These new Diplomas are not even bedded down, they have not even begun to bed down, on the one hand. On the other, in your CSR discussion document you say: "What is the point of changing any funding arrangements to 14–19?", although there is a clear thrust in the Department that 14–19 should be seen as the span that is most relevant to this period?

Alan Johnson: On the second question, we are talking about a three-year CSR period. We do not see a case for changing the funding arrangements during that three-year period. There may be a very good case to changing the funding arrangements after that. On the A level review, we were committed to that in the White Paper. It is a review of A level. It is not a review of Diplomas and A levels, a return to whether we should go back to pure Tomlinson; it is a review of A levels. So the fact that Diplomas are just getting off the ground in 2008 is exactly why it is not going to be an overall review of the whole thing together. It is looking at A levels specifically.

Q291 Chairman: There seems to be no overall review of anything, because the elephant in the room, the more I look at this period, Secretary of State, is apprenticeships. They are out there, they are

important, you want 500,000 of them, but they seem to bear no relationship to what you are doing in the rest of the area?

Alan Johnson: No, I think that is wrong.

Q292 Chairman: How do they relate to Diplomas then?

Alan Johnson: Very importantly they relate to Diplomas. We are looking at apprenticeships as part of the offer that comes to a 16-year-old, whereas Tomlinson said that apprenticeships ought to be subsumed into the Diploma. We believe that was wrong. We believe that apprenticeships have a good brand separate from Diplomas. We have just reached, the latest information is, a 59% completion rate on apprenticeships and we have just said as part of the CSR that any qualified 16-year-old should have a guaranteed apprenticeship in place. So, we are doing an awful lot there in relation to what the choice should be between 14 and 19 and ensuring there is diversity—this is about raising participation as well as raising attainment—that can inspire people to stay in education and training.

Q293 Chairman: Are you not falling into that very trap that you made in Question Time that I particularly challenged you about when you made the unfortunate remarks about secondary modern and grammar in terms of how you view these Diplomas? If you have got apprentices here, Diplomas here, A levels here, people think it is a hierarchical system: if you are really good you do A levels, if you are not so good you do the Diploma and if you are not as good as that you do the apprenticeship. Is not that what you are asking for?

Alan Johnson: No. It was not Question Time, by the way, it was a question and answer session at a union conference where the premise of the question was, "Is not this all difficult? It can all be made much simpler if you did not have the diversity?" Yes, if you just said, "Here is one offer and it is a Diploma and there is no other offer—there is no international baccalaureate, there is no A level (not that we can control the choice of the international baccalaureate), there are no apprenticeships, it is all moulded into one", and I say this because the premise of your point here is about pure Tomlinson again.

Q294 Chairman: Sure.

Alan Johnson: We would have been sitting here in a different position having a whole series of different arguments had we gone down the pure route of Tomlinson. Tomlinson, of course, is ill, which is why you could not see him, but Mike is working for us as our champion in the education world on Diplomas. We would have had a different discussion, but the discussion would have been about abolishing A levels—a quarter of a million young people took A levels last year, it has been the gold standard since 1951—denying choice just for an argument to reduce complexity, and I actually think the diversity there is right, I think this is the right choice to take, and it might make life a bit more complicated but is that what happens when you offer choices to people?

Chairman: Some of us are not so fond of Digby Jones' description of the gold standard, but never mind. Paul.

Q295 Paul Holmes: We have had a whole series of witnesses sitting where you are now from schools, colleges and from sector skills groups, all of whom are committed to Diplomas and applied to deliver them in the first wave—they were all keen on Diplomas—but 80% of them are saying they are worried it is going to go off half-cocked, it is not going to be ready in time, the training is not going to be done in time, there are going to be problems and you said at the Association of School and College Leavers Conference on 9 March, “It could all go horribly wrong.” Were you taken out of context there or were you reflecting the concerns of all the practitioners who are involved in this?

Alan Johnson: It was taken out of context in the sense that the premise of the question was that this is all very difficult. I think the best quote on this is from the QCA in the written evidence they submitted to you. They said, “In ambition, scope, complexity and potential the introduction of Diplomas across 14 lines of learning at three levels in each line is a major national reform of secondary curriculum and qualifications currently without parallel in any other country.”¹ So the premise of the honest question to me from head teachers by and large who supported Diplomas was: “This is really difficult, is it not?”, and my answer was, “Yes, it is.” Actually things are going horribly right. We got through the Gateway process and it worked very successfully. I am very pleased with the way that went. We might deal with that in more detail in a second. I am pleased that even from remarks like that, which was a remark taken out of context but at least got some publicity, that there is a growing awareness now, not just that Diplomas are coming, but this is not a vocational Diploma, it is not another form of job training, this is something really exciting. I think to sit in front of people and say blandly, “This is all a walk in the park and there are no difficulties to it at all”, of course this is a very precious thing, and because it is a precious and fragile thing we have to make sure we deliver it successfully.

Q296 Paul Holmes: You have said that Diplomas are 90% Tomlinson. You have defended that line from your officials, but surely the whole point of Tomlinson was that you had an overarching Diploma that removed this absolute snobbery that is in our system, and I speak as somebody who was a teacher and the head of sixth form, between the academic and the vocational divide. Your Government has not gone down that route. You have rejected most of Tomlinson and are going for just another vocational or academic/vocational, however you are going to describe it, alongside all the other stuff that already exists, especially the A level gold standard. So, how can you really say it is 90% Tomlinson?

Alan Johnson: I think, just repeating the point I made earlier, because Tomlinson himself will tell you that we have taken on board the majority of what he was recommending, the argument, and the difference of opinion between us, I guess, is do you subsume A levels and GCSEs and apprenticeships completely into the Diploma? We thought that would be a mistake, and I think that was right. I think the arguments we would be having now were we doing that would be just as controversial and probably more problematic, but you are absolutely right about this snobbery. This is what we are committed to do here, to remove this very English snobbery. Let us leave Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland out of this. It is an English snobbery about academic qualifications being somehow infinitely superior to vocational qualifications. That is why we have to get this right. If we get this right, there will be people who will take this course as a route into higher education, as well as people taking this course as a route into employment, and that is what we have to work together, given that we have our disagreement. I might have this disagreement with the Select Committee, but that has got to be our objective now given that we have moved on from the initial decision on Tomlinson.

Q297 Paul Holmes: When GNVQs were introduced we were told the same things, and I was the head of sixth form at the time and my school was one of the first to introduce GNVQs. We were told that this would be the answer to all these problems, and now that has gone by the wayside and Diplomas are coming in. Are we not going down exactly the same route to failure that we had with GNVQs?

Alan Johnson: No, because this is different. With the Extended Project, with the concentration on functional skills, with the concentration on a specialism in there as well, with the non-cognitive stuff, with the learning and teachers—that is why it is Tomlinson, that is why Tomlinson should have the majority of praise when this is all delivered successfully to our grateful nation in 2013.

Q298 Jeff Ennis: Secretary of State, your colleague, the Minister of State for Schools and 14–19 Learners, which I am pleased to see is his title now, wrote to us on 28 March with the results of the Gateway process,² which has obviously been key to introducing the Diplomas. Are you satisfied with the number of authorities that have been put into categories one and two, which are the ones that are going to start delivering in 2008? I think there are about 38,000 places nationally that are going to be offered in 2008?

Alan Johnson: Yes.

Q299 Jeff Ennis: As opposed to a figure of roughly 50,000 which was bashed about for a period of time?

Alan Johnson: Fifty thousand was never a target, it was a guide in the implementation plan. We are very satisfied, and I hope that when you take evidence

¹ Ev 2 [Qualifications and Curriculum Authority].

² <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19>

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from elsewhere—and your Committee’s report, incidentally, will be very helpful to us—that satisfaction will be shared right across the board. We have got something like two-thirds of local authorities now engaged with the first five Diplomas in 2008. 70% are either engaged now or will be ready in 2009; so it is a small proportion that we have asked to apply, again, through the Gateway process. Following on from that we have sent out a pack—and we have had some good feedback—to all of the local authorities and consortia that applied as to how now to take this forward, and as I go round the country talking to local authorities, no-one has come up to me and said, “That was a bad process”, even the ones who did not get through the Gateway. I think people think this was a robust and fair process.

Q300 Jeff Ennis: The roll out when it has actually been totally done by 2013: do you anticipate every secondary school delivering Diplomas in this country?

Alan Johnson: I am expecting every child to have the opportunity to take a Diploma by 2013.

Q301 Jeff Ennis: Would it be acceptable for a secondary school not to get involved in the Diploma process?

Alan Johnson: As you know, these will have to be delivered in collaboration, but I cannot think of circumstances where a secondary school would not.

Mr Coles: I think what we have seen in some of the earlier consortia and those that have been successful in the Gateway is that quite a large proportion of partnerships have got a college in the lead. It is not every partnership by any stretch of the imagination, but in those partnerships it may be that the school is not offering that curriculum choice within the school but is offering it to young people as something they can do within a college. As the Secretary of State says, we would expect every young person to have that opportunity. It does not mean that every school has to be offering every line, or anything of the sort, and, indeed, we do not think there is a school in the country that could offer all 14 Diplomas, so this has to be about all the institutions in an area offering more to young people by working together than any one of them would alone.

Q302 Jeff Ennis: If the Diploma is going to be successfully delivered throughout the country, presumably we are going to have to have better collaboration between further education colleges and schools as well working to the same—

Alan Johnson: Yes, we would. Perhaps I could give a bit of good news. On FE you have got the situation where the participation rate is going up—we have gone from 24th in the world to 20th—you have got the situation which was reported where we have now got 71.4% of 19-year-olds qualified to level 2, which is 2% above our PSA target; we have learnt just this week the success rates in FE (ie a success in every course you are taking,) which was down at around 59% in 2002, is now 77%. We have exceeded the target by 1% two years early. So the quality of what

is being offered in FE has improved dramatically, and this is part of everyone generally raising their game to be in a better position to be able to deliver this as well.

Q303 Helen Jones: First they were called Specialised Vocation Diplomas, then they were Specialised Diplomas and now they are just Diplomas. If I was a young person looking at one of these options, what would you say to me if I asked you what a Diploma was for?

Alan Johnson: What a Diploma was for or what a Diploma is going to be called?

Q304 Helen Jones: What is it for? Because the title keeps changing?

Alan Johnson: I think it is a baccalaureate type coherent single qualification that will give you a route into higher education or into employment.

Q305 Helen Jones: Are you satisfied that the design of all these Diplomas is sufficiently robust to give young people, when they finish them, the option of going either way? How can we be assured that the balance between the academic, if you like, and, let us say, the practical, content is right?

Alan Johnson: That is the job of the experts developing these Diplomas now, but that is their goal and that is what everyone is enthusiastically pursuing. We cannot be absolutely sure about this until the first Diplomas are out there with the first students taking them and then the first employers and higher education institutions being ready to take on these youngsters. We cannot be absolutely sure until that time, but everything is going in exactly the right direction.

Mr Coles: It is probably worth saying that, because there is some choice within the Diplomas, actually young people are going to have some freedom to get the right balance of curriculum for them. So at level 3, for example, a third of the Diploma is the additional specialist category, and that will give young people a choice to specialise more heavily. For example, if you are doing engineering, maybe you could do mechanical engineering, and get into things that are more practical, more occupationally specific, at that end of the spectrum, or you could keep a degree of breadth and do something in a modern foreign language, for example, which keeps that breadth of opportunity, and additionally with the Extended Project there is going to be quite a high level of choice for young people. As the Secretary of State says, you cannot actually prove the case until young people are doing it, but because of the design, it does give young people some choices here which will enable them to take a route which works for them.

Q306 Helen Jones: I think I understood you to say earlier, Secretary of State, they are not vocational Diplomas. Is that right?

Alan Johnson: Yes.

Q307 Helen Jones: If so, why is the content employer-led?

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Alan Johnson: Because the whole point of these Diplomas is that they are vocational education. They do not lead to a vocational qualification. They are vocational education in the sense that they are designed by industry, they have an academic content to them as well, for people who want to go into engineering and go into level 4 they are a perfect route, but, similarly, they should never trap someone into a particular route, which is why you have to have all the options as well. So there is a large vocational element to this.

Q308 Helen Jones: So they are vocational, not practical?

Alan Johnson: This is a little bit of semantics, I think.

Q309 Helen Jones: No, there is a way of learning through doing, and you might describe that as practical learning, and there is vocational learning which fits you for a particular occupation. We are trying to determine which they are, because we get different answers depending on who is in front of the Committee?

Alan Johnson: It is not job training. It is not training for employment. If someone wants to take a route to training for employment, that is the apprenticeship route.

Q310 Mr Marsden: Secretary of State, from what you have just said and from what Jon Coles said previously about content, it does seem that there is already, with the five pilots, an enormous amount of variation in the content and, indeed, the design of these Diplomas—some of them are much more detailed than others. Do you agree with that assessment and, if so, does it worry you that future employers and, for that matter universities, some of whom are going to be sceptical about these things to start with, will want to see some commonality of judgment between the five initial Diplomas?

Alan Johnson: There will be commonality in the sense of the functional skills. The generic bit of this will be common. Then you have got the different industries, whether it is construction or whether it is engineering, shaping that element for their particular industry, and then alongside that, as Jon says, you have got the individual choice of what they want to add into that, not to mention the Extended Project. So, a Diploma being offered in construction in Hull might be different in the sense of a Diploma being offered in Blackpool, but only to the extent that it depends on what is happening locally, who is delivering this. There is an absolute consistency about the functional skills, there is an absolute consistency about the generic elements to this; it is bound to change in relation to the substance.

Q311 Mr Marsden: You do not think that that process that you have described will give universities, who might be half-hearted about some of these Diplomas to start with, an excuse to say, “We cannot rate these from a candidate on the same basis as an A level”?

Alan Johnson: No, I do not.

Mr Coles: I would feel really confident actually that the work on consistency across the lines, which has really gone through in great detail all of the content that has been produced by the five first Diplomas, has really dealt with all of those issues of level and consistency across the lines, and I think, as Alan was saying, because we have got very clear rules about level and about generic learning, principal learning, additional specialist learning, which is absolutely consistent across all of the Diplomas, it would be very odd for people to say, “We cannot understand these Diplomas.” I think it is clear, as the qualifications come forward for accreditation beginning at the end of next month, that people will see that we have got some very, very clear, consistent, high quality qualifications coming forward. Of course qualifications are different from one another—A level history is not the same sort of thing as A level maths—but there is no more variation in the levelling and the structure of Diplomas than there is in most other qualifications.

Q312 Stephen Williams: Just one quick supplementary about A levels and A level review. You have already indicated, Secretary of State, that you support an A* at A level. It is reasonable to assume that disproportionately for the first few years private schools will be better represented amongst the students who are likely to get A*s, at least initially. Do you think that is going to make the job of admissions tutors easier or harder to balance those social intakes?

Alan Johnson: The A* is not an argument for admissions tutors and for access to university. We think the raw marks that we are providing and the other changes we have introduced, universities tell us, gives them enough information. So, it is purely an educational argument as to whether we should have an A*, and the reason why we are pursuing this is on an educational argument that we need to have that stretch. Whether it makes it easier or harder for admissions tutors is immaterial to the argument about there being an educational justification for an A*.

Chairman: Moving on to development and the implementation of the Diplomas, Fiona.

Q313 Fiona Mactaggart: You have put a lot of emphasis in this on the partnerships that are required to develop and to implement the Diplomas, but I am struck about the nature of the partnership development. It seems to me that the origination was: we give it to sector skills councils and the two business-led partnerships, not to educationalists, to devise what is required and then we let educationalists look at that. Do you think, on reflection, that was the right way round to do it? Do you not think that people who know about qualifications might have helped the process evolve from the beginning?

Alan Johnson: The first point to say is this was absolutely Tomlinson’s recommendation. Tomlinson said that industry should shape these Diplomas. There is no difference there with Tomlinson. The second point is, it is not industry on

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their own. The point about the Diploma Development Partnerships (DDPs) is you have got higher education institutions involved, you have got the QCA involved, you have got other bodies involved right across the piece and you have got schools and colleges involved on every single one, and you have got on these first five 5,000 employers involved, 1,000 for each of the five Diploma lines. So, it is not working that way where the industry goes off in a corner, works it out and then hands it over to the educationalists. If it did work that way, you would be right, it would be the wrong way, and that is not the way this is operating and it is going very successfully in the partnerships that have been formed through the DDPs.

Mr Coles: To add, if I may, there are three processes here which are really central to this. The first is about defining the content, the second is about the regulatory criteria and the consistency across the different lines and the levelling and the third is designing the assessments. It is very clear that the regulatory job has to be done by QCA and the design of assessments has to be done by awarding bodies, but the right people to be working on leading the content are, in fact, the people who are effectively the end users of the system—the employers, the universities, and so on—and as the Secretary of State said, getting all of those working together on the Diploma Development Partnerships has been an absolutely crucial part of this. In saying employers are leading on the content, it does not mean that we have cut out all of those other partners, we have brought the partners together to do those jobs.

Q314 Fiona Mactaggart: I will leave that bit there. We had some quite interesting evidence from Geoff Stanton from the University of Greenwich who said basically that employers are not very good at naming ways in which some of these things can be turned into qualifications, and that has caused a problem here, but let us look at the other partnership, which is also, it seems to me, getting a bit frail, which is the partnerships about implementation. As people are looking at who gets the money and who gets the student, I can see that all that warm-woolliness that exists in the original plans for partnerships is just getting a bit stretched. What are you going to do to make sure that we do not get those partners who have already got their hands on the students grabbing them continually in order to keep the money: because you, Secretary of State, know very well that in partnerships that is what happens?

Alan Johnson: Yes, “partnership” defined as burying mutual loathing in pursuit of Government money! I do not think any of these are frail, by the way. You used the term “frail”. The partnership that will deliver the first five Diplomas is very strong. The partnership amongst schools is even stronger. Do not forget, we have been in the 14–19 area since 2002 now and the collaborations that are building are very strong. Obviously, they are individual institutions and tensions sometimes occur, but I think it is remarkable how few tensions are occurring in these partnerships. I think it comes back to the question the Chairman was asking about

eventually how the funding works on 14–19, and there might be a point there, at some stage in the future, where we need to look at that, but in this process of moving into this brave new world the partnerships are working very well; in fact one could not be more pleased with how those partnerships are working.

Q315 Fiona Mactaggart: Will you assure the Committee that you will make sure that, as those partnerships become competitors for resources, you will ensure that there is a robust mechanism to make sure that the needs of the student are properly defended against sometimes the interests of the institution? Often they are the same, but not always. What are you going to do to make sure it happens? Can you promise this Committee you will put in place something to do that, and do you have any idea what it will look like?

Alan Johnson: Yes, it is the interests of the student that must come first.

Q316 Fiona Mactaggart: What will you put in place to make sure they do?

Alan Johnson: How this process is going at the moment, the funding that is provided, about £47 million in capital, £45 million in revenue, to get this off the ground in 2008, there is no argument that that is all centered on the collaboration on the consortium that is producing the Diploma.

Mr Coles: Briefly, it is worth saying that the funding consultations actually do, of course, propose some changes, and they are precisely changes designed to make sure that funding does follow the learner and it is the learner’s interest that comes first. It is not that we are proposing a complete *status quo* in those funding consultations, although, as everybody recognises, they are not ripping the system up at this moment.

Q317 Fiona Mactaggart: The other risk that local providers have expressed to me is about these new qualifications coming in and not connecting effectively to things that are there at present and people feeling as though they might have to go backwards in order to get other previously recognised qualifications—how they all mesh in. It was not decided initially to look at what is good about present qualifications and how to mesh it with it, but during this development process how are you going to make sure that you connect it to BTEC, national Diplomas, things like that, which already exist out there, which have respect from business, so that you do not put students into a position where they are going forwards and backwards?

Mr Coles: We set out a policy position in the White Paper back in 2005 about what the long-term position would be. Clearly between now and 2013 we are not going to be in the business of stopping funding existing qualifications. What we do want to do between now and 2013 is to work out a convergence process which gets us to the point where people do not feel that they are giving up something that they really value, particularly things that may come into the specialist learning category, which are

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the more specialist end of existing qualifications. So, there is a piece of work to be gone through there, but, of course, vocational qualifications change rather more quickly than general qualifications do as industries change and year by year the qualifications are updated.

Q318 Chairman: Secretaries of State change. Carry on. I am digging a big hole here.

Mr Coles: I am a mere functionary. So to devise a process precisely to do that, to make sure that people feel that all that is good in the current system is brought within the framework of Diplomas and we are not losing things that are important by 2013, but there is clearly going to be a period between now and then of these qualifications existing in parallel.

Q319 Mr Chaytor: Will all aspects of the design of the Diplomas have been successfully piloted before the launch of the first five in 2008?

Alan Johnson: All aspects of them?

Q320 Mr Chaytor: Yes.

Alan Johnson: I do not know. I am a bit confused, David, because we actually start in 2008.

Q321 Mr Chaytor: I know, but one of the issues with the previous curriculum reform, Curriculum 2000, was that there was inadequate piloting before the launch of the programme. So, my question is will all aspects—

Alan Johnson: They would have all by 2013; 2008 is the launch.

Q322 Mr Chaytor: What about in terms of the curriculum design of the Diploma? Will everything have been successfully piloted before the first ones come on stream in 2008?

Alan Johnson: These are the pilot stream, 2008.

Mr Coles: In qualifications terms 2008 onwards are pilots, so they are real qualifications, they are live qualifications, people are taking them for real, but in terms of the qualifications, that is a period of piloting those qualifications.

Q323 Mr Chaytor: I understand, but in terms of the work on functional skills, for example, or the Extended Project, will those elements of the Diplomas have been successfully piloted before 2008?

Mr Coles: Yes. Whether pilots are successful I should not prejudge, but, yes, they will have been fully piloted.

Q324 Mr Chaytor: Will the pilots have been evaluated before launch in 2008?

Mr Coles: Yes, they will. We have already done some trialling now of functional skills, assessments. There is a full pilot beginning in September, and the training for teachers for that is happening this term, so there has been trialling of the assessments. There is piloting going on, likewise, with the Extended Project.

Q325 Mr Chaytor: Will the report of the full pilot, beginning this September, have been published before the launch of the first five Diplomas in 2008?

Mr Coles: Before anybody is assessed as part of the Diploma process on functional skills there will have been a full opportunity to have learned all the lessons from the pilots, yes.

Q326 Mr Chaytor: So it will not be before the launch of the programme but it will be before the completion of the first cohort in 2010?

Mr Coles: That is right, yes.

Q327 Mr Chaytor: In the Green Paper there is one reference to the modular structure of Diplomas. Will they all be modular and what is the basis of the modular structure?

Mr Coles: They will all be modular, and you are going to test my memory of the detail, but essentially at level 3 we are looking at units of 90 guided learning hours, which is the model we are moving to for A level. So as we go from six units at A level to four at A level, we are going to, effectively, a 90 guided learning hour size module. So it is bigger than the existing AS and A2 modules. That is the size at level 3, and that will be consistent.

Q328 Mr Chaytor: That will apply to level 2 and level 1?

Mr Coles: Yes, level 2 and level 1 units will be somewhat smaller because the qualifications are somewhat smaller, and that is more appropriate for that level and typically age group as well, but the modularity of the structure will be the same across Diplomas.

Q329 Chairman: This is the first time since I have been Chairman of the Committee that we have had a Secretary of State here for education and not been televised, and I suspect it is because we are discussing skills, so I hope you will join me in saying: what on earth are the broadcasting authorities doing? We have got a good media presence, but no coverage for the Secretary of State because we are talking about skills. Would you agree with that?

Alan Johnson: Yes, I put my best tie on as well!

Chairman: On to the Green Paper proposals. Rob, you are going to start us off.

Q330 Mr Wilson: Secretary of State, why do you think that compulsion will increase staying on rates from, I think, 75% now beyond 90%, which is your target?

Alan Johnson: It is 76% now. The compulsion would not kick in until we got to the 90%. We have got a 90% PSA target for 2015, and we are proposing to move up in stages, 2013 up to 17 and 2015 up to 18. Why do I think this? Because I think it is time to stop giving out this mixed message that it is going to be increasingly important to stay in education up until 18, the number of jobs that you can get into with no qualifications is going to sink dramatically and you really should stay in education, but, on the other hand, it is okay if you drop out and disappear off the radar screen completely. Looking at the Leitch

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Report was to me the final confirmation that what was envisaged by Herbert Fisher when he was Secretary of State (and he was a Liberal, so that shows you how long ago that was) back in 1918, and it was envisaged by the great Butler Reforms 1944, it is time to put into legislation.

Q331 Mr Wilson: I hear what you say, Secretary of State, but keeping children in schools is not working at the moment further down the system. We have got a situation at the moment where primary school truancy has risen to record levels, secondary school truancy is up around nearly 10% at the moment. Will not compulsion for 16–18-year-olds just cause a sharp rise in truancy?

Alan Johnson: Leaving those truancy figures on one side for a second, a large part of what is counted as truancy now is what was previously “authorised absences” which are now classified as unauthorised absences—so parents who take their children away on holiday, for instance—and everyone said that was fine. They are now saying that is not fine, and that is absolutely healthy, but leaving that to one side, the general point you are making is one of the reasons why it is a Green Paper with kind of white edges, because we are determined to do this, but we need to talk through the ramifications of it. We are not going to chain children to the desk doing quadratic equations, this is an important part of this discussion—

Q332 Chairman: You have got an obsession with quadratic equations.

Alan Johnson: I know, because I cannot do them. That is why it is important to have the Diplomas in place, that is why it is important to expand apprenticeships up to half a million, that is why it is crucial to be looking at this whole issue about skills and accredited training, so that we seek to inspire and encourage youngsters to stay on at school, but, as I say, it is time to end the mixed messages. So, we should be at 90% participation by then and tackling the other 10%.

Q333 Mr Wilson: What would you do if you had a 17-year-old who refused to stay in education if you pass this legislation, and what is the penalty or enforcement for not staying on?

Alan Johnson: What we are saying in the Green Paper, and, as I say, this is a genuine debate about how we tackle this (and incidentally they tackle this in Belgium, they tackle this in Germany, they tackle this in the Netherlands where they have just lifted their school leaving age up to 18, they tackle it in Canada, they tackle it in all countries where they have this issue) is that there has to be a much better advice and guidance system operating in our schools so we pick up these youngsters at age 14. This is very much a social class issue. If you looked at social classes one and two you would have 100% participation rate. You track this through with the 14–19 process as well. If a child drops out of the system post-2015, you do everything you can, because you will actually have very good contacts and you will have a very good information system to

find out what is happening and to lure them, encourage them, entice them back in and find out what the problem is. We would not move into the realm of punishment in the sense of attendance orders until you have gone through a process. That is what we say in the Green Paper. You would then issue an attendance order as a very last resort, and that is when you get into the grounds of legality.

Q334 Mr Wilson: You know as well as I do that some teenagers will not, under any circumstances, accept compulsion and attendance at school. Do you believe an attendance order is going to be effective on that hard core, and I think we are talking, in terms of the Government figures, of about 217,000 that are considered the hard core, for example, as truants?

Alan Johnson: I think where you have to start from is: is this the right thing to do? Looking now at the world of work in 2020, which Lord Leitch has focused our attention on, where 40% of jobs will be filled by graduates, 4.6 million more high-skilled jobs, we will need 600,000 jobs without qualifications. There were about eight million when I left school. There are 3.6 million now. Then, if you say this is the right thing to do, then you look at these very important issues. It is not an attendance order to go to the classroom to stay in school, it is an attendance order to stay in school, on an apprenticeship, in college, at work with accredited training. You could not just disappear off the radar screen completely. That is where the attendance order would come in. Yes, hopefully by then there will be 10% that we are looking to encourage, and it is a hard core 10%, but given those options and those choices and given the chance to build up to it, not least through the introduction of Diplomas, I am confident that it is manageable, just as it is in every other country where they have education leaving age raisings.

Q335 Mr Wilson: Why do you regard this as such an important issue, ie staggering, doing it first for 17-year-olds in 2013 and then doing it for 18-year-olds later? Why not do it all at the outset?

Alan Johnson: Because if you look at the history of these things, in 1944 the Butler Act said that the Education Act—. I am sorry, in 1918 they put the school leaving age up to 14 and said it should go to 15 and to 18 full or part-time very quickly. It did not happen. In 1944 Butler said it should go up to 15 and should go up to 16 as soon as possible—not practicable; possible. He said it should go to 18 as soon as practicable. It took 27 years. So, all these issues arise, and that was just one year. It has only ever been a one year increase. Going two years, from 16–18, we judge, needs to be done in two stages, 2013 up to 17—that is when all the Diplomas will be on stream—and 2015 up to 18. We think that is sensible. If there is an argument to say do it quicker and do it all at once, we will listen to it, but our judgment is we need a fair run at this.

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Q336 Stephen Williams: Secretary of State, we have got a compulsory leaving age at the moment of 16, but is it reasonable to accept that probably at 14, or even younger, a lot of people mentally drop out of school and then under achieve at the formal leaving age of 16? If you force young people to participate in education, so you meet the participation target, what is the evidence that you get real achievement when that age is reached?

Alan Johnson: First of all, the force is not with you here until you go up to age 18. Getting to 90% participation, which is our PSA target, does not involve any force at all. What it does involve is clearing the clutter in Key Stage Three so you can concentrate there on catch up for kids who are stagnating, or falling behind, or whatever, take some time to get them to that level where, when they get to Key Stage Four, there are meaningful options for them to do. Having all the 14–19 agenda in place has to be a way of inspiring youngsters to stay on. Of course, the biggest inspiration is if they get five good GCSEs at age 16. That is what encourages youngsters to stay on past 16. There is another point in this, and it is another reason why I think we should change. GCSEs are seen as a school leaving certificate, and they were never designed to be that, and so actually changing the system so that the whole of the education world is focused on saying, “You are there either full or part-time until you are 18”, I think will have huge benefits.

Q337 Stephen Williams: Is it 57% of children leave school at 16 at the moment with five good GCSEs, which you say you want everybody to achieve?

Alan Johnson: 58.5% and, while we are on it, up 13.4 percentage points since 1997.

Q338 Stephen Williams: I will give you one and a half per cent extra in that case! That rather implies that over 40% of the people without a compulsory leaving age of 16 at the moment are marking time to some extent. They have got to stay within the formal education environment until they are 16—they are meeting your target in that respect—but the educational aspect of that is failing. What evidence have you got that, if you compel people to stay on even longer than that, educational attainment is going to be dragged up?

Alan Johnson: I think we have got a fair amount of evidence about what happens in countries where they do have an education leaving age of 18 where it is actually much—. You have not reached that cliff edge at age 16.

Q339 Stephen Williams: Can you give me some examples?

Alan Johnson: But I think you are right about mentally dropping out at age 14, and that is a large part of what we are seeking to tackle here. I do not think you are right in saying that the 41.5% who do not get five good GCSEs are marking time. Lots of those youngsters are determined to get to where they want to get. It is wrong to discount them in some way, because I think the evidence is that lots of those will stay on and try again and get to where they want

to go. The big problem is those that have dropped out mentally at 14 do not get anywhere near, are reluctant to take GCSEs in the first place, and that is the hard core, that is the 10% we are going to be tackling when we get to 2015.

Chairman: I am glad you have nailed that, Secretary of State, because I and members of this Committee get very frustrated when people say if you do not get five GCSEs then you are have not succeeded. I go to schools all the time where a lot of kids in that second try who do not get five GCSEs go on to very good careers, they go into apprenticeships, they go into FE and they do improve in a different environment. So that belief that if you do not get five GCSEs you have failed I do not think is true, and I know you do not, and I do not think Stephen does either.

Q340 Stephen Williams: No, I did ask a quick supplementary in the middle of the Secretary of State’s answer to give some examples of the international comparisons you said you had looked at and the standards had gone up because they had a higher leaving age than 16. Can you say what those examples are?

Alan Johnson: No, but we can provide them for you, I am sure.

Q341 Chairman: You are going to provide them to the Committee?

Alan Johnson: Yes.³

Q342 Mr Chaytor: Can I ask a question about capacity. In the Green Paper it predicts that about 15,000 more young people will be in school by 2015 and that this capacity will be dealt with by the expansion of academies. If there are going to be 15,000 additional young people and 400 extra academies, each with a sixth form, we are talking about 37 students per sixth form in each academy. Is there an economic case for proliferation of small sixth forms as a means of delivering the increase in participation rates?

Alan Johnson: Is there an economic case for the proliferation of sixth forms? Probably not in terms of the economies of scale, particularly given what we are having to do to deliver Diplomas. David, was that a quote from our Green Paper?

Q343 Mr Chaytor: The Green Paper says there will be 15,000 extra young people in schools by 2015? Most of this growth will be taken up by the already planned growth of academies. That is the phrase.

Mr Coles: There are a whole lot of things going on in parallel here. That piece of analysis considers what is likely to be the balance between schools, colleges, work-based learning given the prior attainment of those students who we will be asking to stay on who are not at the moment and what people with that prior attainment do right now. So there is quite a detailed piece of analysis behind it, but obviously there is a huge amount of projection there; but sitting behind the national figure, of course, there is a lot of regional variation going on as well, so there

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are parts of the country where population is shrinking considerably and parts of the country where population is growing considerably, so that 15,000 is a net figure, not a gross figure, and it disguises some areas where there is quite a lot of growth and some areas where there is a falling off of the roll despite the fact there has been an increase in the participation rate. So the analysis which divides 15,000 by 400 and comes to 37 is arithmetically, of course, I have no doubt, correct. I have not done the calculation, but actually, in practice, it is not like that. So, what you are actually getting is that schools are going into areas of growth, and areas where there is need, where new sixth forms are planned in particular areas, that is to meet growth in those areas as much as anything else and they are parts of the country where sixth forms will get smaller because there are fewer students around. So, it is not quite the case that you end up with that conclusion that you only have 37 students in each of those sixth forms.

Q344 Mr Chaytor: Our Schools Minister made it clear that he thinks that all schools should be able to have a sixth form, should be encouraged to have a sixth form. My question is: is this a rational economic model for dealing with the increase in participation to encourage more and more small group expense? I think this has to be a question for the Secretary of State. Could you envisage, or would you imagine, that the next Government, or the one after that come 2015, would be confronted with the problem of the huge costs caused by a large number of institutions delivering small numbers of students?

Alan Johnson: I can envisage that. At the moment we have the sixth form presumption, as we have the FE presumption, about the success of the school. Coming back to the point earlier about the children themselves being at the centre of this and having the option and the choices that will encourage them to stay in school, I think the sixth form presumption is right. In a world where we have got 100% participation post-2015, I think we would have to look very carefully at the economics of that and see how best to deliver in a high quality way, taking into account the very important points to make sure that youngsters are still engaged. They are not being forced to stay on in education, they are being inspired to go into education. We would need look at that all over again. I think it is a completely new world we would be moving into.

Q345 Mr Chaytor: The Green Paper also tells us that the Armed Forces last year offered over 8,000 apprenticeship places. Do you think there is scope for significantly increasing that number. Would that be an effective way of dealing with some of the more recalcitrant young people, and would that expansion be a popular policy to include a future election manifesto?

Alan Johnson: It is an idea that we will take away and look at.

Q346 Chairman: Most of the evidence I have read suggests that probably the most effective trainers ever are the Armed Forces.

Alan Johnson: Yes.

Chairman: You are asking for national service, are you, David?

Q347 Mr Chaytor: I think the Secretary of State is saying, yes, it is an interesting idea.

Alan Johnson: I will take it away to look at, yes. It will probably be in three election manifestos now.

Q348 Chairman: We have a tiny bit of time. I am looking at Andrew or Douglas, who have not asked a question. Is there anything you want to ask the Secretary of State? No. I want to be sure of one thing. You said you are clearing the clutter. You have put a really good gloss, I am not saying it is just a gloss, Secretary of State, pulling all these different fragments in the whole system of 14–19 together, but at the same time you do say you are clearing the clutter. It does still look a very cluttered landscape. If you are a parent or a student trying to navigate their way through this, it is very complex at a time when a lot of people out there say Connexions just is not working and there is not a career service out there.

Alan Johnson: Connexions actually move to local authority control soon, and I hope that brings about some improvements there, but the clutter I was referring to is the fact that there is too much prescription at Key Stage Three and we are looking to try and tackle that. The clutter in terms of qualifications, we might resolve some of that, the alphabet soup of vocational qualifications that are out there—

Q349 Chairman: You are not getting rid of many of them?

Alan Johnson: We cannot. It is an open market. We can stop funding some of them, and that is a consideration to be taken post-2013, but it is an open market out there. There are awarding bodies and if there are employers that want to offer them and there are people that want to take them, then that is fine. I do not accept that it is cluttered to the degree that it is over cluttered and that parents and students have a problem understanding actually what the needs are. I think they are very good at understanding diversity and I think by the time we have finished, and there is a big communications exercise on Diplomas, they will see that as a very important contribution to what is already a rich and diverse offer.

Q350 Jeff Ennis: Obviously Education Maintenance Allowances have been very successful in encouraging students from poorer backgrounds to stay on beyond the age of 16. Will they still be available in the brave new world where students have got to stay on?

Alan Johnson: As we say in the Green Paper, the Education Maintenance Allowance is there as an incentive. That is its purpose, to incentivise people to stay on.

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Q351 Jeff Ennis: You said it has been very successful.

Alan Johnson: It has. We will not need to incentivise post-2015, but what we will need to do is to offer financial assistance to youngsters who have come from poorer backgrounds. So we are not looking at this as any kind of money saving exercise; we are saying that we need to look and have a genuine discussion about how we divert that money into other areas. At the moment it is an incentive that we will not be using.

Alan Johnson: I am in correspondence with the unions about this. No, I am not concerned about it, but it is an issue we want to keep under constant review. I mentioned earlier on the success in FE, the enormous success over the last few years. Part of that was the same training model for three days backed up by online assistance, supported by mentoring and consultation. It is the same training exercise we went through there to raise the game there that we are proposing in relation to Diplomas, and I think that will work.

Chairman: Secretary of State, I may have alienated the rest of the Committee keeping them short and sharp, but I think we have had a very good session with you. Can I thank you. We hope to see you in front of this Committee again, and would you give a message to HEFCE when you go to their conference that our report on Bologna, which I think a lot of people will be quite interested in, will be coming out a week on Monday.

Q352 Chairman: Is the up-skilling of teachers in hand? We have had from the NUT evidence, suggestions anyway, that training and up-training teachers to cope with new Diplomas is something they are concerned about. Are you concerned about it?

**Supplementary memorandum submitted by the Rt Hon Alan Johnson MP,
Secretary of State for Education and Skills**

LINKS BETWEEN EXTENDING COMPULSORY EDUCATION AND RAISING ATTAINMENT

When I appeared before the Select Committee last week, on 18 April, I was asked about evidence that compelling people to stay in learning for longer could lead to an increase in educational attainment. I said that I thought there was evidence of this kind from the experience of other countries, and committed to write to the committee with further details.

In fact, the strongest evidence that compelling people to stay in education for longer can lead to a higher level of attainment comes from our own country. In 1997 a change in the law was implemented so that all young people had to stay in school until the end of the school year in which they turned 16, rather than being able to leave at the beginning of the Easter holiday if they turned 16 between 1 September and 31 January. A study has found that those compelled to stay until the end of the year by this change in the law achieved more than the equivalent group in the previous year, who were able to leave earlier (Del Bono, E and Galindo-Rueda, F (2006) *The Long Term Impacts of Compulsory Schooling: Evidence from a Natural Experiment in School Leaving Data*, ISER Working Paper 2006-44). Of course, staying until the end of the year meant that they were more likely to take the terminal exams that lead to qualifications, but the key point from this research is that compulsion can lead to increased attainment.

Turning to international comparisons, recent experience in the state of Western Australia provides evidence that a change in the leaving age can increase participation, although it is too early for data on attainment. In 2006 the leaving age there was successfully changed from 15 to 16, and in 2008 they will move it from 16 to 17. Raising the leaving age in 2006 appears to have raised full-year participation from 80% to 98%.

Whilst noting that it is difficult to draw conclusions on the influence of the length of compulsory education on “early school leaving”, which means the proportion of 18–24 year olds with below level 2 qualifications and not in education or training, a recent European Commission report suggests that a recent increase in the leaving age in Poland may have led to a decrease in the rate of early school leaving (GHK (2005) *Study on Access to Education and Training, Basic Skills and Early School Leaving* ref: DG EAC 38/04).

And a review of evidence from Canada and the US (Oreopoulos (2005) *Stay in school: New lessons on the benefits of raising the legal-school leaving age*. C D Howe Institute Commentary; No 233; Dec 2005) suggests that raising the leaving age can have an impact on school completion rates, which means achievement of the High School Diploma or equivalent. Bigger gains were seen in improved weekly earnings and a reduction in the probability of being unemployed. These effects were seen despite the fact that the policies considered in this review aimed only to keep young people in school, and did not offer alternative options.

I hope that this further information is helpful to the committee.

April 2007

Written evidence

Memorandum submitted by the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. NAHT welcome the opportunity to give evidence on the subject of the Specialised Diplomas and would also appreciate the opportunity to give oral evidence in support of our concerns.
2. The setting aside of the Tomlinson report was an opportunity missed to resolve the difficulties and dilemmas facing 14–19 education. The Diplomas are a part of the proposed solution which could lead to the reform of the secondary examination system but announcements which carry mixed messages are in danger of jeopardising their progress. There is a real danger of a lack of cohesion in the planning of the future curriculum.
3. NAHT has great concerns about the timescale of the Specialised Diploma and the lack of involvement of practitioners at an early stage of their development. There are major issues relating to workforce development and the preparation of school and college staff to deliver the Diplomas. This is too important an initiative to be allowed to fail.
4. Diplomas are intended to be a solution to several different difficulties and run the risk of addressing none of the needs adequately. There is considerable confusion about their purpose and it is unreasonable to expect the same qualification to address, simultaneously, issues of parity of esteem for vocational and academic routes, university discrimination and disaffected young people.
5. NAHT would wish to comment on the difficulties facing schools and colleges in a world in which League Tables, funding pressures, Ofsted inspections and market forces place pressures which militate against trust and collaboration.

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE DIPLOMA

What progress has been made on the development of Diplomas to date? Where have been the sticking points?

6. The timescale for the introduction of Diplomas has been inappropriately and unrealistically short, considering the magnitude of the new initiative. There are also problems which arise from the juxtaposition of this initiative with the KS3 and other KS4 changes.
7. There has been an unrealistic assumption that the employers, with little or no detailed experience of curriculum and qualification design, could play the lead role with so little time for exploration and understanding of the potential impact of the new Diplomas. The work of QCA has been impressive, but so many complex issues have been introduced that their impact has been weakened.
8. The Diploma is intended to solve a number of curricular problems in one process. The issues associated with finding a motivating and appropriate course for the disaffected are very different from the issues facing a bright student who wishes to use a vocational-style educational experience as a way into Higher Education. There are also issues relating to the Diploma as an alternative course within mainstream GCSE work during Years 10 and 11. For the Diploma to be the answer to all these questions was too ambitious given the time allowed for its development.

What role have employers and the Sector Skills Councils played in the development of Diplomas?

9. Sector Skills Councils and employers have been centrally involved in the design and definition of the Diplomas. Unfortunately, the Awarding Bodies and schools and colleges were involved at too late a stage in the design process and this has caused considerable difficulty. The importance of the experience of practitioners was not sufficiently recognised at the outset. The different SSCs had different expectations and ambitions for the qualification and for this to be reconciled and moulded into a motivating and appropriate practical qualification which would appeal to the age range and would be manageable in school and college settings was extremely ambitious.
10. There remain major concerns about the content and the approach of the Diplomas but it is an achievement that they have more or less managed to deliver something within the timescale, however flawed.

Who is responsible for the co-ordination and development of Diplomas?

11. QCA have played a major role in the co-ordination and development of Diplomas and have been assiduous in involving schools, in some cases through the teacher associations and other bodies, which has helped to develop the Diploma to its current point.
12. The problems outlined earlier, however, remain and it is far from certain whether or not the Diplomas will be the successful product as initially envisaged.

Is there a case for a stronger co-ordinating role for one of the agencies involved, or for the appointment of a senior responsible officer or champion?

13. The QCA role, working alongside the professionals within the Awarding Bodies could be strengthened and recognised. The team are well aware of the potential pitfalls and problems and have systematically raised concerns about the timescale and the difficulties inherent in introducing such an ambitious system.

Is there a clear system for accrediting and awarding the Diplomas?

14. QCA have commissioned consultants and have taken this forward with the Awarding Bodies. Considerable financial investment will be made in the infrastructure which will support the introduction of the complex qualification, with its modules and key elements.

15. Considerable work, with consultation, has been undertaken in this respect and, while all the difficulties have not yet been fully resolved, work is clearly in progress to make this a valid and reliable mode of assessment.

16. Given the cost and resources of this initiative, it is essential that the Diploma is given every chance of success. A less frenetic timescale, with more opportunity for schools and colleges, and in their turn, parents and students, to understand the opportunities and the realities of the new qualification is essential.

TEACHER AND LECTURER TRAINING

What are current levels of teacher/lecturer training activity in preparation for Diplomas? Is this sufficient to make Diplomas a success?

17. NAHT has learned that work is being undertaken by the SSAT and QIA, along with the TDA, to prepare resources for the introduction of the Diplomas in September 2008. It is our understanding that these will be available from September 2007 and at that point only available to those partnerships which have successfully gone through the Gateway. This is clearly too short a timescale and does nothing to secure the future development of this qualification.

18. What is not clear is the nature of these materials. It appears that the NCSL have made available their coaching training to all schools and colleges who have applied to go through the "Gateway", irrespective of their success, but this is too little and too late.

19. Schools and colleges are expected to make decisions about the new qualification with very little information about the content (although some of this information about the first five lines is now available.) It is our understanding that the resources made available will focus on CPD aspects and not on the resources which will be required to deliver the Diplomas in the workplace and classroom. A side effect of the Diploma may well be that school staffing is unavoidably divided into a cohort of staff for KS3 and a different group of staff for 14–19. This would be undesirable and unhelpful.

20. Schools and colleges will be expected to deliver the Diplomas with industry-standard resources and by staff with high levels of experience within the industrial context. Staffing decisions need to be made well in advance of the introduction of a new course and professional development is vital in this process. Even for the second and third year introduction of the Diplomas, there is a difficulty with the timescale, in particular as those partnerships who are not early adopters will require even more support to reach the standards.

21. There has been no consultation or involvement of teacher associations and those bodies representing college lecturers in this work. This is a major omission which could have dire consequences.

CO-ORDINATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

What is the current level of co-ordination between colleges and schools in local areas?

22. Across the local authorities there is a huge variation in the levels of collaboration and the experience of working together. There is an alarming difference between those areas where pathfinders have been identified and the majority of the other local authorities.

23. Setting aside the practical difficulties of collaboration, ie transport and travel difficulties as in rural areas and issues relating to joint timetabling, there are far too many areas where they lag behind the leaders in joint 14–19 provision.

24. Collaboration is not supported by many of the divisive policies and approaches which have been developed in recent years. Schools who are in serious competition for students find it harder to work together with their perceived "rivals". League tables, funding pressures, head teacher and teacher shortages have exacerbated this situation and act as a disincentive to work together. The opportunities for some schools to expand and introduce sixth forms may work against the local authority's strategic role to plan places within their areas.

25. There is a surprising enthusiasm in most parts of the country for new developments in the 14–19 curriculum. Many schools and colleges have worked together to introduce the Increased Flexibility Programme and imaginative options for youngsters at 14. The great strides achieved with the BTEC qualification is a powerful example of the potential of working together and personalisation. Any suggestion that BTEC funding may be discontinued has proved unhelpful and alarming for many of our members. There is little point in destroying a qualification that is proving successful and developing opportunities for youngsters until or unless a better alternative is proven.

26. The announcement of the International Baccalaureate possibilities has not helped. This new development was not even mentioned in the 14–19 Implementation Plan which is supposed to be the blueprint for all of the new developments. It is for the local authority partnerships to decide who the IB provider may be. In reality, the schools and sixth forms most likely to be in a position to offer such an elite qualification are least likely to be in the forefront of Diploma offers and it is not clear how the Gateway process might work in this situation.

What are the barriers to co-ordination?

27. The schools and college system is still too built on competition and market forces for open and shared provision to be easy. Falling rolls in the secondary sector, shortages of teachers in certain subject areas and likely financial pressures may deter some from early involvement in innovative qualifications such as the Diplomas.

28. If the new Diplomas do not provide an interesting and robust qualification that attracts young people, the obstacles will be even more difficult to overcome.

29. In practical terms, sharing students from 14 presents difficulties. These include the huge expenses of transport costs and the logistics of these. In some areas of the country, for example in some areas of London, the social context presents further problems (eg gang areas can deter some youngsters from taking risks of personal safety to access courses in some establishments on “the wrong side of the tracks.”)

30. There are funding difficulties. Currently there is a lack of clarity on the 14–19 funding, with the different models for 14–16 and 16–19. How will the less popular courses be supported (freedom of choice and market forces may be incompatible and we do not have a mechanism for cross-subsidy at this point).

What are the lessons that can be learned from areas where there is strong co-ordination on 14–19?

31. In the most successful partnerships, head teachers and school staff have worked closely with colleges in an atmosphere of trust, supported by the local authority and the LSC. The practitioners have taken the lead and have real ownership of the project. (A clear example of this is Wolverhampton where the Heads opted to fund, full-time, one of their colleagues to develop 14–19 across the city. It was the Heads who took the initiative and it has borne fruit.)

32. Where the Local Authority or the LSC seeks to pressure or impose arrangements, it is unlikely to encourage schools to take the risks needed for the move to shared provision to succeed.

What are intermediary bodies such as LAs and LSCs doing to foster co-operation?

33. This varies across the country. Some local authorities are well placed and strongly capable of fostering 14–19 links. Some schools, colleges, LAs and LSCs have good relationships in their areas, although this has been damaged in some places through the difficulties inherent in LSC reorganisation.

34. Elsewhere, there is a range of readiness, from hesitantly enthusiastic to frighteningly unaware.

How engaged are head teachers and college principals in the Diploma agenda?

35. Head teachers and college principals are committed to working for their students and recognise that this means collaboration. Many were extremely disappointed by the rejection of the Tomlinson agenda, which offered a planned and coherent re-structuring of the qualification system at a time when it was badly needed. Many had contributed to the debate and, although the report has been placed aside, the principles and the enthusiasm still represent distilled thinking about the secondary curriculum.

36. Many, however, are keen to find a way forward and have unwarranted optimism about the Diplomas. It is essential that the Diplomas are not allowed to fail. Too many schools, colleges and, in particular, students have too much to lose.

How are the rules on post-16 expansion likely to affect the rollout of Diplomas?

37. As outlined above, the possibility for schools to develop sixth forms and the competition regulations, could potentially work against trust and collaboration.

38. In many areas, the clientele is delicately balanced and the introduction of a new Academy, or a new sixth form could threaten the viability of existing provision in an unplanned and unforeseen way.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL)

1. ATL supports a fresh approach to designing the school curriculum for KS4 and 5 pupils. The Diploma programme is clearly intended to inspire that. A curriculum that does not over emphasise a narrow range of academic skills but which adopts a wider conception of what it means to be an educated person in the 21st century. Academic skills are vital, but are not the whole story for young people growing up in the 21st century. ATL believes pupils from the Foundation Stage upwards should have access to a curriculum that has a more considered balance between transferring knowledge on the one hand and the gaining of a wide set of skills on the other. ATL's campaign for curriculum reform is predicated upon this approach.

2. There is plenty of evidence that many, perhaps the majority, of young people are looking for an educational experience that engages them in a way that a purely pen, paper and test curriculum cannot. In the past, a curriculum with wider aspirations than simply imparting a narrow range of mainly intellectual skills has been seen as almost synonymous with work related or vocational learning. But, vocational and practical/experiential learning are not always the same thing it must said. Referring specifically to the new Diploma programme, there does seem to be some confusion among stakeholders and interested parties as to whether the Diploma is a pre-vocational or a vocational qualification, and what this might mean for their design. In fact, a fairly brief perusal of the content published so far indicates a difference of understanding between the different Diploma design partnerships, never mind the programme as a whole. Putting this concern to one side, we are in favour of giving students choice and a diverse range of options, although the exact point in a pupil's school career when potentially life defining choices should be made is an open question. ATL feels the tension between providing a truly vocational qualification and experience, and one which provides a backdrop of relevant skills and attributes must be made explicit. It is possible that young people could be misled by this apparent ambiguity of intent on the part of the designers and implementers, and disappointed with the experience: expecting something more directly and functionally useful as an entry into industry. The multiple aims which Government seems to have for the Diploma work to amplify this problem: there may be clarity at policy level, but will there be clarity on the ground? Differing perceptions of what this qualification "means" will have to be carefully worked through at school level; and this will be made even less easy if the different Diplomas have different approaches themselves.

3. ATL fear that the plans now being cemented in place may, once again, reinforce the disparity of esteem between academic and vocational education. The intent is clearly the opposite of this: the intent is that the academic and the vocational should meld into a single experience. But by providing two distinct routes through KS4 and KS5, in contrast to the Tomlinson model, the worry must be that we are once again deepening the divide between the vocational and "worldly" curriculum and the academic. One route taken by the able and motivated, the other by those who are left, the troublesome, the poorly motivated and the less able. The retention in essentially their present form of GCSE and A Levels, not to mention the introduction of the International Baccalaureate, make this even more likely. GCSE and A Levels have been tinkered with for a variety of reasons, but still represent the main route through secondary schooling. In order for the Diploma programme to be credible to employers and those in HE, it will need to attract students from across the range of ability and aptitudes: in this way, resources of all kinds will adhere to it—not least being the quality of teachers attracted to its delivery, and the time and resources they are given in schools in order to make a success of it.

4. The main concerns expressed so far around the Diploma development process have to do with timings. For a qualification system this complex the pace of reform places pressure on the systems charged with delivering professional development and it is to be hoped that quality and completeness is not adversely affected: poor training will lead to poor implementation. If this programme gets off to a bad start, given its complexity and novelty, things may well get worse rather than better as pupil, parent and teacher perception of the programme turns against it. Exactly what training is to be delivered is yet to become clear but it is certain that with a qualification so closely keyed into industry and commerce the training will need to be part of an ongoing programme designed to keep teachers up to date rather than a one off orientation course designed to be "cascaded".

5. This Diploma is not simply a new qualification but a whole new method of working; it relies entirely on schools and colleges being able to work together cooperatively. This ATL finds wholly admirable, but struggles to see how this aligns with an existing system which emphasises entirely different values through testing and league tables.

6. The multi institutional delivery model obviously has its own intrinsic difficulties. The practical problems connected with implementation must not be underestimated, or their solutions under resourced, if the Diplomas are to be a success everywhere. Areas such as Wolverhampton have good and useful experience but the difficulties which non-urban areas will face must be properly acknowledged and faced up to. Once again, for the Diplomas to be credible they must be successful everywhere and for all students who wish to take advantage of them.

ATL—The education union—led by education professionals from across the sector and throughout the UK

ATL recognises the link between education policy and our members' conditions of employment. Our evidence-based policy making enables us to campaign and negotiate from a position of strength. We champion good practice and achieve better working lives for our members.

We help our members, as their careers develop, through first-rate research, advice, information and legal support.

Our 160,000 members—teachers, lecturers, headteachers and support staff—are empowered to get active locally and nationally. We are affiliated to the TUC, and work with Government and employers by lobbying and through social partnership

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by Shirley Arayan, Principal, Norton Radstock College

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The evidence we wish to submit concerns the processes which this college has been involved in culminating in the submission of self-assessment forms by the local authority: Bath and North East Somerset. We have listed the main factors which we feel have affected the process.

BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The college has had links with schools in its locality for more than 20 years and, more recently, been involved in Increased Flexibility Partnership work with schools delivering vocational programmes to Years 10–13 students both on the college site and within school premises. The college is currently part of two consortia who have submitted self-assessments to the DfES covering the first five Diplomas to be introduced in 2008.

FACTUAL INFORMATION

(i) The self-assessment process (and the writing of the form) was carried out in individual institutions (some working in long-established partnerships) led by the local authority and the LSC. The forms were worked on over a seven to eight week period in a series of meetings being approved at various stages by the Secondary School Head Teachers and College Principals.

(ii) The leadership offered by the local authority was questionable. There was a lack of coherence in the process and an apparent unawareness of where roles and responsibilities lay.

(iii) The requirements of the Specialised Diplomas were often misunderstood by the head teachers of the secondary schools who lacked information and were not aware that this could change the vocational curriculum already on offer nor that they would need to take part in the offer. This resulted in tensions developing in the process which were not resolved.

(iv) Opportunities to take advantage of the lessons learned in the schools and colleges' existing partnership work and work with employers were frequently overlooked.

(v) The capital bid opportunities within the Gateway process were seen by some as a way to access funding for special projects rather than to enhance delivery to young people of credible, sector relevant applied learning with real opportunities to practice their skills.

(vi) The delay in the Dyson Centre caused some head teachers' commitment to the Engineering Diploma self assessment process to be withdrawn.

(vii) A view point expressed was that working in engineering could be appropriate for students with lower attainment. This view seemed common to all vocational Diplomas for some head teachers.

(viii) Little account seemed to be taken of the need for employer links.

(ix) School heads were not prepared to acknowledge existing resources, in particular colleges having new capital bids with the potential to enhance Diploma delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Protocols for the conduct of Consortia would benefit the self assessment process and subsequent working.
- Protocols related particularly to the role of the local authority would support the process.
- Wider dissemination of information regarding the Specialised Diplomas could ensure that all those taking part in the process understand their requirements and structure.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by Rathbone

1. INTRODUCTION TO RATHBONE

1.1 Rathbone is a national training and educational charity with 70 sites. It supported over 12,000 learners in 2005–06 year and is dedicated to working with young people who are excluded or who are at risk of exclusion from mainstream education.

1.2 The organisation has prioritised growth in the numbers of young people aged 14–16 by offering alternative provision and delivery to that of established institutions. This combined with the organisation's ability to provide a holistic approach to a young person's transition in learning has placed Rathbone in a strong position to make a significant contribution to the delivery of the specialised Diplomas.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 Evidence collated nationally by Rathbone suggests that progress in the development of 14–19 specialised Diplomas varies significantly by area in direct correlation to the strength of the local area partnership and the resources allocated for co-ordination.

2.2 Our evidence suggests that the college sector dominates the development of specialised Diplomas which means that the involvement of Rathbone and other work based learning providers can be marginalised. We found this to be the case in the majority of partnerships.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is important that support is given to organisations like Rathbone to ensure that all young people with the potential to benefit from specialised Diplomas have the opportunity to do so.

3.2 Our evidence and experience leads us to the conclusion that there should be an identified impartial regional lead to oversee development of the Diplomas and to ensure the involvement of all appropriate sectors, with parity amongst partners.

3.3 Guidance should be provided at a national level to ensure that partnerships are addressing the needs of those young people at risk of exclusion from mainstream education through alternative types of provision which focus on a holistic approach to the young person's learning.

4. SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

4.1 There is generally no evidence to suggest employer involvement at a local level in the development of the specialised Diplomas. The exception to this is Yorkshire, where employers have set the agenda to meet their needs. Guidance states that the Sector Skills Councils (SSC's) should be the vehicle by which employers contribute. However, evidence suggests that SSC's have not participated at a regional level either. In the North West requests were made by Rathbone to register an interest in development work with the SSC's, but there was a lack of awareness of the 14–19 Diploma initiative and so far no progress has been made.

4.2 In general the local authority (LA) has taken a lead or key role in co-ordination. In some areas such as Coventry, the LA has allocated a manager dedicated to the development process. In Wolverhampton a "learning partnership" consisting of key education and training providers and LA representation has taken the lead—this scenario is mirrored in Yorkshire.

4.3 Where there is strong co-ordination, as in Coventry, Wolverhampton and Yorkshire, there appears to be a systematic approach to activity. However, the Rathbone experience in other areas could be described as "frantic and rushed" with weak co-ordination.

4.4 There is a view in some local areas that work based learning providers have been marginalised, in some cases even excluded, whilst the college sector appears to be dominant even in the strongest of partnerships. In the North West some colleges have expressed the view that that they will deliver all Diplomas and not work in consortiums.

4.5 In respect of accreditation of Diplomas, indications are that there is little guidance and much development is still being undertaken, with the exception of childcare where the Diploma has been agreed.

4.6 With regards to training for delivery of the new Diplomas, or any related activity, the national picture indicates no discussion or implementation of training at this stage.

4.7 Involvement by other stakeholders appears disparate. The Local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC) is supporting stakeholders in the Black Country, but elsewhere there is no obvious participation. Head teachers are involved, either directly within partnerships or through groups such as "Area School Federations".

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by VT Education and Skills (VTES)

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF DIPLOMAS

VTES is very supportive of the notion of establishing a national entitlement to all 14 Diploma lines by 2013 at the latest. We particularly endorse the Gateway self-assessment process and its focus on collaboration and partnership working within a context of resource planning. We recognise the opportunities to improve the skills development of young people by defining and accrediting functional skills and relating this qualification to the General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSE) in English, Mathematics and ICT. The opportunities afforded by the introduction of extended projects for all level three learners are similarly welcomed.

The Diploma developments are proceeding, but we are a long way from final specifications. There are some fundamental problems associated with the current model which we would like to bring to the Committee's attention.

1. We are concerned that the current content proposals for the 2008 round of pilot Diplomas including the total volume of the qualification may work against the declared outcomes of the Diploma. The volumes of the award as articulated as either guided learning hours (glhs) or in terms of the proposed GCSE or A level equivalences will not attract learners in the numbers required to make the intended impact on the future prospects of our 14-19 learner cohort. It seems inequitable that whereas GCSE and GCE A level students will have significant choice over combinations, levels of awards and volume and types of qualification sought, Diploma students will be required to study one applied principal area of learning at a single level incorporating Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills, Functional Skills, Project or Extended Project plus additional studies. Thus those who may be excited by the content and nature of learning and achievement will be discouraged by its volume and size.

2. The rigid articulation of the levels of the Diplomas will not support the aim of meeting the multiple abilities of learners and the opportunities for stretch and challenge that may be offered by the interlocking awards of flexible frameworks and qualifications. We are committed to the concept of personalised learning and the progression through levels by "stage" rather than "age". We are therefore concerned about the apparent content and structure of the level 1 and level 2 awards which, we feel, could easily lead to a "selection" process where institutions designate learners as "level 1" or "level 2" learners at 14+, rather than providing all learners with an entitlement to pass through the levels at their own pace.

3. Similarly, whilst we are extremely supportive of the concept of a "Foundation Learning Tier" and are keen to see this development as a success, we are anxious to ensure that there are clear progression routes through the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) from Foundation Learning Tier. To underpin the Diploma at an early stage with a credit framework would reinforce the importance of the learner achievement record or transcript and allow learners to reflect their abilities, learning and achievement across levels and at volumes that suit their needs and reflects their achievement.

It is very valuable that information, advice and guidance (IAG) has been recognised in that process as one of the core areas that must be developed for young people to benefit fully from the roll out of the specialised Diplomas. We comment more fully on this in our submission to the committee regarding post-16 skills training.

ABOUT VT EDUCATION AND SKILLS

VT Education and Skills (VTES), a division of VT Group plc, is a private sector company working almost exclusively in the public sector where our major customers are the DfES, LSC, Home Office, local authorities and government agencies.

VTES is among the largest and fastest growing private sector providers of education services in value, range and quality. VTES' main areas of activity are information, advice and guidance (IAG), work-based learning and school support services, each delivered by a separate business unit. This coverage is unmatched in the private sector in the UK.

VT Careers Management is one of the leading IAG companies in England, delivering high quality and innovative services under contract to the DfES and LSC to seven Connexions Partnerships and managing eight Nextstep agencies.

VT Training is the largest work-based training provider in the UK, specialising in delivering NVQs and workplace assessment in five main sectors: hospitality; social care; engineering; active sport and leisure, retail and business administration. VT Training holds work-based learning contracts in each of the nine regions across the country and Train to Gain contracts in the South East, South West, London, East of England, East Midlands, West Midlands and North East.

For the last two years we have been involved in a unique partnership with Surrey County Council—VT Four S—to deliver school and Local Education Authority Services across the UK. It combines the best commercial practices with the values and principles of the public sector. Already this new partnership is one of the largest school support service organisations in the country, providing consultancy, advice, training and development.

Most recently, we have become involved in the Building Schools for the Future programme, and in the last few weeks have been appointed as the long-term strategic partner of the London Borough of Greenwich. We are looking forward to working on this exciting project which will see the renewal of 13 schools within the borough in a way that will transform educational opportunity for young people in the area, and for the wider community.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK)

LIFELONG LEARNING UK

1.1 Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) is the independent employer led Sector Skills Council for community learning and development;¹ further education; higher education; work based learning; and libraries, archives and information services.

1.2 LLUK provides the strategic perspective for workforce planning and development for the sector across the four countries of the UK.

1.3 We are responsible for defining and developing the Sector Qualifications Strategy and are licensed by the UK governments to set standards for occupational competence in the delivery and support of learning. These standards are used to inform the recruitment and professional development of our employer's staff.

1.4 LLUK leads stakeholders in the collection and collation of workforce data and provides analysis on workforce characteristics and trends to better inform future workforce planning. We also work with partners to improve the dialogue between our employers and those who look to the lifelong learning sector to meet their own skills needs.

1.5 As the Sector Skills Council for the employers in the skills system post-14 (outside schools) we have a key role, recognised by Alan Johnson, Lord Leitch and others recently, in ensuring appropriate and effective principals, vice chancellors, teachers, tutors, trainers and support staff can be recruited and have access to the right training and development. We are currently working with DfES in particular on programmes to reform the workforce across the skills system and discussing how we can best support the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly and Northern Ireland Department for Employment and Learning.

Further information can be found on our website: www.lluk.org

2. ROLE OF LLUK IN DELIVERING 14–19 DIPLOMAS

2.1 LLUK is one of the 6 key partners working with the DfES on developing the Workforce to deliver the 14–19 Diplomas.

2.2 LLUK is specifically leading, with the Training and Development Agency for schools, a programme to develop the new and existing staff who will deliver the 14–19 Diplomas.

¹ This includes Community Development, Working with Parents, Youth Work, Development Education, Community Based Adult Learning, Family Learning and Community Education. More detail on request.

2.3 This programme has a number of key elements:

- 2.3.1 Report on good practice in delivering 14–19 pathfinders and increased flexibility programmes, specifically looking at developing and supporting the workforce.
- 2.3.2 A Training Needs Analysis tool to support those centres that pass through the “gateway”.
- 2.3.3 Guidance as to the professional development needs of teachers delivering the Diplomas.
- 2.3.4 Information, advice and guidance on CPD and ITT service for schools, colleges and training providers.
- 2.3.5 Industrial updating programme.
- 2.3.6 An in-service route to QTLS (Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills) status available from 2008 for new teachers.
- 2.3.7 Review of the needs of support staff.

2.4 We are currently on track to achieve our critical milestones as agreed with the DfES.

2.5 In all activities contributing to this work we are working with the other workforce development partners (the Training and Development Agency for Schools, the Quality Improvement Agency, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, the Centre for Excellence in Leadership and the National College for School Leadership) and with the wider 14–19 Diploma steering group partners including the Diploma Development Partnerships, SSDA, QCA and of course the DfES.

2.6 David Hunter, Chief Executive of LLUK, sits on the 14–19 Diploma Chief Executives Group chaired by Rt Hon Bill Rammell MP.

2.7 Simon Bellamy, 14–19 Development Manager sits on the DfES’s 14–19 Implementation Group which reports on risk and identifies blockages. Simon also sits on all the other programme delivery boards associated with the 14–19 Specialised Diplomas.

3. DETAIL

3.1 Below are summarised key issues in response to your specific questions. As our area of expertise is around the teacher and lecturer training we have just submitted specific answers to this area.

3.2 We will forward a copy of the research report titled “Excellence in supporting applied learning” which is the evidence base to underpin the development of the new and existing workforce that will deliver 14–19 Diplomas. This research has been built on extensive desk research, including a review of evaluations of existing programmes, plus interviews with those delivering increased flexibility programmes and 14–19 pathfinders. The final version will be available from week commencing 8 January to be published formally in February.

3.3 The answers below arise from this evidence base and our extensive engagement with colleges, training providers, schools and key stakeholders with a role in delivering the 14–19 agenda.

3.4 Where we refer to “both sectors” this means both schools and the FE system which includes colleges and other providers.

4. RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS ON TEACHER AND LECTURER TRAINING

4.1 *What are current levels of teacher/lecturer training activity in preparation for Diplomas? Is this sufficient to make Diplomas a success?*

- Current levels in terms of courses are few as Diploma specifications are not published yet.
- Difficult to do Initial Teacher Training in both sectors prior to 2008 as trainees would be required to do “teaching practice” in the Diplomas themselves and these are of course not being taught.
- Therefore initially we are developing Continuing Professional Development for existing teachers in both sectors (schools and FE System).
- An “Evidence base” of current best practice derived from Increased Flexibility Programme and 14–19 pathfinders will be published at the beginning of February (agreed draft attached), and a toolkit which emphasises the desirable characteristics of teachers of the Diplomas, based on our research evidence, will be published at the end of February.
- An electronic training needs analysis for aspiring Diploma teachers, based on the Toolkit, will be published in April.
- Conferences will be held at the end of February for potential training providers (both Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and Initial Teacher Training (post-14) (ITT)) to introduce the Evidence Base and Toolkit and prepare for the Training Needs Analysis.
- Planned development of a dedicated website www.teach14-19.org as a “one stop shop” for all enquires, information etc for those wishing to teach the 14–19 Diplomas.

- Please note—all of the above involve close joint working between LLUK and TDA, The underlying philosophy being that, if we are expecting colleges/schools to work together, then LLU/TDA must be exemplary in presenting a united front.
- CPD/ITT course development will start from Easter 2007 as per DfES milestones.
- LLUK recommends that DfES continue to support the development of generic training to build the skills and competence of the teaching workforce for the 14–19 Diplomas post-CSR 2007.

4.2 *What is the current level of co-ordination between colleges and schools in local areas?*

- Information from regional meetings suggests colleges on board, schools less so. Information from Training providers patchy, but certainly larger ones are interested.
- Where Increased Flexibility Programme/14–19 pathfinder established cooperation good, probably less so in other areas.
- Good where schools see Diplomas as a way to improve KS4 results hence schools league table performance.
- Less good where schools KS4 results good and where there is a “if it ain’t broke” mentality.
- LLUK would recommend an audit of cooperation via local authority 14–19 coordinators.

4.3 *What are the barriers to co-ordination?*

- Geographical spread of schools and colleges in rural areas (eg North Cambridgeshire, West Cornwall) where it is more than 20 minutes travel between sites and there are a finite number of 14–19-year-olds or only a single provider.
- Long standing competition between schools and colleges in urban areas.
- Lack of expertise and experience in taking collaborative work a step further, eg in the pooling of budgets.
- Turnover of staff.
- Perception that this initiative is for the less bright.
- Wariness and lack of parity of esteem between schools and college/training provider staff.
- Time to build strong partnerships.
- View from schools that “colleges will do that” (specifically this said by a known assistant head from a large comprehensive).
- Schools thinking that they can go it alone eg school in Berks that has (allegedly) bought a big warehouse to do the Diplomas in.
- LLUK strongly recommends keeping the gateway for phases 1, 2 and 3 small, building on existing strong partnerships so they can concentrate on delivering excellent learning.
- LLUK also recommends that support is put in place for those that fail the gateway to ensure that by 2010–13 they are ready to start delivering the Diploma. This is particularly important in rural areas.

4.4 *What are the lessons that can be learned from areas where there is strong co-ordination on 14–19?*

- Innovative use of e-learning methods.
- Robust strategic management structures are essential.
- Strong employer engagement essential.
- Strong “branding” of partnerships essential.
- Concentration on quality rather than quantity.
- Data used to plan and evaluate across a partnership.
- On-going staff training very important.
- Industrial placements for teaching staff essential.
- Teacher mentoring very important.
- Mutually inclusive Information Advice and Guidance.
- Vertical and horizontal coherence.
- Robust Quality Assurance.

(This answer is specifically taken from the taken from “Evidence base” draft report. This evidence base is built from interviews with practitioners involved in Increased Flexibility programme and 14–19 pathfinders)

4.5 *What are intermediary bodies such as LAs and LSCs doing to foster co-operation?*

- All local authorities and LSCs have 14–19 staff (usually coordinators) in place.
- Most regions, counties and unitary authorities have 14–19 partnerships in place.
- However some places have a very large number—Suffolk has 14 which makes it complex for regional and national partners to engage.

4.6 *How engaged are head teachers and college principals in the Diploma agenda?*

- Similar to above.
- Those involved in Increased Flexibility Pathways and pathfinder programmes have bought in, others are cautious, particularly from schools.
- College principals and training provider CEOs are particularly concerned about funding streams.
- Teachers/tutors/trainers are mostly concerned about how this will change their jobs, with the possibility for some of teaching a new age cohort, raising the issue of what skills they will need to develop and how this development will be provided.
- Research among a range of college and learning provider staff who expressed an interest in delivering the 14–19 Diploma indicates that the most commonly expressed concern is how they will be able to deal with challenging behaviour.

4.7 *How are the rules on post-16 expansion likely to affect the rollout of Diplomas?*

- The International Baccalaureate could be perceived as aimed at the “crème-de-la-crème” therefore Diplomas do not become “all ability”.
- If all schools are to be able to have sixth forms, small sixth forms will be dependent on partnerships for provision and this could encourage partnership working while at the same time raising challenges re co-ordination across multiple providers.

4.8 *Other points*

- Funding is major concern for all the partners.
- If the funding is given to schools under “Local Management of Schools” the schools can spend it as they wish, so a lesser amount of funding may reach the other partners gearing up to deliver the Diplomas.
- Whatever funding system is used must ensure that the money reaches those for whom it is intended.
- The money meant for Diplomas must be expended, as directly as possible on the Diplomas.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by the Association for College Management (ACM)

The Association for College Management is the TUC affiliated trade union and professional association that champions, represents and supports managers in the post-16 education and training sector. Our membership embraces academic and business managers at several levels including principals. We welcome the select committee inquiry into 14–19 developments and are ready to contribute to this work in any way that might be helpful.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

1. *Status of the developments*

There is an increased sense that the development of the Specialist Diplomas is accorded the status of a pilot or trial rather than a fully-fledged implementation. The original government statement that the first Specialised Diplomas would be “implemented” from 2008 has more recently been changed to say that they would be “piloted” from this date.

KEY CONCERN

It would be helpful for students, families and professionals to have clarity concerning the overall time scale for the new qualifications.

2. Vocational nature of SDs

This Association believes that SDs should be vocationally related while retaining a broad general base and the capacity to be shaped to individual student needs. Sector Skills Councils appear to agree with at least the first part of this judgement. However if SDs are not regarded as fully “vocational” this raises the question of why employers are taking the lead in their development. In our view it is important that the new qualifications meet distinctly different learning needs than those met by A levels. We should not fall into the old trap of imagining that the only way to secure parity of esteem is to make the vocational side qualifications resemble academic side qualifications. Indeed we suggest that the parity of esteem debate is unhelpful: let us concentrate on developing first rate qualifications that offer all of our young learners an excellent, modern and accessible education. That, rather than parity of esteem, is our major goal: when we succeed, the parity of esteem issue will wither away. We are concerned therefore that the draft SDs (except in Construction) have very little practical content. We are particularly concerned that the SDs should respond to the needs of those not currently achieving level 2. Our failure to meet the needs of this group is the main barrier to increasing participation in post-16 learning. At a higher level Specialist Diplomas should provide good progression to Foundation Degrees.

The draft materials produced so far display an essentially academic approach to learning (eg “describe/list/define”), rather than the applied approach common to, for example, BTEC Nationals. Furthermore, the learning content as indicated by the draft specifications for the SDs suggests a rather “academic” approach to their development. There is also evidence of significant diversity of approach across the different strands, and in some cases we are not confident that all of the specifications are appropriate to the level to which they are addressed. Awarding Bodies were concerned about the variability in those elements. In particular there was significant variation in the scope they appear to allow for moving between pathways, and the relative emphasis on general and vocational learning.

KEY CONCERN

It is essential that this new pathway meets learning needs distinct from those of the students who choose A levels. By this we mean the needs of young people who benefit from a vocational focus to their work and contextualised, applied learning. It should create and support visible, valuable progression routes. While the SD should be vocationally focused, that focus should be based in a broad programme of learning, with vocational elements coherently integrated. This, in our view, will best serve the interests of learners. At present we are not confident that we are on course to achieve this consistently across all strands.

3. Longer term reform

We remain unclear as to whether the SDs are paving the way for more far-reaching reform after 2008 towards a Diploma model or whether they are a long term third strand next to two separate strands: the academic (A level/ GCSE) and the vocational (apprenticeship).

While recently there has perhaps been less talk about the A level “gold standard”, there is still a paucity of debate about the shortcomings of A levels (for example the increased dependence on rote learning and standardised answers); it would be helpful to promote a fuller debate about the quality of learning A levels provide.

The Association remains convinced that the optimal framework would offer:

- Comprehensive Diploma system for all 14–19-year-olds subsuming all current qualifications, and embracing apprenticeships.
- Multi-level system from Entry Level upwards.
- Common core of learning.
- Appropriate assessment for learning.
- Personalised programmes within a common framework.

KEY CONCERN

We hope that the current developments will pave the way for more thorough going long term reform towards the kind of model we have outlined above. ACM supports a comprehensive Diploma system for all 14–19-year-olds—one which subsumes current qualifications and embraces apprenticeship.

4. *Workforce development*

Professional development for the implementation of the SDs is important to their successful introduction. There are three elements to this work: post-16/school partnerships; leadership; and quality materials. The programmes will cover all 14 strands. A wide range of interested parties are contributing to the DfES working group. However development work in many areas, such as CPD, is difficult to take forward until the final versions of the SDs are available.

KEY CONCERN

We need sufficient clarity about the new arrangements to begin the process of professional development. We are some distance from this at present.

5. *Information, Advice and Guidance*

New IAG quality standards should be in place by April 2007. These are intended to have an impact on IAG practice in schools and colleges across the 11–19 age range, both in terms of independent external provision and on provision internal to organisations.

KEY CONCERN

Advising and supporting young people on to the right course is the *sine qua non* of success and it is of great importance that the new standards truly impact on practice and values in the field of IAG. At present we remain anxious that much of the guidance given in schools is more concerned about the interests (numbers in the sixth form) of that institution than the interests of the young person.

6. *Aiming for excellent, appropriate programmes for all*

At present students on programmes of all types are assessed in ways that too often de-motivate them rather than enable them to learn more effectively. Teaching methods, contexts and materials are insufficiently varied, inadequately considered and reviewed, and often subject rather than learner-centred. At present there are serious shortcomings in 14–19 qualifications. Neither academic nor vocational programmes are sufficiently well constructed, challenging or accessible.

We are concerned too that current developments neglect the long standing and respected idea that there are some things that all young people need to learn as citizens or to keep their progression options open.

KEY POINT

It would be helpful to encourage genuine and wholesale reflection on assessment for learning and on inspirational pedagogy. It would be helpful to have the scope for coherent, personalised programmes within a common framework that takes account of broader demands that may legitimately be made of education.

7. *Operational issues*

In our view reflections on the development of the SDs should be led at all times by the needs and interests of students. However in this the final section we would like to make a series of points about how the work demanded of schools and colleges and other organisations (including awarding bodies) could be helped and supported so that they are able to provide the very best provision for students:

- The vocational nature of the SDs necessitates a good deal of partnership working. Funding the new SDs should take into account the costs of that mode of working.
- The “Gateway” stage, will assess whether sufficiently robust arrangements are in place to operate the SDs. How will it properly assess the expertise of the people running the programmes? There is also potential confusion since those who get through the “gateway” stage may assume they have full approval, whereas approval by Awarding Bodies is determined at a separate, later stage.
- How will Awarding Bodies influence the content of the SDs? Formally the Diploma Design Partnerships are in charge of designing the content of the Diplomas. At present the Diploma for construction appears to include only construction modules, whereas awarding bodies are likely to wish to include elements of broader learning. By contrast, the emerging model from the creative and media SSC seems to envisage a wide range of option combinations. The case for variation—if there is one—must be based on students’ needs and interests.
- It is unclear whether QCA will be regulating with respect to whole qualifications, or against individual components (units).

- QCA's consultation document Framework for Achievement envisaged a move towards a unitised, credit-based system. It raised the prospect of a centralised bank of units, with qualifications based on different mixes of units drawn from this bank. Discussions were originally led by QCA and LSC on how to make such a system work, but DfES has now taken control, and set up a group called the National Vocational Qualifications Reform Group. This group has in turn spawned separate sub-groups, each looking at a different strand of activity: sector qualification strategies (led by SSDA)/qualifications design (led by the regulators)/funding issues (led by the funding bodies)/rationalisation of existing qualifications (led by the awarding bodies)/communications strategy (led by DfES).

The aim appears to be that all qualifications should be subsumed within a new framework which would replace the existing National Qualifications Framework. However GCSEs and A levels are currently outside the scope of these discussions, whereas the new Specialised Diplomas are included. The latest document envisages that, over time, GCSEs and A levels will be subsumed in the framework; in our view this is essential for system coherence.

KEY POINT

We hope we have illustrated there persists a good deal of structural confusion and over complication around the process of designing, developing and implementing the SDs. Greater clarity and rationality would benefit all concerned.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by the Royal Society of Chemistry

The Royal Society of Chemistry is the largest organisation in Europe for advancing the chemical sciences. Supported by a network of over 43,000 members worldwide and an internationally acclaimed publishing business, our activities span education and training, conferences and science policy, and the promotion of the chemical sciences to the public.

The issues raised in the inquiry would be of concern should the development of a Science Diploma be agreed. We would be particularly concerned that those currently charged with developing Diplomas may not have sufficient experience of curriculum development and we strongly recommend that the developers be required to consult with recognised curriculum developers in the field as part of their remit.

In March 2006 we wrote to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools outlining our views on a Diploma for Science. Attached is a copy of the letter.²

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by the National Education Business Partnership Network (NEBPN)

1. The National Education Business Partnership Network (NEBPN) is the representative body for local education business partnerships (EBPs) in England and Wales. Other members include specialist providers of education business link activities. A number of employers also belong to the NEBPN.

2. EBPs vary in size and structure according to local circumstances. However, they all help employers to make a contribution to the education of young people in schools and colleges. A key aspect of their work is support for the work experience programme, which enables young people in key stage 4 (that is, aged between 14 and 16) to spend a week or a fortnight with a local employer, experiencing the world of work at first hand. EBPs also support a remarkable range of other activities such as science and engineering projects, enterprise education and arranging opportunities for teachers to spend time in industry.

3. Specialised Diplomas are being designed by development partnerships led by Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), so that employers in key sectors of the economy have a major influence on the overall design and content of each Diploma.

4. Students will find the specialist content of Diplomas much more interesting and relevant if they appreciate how it relates to the real world. Employers will therefore have a vital part to play in delivering the Diplomas. They can help schools and colleges by:

- providing real-life case studies and projects for students to work on;
- acting as additional course tutors and mentors;
- providing talks and demonstrations;
- arranging work experience linked to the specialist Diploma; and
- providing industry placements for teachers and lecturers.

² Not printed.

5. Some of this activity can be organised nationally, either by SSCs or by major employers with sites in many parts of the country. However, this will not be enough. Small and medium-sized businesses are rarely in touch with their SSC. They generally prefer to work with local agencies—particularly EBPs.

6. For this reason, NEBPN is working with the Sector Skills Development Agency and a growing number of SSCs to provide a new channel of communication between Diploma Development Partnerships, national agencies such as the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and the Learning and Skills Council and local EBPs. A conference was held at Warwick University in March 2006 specifically for this purpose, and various meetings and briefing events have taken place since then. Most recently, a number of SSCs attended the NEBPN national conference in December in order to brief EBPs on plans to pilot specialised Diplomas.

7. NEBPN very strongly believes that EBPs should have a significant role in making sure specialised Diplomas work as intended. EBPs are run by people who have a clear understanding of both education and industry. They help employers understand the language of education, and vice versa. They help tailor services to the needs of individual schools and colleges. They listen to local employers to find out what they can offer and how they prefer to work. They also manage some of the important safeguards, such as health, safety and child protection checks, which could become cumbersome if left to individual schools and businesses.

8. In short, EBPs provide an excellent local brokerage service to schools and employers alike.

9. NEBPN wishes to draw the Committee's attention to two concerns.

10. First, there is some confusion about the exact aims of specialised Diplomas.

11. On 7 December 2007, Lord Adonis took part in a live web chat.³ He answered two questions on specialised Diplomas. One questioner asked, "What can we do to make sure all young people, including academically gifted young people, experience practical learning both in key stage 4 and when they move into the sixth form?" Lord Adonis replied:

"From 2008 we are introducing a new range of vocational Diplomas precisely to address this issue. These Diplomas will be available in all localities—and although we will not be obliging students to take them, we believe they will be highly attractive to students of all aptitudes and abilities, including the most able."

Another questioner asked, "How do you propose to broaden the curriculum to develop the creative and practical talents of the less academic children?" Lord Adonis replied:

"From 2008 we are introducing new vocational Diplomas into the school curriculum, to meet precisely the point you raise. The subjects will include construction, engineering, health and social care, ICT and media technology."

12. Our concern, no doubt shared with others, is that the specialised Diplomas may fall between two stools. Lord Adonis says they will appeal to students of all aptitudes and abilities, including the most able. He also says that they are being introduced "precisely" to meet a need to develop the creative and practical talents of less academic children.

13. NEBPN firmly believes in the value of work-related learning for all young people. Students likely to achieve straight A grades at GCSE and A level benefit from experiencing the world of work, and from seeing how their learning fits into an industrial context. However, we doubt if specialised Diplomas really can appeal equally to students across all levels of academic ability. There is a real risk that Diplomas will—like previous vocational qualifications—end up being ignored completely by the vast majority of academically-gifted young people. We believe this would be a great shame.

14. Secondly, NEBPN is concerned that work-related learning has developed in a piecemeal manner over recent years. There is no overall strategy in place, linking all the many strands of government policy and myriad educational initiatives that are launched each year. The result is extremely confusing to education and employers alike. How are they supposed to know about all the different opportunities on offer? And how are they meant to choose between them? EBPs do their best to guide schools, colleges and employers in their local area, enabling them to make good use of initiatives which best support their own priorities. However, employers increasingly complain that the picture is unnecessarily complicated. They fear that specialised Diplomas will add another layer of confusion.

15. Against that background, NEBPN, the Edge Foundation and Business in the Community propose to set up an employer commission to develop an overarching strategy for linking employers and education. This will of course consider ways of encouraging employers to support specialised Diplomas, but in the context of a coherent strategy rather than as yet another in a long list of disparate activities. We will set up the commission by March, and aim to report by June. We will send a copy of the commission's report to the Select Committee as soon as it is ready.

January 2007

³ The transcript is available at <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page10560.asp>.

Memorandum submitted by the Federation of Awarding Bodies

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This submission is made by the Federation of Awarding Bodies, the trade association for vocational awarding bodies, on behalf of its members.

1.2 It notes that there are significant technical challenges to be resolved for the first five lines of learning and that five months is the shortest timeframe within which awarding bodies have ever attempted to develop a major national qualification.

1.3 Diploma Development Partnerships (DDPs) were hampered by the limited guidance they were given at the outset as to the nature of the “content” they were required to deliver. As a result there is ongoing intense work between DDPs and awarding bodies to resolve structural issues and inconsistencies.

1.4 In our view there has been a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities and a lack of shared vision. None of the key governmental agencies had either the capacity or the expertise to deliver what was expected of them. The process has been too linear. Involvement of awarding bodies, and crucially of providers, has come too late, impairing a proper consideration of deliverability issues.

1.5 Perhaps because of the need to resolve basic issues with specifications there has been little work to date on accreditation and awarding arrangements and these are now pressing.

2. INTRODUCTION TO THE FEDERATION OF AWARDING BODIES

2.1 The Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) is the trade association for vocational awarding bodies and works to open up a dialogue between awarding bodies and the different regulatory and stakeholder organisations. Our activities are focussed on achieving a vocational qualification system that meets the differing needs of learners, employers, education and training providers and awarding bodies as well as offering good value to funding bodies and taxpayers.

2.2 The Federation seeks to be pro-active on policy and development issues on behalf of its members and has a number of strategic working groups through which it forms its views and positions. In relation to this inquiry, the two most relevant are the 14–19 Strategic Working Group and the Centres Strategic Working Group. The Federation and individual awarding bodies have put extensive resources into the Diploma development process to date and have participated in a multitude of QCA groups, as well as developing their own working relationships with DDPs. FAB is represented on the recently re-formed Diploma Project Board.

OUR SUBMISSION

3. *What progress has been made on the development of Diplomas to date? Where are the sticking points?*

In relation to the first five lines of learning, component by component:

3.1 Principal Learning/Personal Learning and Thinking Skills

The criteria for principal learning were delivered to awarding bodies in December 2006 so work on developing the qualifications has only recently started, but is due for completion by May 2007.

Part of the development work requires awarding bodies to integrate the assessment of Personal Learning and Thinking Skills across the Principal Learning, which will provide technical challenges which have yet to be fully explored. Also it has yet to be determined how the principal learning will be graded and assessed.

Almost certainly, five months is the shortest timeframe within which awarding bodies have ever attempted to develop a major national qualification.

3.2 The Functional Skills (English, Maths and ICT)

Two models, each with their own variants, are being trialled, one where each Functional Skill will be a stand-alone qualification, and one where each skill will be integrated within the relevant GCSE. Although this work is complex and is dogged by tight deadlines, it is likely that a range of qualifications, suited to the needs of different learners, will be available on time. We are unaware of any direct involvement in this development work from DDPs.

3.3 The Project

The Extended Project at level 3 is currently being piloted by a limited number of awarding bodies across a range of different types of learners in traditional and vocational settings. Far less work appears to have been carried out at levels 1 and 2.

3.4 Additional Learning

The Additional Learning component can be taken from any accredited qualification and so might include a language qualification or something of special interest to the learner, such as music. Although there are issues about the administration of such an open-ended arrangement and identifying the size and level of all potential qualifications, this can be progressed.

3.5 Specialist Learning

The specialist learning, based on the vocational subject being studied, can be drawn from any existing vocational qualification in the same way. However, a number of DDPs have each specified particular content that they wish to see included in the specialist learning, which will have to be developed as new qualifications/units if it is to be included. In most cases, this potentially vast amount of additional development work will need to take place after the May submission date.

3.6 The main sticking points

In summary, the remaining major sticking points (for the first five lines) are:

- A lack of a final position on grading.
- A lack of clear criteria for how the Principal Learning should be assessed.
- Technical challenges associated with incorporating Personal Learning and Thinking Skills within the Principal Learning.
- Separate piloting of various complex Functional Skills models, driven by the timetable to integrate them within GCSEs.
- Emphasis on piloting of the Extended Project at level 3, where this is seen as key to wider reforms, leaving much work to be done at levels 1 and 2.
- No clear programme for developing specialist learning from content already produced by DDPs.

4. *What roles have employers and Sector Skills Councils played in the development of Diplomas?*

4.1 Diploma Development Partnerships have played a centre-stage role in Diploma-related activity. Each has been led by a lead Sector Skills Council.

4.2 Although the overall structures of DDPs has provided for some input from a wide range of stakeholders, the dominant influence has been employers, in keeping with the policy that Diplomas should be “employer led”. Most DDPs have engaged in large scale consultations with employers in their sectors to confirm support for the content they have produced.

4.3 Unfortunately, DDPs were given little clear guidance at the outset as to the nature of the “content” they were required to deliver. There was little clarity as to whether they were simply specifying areas of study that employers would like to see covered, identifying the attributes they would expect to find in successful Diploma candidates, developing detailed teaching plans, putting together assessment criteria and learning outcomes, defining a whole curriculum etc.

4.4 After June 2006, the awarding bodies, QCA and DDPs began an intense period of reworking the original DDP content. The content was in many ways an extremely valuable expression of the learning that employers were looking for and we would not support the view that they are an unsound basis for developing Diplomas. However, not surprisingly, given the nature and capacity of DDPs and the lack of criteria at the outset, there were difficulties with:

- The level of challenge which varied within and across lines.
- The “size” of the Diplomas, which varied.
- Very different approaches to structure.
- Different understandings of the extent to which Diplomas offer a broad-based general education, versus something highly job-specific.
- A limited understanding of pedagogical issues, especially at levels 1 and 2.
- Difficulties with bringing out opportunities for “applied learning”, rather than that which is knowledge-based.

4.5 Not all of these issues have yet been fully resolved.

5. *Who is responsible for the co-ordination and development of Diplomas?*

5.1 QCA published a draft document detailing the responsibilities of DDPs, awarding bodies and QCA in Diploma Development. The status of this document was never confirmed and it appears to have remained in draft form only.

5.2 The following is our understanding of individual roles, although our experience was that all parties were fighting for a significant role in developing the actual qualifications.

5.3 DDPs are responsible for articulating the needs of a range of interest groups, on a sector basis, in relation to Diplomas.

5.4 Awarding bodies develop qualifications; they are accredited to do so under the Education Act. In doing so, they consult with employer bodies, Higher Education, and crucially, the teachers and practitioners who will deliver these qualifications.

5.5 The regulator, QCA, is responsible for determining the overarching technical framework within which qualifications should be developed and awarded. They can only do this by working closely with awarding bodies. In the case of new qualifications, such as Diplomas, QCA creates a schedule of milestones for the development of criteria and the submission process, drawing on the dates in the Implementation Plan published by the Department for Education and Skills.

5.6 The Department for Education and Skills is responsible for co-ordinating the overall development, introduction and ongoing support required for the Diplomas. It is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the vision for Diplomas, as set out in the 14–19 White Paper, is delivered. In doing so it has to co-ordinate work between a host of agencies—funding bodies, Ofsted, QIA, QCA, SSCs, etc.

6. *Is there a case for a stronger co-ordinating role for one of the agencies involved, or for the appointment of a senior responsible officer or champion?*

6.1 There has been a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities and a lack of a shared vision. None of the key governmental agencies had either the capacity or the expertise to deliver everything that was expected of them.

6.2 This has been recognised, with DfES and QCA taking steps to set up new, stronger, steering groups, appointing Cap Gemini to provide QCA with project management support, the creation of working parties between DDPs and awarding bodies for all 14 lines of learning, and with the proposed appointment of a Project Director for an “end to end” Diploma project.

6.3 QCA’s new found capacity is not wholly positive. It has led to the introduction of a raft of new meetings, and has developed a template for the next phase of DDPs which creates a complex new stage in the development process. There is a danger that, as the regulator gets this close to developing the very products it is meant to regulate, its position will be compromised. A similar point was made about Key Skills in QCA’s quinquennial review.

6.4 It is probably true that the role of DDPs has been too central, which has distorted the process. More time and money has been spent by DDPs than any other partners in the process, leaving awarding bodies with a very narrow window to develop the actual qualifications. On a number of occasions decisions which we thought had been agreed across partners were revoked at subsequent meetings as a direct result, we believe, of intervention by senior staff within SSCs. SSCs remain a powerful and influential force in their own right.

6.5 Although there has been some representation through DDPs, the voice of the teacher and the institutions they work in has been weak. Awarding bodies will work closely with deliverers over the coming months as part of normal development processes, but it is to the detriment of Diplomas that this input should come so late in the process.

6.6 Any strengthening of roles would need to start with clear leadership, defining a shared vision of who does what and articulating the purpose and features of the Diploma in a more concrete way. It will be necessary to ensure that partners work alongside each other, rather than in a linear way, so that awarding bodies can begin development earlier and bring their partners into the process. Above all, the awarding bodies frustration has been the inability to begin real development work until so late in the process. If any changes are to be made, we would wish them to be ones which free us up to get on with the job, rather than ones which introduce more hurdles between decisions and eat up even more resources.

7. *Is there a clear system for accrediting and awarding the Diplomas?*

7.1 QCA is currently drafting the criteria and subsequent forms for awarding bodies to apply to become a “Diploma Awarding Body (DAB)” or a “Component Awarding Body (CAB)”.

7.2 The process for accredited CABs and DABS to submit their Diplomas or contributing components to QCA is not yet fully established.

7.3 Once an awarding body is accredited, it can recognise an institution such as a school or college as an “approved” Diploma centre. As Diplomas are made up of various components with different assessment models (some of which are still to be decided), it is not clear what criteria a DAB may use when deciding to recognise or approve an institution. This is further complicated by the fact that many of the component parts are likely to be offered by different institutions operating within one or more consortia. This is not directly linked to the DfES “Gateway” process for recognising consortia to attract funding and support for the delivery of Diplomas.

7.4 As the overall Diploma can be achieved by combining components achieved over a period of time, across different institutions and, potentially, different awarding bodies, there is a need to capture data on achievement centrally, using a unique learner number. Some awarding bodies are in negotiation with the National Assessment Agency and the DfES to explore possibilities of working together to create this solution. A memorandum of understanding has been created alongside a detailed scoping exercise.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 There must be clear leadership, defining a shared vision of who does what and articulating the purpose and features of the Diploma in a more concrete way.

8.2 There needs to be more focus on deliverability issues at all stages in the design of Diplomas.

8.3 Partners need to work alongside each other rather than in a linear way so that awarding bodies can begin their development earlier and bring their partners into the process.

8.4 Implementation issues need to be approached as a priority.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by the Royal Academy of Engineering (RA Eng)

1. The Royal Academy of Engineering (Note 1) is directly involved with the development of the Specialised Diploma in Engineering through its HEFCE funded work in the London Engineering Project (LEP), the pilot phase of the National Engineering Programme (NEP) (Note 2).

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE DIPLOMAS

2. The rationale of these programmes is to develop mechanisms for the training and development of skilled engineers who wish to pursue the applied learning routes post-16. The Specialised Diploma in Engineering is now being developed to ensure that it meets this need, in particular at level 3, where it needs to provide qualifications for direct entry into higher education on degree and Foundation Degree courses.

3. Experience to date has illustrated the need for a wide consultation between all parties concerned, not just the employers and the Sector Skills Councils but the Higher Education Institutions, the Science and Engineering Institutions and the Qualifications & Curriculum Authority (QCA) to ensure that the correct level of curriculum content is maintained, so that the applied learning routes provide the correct level of academic content as in the A 2 courses: for engineering courses this means predominantly mathematics and science. After a halting start The Academy believes that this is being achieved. Nevertheless there is still serious concern in some universities that there might not be enough mathematics and physics for many of our engineering degree courses and whilst money will be invested in schools and colleges to implement the new programmes, the needs of universities to fund significant changes to their courses will not be recognised.

4. The coordination and development of the Engineering Diploma remains with the Diploma Development Partnership established by SEMTA (the Sector Skills Council).

TEACHER AND LECTURER TRAINING

5. The current timescale for the implementation of the Diploma (by 2008) is tight. However, provided details of the curriculum and syllabus content are circulated in accord with the current schedule the teachers and lecturers should be able to deliver it without any need for extensive additional training. Most of the generic material is covered in the existing curriculum which they teach and most are already familiar with delivering applied learning courses. However, serious concerns remain over the capacity of teachers to deliver “principal” learning at levels 2 and 3 without significant training and support.

COORDINATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

6. The purpose of the LEP is to demonstrate that there can be more efficient ways of coordinating activities between schools, employers, FE colleges and schools in local areas. Much can be achieved at local level to break down the traditional barriers which have been created by independent funding systems, different qualifications frameworks and barriers to easy transfer. The LA and LSC are major players in this

process. Our experience to date has been that headteachers and college principals are actively engaged, and supportive of the Diploma Agenda. However, university admission tutors have yet to embrace the new specialised Diploma for direct entry to degree courses.

NOTES

1. The Royal Academy of Engineering [RAEng] brings together over 1,200 distinguished engineers, drawn from all the engineering disciplines. Its aim is to promote excellence in engineering for the benefit of the people of the United Kingdom. (www.raeng.org.uk).

2. The NEP started with the London Engineering Project pilot in Southwark in late 2005. This will work with five universities and 50 schools over 4.5 years. The pattern will be repeated, modified and enhanced, as appropriate, in six regions in England over the 10 years. The NEP supports schools with their raised profile for Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) by providing students with access to hands-on SET activities in class, residential and other SET learning events out of school and a system for mentoring of students with a capacity for higher education and ability in SET. This attention paid on schools and groups so-far unengaged in engineering is seen as key to strengthening the engineering profession in the long-term. The NEP is led by the Royal Academy of Engineering with the generous support of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by the Electrical Contractors Association (ECA)

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF DIPLOMAS

1. *What progress has been made on the development of Diplomas to date? Where have been the sticking points?*

1.1 The ECA is not directly involved in the development of the Diplomas but has been involved in the consultation process. A major sticking point for the Construction Diploma is the provision of relevant site experience due to health and safety concerns.

2. *What role have employers and Sector Skills Councils played in the development of Diplomas?*

2.1 Employers have been involved in the consultation process but feedback has been poor.

2.2 Sector Skills councils have been involved in the design process.

3. *Who is responsible for the co-ordination and development of Diplomas?*

3.1 No Comment

4. *Is there a case for a stronger co-ordinating role for one of the agencies involved, or for the appointment of a senior responsible officer or champion?*

4.1 No Comment.

5. *Is there a clear system for accrediting and awarding the Diplomas?*

5.1 Our understanding is that at present there is no clear system for accrediting and awarding the Diplomas. This should be industry led and not left to market forces and is key to the success of the new Diplomas.

TEACHER AND LECTURER TRAINING

6. *What are current levels of teacher/lecturer training activity in preparation for Diplomas? Is this sufficient to make Diplomas a success?*

6.1 This is a major concern for the industry that the teachers will have insufficient knowledge and/or experience to be able to deliver the specialist knowledge required for the Diplomas.

CO-ORDINATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

7. *What is the current level of co-ordination between colleges and schools in local areas?*

7.1 This depends on location. In some areas it is excellent, in others non-existent. Co-operation between schools and colleges is essential to deliver the Diplomas, as it is unlikely that schoolteachers will have sufficient knowledge or experience and will have to rely on college staff. This is a major area of concern.

8. *What are the barriers to co-ordination?*

8.1 The main area of concern is who will receive the funding of the new Diplomas and how results will be represented on league tables. Assuming that the Diploma will be administered by the compulsory education sector this may have a detrimental affect on the relationships between the different training providers. As there are many areas that schools and colleges are assessed against there is a real concern that the quality of the Diploma delivery will suffer.

9. *What are the lessons that can be learned from areas where there is strong co-ordination on 14–19?*

9.1 That strong co-ordination produces successful results, that the award has credibility with learners, parents, providers and employers.

10. *What are intermediary bodies such as LAs and LSCs doing to foster co-operation?*

10.1 No Comment.

11. *How engaged are head teachers and college principals in the Diploma agenda?*

11.1 No Comment.

12. *How are the rules on post-16 expansion likely to affect the rollout of Diplomas?*

12.1 A major concern for employers is the relationship between the Diploma and the requirements of the Technical certificates for the Apprenticeship framework. If there is major areas of overlap students who take the Diploma, and then the technical certificate, will be demotivated at having to re-learn material. The Diplomas need to be dovetailed into the Apprenticeship frameworks at both level 2 and level 3.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by City & Guilds

1. CITY & GUILDS' ROLE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

(a) City & Guilds is a Royal Charter body and has been working as a not-for-profit organisation in support of better practice for over 125 years. We are the UK's leading awarding body for work-related qualifications, offering over 500 qualifications in over 28 industry sectors, through 8500 approved centres in 80 countries worldwide. Our qualifications, which span eight levels from basic skills to the highest standards of professional achievement, are designed to help people and businesses achieve growth, prosperity and success.

(b) City & Guilds qualifications provide a combination of practical competence and theoretical knowledge. They are developed with the help of experts in relevant industries and many are offered in partnership with industry bodies. Our centres include schools, colleges, training organisations, companies, adult education institutes and the armed forces. Depending on the centre, it is possible to study full-time, part-time, or through distance learning.

(c) Our portfolio of qualifications provides:

- nationally-recognised pathways to career development;
- appropriate flexibility to respond to changes in technology and other developments;
- a wide choice to meet particular needs and interests;
- qualifications directly meeting the needs of specific businesses and industry;

- international portability; and
- progression within and between sectors including into and from HE.

(d) During the past 30 years we have been involved in a number of government led developments that have sought to provide an alternative to the general qualification provision for the 14–19 cohorts. From this experience we believe we have much to offer to the Diploma development so as not to repeat mistakes that have caused previous developments to fail.

2. AQA/CITY & GUILDS PARTNERSHIP

(a) AQA and City & Guilds announced a partnership for the development and delivery of Specialised Diplomas on 3 February 2006. The largest unitary awarding body in the UK and the leading provider of vocational qualifications in the UK were convinced that, working in partnership, they could provide the most comprehensive curriculum offer across all 14 lines of learning. Centres will be able to access a wide choice of coherent progression pathways with the administrative simplicity of one point of contact. The resources of the two awarding bodies will provide a variety of means of support for those delivering programmes, especially in the all-important initial years of this new qualification.

(b) The partnership has contributed to discussions with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and Department for Education and Skills (DfES) on such issues as the content and structure of the Diploma, its assessment, moderation, verification and reporting mechanisms, and whether or not the Diploma should be awarded an overall grade and if so, how.

3. THE POTENTIAL VALUE OF SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS

(a) Specialised Diplomas will offer an alternative to traditional learning styles through a combination of general education and applied learning. These qualifications need to provide an exciting, relevant and challenging programme of learning to young people of all backgrounds and abilities. By doing so they will ensure there is a real choice for young people at 14.

(b) To ensure this new qualification has real credibility with employers, HE, young people and their parents we believe that the following has to be in place:

- a sound curriculum, with a blend of knowledge, skills and application that includes significant vocational content;
- appropriate access to facilities, equipment and materials; and
- a sufficient supply of well trained, vocationally competent teachers.

4. OUR VIEWS OF THE TIMETABLE FOR SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS

(a) City & Guilds is committed to making Specialised Diplomas work for all stakeholders. However, there are a number of issues over their introduction and development that we feel may impede their eventual success. These are:

- designing any qualification is a complex process. This is magnified when you involve multiple agencies and stakeholders. Against this complex background the leadership of the process, the transparency and timeliness of the decision making has been inappropriate to date. New arrangements have been put in place to address these issues and we are keen to work on the way forward. However, there is a legacy that will remain a challenge for the future;
- significant delays in the agreement and publication (30 November 2006) of criteria for DABs/CABs and individual lines of learning; assessment strategy; operational issues such as the implementation of Minerva, have led to an increased risk for successful delivery in September 2008; and
- extra workforce development is required to ensure that the extra demands on teachers, managers and administrators are understood and any additional resources planned for.

5. OUR SUGGESTED WAY FORWARD

(a) We cannot risk Specialised Diplomas being tarred with the same brush as GNVQ or Curriculum 2000 and criticised for being poorly introduced. As a review process is now underway, we suggest further reflection and/or action in the following areas:

- piloting carefully to ensure maximum success in the long run and using the pilots to inform subsequent development, including workforce support;
- the further development of new governance arrangements in which all the parties involved—government, the regulators, DDPs, awarding bodies and representatives of providers are able to influence the future development of the programme; and

- the overall process, allowing for the implementation of waves 2 and 3 of the Diploma. Consideration should be given to the timescales involved, and whether a less rigid timetable of introduction would create a more successful outcome for all stakeholders, allowing a more fluid introduction for this new type of qualification.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET)

1. The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) was formed by the Institution of Electrical Engineers (IEE) and the Institution of Incorporated Engineers (IIE) and has more than 150,000 members worldwide. The membership of the IET represents a wide range of expertise, from technical experts to business leaders, encompassing a wealth of professional experience and knowledge, independent of commercial interests. Our members recognise the important contribution that the proposed Diploma scheme could make in preparing young people for careers in engineering and technology.

2. The IET is therefore pleased to respond to House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee Inquiry into skills issues. This submission covers the 14–19 Specialised Diplomas and has been prepared on behalf of the Institution’s Trustees, after inviting input from its membership.

3. We have adopted a pragmatic view of the Diplomas. It is very easy to criticise the concepts behind them, but we felt it was more valuable to accept they were being introduced into schools and that our role should be to work with those developing them to help ensure they are the best, most suitable and interesting/engaging courses that can be delivered. We have therefore supported the development of the Engineering Diploma, firstly by working with the consortium of sector skills councils (SSCs) and then the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. We are now starting to engage with the awarding bodies. It is also our hope that we will be able to support delivery in schools in some manner, either directly or through our members or business partners. There are nevertheless a number of issues that the Select Committee may wish to investigate.

4. Firstly, in our view the introduction of the Diplomas has been rushed. Insufficient time has been set aside either for the creation of new course content, or to take and consider input and experiences from the wider group of stakeholders. Hence, whilst we are actively supporting the development process we are withholding final endorsement until we see a completed Diploma structure.

5. Secondly, we must get this right first time. Whilst it is argued that the 2008 delivery is only on a small scale, it is still being delivered to students, and students only get one education. The time between 2008–13, from initial introduction to the mandated national teaching, can of course be used to further improve delivery. However it cannot be used to re-educate those starting the Diploma in 2008.

6. Thirdly, 2008 is a pivotal year for the future success or failure of the Diplomas at large. The first group through must have a positive experience and succeed—otherwise irreparable damage will be done to the qualification as a whole. For subjects that are not currently widely delivered in schools, such as Engineering, getting it “wrong” in terms of the Diploma will seriously damage subjects that already have perception problems.

7. We have provided more detailed comments at Annex A; these reflect largely our experiences with the development of just the Engineering Diploma. However, we have recently become involved in the development of the Manufacturing Diploma and it is pleasing to see that the Diploma delivery teams are working closely together. We hope that implementation of the later Diplomas will draw from the lessons of those in the first wave.

Annex A

IET COMMENT ON THE 14–19 SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF DIPLOMAS

What progress has been made on the development of Diplomas to date? Where have been the sticking points?

1. We are aware of a number of issues that have been difficult to overcome in terms of development of the specifications, but these are the sorts of issues that would be encountered in any project of this nature—for example number of guided learning hours or method of assessment.

DELIVERY

2. The issues that are perhaps unique—and have seen less progress made—are around delivery. It is still unclear to us that the resources will be in place—from partnerships to trained teachers—for commencement of teaching in 2008.

3. With many consortium currently looking deliver the Diplomas from 2008, a balance must be struck between capturing enthusiasm from schools and delivery partnerships—and any other motivations, such as demonstrating the success through the number of deliverers—and ensuring that those entering the gateway process really do have the resources to deliver from September 2008.

4. A requirement within each Diploma is, we understand, for each student to undertake 10 days work experience. This is fraught with difficulty and a number of issues need to be addressed not least: the availability of a sufficient numbers of placements; the quality, relevance, consistency and sustainability of placements; health and safety requirements; and administrative workload.

5. At present (assuming no major change to the specification/qualification) delivery remains our number one concern.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION/“MARKETING”

6. Part of delivery must be the public perception—specifically amongst parents, students and employers—of what the Diplomas are. There does already seem to be some confusion over how to describe the Diplomas; for example in the Pre-Budget Report they are described as being

“[. . .] specialised Diplomas in broadly vocational areas [. . .]” (section 3.94, p 63).

7. Whilst this is technically accurate, our understanding is that Diplomas must not be seen as vocational, but rather “applied”, and a great deal of effort needs to be put into making sure the idea of these being new vocational qualifications is not perpetuated.

What role have employers and Sector Skills Councils played in the development of Diplomas?

8. The Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) are uniquely placed to gather employer input. In terms of engagement they have toured the country and engaged with many groups. However, on a purely anecdotal basis, it seems to be particularly difficult to engage with the small and medium sized business community. Considering it is widely believed SMEs account for around 50% of private sector employment, this is a problem that needs to be addressed.

9. Furthermore it is difficult for anyone to pin point the person within an employer organisation who is best placed to become involved; the obvious choices are training or development officers, but there is also clearly input from HR, technical directors and in some cases Chief Executives.

10. This makes the job of co-ordinating the input very difficult, and one that the partnership we have been involved with has risen to very well. That is not to say that we believe the process has been perfect—the time scales handed down for development have almost certainly made consultation more of a challenge. How closely the end product matches the original government vision remains to be seen.

11. More broadly on the issue of employer involvement in skills and training, we do urge a note of caution in terms of the long term view. It is important to note that reports and analysis like that of Lord Leitch must continue to play a role in setting the skills agenda—businesses ultimately have other responsibilities and cannot be expected to completely ignore their short term needs over and above the long term benefits of the UK more widely. This is not to say business input will only ever consider the short term, but other input should be sought.

12. Organisations like ourselves also do not naturally fit a consultation process designed to engage with employers. Whilst we are clearly not the core constituency that the SSCs were asked to work with, we believe there is a great wealth of expertise from our membership. Although the initial process may have been slow to include professional bodies, our experience has shown that the SSCs have been quick to respond once the relationship was established, and we hope they would agree that we have made a valuable contribution to development and support of the Diplomas.

Who is responsible for the co-ordination and development of Diplomas?

13. Responsibility is not always clear to us. The specification has been passed along from the development partnerships, to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authorities, to the exam boards. Each organisation has had a large level of input and often made significant changes.

14. In terms of the final owner, it seems to be the QCA in terms of the specifications, although ultimately we believe there must be ministerial responsibility for delivery. Our understanding is that there is some overall coordination of the consortiums of SSCs, and we do hope this extends to joint marketing and awareness projects, as well as for delivery.

Is there a case for a stronger co-ordinating role for one of the agencies involved, or for the appointment of a senior responsible officer or champion?

15. Delivery is the one area that tends to have been somewhat put on hold whilst the developmental work on the specifications has continued. A single co-ordinator, with a large amount of funding and specialised resource would seem to be one way of taking this forward.

16. The other key area is wider public engagement—media work specifically. The media response to the 21st Century Science GCSE suggested that there was an incomplete understanding of the thinking behind the development, and a fairly negative view was put forward.

17. This type of perception of new qualifications is a real danger, and must be pre-empted with a sustained campaign to businesses and parents, explaining what Diplomas are, what the benefits are and other pertinent information.

18. The IET is already planning some media work involving the SSCs and hope that other organisations will do likewise. The media work must reach parents and students and must be pro-active; a press strategy of reacting to negative stories will not work.

Is there a clear system for accrediting and awarding the Diplomas?

19. We understand this is still under development, but it clearly a vital component of the scheme. The strength of the Diploma is in it being widely accepted, and the accreditation and award must be robust. However, there is a risk that attention to content becomes the overwhelming influence, whereas it will be the assessment of the effectiveness of delivery that will determine the real success of the initiative.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by OCR

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The development of Diplomas continues to be unnecessarily difficult, complex and fraught with uncertainty. The ultimate success and quality of the outcomes still hangs in the balance and we are in danger of forgetting many of the lessons learned from Curriculum 2000, most notably the risks of denying schools and colleges sufficient preparation time and the confusion of roles and responsibilities between government, its agencies and qualifications awarding bodies.

1.2 I have summarised the key messages that resonate throughout our evidence into three main areas: a lack of clear vision and leadership; weak management processes and ambiguous responsibilities; and a failure to exploit the value and importance of existing infrastructures and expertise.

2. A LACK OF CLEAR VISION

2.1 *A “wish list” in place of a clear purpose*

The 14–19 White Paper provides a description of Diplomas which is a highly aspirational wish-list of features and benefits, many of which are difficult to reconcile. The project has been dogged from the start by a lack of clarity over the Diplomas’ educational purpose.

2.2 The target audience is variously claimed by policy-makers to include the gifted and talented, a large mass of learners seeking a more vocational alternative to GCSEs and A levels, and the disengaged. Much emphasis is given to work-based and “applied” learning, yet elsewhere we learn that Diplomas must provide a “broad general education”. Diploma development will be “employer-led” yet the White Paper strenuously avoids linking the term “vocational” to the Diplomas and stresses their importance as a route to Higher Education. The first five Diploma Development Partnerships have not demonstrated a common understanding of the nature of the Diplomas to which they are seeking to contribute, with some seeing them as heavily occupation-specific and other as a general preparation for working life or higher education.

2.3 *No such thing as “a Diploma”*

Diplomas have been misleadingly referred to as qualifications but they are, in fact, overarching awards recognising a range of varied achievements which can be combined in endless ways. Assumptions that they can be graded like an A level or that the “content” can be developed for any single Diploma have been made without real consideration. As many of the components of Diplomas are being developed/re-developed for other purposes in other parts of the curriculum, a series of complex interdependencies have been created.

3. WEAK MANAGEMENT PROCESSES AND AMBIGUOUS RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 The process of developing Diplomas has been heralded as revolutionary; it is certainly true that the DFES 14–19 Implementation Plan takes the standard process for developing a qualification and turns it on its head.

3.2 *Content divorced from assessment*

Following good practice in qualifications development, the definition of content (what is to be learned), except in outline form, must be integrated within the assessment development process (how learning is be measured); to develop the content first and in isolation is to make the process more difficult, yet this has been the process for Diplomas thus far. DDPs were tasked to work on content with little guidance and no technical specification (these were developed by QCA after the content had been produced, forcing a series of uncomfortable compromises on to DDPs, risking the disengagement of employers at a critical point).

3.3 *QCA's role: project manager or regulator?*

In a repeat of a difficulty which Mike Tomlinson identified after the troubles of Curriculum 2000, the role of QCA has been highly ambiguous. As a regulator, I would expect it to be concerned with developing a framework of criteria and an accreditation process—both bread and butter to a regulator—yet it has failed on both counts, causing deadlines to slide as it has tried to make good these failures too late in the process. QCA has dipped in and out of “hands-on” project management and qualifications design, monitoring the progress of DDPs, devising communication plans, facilitating workshops and chairing various committees.

3.4 Having belatedly recognised that its change management capabilities were insufficient, QCA has bought in the resources of consultants Cap Gemini. However, this has simply led to further micromanagement of the development process and an inappropriate attention to detail, whilst the key regulatory functions remain neglected. It is neither appropriate nor a good use of QCA's resources to involve it in managing the development of qualifications it is also required to regulate. When QCA makes its decision on whether to accredit Diplomas into the National Qualifications Framework, I do not believe it will be in a position to do so objectively, given its excessive involvement thus far. There must be a real risk that a qualification which is not fit for purpose might nevertheless receive the regulator's approval.

3.5 *The disproportionate role of DDPs in developing Diplomas*

The vision that development of qualifications should be “employer-led” is a familiar one; indeed, the most popular vocational qualifications in use today (such as CLAIT and BTEC Nationals), most of which were developed 20–30 years ago, were invariably created with strong employer input, a model which has been weakened since then by the introduction of various government agencies (eg NTOs and SSCs) as employer proxies.

3.6 The creation of DDPs has not been a success in the context of Diplomas. DDPs have been given a poorly defined remit to “develop content” for Diplomas without a proper delineation of their responsibilities compared to that of qualifications designers (awarding bodies) and with little understanding of the educational context into which the new qualifications will be pitched. The Government has effectively created new bodies that believe, according to their own literature, that they were created to develop Diplomas without feeling constrained by the views of teachers or assessment experts. Whilst employers could and should play a greater role in defining what should be taught in schools and colleges, it is stretching credibility to that they should do the spadework of developing a detailed curriculum for 14–19-year-olds.

3.7 Most DDPs kept awarding bodies at arms length until they were close to completing their detailed Diploma content. I know from regular contact with many educational stakeholders, particularly those representing schools and colleges who will have to deliver Diplomas in practice, that they share our frustration at the lack of input and feedback sought by DDPs.

3.8 When OCR received the content developed by DDPs, the content required considerable re-working in a range of areas (and to some extent still does). Some of the early drafts were extremely content heavy and would have been unachievable by a typical 14–19-year-old; the level of demand was not consistent across sectors; and there was a palpable lack of any commonality of structure which might aid curriculum planners in integrating these new programmes into schools' and colleges' curricula. At the tail end of this process, OCR now finds it has less than five months to develop, and consult schools and colleges about, the qualifications which underpin—in Dr Ken Boston's words—“the most exciting and innovative educational reform taking place in the developed world”.

4. THE VALUE OF EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURES AND EXPERTISE

4.1 Developing a qualification is a complex business. It requires highly developed understanding of pedagogical and assessment issues, good project management, a grasp of operational implications of different qualification designs (eg cost or administrative burden on schools, colleges and awarding bodies) and strong networks of educators with whom to consult. A raft of teacher training, publications and briefings need to be scheduled from the outset to prepare the ground. Extensive and ongoing consultation is needed with employer bodies, Higher Education and above all teachers. The involvement of teachers in the development process is essential to ensure buy-in and a sense of ownership amongst the teaching community, as demonstrated by the huge success of OCR's new 21st Century Science GCSE, which has benefited from precisely this iterative, consultative process.

4.2 OCR and many other awarding bodies have, over time, developed mechanisms to deliver such complex programmes and also know too keenly from the experiences of 2002 the consequences of failure in managing complex change. Yet to our frustration, with Diplomas, we have seen that expertise and capacity, and at times our expert advice, pushed to the margins. For example, on the key issue of whether to grade the Diploma, our considered opinion that it should not be graded has been determinedly ignored, despite the risks that grading poses to the credibility of a composite award such as Diplomas. Only in recent months have awarding bodies been invited to contribute more fully to developments. We have been pleased to see our contributions increasingly well-received by DDPs, DfES, and QCA. However, we do not believe this is enough and, for the first five Diplomas, it has come too late.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 A bold—and, we believe, potentially valuable—new development in 14–19 education is at risk of being de-railed by precisely the same factors as led to the crisis of 2002.

5.2 Diploma development can only succeed by drawing on the strengths of each of the key partners: DDPs should provide an invaluable resource for capturing the requirements and expectations of employers and other stakeholders such as universities; awarding bodies should design the assessment regime and project manage the development of their own Diplomas, engaging fully with schools and colleges from the earliest possible stage; QCA should put in place the regulatory framework, accredit qualifications objectively and monitor awarding body maintenance of standards and service; and DfES should concentrate on a strategic oversight of 14–19 reform and work harder with ministers to define a clear purpose and vision for Diplomas against which many detailed decisions can be taken by others.

5.3 Even if these recommendations are followed, it is highly uncertain whether Diplomas can still succeed. A repeat of the management failures of Curriculum 2000, with too many overlaps in responsibilities leading to confusion and repeated delays, has compressed preparation time for schools and colleges, reduced the time available to convince parents and employers of the value of Diplomas, and ensured that learners who set out on a Diploma journey in 2008 or later will be entering very choppy waters indeed.

6. INTRODUCING GREG WATSON AND OCR

6.1 Greg Watson became Chief Executive of OCR in May 2004. He joined OCR just after its formation in 1998 and spent three years as its first Marketing and Sales director before becoming Managing Director and Deputy Chief Executive in 2001. He worked closely with the then Chief Executive, Dr Ron McLone, on the preparation and presentation of evidence for the Select Committee Enquiry into Curriculum 2000.

6.2 Greg is a graduate in Modern and Mediaeval Languages from Queen's College Cambridge and is the Chairman of Qualdat, the joint venture company set up by OCR, Edexcel and AQA to bring together records of learners' achievements over time and across different awarding bodies.

6.3 OCR is a leading awarding body, with over 550 staff, offering every type of qualification from industry-based NVQs, through to GCSEs and A/AS levels in schools. Recognising achievement is our core business and we employ a full and dynamic range of approaches to assessment to meet a full variety of needs. With over 13,000 diverse organisations throughout the UK approved to offer our qualifications, millions of successful candidates have been awarded our certificates.

6.4 OCR has a strong track record in managing major contracts and projects forming strategic alliances and providing large scale assessment and support services linked to education and vocational training. OCR is part of Cambridge Assessment, a powerful group of assessment bodies owned by the University of Cambridge.

EVIDENCE FOR THE EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO SKILLS—14–19 SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS

7. *What progress has been made on the development of Diplomas to date? Where are the sticking points?*

7.1 To some extent, Diplomas are a wish-list of irreconcilable features and benefits. Different parties have different views as to their nature and purpose and it is important to bear this in mind when evaluating the sticking points.

7.2 Also, Diplomas are not single entities; in some respects there is no such thing as Diplomas. They are made up of a variety of components, some of which already exist (for example, A Levels can feature as components of Diplomas), and some of which are at various stages of development. The key components of Diplomas are:

- Principal Learning.
- Personal Learning and Thinking Skills.
- Functional Skills (English, Maths and ICT).
- The Project.
- Additional Learning (to include many existing qualifications).
- Specialist Learning (to include many existing qualifications and potentially much new content).

7.3 This complexity, in itself, makes development work a staggered process with many dependencies.

8. PROGRESS TO DATE

8.1 The following update on progress to date relates to the first five Diploma lines, those which are due for first teaching 2008. For awarding bodies the slippage between delivery of finalised content in July 2006 to their eventual delivery in December 2006 is of critical concern. Awarding bodies have been given less than five months to develop Diploma qualifications.

9. PRINCIPAL LEARNING/PERSONAL LEARNING AND THINKING SKILLS

9.1 Qualification development of the key component, known as the Principal Learning, began after 1 December 2006, when the Diploma Development Partnerships (DDPs) finalised the criteria to which they should be developed. They did this using a template and structure devised by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) which was finalised in November 2006. Originally the content was scheduled to be provided to awarding bodies so that development work could start in July 2006.

9.2 Had QCA recognised the need for clear criteria at the outset, rather than near the end of the schedule (as consistently pointed out by awarding bodies), this delay and many other problems could have been avoided.

9.3 The awarding bodies now have to the end of April 2007 to develop the Principal Learning. Part of the development work requires awarding bodies to integrate the assessment of Personal Learning and Thinking Skills across the Principal Learning, which will present technical challenges. Almost certainly, five months is the shortest timeframe within which Awarding Bodies have ever attempted to develop a major national qualification.

9.4 This development work is hampered by significant uncertainties, the key ones being that the grading model has not been determined and that there is a lack of clarity about the assessment model. The final recommendations on grading are due to report by early February and it is difficult to begin detailed development work when something as fundamental as the grading scale has yet to be determined. Awarding bodies consistently advised against attempting to derive an overall grade for Diplomas due to the inherent technical difficulties in any attempt to derive a single grade for a “multi-component” or compound qualification.

9.5 Ken Boston stated that the Secretary of State took the decision to grade Diplomas many months ago. It is not always clear whether advice from the regulator is developed to inform ministerial decisions or to confirm them after they have been taken. There is scope for greater transparency in the way advice is arrived at and when it is shared.

9.6 The criteria, developed by QCA, for the assessment model to be used for the Principal Learning, remain subject to interpretation (some of the drafting requires further work, as it uses ambiguous phrases such as “must normally be”). The extent to which teachers should be able to make local decisions about the performance of learners, and the ways in which this should be controlled and monitored by awarding bodies remains a point of discussion.

9.7 Furthermore, the regulator has suggested that awarding bodies should award the principal learning jointly, as though there were one single awarding body—a position the awarding bodies, including OCR, will not accept. Joint awarding would depend on a perfect match in the design, content and assessment approach of the principal learning between awarding bodies. Given that Diplomas are made up of a variety of different qualifications and awards, there is little logic in such an approach.

9.8 Previous attempts at joint awarding have been slow and bureaucratic (Key Skills is a prime example) and have not performed well in maintaining a consistent standard from one awarding session to the next. The policy of having more than one awarding body ensures contestability, and in a project as critical to learners as the Diplomas it would be highly risky to settle on a single approach at the outset of a two year pilot. Nor should regulatory criteria be used to drive awarding bodies to behave as a single monopoly, when this contradicts directly with current statutory requirements and government policy.

9.9 This uncertainty is added to by the ongoing drafting and re-drafting of advice to the Secretary of State on the assessment model for the Diploma, which is not due to be submitted until January/February 2007. This relates to assessment of the entire Diploma, not just the Principal Learning.

10. THE FUNCTIONAL SKILLS (ENGLISH, MATHS AND ICT)

10.1 Two models, each with their own variants, are being trialled, one where each Functional Skill will be a standalone qualification, and one where each skill will be integrated within the relevant GCSE. Although this work is complex and is dogged by tight deadlines, it is likely that a range of qualifications, suited to the needs of different learners, will be available on time. We are unaware of any direct involvement in this development work from DDPs.

11. THE PROJECT

11.1 The Extended Project at level 3 is currently being piloted by a limited number of awarding bodies across a range of different types of learners in traditional and vocational settings. These pilots are overseen and funded by QCA which put this work out to tender in August 2006. An interim report on the findings of these pilots is due in January 2007 with several other reports following in March and September 2007 and March and September 2008. Meanwhile, far less work has been undertaken at levels 1 and 2, with QCA providing some outline drafts specifications. The target date to deliver projects at all three levels is May 2007. We are unaware of any detailed work having been undertaken by awarding bodies to date. Certainly there has been little or no input from QCA. This is an area where some slippage may occur.

12. ADDITIONAL LEARNING

12.1 The Additional Learning component can be taken from any accredited qualification and so might include a language qualification or something of special interest to the learner, such as music. Although there are issues about the administration of such an open-ended arrangement and identifying the size and level of all potential qualifications, this can be progressed.

13. SPECIALIST LEARNING

13.1 The specialist learning, based on the vocational subject being studied, can be drawn from any existing vocational qualification in the same way. However, a number of DDPs have each specified particular content that they wish to see included in the specialist learning which will have to be developed as new qualifications/units if it is to be included. In most cases, this potentially vast amount of additional development work will need to take place after the May submission date. The timeframe for introducing it to schools and colleges is unclear. Nevertheless, this new content is not essential to the introduction of Diplomas.

14. THE MAIN STICKING POINTS

14.1 In summary, the remaining major sticking points (for the first five lines) are:

- A lack of a final position on grading.
- A lack of clear criteria for how the Principal Learning should be assessed and whether it should be jointly awarded.
- Technical challenges associated with incorporating Personal Learning and Thinking Skills within the Principal Learning.
- Separate piloting of various complex Functional Skills models, driven by the timetable to integrate them within GCSEs.
- Emphasis on piloting of the Extended Project at level 3, where this is seen as key to wider reforms, leaving much work to be done at levels 1 and 2.
- No clear programme for developing specialist learning from content already produced by DDPs.

14.2 Given that awarding bodies now have less than four months to complete work on Diplomas, these outstanding issues and risks must be addressed. They are, however, a symptom of a deeper problem about the way in which Diplomas have been conceived and executed.

15. *What role have employers and Sector Skills Councils played in the development of Diplomas?*

15.1 Diploma Development Partnerships have played a centre-stage role in Diploma-related activity. Each has been led by a lead Sector Skills Council, contracted to form a DDP which would then undertake the role of defining Diploma “content”. OCR has not had sight of any of these contracts so is making some assumptions about what DDPs were/are required to do, the milestones and required outputs. In retrospect, some of these arrangements could have been made more transparent.

15.2 Although the overall structures of the DDPs have facilitated input from a wide range of stakeholders, the dominant influence has been employers, in keeping with the policy that Diplomas should be “employer led”. Although the DDPs are all very different in nature, the main boards of SSCs tend to have strong employer representation. Most DDPs have engaged in large scale consultations with employers in their sectors to confirm support for the content they have produced.

15.3 Unfortunately, DDPs were given little clear guidance at the outset as to the nature of the “content” they were required to deliver. There was little clarity as to whether they were simply specifying areas of study that employers would like to see covered, or identifying the attributes they would expect to find in successful Diploma candidates, or developing detailed teaching plans, or putting together assessment criteria and learning outcomes, or defining a whole curriculum etc.

15.4 Awarding bodies wrote to DDPs collectively through the Federation of Awarding Bodies, offering early technical support, but there was no strong response and a feeling exists amongst awarding bodies that they were kept at arms length by DDPs.

15.5 Many personnel inside the DDPs, DfES and elsewhere, and their literature, would state frequently that they were “developing Diplomas” which of course was never the intention. All the DDPs developed detailed and complex documents (some misusing terms such as “assessment criteria” and “learning outcomes” which have precise technical purposes with regard to qualifications), which, we believe, used up unnecessary resource and took the content to a stage way beyond that which could credibly be described as expressing employer requirements.

15.6 It was only after the first five lines of content were delivered in July 06 that it became clear to all, despite the ongoing protestations of awarding bodies, that there needed to be some structure and criteria within which the content should be specified.

15.7 In late August, Awarding Bodies in desperation, and with the encouragement of the DfES, took it upon themselves to draft a first version of this criteria and present it to the regulator. This formed a very early version of the criteria that finally emerged from QCA.

15.8 In parallel with developing this criteria, awarding bodies, QCA and DDPs began an intense period of reworking the original DDP content. The content was in many ways an extremely valuable expression of the learning that employers were looking for. However, not surprisingly, given the nature and capacity of DDPs and the lack of criteria at the outset, there were difficulties with:

- The level of challenge which varied within and across lines.
- The “size” of the Diplomas, which varied.
- Very different approaches to structure.
- Different understandings of the extent to which Diplomas offer a broad-based general education, versus something highly job-specific.
- A limited understanding of pedagogical issues, especially at levels 1 and 2.
- Difficulties with bringing out opportunities for “applied learning”, rather than that which is knowledge-based.

15.9 Not all of these issues have yet been fully resolved.

15.10 In conclusion, it is our view that employers had a strong opportunity to describe what their Diplomas should contain, and at least some of them took that opportunity. However, we believe DDPs then developed this beyond a point that was necessary and did so with little guidance or support.

16. *Who is responsible for the co-ordination and development of Diplomas?*

16.1 The following is our understanding of individual roles, although our experience was that all parties were vying for a significant role in developing the actual qualifications.

16.2 QCA published a draft document detailing the responsibilities of DDPs, Awarding Bodies and QCA in Diploma Development, which also informed our understanding. The status of this document was never confirmed and it appears to have remained in draft form only.

16.3 DDPs are responsible for articulating the needs of a range of interest groups, on a sector basis, in relation to Diplomas.

16.4 Awarding Bodies develop qualifications; they are accredited to do so under the Education Act. In doing so, they consult with employer bodies, Higher Education, and crucially, the teachers and practitioners who will deliver these qualifications. They play an ongoing role in training teachers and examiners and, of

course, awarding qualifications to the required standard. Awarding bodies are independent organisations, some of which are for-profit, some of which, like OCR, are not. Those awarding bodies developing Diplomas do so at their own risk and without direct contribution from the public purse.

16.5 The regulator, QCA, is responsible for determining the overarching technical framework within which qualifications should be developed and awarded. They can only do this by working closely with awarding bodies. In the case of new qualifications, such as Diplomas, QCA creates a schedule of milestones for the development of criteria and the submission process, drawing on the dates in the Implementation Plan published by the Department for Education and Skills.

16.6 The Department for Education and Skills is responsible for co-ordinating the overall development, introduction and ongoing support required for the Diplomas. It is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the vision for Diplomas, as set out in the 14–19 White Paper, is delivered. In doing so it has to co-ordinate work between a host of agencies—funding bodies, Ofsted, QIA, QCA, SSCs etc. This has not always worked well; currently QIA has appointed Nord Anglia to deliver a sizeable contract for materials to be used to train teachers in delivering the Diplomas. However, these materials are due for delivery in April 2007, two months before the actual Diplomas will be finalised.

17. Is there a case for a stronger co-ordinating role for one of the agencies involved, or for the appointment of a senior responsible officer or champion?

17.1 There is no doubt that the process to date could have been better managed. There has been a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities and a lack of a shared vision. None of the key governmental agencies had either the capacity or the expertise to deliver everything that was expected of them.

17.2 This has been recognised, with DfES and QCA taking steps to set up new, stronger, steering groups, appointing Cap Gemini to provide QCA with project management support, the creation of cross-working parties between DDPs and awarding bodies for all 14 lines of learning, and with the proposed appointment of a Project Director for an “end to end” Diploma project.

17.3 QCA’s new found capacity is not wholly positive. It has proposed the introduction of a raft of new meetings, and has developed a template for the next phase of DDPs which creates a complex new stage in the development process. There is a danger that, as the regulator gets this close to developing the very products it is meant to regulate, its position will be compromised. A similar point was made about key skills in QCA’s quinquennial review.

17.4 DDPs extended their role beyond that which was originally envisaged, distorting and lengthening the process. We believe more time and money has been spent by DDPs than any other partners in the process, leaving awarding bodies with a very narrow window to develop the actual qualifications. On a number of occasions decisions which we thought had been agreed across partners were revoked at subsequent meetings as a direct result, we believe, of intervention by senior staff within SSCs. SSCs remain a powerful and influential force in their own right.

17.5 Although there has been some representation through DDPs, the voice of the teachers that will deliver the Diplomas and the institutions they work in has been weak. OCR will work closely with those teachers over the coming months as part of its normal development processes but it is to the detriment of Diplomas that this input should have come so late in the process.

17.6 Any strengthening of roles would need start with clear leadership, defining a shared vision of who does what and articulating the purpose and features of the Diploma in a more concrete way. There are still varying views as to who it is for, what it is intended to achieve and, even, what it will be called.

17.7 It will be necessary to ensure that partners work alongside each other, rather than in a linear way, so that awarding bodies can begin development earlier and bring their partners into the process. Above all, OCR’s frustration has been the inability to begin real development work until so late in the process. Even now our hands are tied over issues such as grading and the assessment model. If any changes are to be made, we would wish them to be ones which free us up to get on with the job, rather than ones which introduce more hurdles between decisions and eat up even more resources. Sometimes, more is less.

18. Is there a clear system for accrediting and awarding the Diplomas?

18.1 QCA is currently drafting the criteria and subsequent forms for awarding bodies to apply to become a “Diploma Awarding Body (DAB)” or a “Component Awarding Body (CAB)”.

18.2 The process for accredited CABs and DABS to submit their Diplomas or contributing components to QCA is not yet fully established.

18.3 Once an awarding body is accredited, it can recognise an institution such as a school or college as an “approved” Diploma centre. As Diplomas are made up of various components with different assessment models (some of which are to be decided), it is not clear what criteria a DAB may use when deciding to recognise or approve an institution. This is further complicated by the fact that many of the component parts are likely to be offered by different institutions operating within one or more consortia. It should be noted that this is not directly linked to the DfES “Gateway” process for recognising consortia to attract funding and support for the delivery of Diplomas.

18.4 The process for awarding the different components of the Diploma, each capable of separate certification, will depend on the nature of the component. However, the component which remains most contentious is the Principal Learning. It is anticipated that this will determine the overall grade of the Diploma.

18.5 As the overall Diploma can be achieved by combining components achieved over a period of time, across different institutions and, potentially, different awarding bodies, there is a need to capture data on achievement centrally, using a unique learner number. OCR and some other major awarding bodies are in negotiation with the National Assessment Agency and the DfES to explore possibilities of working together to create this solution. A memorandum of understanding has been created alongside a detailed scoping exercise.

19. TEACHER AND LECTURER TRAINING

19.1 Others will be in a better position to outline the full range of training and support planned for the roll out of the Diplomas, in particular the materials and training commissioned by QIA and partners.

19.2 OCR has a long track record of providing training and support to deliverers of its qualifications and, more broadly, on curriculum and school leadership issues. Almost 50,000 delegates attend OCR training courses every year. Further support is provided by working with leading publishers to ensure the availability of a range of support materials. In relation to Diplomas, we have already established ourselves as a provider of quality information about Diploma developments through our “Diploma Watch” campaign (a copy of our newsletter is attached).⁴

19.3 From September onwards OCR will deliver regular training on the delivery and, more precisely, the assessment of Diplomas. Organisations and consortia seeking to work with us over the two year pilot and beyond will be offered comprehensive packages of support and will be included in our processes for evaluating the outcomes of our pilots.

19.4 OCR training tends to be tailored and precise to the details of particular qualifications or the needs of a particular department, pilot etc. It is important that institutions remain free to choose the training that best suits their needs.

20. CONCLUSION

20.1 The only solution to making Diploma development succeed is to play to the strengths of each of the key partners. There should be clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Namely:

- awarding bodies should project manage the development of their own Diplomas, engaging fully with schools and colleges from day one;
- QCA should develop the outline regulatory framework and monitor awarding body performance;
- DDPs should provide an invaluable resource for capturing the requirements and expectations of employers and other stakeholders; and
- DfES should concentrate on strategic oversight of all 14–19 reform and work harder with ministers to refine the purpose and vision of Diplomas.

20.2 Even if these recommendations are followed, it is now touch and go whether Diplomas can still succeed. If awarding bodies are not able to manage their own processes, schools and colleges will have little or no time to prepare and sketchy support, parents will view Diplomas with suspicion, and the learners who set out on a Diploma journey in 2008 or later will be entering very choppy waters.

January 2007

Supplementary memorandum submitted by OCR

As you will be aware, OCR has already provided written evidence to the Select Committee inquiry into specialised Diplomas. We would have liked the opportunity to have developed our views further in oral evidence but we recognise the time constraints upon the Committee and welcome the Committee’s desire to report in a timeframe which leaves room for action.

⁴ Not printed.

However, as a major awarding body, with considerable experience of developing qualifications, we felt it important to correct some potentially misleading impressions that may have arisen as a result of evidence the Committee heard on 17 January.

GRADING THE DIPLOMA

It was claimed that the issue of grading has been resolved. According to the uncorrected transcript of evidence: “That is ticked off. We know we are going to grade the Diplomas. We know how we are going to arrive at these grades.”

At the time this statement was made, awarding bodies did not know how we were going to grade Diplomas. Subsequently, in a letter dated 30 January 2007, we have received outline details of proposals for grading based on advice to ministers. It is prefaced with the sentence, “In order to ensure that Awarding Bodies are working within *the latest position* on grading, we outline below the advice we have given to Government on Grading the Diploma.” The italics are ours. Although this document does move us forward, it is neither exhaustive nor conclusive.

The limited advice on grading, far from resolving matters, raises many further technical issues, not least around designing individual mark schemes for each unit. In the same document on grading, QCA proposes collaborative working on this through the establishment of “a national ‘Marking Criteria and Comparability Technical Group’ through which all relevant awarding bodies, with support from QCA, could agree on appropriate mechanisms for ensuring consistent marking.” We would strongly suggest that, with the technical issues surrounding grading being far from “ticked off”, there are considerable limitations on our ability to progress Diploma development, despite a deadline which is now three months away.

TIMESCALE

Although grading is a very specific, technical example of the difficulties facing OCR, we feel that, on a more general level, based on evidence presented to date, the Committee might easily under-estimate the enormity of the task still facing awarding bodies. We repeat the observation offered in our written evidence that this is the shortest timescale that awarding bodies have ever been given to develop a significant suite of national qualifications.

We are concerned that the Committee heard evidence to suggest that the work was nearing completion. Dr Ken Boston of the QCA was right to state that “on the issue of five months, we are not starting from scratch. We have been working on this for well over eighteen months to two years. We now have criteria for all of the five Diplomas on the website. [. . .] There is not a great deal of scrambling around the content of the specification to be done in the next few months.” However, we would want the Committee to appreciate that a qualification is not the same thing as a course. As the Committee will appreciate a fit-for-purpose qualification is defined in four dimensions:

1. What is to be learnt (usually referred to as the “content” or “curriculum”).
2. What is to be assessed (what the qualification will certify that a learner knows or can do).
3. How valid and reliable assessment is to be carried out (eg through examinations, portfolios of evidence or direct observation).
4. How standards are to be set and maintained (to ensure currency for the qualification, consistency over time and fairness to candidates).

For the Diplomas, only the first of these four dimensions, that of defining the content as described within the lines of learning criteria, is almost complete. In the time remaining, awarding bodies must now resolve the other three. On the fourth dimension, work has barely begun.

In practice there is something of a chasm between the development of the lines of learning criteria, published by the DDPs, and the production of actual qualifications. The content-based criteria have to be translated into assessable learning outcomes. Each learning outcome has to be interpreted, weighted and levelled. The assessment approach for each unit needs to be established, and assessment material and processes developed. All this has to be worked up with schools and colleges to ensure that what is produced can be delivered as a coherent and manageable programme.

THE CURRICULA

On top of the many technical challenges thrown up by the criteria, the industry “curricula” do not in themselves reflect a consistent and reliable standard. We welcome the vital input from employers and the work undertaken by QCA and the DDPs, but it would be wholly wrong to suggest that this work makes the task left to awarding bodies relatively straight forward. That the content has been given to us as a starting point, rather than content and assessment arrangements being developed in parallel and iteratively, as is usually the case with public qualifications, actually increases the complexity of development work needed to arrive at fit-for-purpose qualifications.

In conclusion, OCR believes that, through Herculean efforts, it may be possible to develop the foundations of Diplomas, of a quality that all agree is essential, for delivery in 2008. We do not believe that the risks should be underplayed, and fully concur with the evidence of witnesses representing the DDPs offered at the 17 January session that, to protect the interest of learners, the pilot should be of limited size with robust and careful monitoring and management, involving input and support from awarding bodies every step of the way. We also feel it is essential that awarding bodies should contribute at a much earlier stage to the development of the other lines of learning so that the right relationship can be established between relevant content and sound assessment.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by the Institute of Education, University of London

SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS: TRANSFORMING THE 14–19 LANDSCAPE IN ENGLAND?

ABSTRACT

Reforming vocational education in the English education and training system has occupied governments for at least the last three decades, the latest development being the introduction of 14 lines of Specialised Diplomas.ⁱ Using an historical analysis of qualifications reform, we suggest they are unlikely to transform 14–19 education and training. The failure to reform academic qualifications alongside their vocational equivalents is likely to result in “academic drift”,ⁱⁱ lack of status and a relatively low level of uptake for these new awards, a process compounded by low employer recognition of broad vocational qualifications. In rejecting the Tomlinson Report’s central proposal for a unified Diploma system covering all 14–19 education and training,ⁱⁱⁱ we argue that the Government may have condemned the Specialised Diplomas to become a middle-track qualification for a minority of 14–19-years-olds, situated between the majority academic pathway and the sparsely populated apprenticeship route.

UNDERSTANDING AND LOCATING SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS

Specialised Diplomas are the most recent qualifications policy initiative in the upper secondary English education and training system. We will argue that they are the latest in a long line of qualifications-based solutions to the deep-seated problem of raising the status of vocational learning in this country. The Government in England is relying on the development of this new suite of vocational qualifications to lever up participation rates in the 14–19 phase and,^{iv} in particular, at 17+ . Specialised Diplomas are seen as the centrepiece of the national 14–19 Entitlement outlined in the 14–19 White Paper (DfES 2005a) and they are the principal reason given for why schools, colleges and work-based learning providers should collaborate (DfES 2005b). Using historical analysis and current data on Specialised Diplomas in the early phase of their design and implementation, we argue that these new qualifications are likely to function more effectively than predecessors, such as General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), as a “middle track” for full-time younger learners.^v Their position between a dominant academic track and apprenticeships will, however, in our view, inhibit Specialised Diplomas from becoming highly regarded and popular qualifications. The prospect of these awards making only limited headway in the middle track should be concerning for Ministers who hope that Diplomas can be a transforming influence for the 14–19 education and training system as a whole (DfES 2005a). Or, put another way, Specialised Diplomas may make more of an impact than GNVQs, but they are unlikely to usher in a new dawn for vocational education in this country.

Our presenting argument is that the future of Specialised Diplomas, as broad vocational qualifications,^{vi} will be affected not only by supply-side features, such as their design, structure, content and assessment, important though these will be, but by issues of learner and end-user demand due to their location vis-à-vis established academic qualifications and sought-after employment-related experiences such as apprenticeships. Learner demand for these new qualifications is, therefore, likely to be reduced by the continuation of traditional A levels and General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) and by the low level of employer demand for broad full-time vocational qualifications. These long-standing difficulties facing vocational qualifications in England mean that it is important to exercise what Higham and Yeomans (2006) refer to as “policy memory” when assessing the potential impact of new initiatives in order to learn lessons from the past.

SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS WITHIN THEIR HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The history of broad vocational qualifications in England spans more than two decades, but the debate about the function of a nationally recognised broad vocational track between academic A levels and occupationally-specific National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) only emerged after the publication of the 1991 White Paper (DfE/ED/WO 1991) with its proposals for the development of Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced GNVQ as part of a national triple-track qualifications system (Hodgson and

Spours 1997). Other broad vocational awards existed prior to this (eg the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education, the Diploma of Vocational Education and the Business and Technology Council (BTEC) National Diploma), but these were products of individual or joint awarding body initiatives rather than government-inspired national awards. Of these, BTEC Diplomas stand out because of the way they gradually became accepted by employers and even higher education throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s and have become a durable part of the vocational qualifications landscape, despite the indifference or even hostility of successive governments (Williams 1999).

What all of these broad vocational qualifications had in common was that they were reactive to wider trends and structures and were introduced to respond to rising levels of full-time post-16 participation in a divided qualifications system (Hodgson and Spours 1997). GNVQ in the early 1990s, for example, was designed to provide an alternative to A levels, particularly in school sixth forms. At the time that the GNVQ was being introduced, the Conservative Government was trying to restrict participation in the academic track by closing down innovative modular A level programmes, such as the Wessex Project (Rainbow 1993), by restricting the amount of coursework in both GCSEs and A levels and by introducing tiered GCSE examinations (Spours 1993).^{vii} Given this policy context, practitioners reacted with pragmatic enthusiasm to the GNVQ because they needed post-16 awards for learners who were deemed unsuitable for participating in what was intended to be a more restrictive academic track (Williams 1999).

At the same time, practitioners had to deal with an extremely complex NVQ-inspired assessment regime (Ofsted 1994, SCAA 1996, Ecclestone 2000), which contributed to very low GNVQ completion rates compared with BTEC awards (Spours 1995, Robinson 1996, Carvel 1997). As a result of these difficulties, the fledgling GNVQ went through a number of reviews during the mid-1990s (eg NCVQ *et al* 1995, Capey 1995, Dearing 1996), the effects of which were to make them more manageable to deliver. Consequently, by the end of the decade, GNVQs had managed to establish for themselves a niche in 16–19 education and, in a slightly different form—Part 1 GNVQs—began to be introduced into the 14–16 curriculum. In compulsory education they earned a reputation not only for providing practical learning for young people alienated by a traditional curriculum (Ofsted 1996), but also for offering accessible GCSE equivalent qualifications that counted in performance tables. This too proved popular with schools.

The most recent newcomer to situate itself within the broad vocational suite of qualifications for full-time 16–19-year-olds was the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE), introduced in 2000 as part of what became known as the Curriculum 2000 reforms.^{viii} For 14–16-year-olds, the Government also developed GCSEs in Vocational Subjects. AVCEs were a response to criticisms of GNVQ standards and were situated much closer to academic qualifications than either GNVQ or BTEC awards. This location, the Government hoped, would ensure greater parity of esteem between vocational and academic qualifications. AVCEs, designed as vocational equivalents to A levels, turned out to be more “academic” than GNVQs, although this did not make them any more popular (Hodgson and Spours 2003). In fact, AVCEs made very little headway, particularly in further education colleges, due to their lack of vocational content and because their assessment requirements made it more difficult for learners to achieve high grades than in equivalent subjects offered as Advanced Subsidiary (AS)/A2 A level qualifications. Many colleges quickly reverted to the more familiar BTEC National Diplomas (Hodgson and Spours 2003).

Broad vocational qualifications have, over the last 20 years, thus occupied what might be termed the middle track. In this location they have experienced a mixture of success and failure. Their successes include being regarded as “motivational” qualifications for the disengaged (Williams 1999, Bathmaker 2001), contributing to full-time 16–19 participation rates and providing a relatively small but significant alternative route into certain parts of higher education. For policy-makers and practitioners content to see broad vocational qualifications play their niche role in a divided system, this might be success enough.

However, for those not satisfied with our “medium participation and achievement system” (Hodgson and Spours 2004), and this includes the Government (DfES 2005a), broad vocational qualifications still constitute a prime site for further reform. This being the case, it is worth reflecting on five significant weaknesses of these awards, as well as the three strengths identified above.

First, they have never been able to escape the shadow of A levels. The most capable learners continue to take these awards and the very success of broad vocational qualifications in their “motivational” role means that they are seen as an “alternative” curriculum (Spours 1997, Williams 1999). Second, GNVQs and AVCEs were designed for post-16 programmes in schools and colleges and they have singularly failed to articulate with apprenticeships and work-based learning, another potential source of prestige (FEDA/IOE/Nuffield 1997). BTEC National awards, which were not government designed, proved to be an exception because they slowly evolved with greater employer and practitioner involvement. The third weakness concerned assessment. Both GNVQs and AVCEs became weighed down by NVQ competence-derived assessment methodology, contributing to mediocre attainment performance and learner instrumentalism (Bates 1997, Savory *et al* 2003, Torrance 2006, Ecclestone 2002, 2006). A related issue for both qualifications, although more prevalent with GNVQ, was constant government interference both with their labelling and with their design; processes which compounded the problem of their low visibility and take-up by learners. Hence their fifth weakness, particularly in the case of AVCE, was their relative lack of recognition by either higher education (Hodgson, Spours and Waring 2005) or employers.

This balance of strengths and weaknesses points to the significant challenges facing Specialised Diplomas. They need to be both motivational and rigorous, to provide horizontal and vertical progression routes for 14–19-year-olds, to attract the full range of learners, to contain a mix of both general and vocational education and to alter employer and higher education demand for vocational qualifications. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2006b, p 1) reflects these tensions in two recent statements about Specialised Diplomas.

“They have been created to provide a real alternative to traditional education and qualifications”.

“Because of their unique design, Diplomas are equally suitable for the most able pupils preparing for demanding university courses; for young people who find the existing education system doesn’t suit them and for those who want to go straight into work after leaving school”.

Unsurprisingly, we argue that this is a tall order for any set of qualifications and particularly those that will continue to occupy a middle track location in the English education and training system. Historical analysis shows that the words “alternative” and “most able pupils” have not previously sat comfortably together. The evidence considered in the next section of this paper suggests that Specialised Diplomas may improve the role and function of the middle track, but will not be able to meet the full set of criteria outlined above without becoming part of a much wider set of system reforms, which do not feature in current government policy for 14–19 education and training.

SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS WITHIN THE CURRENT 14–19 REFORM AGENDA

POLICY AIMS AND ASSUMPTIONS

The major driver behind 14–19 policy in England is the widely accepted desire to raise levels of participation and attainment in order to compare more favourably with international competitors on education and training system performance. In particular, there are concerns about participation at 17+ and raising level 2 attainment (the level associated with employability in policy discourse). Three key targets related to participation, attainment and engagement are cited in the 14–19 Implementation Plan (DfES 2005b) which, during 2005–06, has been seen as the key policy text in this area:

- increasing attainment by the age of 19—at level 2 from 67% in 2004 to at least 70% by 2006 and 72% by 2008;
- at level 3, increasing the number of young people completing apprenticeships by 75% by 2007–08 as compared to 2002–03; and
- increasing the number of young people participating in education from 75% now to 90% by 2015 and reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training by two percentage points 2010.

The DfES view is that to meet these targets it will need to change the nature of 14–19 education and training. Policy documents (eg DfES 2002, 2003, 2005a) suggest that more young people will stay on in education or training if they can be offered a choice of ways of learning through an alternative vocational curriculum; the basic skills to progress within the 14–19 phase; and collaborative 14–19 institutional arrangements to support a vocational entitlement. Others have looked at the problems of low levels of participation and attainment in 14–19 education and training in a different way, which requires a broader set of reforms. They have stressed the importance of removing qualifications divisions, both academic/vocational and pre- and post-16 (Finegold *et al* 1990, NCE 1993, Hodgson and Spours 1997, Working Group on 14–19 Reform 2004); the central role of the youth labour market in framing young people’s behaviour (Evans *et al* 1997, Hayward *et al* 2005); and the need for institutional reorganisation to reduce social segregation between schools, colleges and the work-based route (Stanton and Fletcher 2006, Hayward *et al* 2006). This latter analysis has led to proposals for a unified qualifications system; licence to practise in the youth labour market and tertiary solutions to 14–19 organisation—all of which currently appear to be unpalatable to this Government.

Given the DfES analysis of the problems within 14–19 education and training, the key concepts it uses to drive policy in this area are “excellence” and “standards”, “choice” and “personalisation”, a “national 14–19 entitlement”, a focus on basic skills and provider collaboration. Behind these key concepts lie eight broad assumptions:

- (1) A better quality education and training system will attract more learners to stay in it—“for all the improvement in individual schools and colleges, not enough people feel engaged by the education on offer”. (DfES 2005a, p 1)
- (2) Young people learn in different ways and need to have “tailored” support, so it is important—“for all young people to choose a qualifications pathway which suits them” (DfES 2005a, p 2) and a choice of mode of study, whether this be at school, college or in an apprenticeship.
- (3) All young people need functional skills to level 2 in English, Maths and ICT—“Whichever route young people take, they will have to succeed in the basics of English and Maths, which are so crucial to success in life and at work”. (DfES 2005a, p 2)

- (4) GCSEs and A levels are “well understood” and “internationally recognised”, but vocational qualifications constitute a weak link in our system.
- (5) There will be a wide range of institutions offering provision (FE colleges, sixth form colleges, specialist schools, school sixth forms, national skills academies, academies and 16–19 academies as well as private work-based learning providers) and this will be reinforced by the use of LSC led “competitions”—“we are taking important steps to bring in new providers”. (DfES 2005a, para 3.46)
- (6) Institutional collaboration is vital because—“the nature of the 14–19 entitlement makes it evident that no school acting alone will be able to meet the needs of all young people on its roll and very few colleges will be able to offer the full breadth of curriculum on their own”. (DfES 2005a, para 3.1)
- (7) There needs to be local flexibility in the way that the new provision will be offered—“the detail of how an entitlement is to be delivered in an area must be decided locally”. (DfESa 2005, para 3.2)
- (8) Vocational qualifications will be strengthened because of employers’ leading role in the design of the new Specialised Diplomas “[. . .] we are working with employers to develop new qualifications with practical workplace experience”. (DfES 2005a, p 2) and employers will recognise these new qualifications because they have been involved in determining their content.

There are two main mechanisms for achieving these aims—the creation of a national 14–19 Entitlement to be in place by 2013, the centrepiece of which will be the new 14 lines of Specialised Diplomas, and the development of flexible and collaborative local delivery systems. While these two mechanisms are very much inter-related in practice, it is the former which constitutes the focus of this article and which we discuss in more detail below.^{ix}

THE SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS—DESIGN, PURPOSE AND IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES^x

As we have seen, at the heart of the national 14–19 Entitlement lie the new “employer-designed” Specialised Diplomas of which there will be 14 lines offered at levels 1–3 (Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced) of the National Qualifications Framework. The DfES intends that Specialised Diplomas should provide “an exciting, stretching and relevant programme of learning for young people of all backgrounds and abilities” (DfES 2006a, p 3) and should prepare them for life and work. It is claimed that the Diplomas will achieve this by their blend of general and applied learning in “real world environments” (each Diploma has to include at least 10 days of learning in a work setting) and the fact that they are designed by both employers and educators.

Each of the Diploma lines follows a common template comprising three elements:

- Principal Learning, which is designed to “develop knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to a broad economic sector, using realistic contexts and leading edge sector relevant materials”.
- Additional/Specialist Learning which “will allow learners to tailor their programme according to their interests and aspirations and may include further specialisation, or complementary studies”.
- Generic Learning, which “will ensure that all Diploma students cover common skills essential to successful learning and future employment. It includes personal learning and thinking skills, a project, work experience and maths, English and ICT.” (DfES 2006a, p 10)

The proportions of each of the three elements of the Diploma are different at each of the three levels, with Generic Learning decreasing and Principal Learning increasing from level 1 up to level 3. A level 1 Specialised Diploma is seen as broadly equivalent to 4–5 GCSEs, level 2 to 5–6 GCSEs and level 3 to three A levels, although there will also be a smaller “Certificate” at level 3 equivalent to two A levels. In addition, the content and assessment requirements of each line of Diplomas are likely to be different in different lines because relevant Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) have been asked to take a lead in the 14 Diploma Development Partnerships (DDPs), which are responsible for the content of the Specialised Diplomas, and the sectors cover very broad areas.

At the time of writing, Specialised Diplomas are still at a relatively early stage of development. The first five lines—IT, Health and Social Care, Construction and the Built Environment, Engineering, Creative and Media—will be available from September 2008, a further five—Land-based and Environmental, Manufacturing, Hair and Beauty, Business Administration and Finance from September 2009—from September 2009 and the final four—Public Services, Sport and Leisure, Retail and Travel and Tourism—will be introduced from September 2010. However, even at this point in the policy process a number of fundamental questions arise both about how the Specialised Diplomas will fare in the implementation phase and, more importantly, what their role will be in the future shape of the 14–19 education and training system. Several of the more practical issues raised in this article arise from seminars and in-depth discussions with a wide range of practitioners, researchers and policy makers as part of the Nuffield Review of 14–19 Education and Training in England and Wales.^{xi}

What are their purposes?

Like GNVQs, the Specialised Diplomas are intended to serve multiple purposes, some of which are in tension with one another. As we have already noted, they are intended to provide programmes of study for disaffected learners; for learners who have failed to reach the 5 A*-C benchmark at 16; for those wishing to pursue a high-quality employer recognised qualification and for those wanting to prepare for entry to higher education. The recent history of broad vocational qualifications suggests that it is difficult to design a single set of awards to meet this wide range of needs without compromising one or more of its aims. In the case of both GNVQs (FEDA/IOE/Nuffield 1997) and AVCEs (Savory *et al* 2003), this led to awards which were neither sufficiently vocational to be highly valued by employers nor sufficiently general to be fully accepted by universities.

In addition, Specialised Diplomas at levels 1 and 2 are supposed to meet the needs of 14–16-year-olds still in compulsory education and 16–19-year-olds undertaking post-compulsory study. This is likely to give rise to a number of problems. In particular, practitioners have highlighted the issue of learners pursuing vocational specialisation pre-16. Learners of this age are not old enough to gain “licence to practise” awards such as those in childcare, so even if they pass a level 2 qualification, they are not necessarily ready to go out into the workplace, unlike their post-16 counterparts. This raises a question about what the function of a sectoral vocational award of this type might be within compulsory education. In addition, if learners undertake sector-specific specialisation pre-16, there is a danger of repetition of study post-16, particularly if they do not progress to the next level. This practical problem has to some extent been recognised by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and it is considering a “hybrid” level 1 Specialised Diploma that would offer learners the opportunity to experience more than one vocational area pre-16, thus keeping their options more open at this stage in their education. However, this relatively minor design solution will not address the broader problems of purpose highlighted above.

How popular are they likely to be?

Historical precedent suggests that the retention of GCSEs and A levels, which have been accepted as the most prestigious route of study for 14–19-year-olds for many years, will mean that the most able learners (and their parents) are likely to continue to opt for these qualifications rather than to choose one of the new Specialised Diplomas. Moreover, if Specialised Diplomas co-exist with tried and tested vocational qualifications such as BTEC Diplomas, and City and Guilds London Institute awards, their popularity is not assured even among those learners wishing to take more applied or vocational study. Currently, awarding bodies are reserving their position on whether to replace their existing awards with the new Specialised Diplomas. There is, therefore, the danger of a repetition of the GNVQ and AVCE experience of a low-status and low-profile award which has to compete with other more tried and tested qualifications and is only partially accepted by higher education and by employers, thus reducing both learner and end-user demand.

Who is designing them?

The DfES hopes that the “unique” design of the Specialised Diplomas will make them attractive to learners. However, the design of the new awards has been rushed (the original date for their full implementation has been brought forward from 2013 to 2010), has separated the determination of content, accreditation and assessment and has not overtly built upon previously successful vocational qualifications.

The generic template for the Specialised Diplomas was primarily designed by private consultants working for QCA, with very little time for full consultation either with qualifications experts or with practitioners. The designers attempted to incorporate some features of the Tomlinson proposals into the Diploma template but did not make strong use of existing vocational qualifications designs. The DDPs, who were in charge of “populating” the specialised Diploma generic template with learning outcomes, did not necessarily have the curriculum expertise required for this task and they had to adapt to a pre-determined template which did not always match their sector needs. Meanwhile, awarding bodies, which do have the expertise to design the Diplomas, played a marginal role in the initial design, even though they are now expected to develop the specifications for these new awards and possibly to use them to replace their own existing qualifications. QCA, as the regulator, has overall say on the final designs and assessment and, as history suggests, the approach to assessment will have a major bearing on teaching, learning and achievement.^{xiii}

The different roles for each of the three parties in the shaping of the new Specialised Diplomas, particularly given the very short timescale for their development, has been fraught with communication problems. Moreover, this new and untried approach to qualifications design, in which bodies representing employment sector interests have been accorded the leading role, risks creating very different Specialised Diplomas in each of the 14 lines, which may restrict horizontal and vertical progression for learners within and across the framework. As Mike Tomlinson pointed out in his Final Report (Working Group on 14–19 Reform 2004), this kind of learner mobility is particularly important at the lower levels of the new Specialised Diploma ladder because this is where learners face the greatest barriers to progression under the current qualifications system.

This is not to say, however, that there has been an absence of educational thinking in determining the content of the first five Specialised Diplomas. However, in the context of middle track location, content design in itself will not necessarily produce an award attractive to a very diverse group of learners.

Who will offer them?

It is clear from the 14–19 Implementation Plan (DfES 2005b) that schools are expected to play a major role in delivering the Specialised Diplomas. It is unlikely, however, that they will be able to offer a large number because they will not have the facilities, despite the capacity-building measures described in the Plan. Colleges, on the other hand, while potentially the obvious providers of the vocational entitlement are, from discussions we have had with senior managers and sector representative bodies, concerned on at least four accounts about fulfilling this role. They are nervous of taking on new qualifications without a strong reputation, having been burnt by the AVCE experience. As a result of dissatisfaction with AVCEs, many colleges have recently gone back to offering BTEC awards and are unlikely to want to switch wholesale to the new Specialised Diplomas. They are also concerned that some of the Specialised Diploma lines, at each of the levels, may attract very small numbers of learners and will make them costly to mount as courses. GNVQs have taught FE colleges that some sector qualifications do not prove popular—Art and Design, Business, Health and Social Care and Leisure and Tourism GNVQs, for example, attracted much larger numbers of learners than any of the other areas (FEDA/IOE/Nuffield Foundation 1997). In addition, colleges are anxious about the very broad nature of each of the 14 lines and the risk of not being able to meet specific learner or employer needs without offering large numbers of costly specialised units. Finally, both schools and colleges are concerned about how to ensure enough employer engagement to cover all the work-based elements at all levels of the new awards. This would demand a significant rise in the number of work experience placements available to 14–19-year-olds. Evidence submitted to the Nuffield Review of 14–19 Education and Training suggests that schools and colleges are already struggling to fulfil the much less demanding requirements of current vocational qualifications.

ANALYSING THE LOCATION OF SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS

The Specialised Diplomas could thus be seen as yet another attempt to strengthen vocational learning for young people, to raise its status and, possibly, to rationalise the plethora of vocational qualifications for this age group. They take forward the programmatic approach to learning and qualifications outlined in the Tomlinson Final Report (Working Group on 14–19 Reform 2004) and appear to constitute a progression ladder of broad vocational full-time provision located between the GCSE/A level track and apprenticeships, leading to either employment or higher education. While these characteristics look similar to GNVQs, policy documents suggest that Specialised Diplomas are intended to be more vocationally-focused with higher degrees of employer engagement and recognition and it is these features that government is hoping will prove attractive to both young people and end-users. The Government has staked the reputation of Specialised Diplomas on their “unique design” and the formation of a collaborative network of providers to deliver them. However, it is within the wider context of the 14–19 education and training system and reform process that Specialised Diplomas will, arguably, either succeed or fail.

First, as we have argued above, Specialised Diplomas will co-exist with “traditional” GCSEs and A levels and history suggests that these latter qualifications will continue to attract the most able learners. From the initial specifications of the first five Specialised Diplomas, it appears that the DDPs are aware of this danger and have been designing the content of the Diplomas (particularly in Engineering) to emphasise parity of esteem in order to attract students away from the academic track. At the same time, Specialised Diplomas are seen as a full-time route to apprenticeship but not the qualifications basis of apprenticeship (QCA 2006). Both these design features confirm the middle track location of Specialised Diplomas. This is fuelling an ongoing debate as to the nature of the new awards, centring around the degree to which they will become more general, more applied or more sharply vocational. The latest draft of content of the first five Diplomas published in July 2006, possibly with the exception of Construction, looks as if the balance is tilting towards academic/applied rather than vocational/practical, casting doubt over whether these awards will eventually be labelled as vocational qualifications.

Second, there is absolutely no guarantee that employers will recognise Specialised Diplomas to the extent that young people will detect strong labour market signals for these awards. Vocational qualifications currently play a marginal role in labour market recruitment and selection (Keep 2005) and the fact that the relatively new Sector Skills Councils have been involved in determining the content of these new qualifications is likely to cut little ice with employers as a whole.

 THE FUTURE FOR SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS—NICHE AWARD OR PART OF A TRANSFORMED 14–19 SYSTEM?

MIDDLE-TRACK LOCATION

When she came into post as Secretary of State for Education and Skills in 2004, Ruth Kelly made two inter-related assumptions about 14–19 education and training—A levels and GCSEs were untouchable because they were an education brand recognised by parents, employers and higher education; and the main problem with the English education and training system lay with vocational education. Immediately, the broad scope of discussion about reform of the phase, led by Mike Tomlinson’s Working Group on 14–19 Reform, was narrowed to focus on vocational education taking place in schools and colleges and separate from GCSEs, A levels and apprenticeships. We have argued that because of these political assumptions and policy actions, Specialised Diplomas appear destined to become a full-time vocational route occupying a middle track between a dominant A level route and a smaller Apprenticeship system. In this location, they risk the fate of their predecessor qualifications—successful to a degree as an applied alternative to GCSEs and A levels, but hardly transformative of 14–19 education and training.

It is possible that Specialised Diplomas could form a larger middle track if they were able to replace the vocational qualifications (eg AVCEs, GNVQs, BTEC and NVQ equivalents) that currently occupy this space. However, this “locational” clarity is not assured because awarding bodies, such as Edexcel and CGLI, are only likely to surrender their tried and tested qualifications if Specialised Diplomas subsume some of the specialist vocational functions of these current qualifications. It is almost certain that Specialised Diplomas will replace the more school-based GNVQ, AVCE and GCSEs in vocational subjects but it is not at all certain that they will replace the more sharply vocational BTEC and CGLI awards that currently straddle college-based and work-based learning programmes and, in some cases, serve as the technical certificate component of apprenticeship frameworks.

CONFUSIONS OF PURPOSE IN A RUSHED POLICY PROCESS

The ability of Specialised Diplomas to offer a high degree of vocational specialisation is thus in doubt. Designed across 14 broad sectoral lines, Specialised Diplomas do not have the range of work-based content offered by many current vocational qualifications. Moreover, there is a sharp debate taking place behind the scenes as to their purpose and orientation. Like their predecessor broad vocational qualifications, Specialised Diplomas are being designed to provide progression to both further study and to work and their middle-track location means that they risk being pulled in different directions. Policy espousal has projected them as vocationally distinct, meeting employer needs and convergent with the desires of some learners for a more practical curriculum. Policy practice, as we have seen, reflects a different process taking place. Specialised Diplomas are being pulled away from a strongly vocational trajectory by the status of unreformed A levels and their distinction from apprenticeships. Moreover, the issue of balance between general and vocational learning has been made more acute by introducing Specialised Diplomas into compulsory education at Key Stage 4,^{xiii} where general education needs are most pronounced. The outcome may well be that Specialised Diplomas will become “neither fish nor fowl” in the eyes of post-16 learners and end-users—not really equivalent to traditional A levels but not sufficiently vocational to meet vocational “licence to practise” requirements.

Problems of location and purpose are being compounded by a rushed and less than transparent policy process. Having rejected the central proposal from the Tomlinson Final Report—a unified and inclusive Diploma system covering the whole of 14–19 education and training—the Government felt the need to have a driving proposal in the 14–19 White Paper—the Specialised Diplomas—which reflected some of the Tomlinson ideas. This was combined with the need to convince employers that it was serious about meeting their “needs”—hence the move to involve them more fully in designing entirely new vocational qualifications with an untried qualifications design process. However, in failing to recognise the value of long-standing vocational qualifications, such as BTEC National and CGLI awards, and to build on their success, the Government may be taking significant risks. It may get the designs wrong and, in the short-term at least, increase rather than rationalise the already large number of vocational qualifications; a process likely to cause further confusion amongst end-users and to lower the profile of the new Diplomas.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND ISSUES

These three problems—middle-track location, multiplicity or even confusion of purpose and a rushed reform process—are likely to lead to significant status problems as Specialised Diplomas struggle to establish themselves in a crowded qualifications landscape, still under the shadow of A levels and with unchanged employer recruitment practices. The Government is depending upon the design of the new Diplomas and employer involvement in this process, together with the development of collaborative provider partnerships, to boost learner demand and post-16 participation. We have argued that this supply-side strategy may not be enough because the prognosis for Specialised Diplomas will be fundamentally determined by learner and employer demand for the new qualification and neither of these is assured for what is likely to be a new, untried, broad vocational qualification. Simply, too much is being expected of a narrow supply-side initiative.

WHOLE-SYSTEM NOT PART-SYSTEM REFORM

At this point in the reform process, we conclude that the fate of Specialised Diplomas will be determined more by their context than by their content. The Government has staked a great deal on this new qualification but has done very little to change the context into which it will be introduced. This, in our view, points to the need for more radical whole-system reform. The 14–19 reform process will need to avoid dependence on what we have characterised as a divided supply-side strategy and to seek, instead, a more expansive synergy of supply-side and demand-side policies.

On the supply side, whole-system reform would mean, for example, the development of a unified and comprehensive 14–19 Diploma system, such as that proposed in the Tomlinson Final Report (Working Group on 14–19 Reform 2004), which would provide a mix of more open and more specialised Diploma programmes to meet the needs of all learners throughout the 14–19 phase.^{xiv} A levels, GCSEs, other major awards for 16–19-year-olds and apprenticeships would all be absorbed into the Diploma system, rather than being located separately and would thus obviate the need for arguments about “parity of esteem”. For the 14–16 age group, such a system would provide more general programmes of study pre-16 at entry, level 1 and level 2, allowing for sharp vocational, practical and applied experiences, but avoiding the problems of early sectoral or occupational specialisation highlighted earlier.

However, if 14–19 reform is going to lever up participation, policy would have to go further than a comprehensive approach to supply-side changes and would need to address issues of employer demand (Keep 2005, Hayward *et al* 2005) and post-16 organisation (Hodgson and Spours 2004, Stanton and Fletcher 2006). A broader range of reform synergies is required to shift the education and training system into a new gear. This strategy is more difficult to deliver in the short-term because it involves widespread regulatory and organisational change but, in our view, this approach should be openly discussed as part of the debate on the 14–19 phase.

In the meantime, serious consideration needs to be given to the Review of A levels in 2008, outlined in the 14–19 Implementation Plan, and what this means for the role of Diploma programmes in 14–19 education and training in England. Here, it is possible to view the current reform effort around Specialised Diplomas in two ways. The first is to see the new qualifications, as the Government presently does, as “alternatives” to academic study and thus broadly equivalent to current broad vocational qualifications. The second, is to view them as precursors of a comprehensive system of Diplomas designed to shape the curriculum and accredit programmes embracing both academic and vocational education. We have argued that the first interpretation is beset by contextual and structural problems that will undermine learner and employer demand. The second is, arguably, a more viable course, because it changes the context for Diplomas to succeed, although it will mean challenging GCSEs and A levels in their role as high status separate qualifications and this is likely to present political difficulties. However, if the Government were to adopt the second perspective in the approach to the 2008 Review of A levels and the new awards were seen as Diploma precursors for all learners in the 14–19 phase, rather than alternatives for those deemed unable to succeed in academic qualifications, Specialised Diplomas might just be rescued from the mire of the middle track.

January 2007

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NOTES

- ⁱ IT, Health and Social Care, Engineering, Creative and Media, Construction and the Built Environment, Land-based and Environmental, Manufacturing, Hair and Beauty, Business Administration and Finance, Hospitality and Catering, Public Services, Sport and Leisure, Retail, Travel and Tourism.
- ⁱⁱ "Academic drift" here refers to the process whereby vocational qualifications take on features of their academic counterparts in order to raise their status in a divided qualifications system (See Hodgson and Spours 2003). Others, such as Raffe *et al* (2001) and Wolf (2002) use the term to refer to the way that young people opt to remain in the academic route rather than choosing vocational options when the latter are perceived as of lower status.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Working Group on 14–19 Reform (2004).
- ^{iv} Some vocational education policies in the UK cover England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (eg credit frameworks). Currently, however, Specialised Diplomas are part of 14–19 policy only in England. Wales is reserving its judgement on whether to introduce these awards (see Hayward *et al* 2006, Chapter 2).
- ^v By this term we mean a 14–19 pathway that is neither "academic" (GCSEs and A levels) nor strongly vocational/work-based (NVQs/Apprenticeships) and thus sits in the middle of the three main routes through 14–19 education and training in England.
- ^{vi} We use the term "broad vocational qualifications" to distinguish those qualifications, such as GNVQ and BTEC National (and now Specialised Diplomas), which are composite awards that constitute either the whole or a substantial part of full-time learner programmes, from "vocational qualifications", such as NVQs, which are usually smaller, are mainly offered to part-time learners as part of a predominantly work-based programme.
- ^{vii} Tiered GCSEs refers to the introduction of a number of different levels of papers spanning different grade profiles into what had been a single examination.
- ^{viii} *Curriculum 2000* refers to the reform of the major full-time qualifications for 16–19-year-olds and the introduction in 2000 of modular AS/A2 qualifications, replacing traditional A levels, AVCEs or Applied A levels in some subject areas and a new Key Skills Qualification for all 16–19-year-olds (see Hodgson and Spours 2003 for a full account of the Curriculum 2000 reforms).
- ^{ix} See Hayward *et al* 2005 and 2006 *Annual Report of the Nuffield 14–19 Review* for a more detailed discussion of the role of collaborative local delivery systems in 14–19 reform.
- ^x Our comments in this section are based on a snapshot at a particular point in the reform process that is changing rapidly.
- ^{xi} The Nuffield Review of 14–19 Education and Training in England and Wales was launched in October 2003 and will run until August 2009. The Review is led by a Directorate of Richard Pring and Geoff Hayward from the University of Oxford's Department of Educational Studies; Ann Hodgson and Ken Spours from the Institute of Education, University of London; Jill Johnson from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service; and Ewart Keep and Gareth Rees from the University of Cardiff. It is both independent of government and aims to take a comprehensive view of 14–19 education and training. The work of the Review is available online at: www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk.
- ^{xii} The modes, amount and balance of assessment were problematic in both GNVQs (Capey 1995, Dearing 1996, Ecclestone 2002) and AVCEs (Savory *et al.* 2003) so the impact of this aspect of the new Specialised Diplomas should not be underestimated. However, a discussion of assessment within the Specialised Diplomas cannot be a focus of this article because the assessment model is still not determined.
- ^{xiii} Key Stage 4 is the name given to the final two years of secondary schooling for 14–16-year-olds.
- ^{xiv} Open was the term used in the Tomlinson Final Report to denote Diplomas made up of a variety of subjects without any clear area of specialisation. "We do not, however, propose to label any individual Diploma awarded to a young person as 'specialised'. Every Diploma would either be 'open' or be labelled according to the area of specialisation." (Working Group on 14–19 Reform 2004, p 24).

Memorandum submitted by Confed

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Confederation of children's services managers—Confed—is the professional association representing Directors and Managers of Education and Children's Services in local authorities in England and Wales. Initially established as the Association of Directors and Secretaries for Education in 1906, the Association evolved over time into the broader based Society of Education Officers. Confed was officially launched in July 2002 marking the beginning of the Association's expansion into the broader children's services agenda. Confed is an umbrella body bringing together the Society of Education Officers (SEO), the Association of Directors of Education and Children's Services, (ADECS, formerly the Association of Chief Education Officers), the National Association of Senior School Improvement Professionals (NASSIPs, formerly the Society of Chief Inspectors and Advisers) and the Association of Local Authority Advisory Officers for Multi-cultural Education (ALAOME).

1.2 The prime purpose of Confed is to contribute to the raising and maintaining of high quality standards in local authority education and children's services. As a Learned Society, Confed aims to influence national developments in the provision of education and children's services and within the profession to share good practice among local authorities and promote the interests of staff working in the leadership and management of education and children's services. Confed is committed to a stakeholder model of a publicly accountable system which delivers high quality, appropriately-targeted services to children, young people and their families and carers, where all providers work together collaboratively for the good of every child and young person.

1.3 As the professional voice of Directors of Children's Services, Confed would wish to work with all partners to ensure that the emerging 14–19 agenda is both deliverable and delivered to our young people. It is Local Authorities who now have the responsibility to establish and develop effective local 14–19 Partnerships. Confed members have a key role in the development and strategic leadership of the delivery of the Diploma at a local level.

1.4 The implementation of policy into practice and providing feedback is the particular experience, role and expertise of Confed's professional membership and Confed has considerable collective knowledge and understanding of how to deliver through partnership working. Confed also has a regional membership structure across England and is currently re-organising with ADSS to develop a single professional voice of Children Services leaders in England.

2. CONFED'S RECOMMENDATIONS

There are three main recommendations that Confed would wish to put forward for consideration:

2.1 That a new Joint Protocol be agreed, under the leadership of the Diploma Champions that sets out the vision, values and modus operandi of all key stakeholders and that clarifies roles and responsibilities.

2.2 That nine Regional Diploma Teams be established that are multi-agency and integrate with the existing regional infrastructure.

2.3 That National Demonstration Projects for each line of learning that become regional hubs for Diploma development and delivery and sit within new regional Diploma strategic management arrangements based on Government Offices

3. DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF DIPLOMAS

We need a Protocol to engage all partners and stakeholders, including young people, that will map the:

- Design
 - Development
 - Delivery
- of the Diplomas and will clearly articulate the:
- Aims
 - Ambitions
 - Roles
 - Responsibilities
- of all the players.

3.1 The shared vision and common understanding that comes from this will establish:

- The Purpose of The Diploma.
- Shared values, principles and strategy.
- How the Diploma fits into and complements the 14–19 Framework and curriculum.
- How the Diploma will innovate and motivate.

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- Delivery of the knowledge, understanding and skills that will have currency for young people in the world of work and how they will be assessed and graded.
 - The experiential nature of the curriculum.
 - Employer and key stakeholder engagement at a regional level.
 - Regional support and strategic management.
 - Testing, trailing, research and development to inform Diploma delivery.
 - Clear roles and responsibilities at both national and regional levels.

4. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

An all-partner National Steering Group should be established to ensure that the implementation of the Protocol is followed.

4.1 *A National Steering Group*

National Progression Demonstration Projects (see below) are principally concerned with development and delivery of the Diploma. It would be appropriate for the National Steering Group to be chaired by the QCA. The purpose of the steering group would be to co-ordinate and have strategic leadership of the National Demonstration Projects and bring together key national strategic leaders in the Development of the Diploma and in particular would have strong Employer membership and involvement to ensure highly successful Diploma provision and credibility for each of the Phase 1 Lines of Learning.

4.2 *The roles and responsibilities of the National Steering Group*

These would include:

- Determining terms of reference for the Demonstration Projects to develop scale, structure, and employer leadership.
- Scoping, commissioning and implementing a Project Plan.
- Inviting expressions of interest for NDP status.
- Determining criteria and deciding choice of projects to include geographic spread.
- Responsible for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Projects and producing an Annual Progress Review of the Demonstration Projects.
- Giving strategic leadership to the development of the NDPs.
- Quality Control of the work of NDPs.
- To disseminate effective practice for future Diploma development.
- Commissioning and overseeing regional strategic management support for local management and implementation of the projects.
- Monitoring the implementation of the project plan and receiving progress reports.

4.3 *National Steering Group Membership*

The membership of the National Steering Group would carry out the Governance role and its membership should include as a minimum:

- Phase 1 DDP Leads and/or SSDA representatives.
- DfES representative.
- QCA.
- A Regional Steering Group Representative for each Phase 1 line of learning National Demonstration project.
- Two HEI Representatives.
- Two Awarding Body Representatives.
- Two Confed/ADCS representatives.

This would give a membership of around 20 and it is envisaged that the National Steering Group would need to meet at least three times a year and possibly more intensively at the development stage.

5. DIPLOMA NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

5.1 A programme of National Demonstration Projects should be established that will secure high-level national credibility for each Line of Learning. It will ensure that students, parents, employers and HE have full confidence in the Diploma as a genuine, robust and clear pathway for progression through secondary, further and higher education to employment according to their appropriate entry point into the world of work. The National Demonstration Projects will demonstrate, from first draft to delivery, that Diplomas are high quality, robust and genuinely innovative for learners with new opportunities for progression that meet the needs of employers, Higher Education and young people.

5.2 The five Projects, one for each Phase I line of learning, will be nationally led. They will demonstrate the benefits of effective employer engagement and leadership and give a practical explanation of how each line of learning will work. This will teach and inform training providers, schools, colleges, employers, learners and Higher Education how an individual line of learning can be effectively delivered. They will show -case innovative curriculum practice and establish new approaches for applied, experiential learning, PLTS and Functional Skills, in the context of an individual line of learning. They will also provide the opportunity for national testing, trialling and structured external evaluation of qualification development and test the implementation of each individual line of learning.

5.3 The NDPs will be Centres of Excellence for staff development, effective practice, stakeholder engagement, and act as regional hubs for the national rollout and promotion of the Diploma as well as being a national exemplar reference point for their individual line of learning.

5.4 There may be some national organisations including the Offender Management Services, Young Offenders Institutions and The Armed Forces where it might be appropriate to consider separate demonstration projects to reflect their unique situation.

5.5 There would be the opportunity to link national and local employer Diploma champions to each National Demonstration Project who could form an Ambassadors Network to promote the Diploma so that the National Demonstration Projects are shown to be and are in practice employer-led.

5.6 By 2008 there would be 5 National Progression Demonstration Projects (one for each Phase 1 Line of Learning) located in different parts of the country in different kinds of communities developed to reflect the context of the regional economy and the regional economic strategy. In Phase 1 it would be appropriate for innovative local centres and consortia to be designated as National Demonstration Projects that would bring together the Sector Skills Councils, local centres, their partnerships, national and local employers, awarding bodies and higher education. They would be compatible with the Diploma Gateway process and would be complementary to the proposed Pathfinder projects. The selection of designated NDP's would mirror the Diploma Gateway process in terms of meeting robust selection criteria.

5.7 It would be possible in Phase 2 to identify further National Demonstration Projects for each new line of learning in such a way as to eventually ensure geographical coverage for each of the nine Government Office Regions. Consideration could be given to establishing at least one National Progression Demonstration Project for each Line of Learning in each Region as the Diploma is developed.

5.8 A crucial aspect of a National Demonstration Project will be the alignment of all delivery partners to establish clear, genuine and robust pathways for young people and for these to be communicated to young people and their parents. Therefore a co-ordinated local stakeholder engagement strategy will be a prerequisite of designation as a National Demonstration Project as part of the national 14–19 Communication strategy.

5.9 The NDPs will provide the opportunity to secure national strategic management, structured implementation, and feedback and learning on a range of Diploma development and delivery issues. These would include:

- Employer Engagement and Leadership.
- Communication with teachers, learners and parents.
- Identify effective ways of delivering the Diploma.
- Making collaborative consortia work.
- Strategic management and planning.
- Impartial IAG and structured access for Young People.
- Workforce Development and training.
- Funding mechanisms and costs.
- Grading and Assessment.
- Timetabling and transport.
- KS3/4 Curriculum models and compatibility issues.
- Progression across 14–19 framework including pathways to Apprenticeships & employment.
- Buildings and specialist facilities.
- Accountability, reporting, roles and responsibilities.

- Delivery of PLTS, Functional Skills and high quality work experience.
- Experiential learning and teaching strategies.

6. THE REGIONAL APPROACH

Many of the key stakeholders for the Diploma have a regional organisational structure eg Government Offices, LSC, Sector Skills Councils, Employer Organisations, SSAT, Confed/ADCS and there are also a number of existing regional partnerships that have an interest in this agenda as well school, college, HE and training provider networks. There is also regional support for the 14–19 agenda through EBLOs and Connexions arrangements as well as the local 14–19 Partnerships which LAs have the responsibility for establishing and developing.

6.1 A Regional Diploma Team is urgently needed, established through the nine Government Offices in England who are ideally placed to, co-ordinate and align all field force support and partnership work on the 14–19 Agenda and are already giving local leadership to the 14–19 Progress Checks and the Diploma Gateway Processes. Each Regional Diploma Team should include any organisation or field force that is involved in Diploma support and delivery as set out above. At the same time there is the opportunity to integrate these developments with the work of the RDAs and Regional Skills Partnerships, who bring together the major regional stakeholders including Sector Skills Councils in addressing skills development in the context of the Regional Economic Strategy.

6.2 *Regional Steering Groups*

It is envisaged that there will be a geographical spread of National Demonstration Projects and that a Regional Steering Group could oversee them at a local level to exercise local Governance. This would integrate with existing LSC regional partnership arrangements and could be an additional function of an already existing group or be newly created for this purpose according to local needs. It would be crucial that this is seen to be employer-led and again there will be different local networks that would be appropriate in the context of local LSC arrangements.

6.3 *Regional Steering Groups-Roles and Responsibilities*

These would include:

- Engaging all local key stakeholders particularly employers.
- Provide additional support for delivery of agreed Demonstration Projects.
- Management of NDP support budget..
- Management of Tests, trials and drawing lessons from project
- Drawing up NDP in consultation with local partners.
- Project management of the Demonstration Project Plan for their NDP.
- Approval, monitoring and evaluation of their NDP.
- Regular accountability to the National Steering Group.
- Liaison with the National Demonstration Project Steering Group.
- Oversight of strategic support for all Diploma development in the Region.
- Promotion and marketing of the Diploma in their region.
- Developing a regional communication strategy for dissemination.
- Developing regional infrastructure support for Diploma rollout.

6.4 Regional Steering Group Membership would include:

- Employer Chair.
- Local Sector Skills representative.
- Regional Skills Partnership.
- RDA
- Government Office DfES 14–19 lead.
- HEI.
- LSC.
- QCA.
- Local 14–19 Partnership co-ordinator and key providers.
- Awarding Body Representative.
- Local Centre Co-ordinator.

7. KEY OUTCOMES

7.1 A success story, which demonstrates that the new qualification can genuinely meet the needs of employers and HEIs by developing technically competent and personally proficient young people, who might not otherwise have chosen that field of employment, attracted by an applied learning course.

7.2 The development of a national test-bed framework for independent evaluation, testing and structured trials during the development of the Diploma prior and subsequent to the launch of Phase 1 in 2008.

7.3 A practical foundation for the development of national guidance for local centres and providers based on a well-designed research and development framework established within the National Demonstration Projects.

7.4 Involvement of National bodies in local development through the leadership of Sector Skills Councils/DDP's, DfES, QCA.

7.5 Creating synergy between national and regional organisations such as LSC, Aim Higher and Regional Skills Partnerships, RDAs and Specialist Schools and Academies.

7.6 Development of Centres of Excellence to support on-going local Diploma rollout, and work-force development.

7.7 Demonstrating how effective pathways will work from age 14 through to Higher Education and employment.

7.8 Demonstrate that the Diploma is as good as A levels as a pathway to Higher Education and employment.

7.9 National communication and sharing of effective practice.

7.10 Co-ordination of national, regional and local stakeholder involvement to deliver a high quality hub and spoke framework.

7.11 Support for the delivery of the Work Experience component.

7.12 Limited in scale so that it can be assured of success, capable of replication and carefully and widely marketed.

7.13 Delivering confidence and credibility for the Diploma demonstrating the benefits of local employer engagement.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by the Financial Services Skills Council (FSSC)

INTRODUCTION

The Financial Services Skills Council (FSSC) was established in 2004 to lead the skills and productivity drive for the United Kingdom financial services industry. It is the only body, apart from industry regulator the Financial Services Authority, acting for the entire UK financial services industry, and seeks to provide strategic leadership for training, skills and education development in the industry in order to improve productivity and performance.

The FSSC is focussed on representing the employers' interests (employer-led) and directly influences the planning and funding of education and training across the UK with relevant Government, national and international organisations. The FSSC promotes the concept of spending on skills training to meet the strategic needs of the financial services industry, rather than being driven by calls simply to comply with the requirement to provide skills training. Further, the FSSC works to enhance the profile of British qualifications in the global financial services community.

The FSSC is part of the Skills for Business Network, a cluster of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) covering the key industry sectors, and highlighted by Lord Leitch in his recent HM Treasury Report on Skills as being important to the delivery of future skills provision in the UK. SSCs are the access points to public funding to match employers' investment, and actively involve trade unions, professional bodies and other stakeholders. The FSSC has also memoranda of understanding with professional associations including the Alliance for Finance, Investors in People UK and the Financial Services Authority.

Over the past 10 years, heightened competition for global markets and the advent of offshoring trends have increased the pressure on cost reduction and productivity, and the sector has faced many changes; structurally, legislatively and technologically. With no sign of these changes abating, it has never been more important to be prepared for the needs of an increasingly global dimension to the UK economy in the future; this must entail the creation of a greater skills base in the UK.

Since the Government published its Education and Skills White Paper in February 2005, in which it set out its vision for the future of 14–19 education, the FSSC has been intimately involved in the progress of reforms.

The Financial Services Skills Council was nominated to lead the development of the Business, Administration and Finance Specialised Diploma learning content.⁵ The aim is that by recruiting individuals with a specialised Diploma, UK financial services employers will be confident that each person has the relevant knowledge and skills to make a positive contribution to a key UK industry. This will help employers to retain a UK workforce rather than having to seek overseas talent.

TEACHER AND LECTURER TRAINING

The FSSC believe that schools have been slow to fully embrace the demands the introduction of the Diploma will make on teachers. There are concerns that the teacher training on offer may be “too little—too late”. For the Diploma to be successful teachers and lecturers need to have a deep and thorough knowledge of the subjects being taught. The FSSC is concerned that teachers will not be fully prepared to deliver the new Diplomas, especially the Business, Administration and Finance Specialised Diploma, and may thus undermine their potential success with both students and potential employers.

In order to allay this problem of implementation the FSSC proposes that employers work with providers, perhaps through Education and Business Partnerships on projects that will provide teachers with first hand work experience of topics included in Diplomas.

CO-ORDINATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

The FSSC suggests that schools and colleges work much more closely with each other in order to deliver Diplomas within their district. This will require a strengthening of existing relationships, through greater communication and sharing of information on delivery methods.

The new network of national skills academies may offer useful opportunities to develop both these relationships and Diploma content. As a minimum, Skills Academies offer a ready-made forum for sector-specific employer engagement. Where Skills Academies do not exist, Sector Skills Councils can fulfil aspects of this role.

Other issues that may emerge from closer coordination will be the pooling and use of resources. The FSSC hopes that the number of providers in a district able to offer Diplomas will grow, with more specialist schools, existing colleges and city academies willing to run the Diplomas as the lines develop. This may actually help to overcome the problem of resource distribution.

Already the FSSC has found some very good examples of strong coordination between education providers. These are being used to promote changes in how education is delivered, with particular emphasis on the mobile pupil.

The FSSC believes that Local Authorities (with Learning and Skills Councils where relevant) should be fully responsible for ensuring the provision of Diplomas within a district. In this role both bodies must be a pivotal in the coordination, provision and delivery of the Diplomas as they are rolled out. There is also, of course, a role here for Sector Skills Councils in bridge-building between providers and employers.

The FSSC has for some time detected a great deal of interest in Diploma development from head teachers. This interest does not, however, appear to have been replicated thus far by college principals. The FSSC also has concerns that the interest manifested by headteachers in Diploma delivery has not been passed on to teachers. This should be rectified, as early and intense teacher involvement will be critical in the front-line delivery of all Diplomas.

CONCLUSION

The FSSC hopes that the inquiry will give significant drive to the specialised Diploma agenda in order that crucial policy decisions are made to enable faster progress of Diploma implementation.

This submission has briefly outlined several areas in which we feel implementation methods could be improved; principally, through greater coordination between colleges and schools, and the effective pooling of resources. We recommend that the review look closely at the issue of teacher training, to ensure that all teachers involved in instruction for Diplomas have extensive, detailed and accurate knowledge of their subject.

As is the case with the wider skills provision agenda, the FSSC promotes greater employer engagement with education at 14–19 stage, in order that more young people are prepared for employment in a manner beneficial both to themselves and their prospective employers.

⁵ Our partners in this development are the Council for Administration and Skillsmart Retail—the Sector Skills Council for the retail industry.

The FSSC looks forward to viewing the results of the 14–19 specialised Diplomas inquiry. We would be happy to provide further information on our practice and research for the Education and Skills Committee if it would be considered helpful.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by Skillset

INTRODUCTION

1. The following submission has been prepared for the Education and Skills Committee by Skillset, the Sector Skills Council for the audio visual industries.

2. Skillset has led the development of the Diploma in Creative and Media, one of the first five Diplomas due for first teaching in 2008. Skillset has worked closely with the Creative and Cultural Industries SSC and Skillsfast UK to support the Diploma Development Partnership and to develop the content for the Diplomas. We are now working with Awarding Bodies and implementation partners to support ongoing development and successful planning and implementation.

3. The terms of reference for the inquiry set out a number of specific questions and we have responded to these questions in the order presented; design and development of the Diplomas; teacher and lecturer training; and coordination between skills and colleges.

Our response has concentrated on the first two sets of questions as we have less direct involvement in the coordination phase.

4. Prior to the section detailing the answers to the specific inquiry questions we have provided an overview from our sector highlighting the key issues of:

- (i) positioning and branding of the Diplomas and
- (ii) the need to introduce a small and structured pilot for 2008 in order to reflect on designs made in the context of a tight timescale for development.

OVERVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2005 Skillset was asked to lead the development of the new Diplomas for Creative and Media and after much debate with our industry Board of Directors, Patrons and educational advisors we agreed to take this development forward on behalf of the Creative and Cultural Industries SSC and Skillsfast UK.

We did so with full support and enthusiasm from the industry to work on one of the most important educational reforms for a generation but also with a number of provisos; first that the qualifications would be genuinely new, innovative and aspirational. We were not mandated by our industry to develop narrowly “vocational” qualifications but to use the full context of the creative and media industries as a medium through which new curriculum and assessment approaches could be developed. These new qualifications were to be aimed at the full 14–19 cohort (particularly at levels 2 and 3) and not the lower quartile or “under achievers”. Our key audience for the development therefore has been higher education, as well as employers and our development advisors both educationalists and industrialists.

The second flag we raised related to the timescale. We strongly felt that the overall timescale was problematic given the ambitions we had for the qualifications and anticipating the impact this would have on qualification design, teacher support, resource support and the critical partnership approach to delivery. The overall timescale has resulted in a development of many strands of activity being developed concurrently rather than sequentially, by and through complex partnerships and subcontracting processes.

Both of these issues remain live.

The speed of the development remains challenging and in order for the DDPs to continue to retain the necessary employer and higher education ownership and “buy-in” we need to continue to engage them in important design and implementation decisions.

Much has been achieved to date and we should not compromise the strength of employer and HE involvement and the need to create new models of partnership with the drive for a fast approaching teaching deadline.

In addition to our response to the inquiry question we put forward two key recommendations:

1. To implement the new governance arrangements as quickly as possible, recognizing the need for an end-to-end process that has clear accountability, is based on clarity of responsibilities and is supported by excellent programme management and leadership. This clarity and leadership needs to include communications and the need for sure and consistent branding and positioning of the Diplomas.
2. To reflect the challenging timescale for development and planning, we need a small and structured pilot for 2008. The pilot needs to be controlled and managed and signalled as part of the

development process so that we use the opportunity to continue to refine and develop the qualifications, approaches to learning and assessment and all of the support and delivery programmes that will be needed to make this work.

We continue to be totally committed to this reform and our role in the development and we feel passionately that the vision for the new qualifications and the partnership approach to development and delivery is the right one.

To reiterate from the body of the text attached we need:

- Strong strategic and publishing leadership.
- Incentives for collaboration.
- Small, controlled and well supported pilots.
- Recognition that coordination takes time and skill.

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF DIPLOMAS

1. *What progress has been made on the development of Diplomas to date? Where have been the sticking points?*

In terms of progress to date, Stage 1 of the Diploma development is complete. Stage 1 focused on the definition of content and the design of the Diplomas in each line of learning, in parallel with the definition of the design parameters across all lines of learning.

The definition of content was the responsibility of the Diploma Development Partnership (DDP) for each line of learning and managed by the designated lead Sector Skills Council. Skillset is the lead SSC for the Creative and Media line of learning, working with Skillsfast UK and the Creative and Cultural Industries SSC.

The DDP for the Creative and Media line of learning was supported by a number of sub-groups that fed directly into the DDP, including an Awarding Body Group, Curriculum Development Group and a Specialist Expert Group. The major milestone for this activity was the publication of the Statement of Content. The first draft was published in June 2006; the final draft was published in November 2006.

In order to facilitate the transition to Stage 2 and the process of qualification development, it was belatedly acknowledged that regulatory criteria were required to support awarding bodies in the development of the qualifications. The Statement of Content itself was deemed insufficient to enable Awarding Bodies to begin this work as it would not necessarily ensure consistency across Awarding Bodies and across lines of learning.

To this end, a significant piece of work was undertaken to produce regulatory criteria for the accreditation of Specialised Diploma qualifications and separate qualification criteria per line of learning. This activity was led by QCA, in partnership with the DfES, Awarding Bodies and the lead SSCs representing the DDPs for the first five lines of learning. The overarching criteria were published in October 2006; the separate qualification criteria for each line of learning were published at the end of November 2006.

It was a significant challenge to produce the overarching criteria and line of learning criteria at the same time for a number of reasons. The timescales were incredibly tight, with an activity schedule that had to run alongside the existing project plan. This had an impact on work already planned, forcing other deadlines to slip. The process was also problematic as outstanding policy decisions had to be made with little or no opportunity to consult with the DDPs and stakeholder groups. In some instances, the policy decisions resulted in changes to the content or design of the Diplomas as articulated in the Statement of Content. This resulted in retrospective alterations to aspects of the Diplomas in some lines of learning; in some cases, the required changes were significant. In essence, the process was back to front; criteria should inform the development of content as well as the qualification. This proved extremely challenging as the process had the potential of undermining the quality of the outcomes produced and supported by the DDPs and the industries and stakeholder groups they represent.

2. *What role have employers and sector skills councils played in the development of Diplomas?*

Sector Skills Councils have played the lead role in the development of the content of the Diplomas. The lead SSC within the partnership has managed the process, following a project plan agreed by the Diploma Project Board. The lead SSC also managed the DDP and its supporting sub-groups in defining the learning objectives of the Diploma at levels 1, 2 and 3 and in designing other aspects of the Creative and Media Diploma in line with the generic design parameters consistent within all lines of learning.

Throughout stage 1, it was the responsibility of the lead and partner SSCs to ensure that an appropriate range of stakeholders were engaged in the design and development of content. As well as employers, this included higher education, further education, schools, training providers, industry bodies and other networks and organisations with expertise and interest in education in the context of the creative and media industries.

In terms of engaging with employers, the partner SSCs utilised their existing forums and networks to engage with industry practitioners, as well as bespoke “sector surgeries” established to review the emerging content from a sector perspective. This engagement was enhanced by a variety of consultation activities to disseminate information and invite comment.

Wider stakeholder groups were engaged through a concurrent schedule of communication activities and events. In order to reach as broad an audience as possible, externally coordinated events were utilised as much as possible to present the emerging content and invite feedback.

It is important to note the extent to which we facilitated wider consultation and included in the remit of the DDP all constituencies and certainly not just employers and industry representatives. Our DDP involved eight separate sub groups including all major Awarding Bodies, a Specialist Expert Group including organisations such as the Design Council, Arts Council and the British Film Institute, a team of thirty teachers and lecturers who formed the basis of our curriculum group along with representatives from the AOC and bodies representing the HE workforce.

3. Who is responsible for the co-ordination and development of Diplomas?

Up until now the Diploma Project Board has had overall responsibility for the co-ordination and development of Diplomas. The Board represents the lead project partners who share this responsibility; they are the DfES, QCA and the SSSA. Lead SSCs are contracted to SSSA to fulfill their responsibility within the overall development plan. During these critical early stages of the development, SSCs were treated very much as “contract providers” as opposed to full development partners and this caused difficulties throughout the development of the Diplomas. Another major issue has been the separation between Diploma development, workforce development and communications in governance terms and reporting arrangements as this has resulted in a fragmented approach to this development and overall reform.

4. Is there a case for a stronger co-ordinating role for one of the agencies involved, or for the appointment of a senior responsible officer or champion?

Our understanding is that the new governance arrangements are now being established with an “end to end” focus which will include overseeing the ongoing Diploma development, the Gateway process, plans for workforce development and communications. This is to be welcomed but will need to become effective quickly as we are now working on the important pilot selection and developing workforce plans and the ambitious timescale for this development requires strategic leadership and high level change and programme reform management.

5. Is there a clear system for accrediting and awarding the Diplomas?

A process to reach the point of submission for accreditation has been agreed and is now underway. Awarding bodies and the lead SSCs are committed to working in partnership throughout the qualification development process to ensure that submission for accreditation is achieved by the deadline and with DDP support. This joint working partnership is absolutely critical if the vision behind the new content is to be realised by the Awarding Bodies now developing the Diplomas. The first stages of this process seem to be working well and we have established good working arrangements. The timescale is however incredibly tight and we feel it is imperative to use the gateway process as the basis to select a small number of pilots to offer the first Diplomas from 2008.

The system for the regulator’s accreditation of the qualifications and its component parts should be made clear to Awarding Bodies. As far as we are aware, the procedure is not set out for them and Awarding Bodies are still asking questions relating to formal reporting and submission procedures.

There is lack of clarity around the awarding of Diplomas. This is largely due to the fact that decisions relating to the awarding of Diplomas have yet to be made. It is also hindered by the fact that the mechanism by which awarding and aggregation will be achieved—Minerva—is a new and complex system for all parties involved.

Key policy decisions, including grading, has still to be agreed and there is some concern that timescales will constrain full analysis and the need for engagement of employers and Higher Education in these decisions.

TEACHER AND LECTURER TRAINING

6. *What are current levels of teacher/lecturer training activity in preparation for Diplomas? Is this sufficient to make Diplomas a success?*

The workforce development plans for teachers and lecturers are currently still being developed by a number of agencies, including SSAT, TDA and LLUK and QIA. Although a protocol has been developed to ensure engagement between these partners and the DDP's, working arrangements on the ground have yet to become effective. There needs to be role clarity between the agencies and this includes urgently confirming the role of the DDP/SSCs in informing and influencing the plans for teacher training and support as opposed to delivery. DDPs are not informing these plans at an early stage.

The level of sector experience required to teach the Diplomas is likely to differ between lines of learning. For the Creative and Media Diploma we are not anticipating that "new" teachers will have to be found from the industry, however we do anticipate that existing teachers will need training to update sector knowledge and, just as importantly, we want to see teacher training approaches that cover the new, applied way of learning and assessment. To date we have seen plans that refer to "subject centered" training but there is also a need for teacher/lecturer development to focus on cross-subject pedagogical approaches.

We strongly recommend that time is given to undertaking an analysis of training per line of learning as opposed to a generic approach that is not based on analysis of need.

Overall CPD and training for new teachers should incorporate more emphasis upon team teaching, case study and project based approaches to teaching and learning, working with employers, managing learning from a variety of different learning environments and innovative and reliable assessment methodologies.

COORDINATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

7. *What is the current level of coordination between colleges and schools in local areas?*

Up until November 2006, the focus for the DDP has been on the development of the content and criteria for the Diplomas and we have not carried out extensive market/provider research to identify implementation progress and/or barriers. We have however been actively consulting schools and colleges, and their representative forums in terms of the new content and Diploma design and in doing so have established a view of some of the issues in the field.

We are now also actively engaged in the Gateway Process. As this response is being provided we are reading and scoring the 263 applications from schools and colleges who have applied to pilot the Creative and Media Diploma.

We will therefore have a more informed view on the level of coordination after this process is complete (mid January). The sheer volume of applications and the number of partnerships these involve demonstrate a willingness to cooperate. The quality of these partnerships however has yet to be confirmed.

8. *What are the barriers to coordination?*

The following issues have been raised by schools and colleges at the various national and regional consultation and Gateway events:

- Lack of funds which can be used to facilitate cross centre delivery, for example, travel costs, staff costs.
- Concerns about managing quality of teaching and learning across a number of institutions.
- Lack of suitable management and co-ordination skills.
- The need to change cultures, not least among learners, some of whom are reluctant to step outside of their "comfort zone". This also applies to teaching and management staff within schools and colleges.
- Concerns about which institution "owns" the learner—particularly in relation to performance targets and league tables.
- With particular regard to co-ordination of Diplomas, lack of successful, reliable and sustainable relationships with employers.
- Lack of vision and fear of failure.

9. *What are the lessons that can be learned from areas where there is strong coordination on 14–19?*

The 14–19 pathfinders established in 2003 have been viewed as a way of building cooperation between schools and colleges and local/regional agencies. These pathfinders have tested elements policy rather than pilot collective approaches. Certainly we have seen evidence of innovation from the pathfinders and there is potential to bring together CoVE and specialist school expertise to develop strong pilots for 2008.

Lessons that either have been or need to be learnt from existing collaborations are:

- The need for strong strategic leadership at partnership level.
- The need to introduce major incentives for collaboration in order to match the equally strong incentives for competition (eg performance league tables, higher level funding for higher level achievements).
- That we need small, controlled, well supported evaluated pilots.
- That coordination takes time and skill.

10. *What are intermediary bodies such as LA's and LSC's doing to foster co-operation?*

LAs and LSCs have supported the application to the Gateway process by schools and colleges in their regions.

Overview is that support has been variable between regions. Some LAs and LSCs have been proactive in informing and preparing the workforce, others have taken a re-active role, providing minimal facilitation of individual consortia applications.

Some LAs have approached relevant SSCs to assist them in preparing their workforce by co-coordinating conferences and workshops to look at the development of the Diplomas.

11. *How engaged are head teachers and college principals in the Diploma agenda?*

Our experience of working with head teachers and principals has been generally positive at conceptual level. The leaders in schools and colleges have welcomed the idea of new, applied qualifications which have been designed with the active participation of employers and higher education and a practical level however heads are expressing concern at the growing number of policy initiatives, the logistical implications posed by collaboration and timetabling, ongoing funding and resource issues and what are perceived as mixed messages about the nature of the new Diplomas.

On this last point, there is still confusion about exactly what the qualifications are, ie practical/applied as opposed to vocational/skills based qualifications. Some heads and principals have been hesitant about committing to offer the qualifications through the Gateway process prior to the full specification being available. Once again the timescale of delivery has constrained understanding and analysis and early feedback from the Gateway applications indicate that speculative rather than developed applications may form the majority of response at this stage.

12. *How are the rules of post-16 expansion likely to affect the rollout of Diplomas?*

If developed and implemented in the way in which they have been designed by the DDPs, these new Diplomas will provide a new aspirational qualification that will add to the rather limited choices on offer to the post-16 cohort currently.

There are now four qualification choices on offer, General qualifications (GCSEs, A Levels), The Diplomas, International Baccalaureate and work based qualifications (VQS and NVQs as part of apprenticeships).

The key issues will be to ensure flexibility between routes at different levels and clarity about the nature and type of learning route and qualifications on offer.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)

A. INTRODUCTION

1. The Association of School and College Leaders represents 13,000 members of the leadership teams of colleges, maintained and independent schools throughout the UK. This places the association in a unique position to see the Diplomas from the viewpoint of the leaders of both secondary schools and colleges.

2. ASCL welcomes the Education and Skills Committee's Inquiry. School and college leaders have long campaigned, through this association and other bodies, for a more coherent, unified system of 14–19 qualifications. We were strongly supportive of the recommendations in the Tomlinson report and, although we were disappointed that the Government did not accept these recommendations in full, we support the introduction of the Diplomas as a major step on the way to the 14–19 system that we believe to be necessary for England in the 21st century.

3. These Diplomas offer the possibility of a curriculum at KS4 in particular that may be better suited to the needs and interests of a significant proportion of young people.

4. While supporting the introduction of the Diplomas in principle and practice, ASCL is concerned about several aspects of the present situation and these concerns are outlined below.

B. STRUCTURE

5. ASCL has viewed with concern the statutory entitlement, enshrined in the Education and Inspections Act 2006, for all young people to study one of 14 Diplomas by 2013.

6. We believe that this will inevitably create an extremely complex structure, which will have two major problems.

7. First, with 14 Diplomas at three different levels, it will be difficult for schools and colleges, even when supported by careers services, to explain to students and their parents the full implications of the choices that lie before them at the ages of 14 and 16. Yet, without a clear communications plan, it will be difficult to recruit to Diplomas all the students who would benefit from them.

8. Second, the sheer size of the structure will almost inevitably lead to a massive amount of bureaucracy falling on school and college leaders.

9. It has to be remembered that the Diplomas will in practice work quite differently in KS4 from post-16. At the later stage there is already a tradition of courses more similar to these, and students will very likely move to a new college or school to take the Diploma of their choice. (Most young people already change institutions at age 16.) At KS4 the expectation is for students to stay at their current schools, spending part of the time taking a Diploma, in many cases at another institution.

10. Because of the complexity of the proposed eventual structure, ASCL strongly supports the gradualist approach adopted by the government for the introduction of the Diplomas. Although we recognise that many school and college leaders are hoping to introduce Diplomas in their institutions in 2008, we believe that the system will be best served by a small-scale start in 2008, and a further small cohort starting Diplomas in 2009. ASCL believes that these two initial cohorts should be treated as a two-year pilot—surely a minimum period for a trial of so large and important an initiative as this.

11. Although 2013 seems to be a distant date, the target for all young people to have access to all Diplomas at all levels is a very demanding one that may not be possible. ASCL would urge that every effort is made to make sure that this large curricular change is made well rather than to what will prove a tight deadline.

12. The Welsh Baccalaureate and the Secretary of State's announcement in December of an encouragement of the International Baccalaureate are other developments which may compete for the attention of teachers and their leaders in schools and colleges. The Welsh Baccalaureate has proved successful in early trials, and some schools and colleges in England have already expressed an interest in it if permitted to offer it to their students. Alan Johnson's announcement about the International Baccalaureate included an expectation that its expansion might be largely in sixth form colleges, but the leaders of these colleges will in most cases also have to involve themselves in the partnerships required for the specialist Diplomas.

C. COLLABORATION

13. ASCL is strongly supportive of partnership working between schools, and between schools and colleges. We see the 14–19 Diplomas as giving a considerable boost to school/college partnerships; indeed, the Government has already acknowledged that it will be impossible for single institutions to deliver Diplomas.

14. ASCL hopes that the Diplomas will help the school and college system to move from the culture of competition that has been evident for the last 20 years to a culture of collaboration, in which institutions work together to broaden opportunities and raise achievement of all young people in the area.

15. However, many of the policy drivers in the system still promote competition. The accountability structure, for example, relates to individual institutions. It hardly makes sense, where there is fully collaborative local provision, for each institution to be held separately to account publicly for the results of its own registered students, many of whom will have done some of their courses in other schools or colleges. If the imperative towards joint working in the 14–19 sector is to mean anything, joint performance indicators are a pre-requisite.

16. The demographic dip in pupil numbers in secondary schools, which coincides with the period of introduction of the Diplomas, will—at least, in some parts of the country—lead to increased competition between schools. This could easily work against the efforts to collaborate on 14–19 provision.

17. It is possible that the new system will lead to 14-year-olds transferring from one school to another not just for their Diploma work, but outright. If that becomes significant it could again increase competition and undermine collaborative structures.

18. The difficulties of timetabling the Diplomas simultaneously in several institutions should not be under-estimated. Joint timetabling always has to take precedence over all other curriculum priorities in the single institutions and this often leads to unacceptable compromises elsewhere in the timetable, particularly in the lesson arrangements for 11–14-year-olds. If lesson patterns and timings are inappropriate, or specialist staff or facilities not available when needed, this could have a deleterious effect on standards in KS3 or elsewhere in the post-14 curriculum.

D. COST

19. The Government must recognise that collaboration costs money. Diplomas are an expensive option and this must be reflected in the funding of schools and colleges. ASCL has been attempting to estimate the scale of the extra cost, and the relatively technical paper prepared by our funding expert is attached as an appendix.

20. The major cost of offering Diplomas as a school/college partnership is the cost of transport for students studying some of the week at an institution other than their “home” school or college. This is substantial in most urban settings. It will be prohibitive in many rural settings without additional funding.

21. Partnerships require management structures and this, too, requires additional funding, both for additional posts to lead the collaborative and for the governance of the joint work.

22. Joint timetabling between institutions also has additional costs if there are not to be major compromises for other students, as mentioned in the previous section.

23. There will be considerable costs associated with the professional development of the school and college workforce to enable the Diplomas to be delivered successfully.

24. ASCL is concerned at the potential costs of the Diploma assessment arrangements. Vocational course examination fees have always tended to be greater than those of traditional academic examinations. ASCL sees no need for this to be case with Diplomas. External examination fees already take up far too big a proportion of school and college budgets and are often the second largest budget item after staffing.

E. CREDIBILITY

25. Because the Government made the decision not to include GCSEs and A levels within the Diploma structure, there is a grave danger that the Diplomas will be seen as second-class qualifications and all the hopes of creating greater parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications, promoted by Sir Mike Tomlinson in his report, will have come to naught.

26. The credibility of the Diplomas is therefore of great importance to their success and the Government should continue to give consideration to how to address this question with employers and higher education. The recently announced champions will be good ambassadors in this respect, but much more will need to be done.

27. In particular, because A levels are not part of the Diploma system, ministers will need to persuade the Russell Group universities and the major independent schools of the depth and rigour of the Diplomas, so that bright students from both maintained and independent sectors see Diplomas as a credible alternative path to a degree course at a prestigious institution. Without declarations from the Russell Group universities that they will accept Diploma qualifications for entry to the most competitive courses, the major independent schools will not offer Diploma courses to their students. Without the imprimatur of the Russell Group universities and the participation of the major independent schools, the task will be made immeasurably more difficult for state schools to persuade bright students to study for the Diplomas.

28. As well as the new Diplomas being demanding enough to allow bright students to demonstrate their capability they must also be accessible to a wide range of abilities. And if they are to provide a real alternative they must not simply emulate academic courses in pedagogy or assessment methodology.

29. The new Diplomas will have to establish credibility in a very hostile context, which means that they cannot afford to have widespread significant failings, of organisation, delivery or assessment, in their early years. This again underlines the need for a small number of carefully chosen pilots in 2008 and 2009 to minimize the danger in those years and to allow for lessons to be learnt before a complete implementation in later years.

F. CONCLUSION

30. ASCL welcomes the new Diplomas. School and college leaders hope that they will succeed in breaking down the academic/vocational divide and hierarchy and in offering a genuine alternative to many young people not well served by our present qualification structure.

31. Several earlier initiatives have failed to do this. If the Diplomas are to be such a success the significant concerns outlined above must be fully addressed and the new courses must be very carefully prepared by awarding bodies, by school and college leaders, and by teachers.

32. It is therefore imperative that there is a proper pilot phase, with a small number of carefully chosen consortia in 2008 and 2009, and with sufficient time allowed for proper evaluation before the Diplomas become generally available.

January 2007

APPENDIX

Diplomas 14–19: how can the funding system best support the proposed new curriculum?

1. Principles

1.1 The Diplomas for 14–19-year-olds are a new curriculum with the potential to improve the opportunities and educational experience of many 14–16-year-olds and improve participation rates in education and training post-16. So the first questions are:

- What does the new curriculum involve?
- How does it differ from the existing curriculum?
- What elements are new, what stays the same and what can be adapted?
- How do we ensure that there is flexibility within the system so that students are not locked into one path chosen at 14?

1.2 One thing is already clear, schools and colleges will have to collaborate to ensure that the full entitlement to all possible Diplomas at all levels is available for all students—this is what is meant by an entitlement curriculum. So the next questions are:

- How are we going to deliver this?
- What will be the changes to the existing structure?
- Who will manage the provision of entitlement in an area?

1.3 The funding system has to support the new curriculum. Currently 14–16-year-olds are funded through local authority formulae and 16–19-year-olds through a national LSC formula. We need coherence 14–19; the funding for an individual student 14–19 must not depend on the institution attended but on the cost of delivering their course. The questions for the funding system are:

- What is the cost of the new curriculum?
- What are the additional costs of collaboration?
- Are there additional costs within post-16 institutions in dealing with 14–16-year-olds?
- What are the possible savings within the existing structure?
- How can the funding for the new curriculum be delivered across all local authorities (14–16) and the LSC funded elements (post-16)?

2. The new curriculum

2.1 All 14–19-year-olds will be able to choose to follow any one of 14 different vocational pathways, starting at three different levels based on their prior levels of attainment. It is relatively easy to plan (and cost) for students choosing to enter a vocational pathway at 16 because, although there are changes to the curriculum provision, there are not significant changes to the existing structures. Students will be able to choose different paths available at different institutions or providers or through existing or similar patterns of collaboration between institutions and providers.

2.2 The planning for students choosing a vocational pathway at 14 is more difficult. Presumably the cost of delivering the Diploma will be the same whether a student is 14 or 16. However 14–16-year-olds will also have to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum core and RE. There are still unanswered questions about the curriculum structure.

- Will the Diploma be a coherent package with some integration between the elements of core skills, vocational elements and work-based learning?
- How will this change the current provision in school of separate National Curriculum core subjects, some option subjects, RE and personal, health and social education?
- Will there be integration between the levels of each Diploma or common themes across the same level of different Diplomas?
- How will students be able to move between Diploma areas?
- How will the guidance programme in Key Stage 3 need to be changed to ensure that students make informed and appropriate choices?
- How will all this fit into the Key Stage 4 curriculum for students not choosing to take one of the Diplomas?

Until we have some models answering all these questions, it is difficult to estimate the additional costs for 14–16-year-olds.

2.3 At present funding for students 16–19 is greater than funding for 14–16-year-olds to reflect the cost of smaller class sizes as a consequence of more choice and specialised teaching. The cost of delivering a Diploma for 14–16-year-olds will include all these inherent costs plus any additional curriculum (most full time 16–19-year-olds are not taught for 25 hours a week, Key Stage 4 students are). If some 14–16-year-olds are going to spend time at an FE college or other provider, there will be spare unused capacity in their home schools. Schools will not be able to fill this spare capacity because all 14–16-year-olds have a place in the system. Whilst there may be some small savings in schools if fewer classes are being taught, there will be no savings in overheads such as site, occupancy and management costs.

3. Delivery

3.1 Collaborative arrangements will be needed to deliver the Diplomas. What are the characteristics of these collaborations? They will need to:

- Ensure that students have access to all Diplomas without unnecessary duplication of resources or uneconomic provision within an area.
- Be different in different circumstances—rural or urban, proximity of institutions, travel patterns.
- Not necessarily involve students travelling—teachers can travel and there could be small specialist facilities in some schools.
- Arrange work experience to suit both the learning needs of the students and the employers.

3.2 The present structure of buildings and resources will need to change:

- If local colleges and other providers have the capacity to provide for some 14–16-year-olds then the changes may be minimal, involving changes to the working practices of schools and colleges.
- If there is no suitable arrangement of schools and colleges or the colleges do not have the capacity to meet the needs of 14–16-year-olds then there may be the need for capital investment—including establishing small workshop facilities in rural areas (perhaps based on a school) and moving teachers rather than students.
- The main changes to existing structures will be in the working practices of staff.

3.3 There will need to be changes to the organisation and work of staff in schools and colleges. Collaboration between schools and colleges requires a formal organisation with a clear management structure to cover:

- Information and guidance for Key Stage 3 students to enable them to choose an appropriate path from the full entitlement.
- Organisation of the timetable of collaborative provision, including matching school and college term dates.
- Ensuring good curriculum links between different institutions so that the Diplomas form a coherent curriculum.
- Ensuring quality control so that all partner institutions are satisfied.
- Ensuring good pastoral links across partner institutions so that students are monitored and there is satisfactory reporting to parents.
- Efficient and safe travel for students, particularly 14–16-year-olds, between institutions.
- Organisation of the work experience element—including health and safety checks, Criminal Records Bureau checks for all relevant staff and ensuring the work experience fits into the Diploma curriculum.

3.4 FE and Sixth Form Colleges and other providers will need to consider for their staff:

- Time for liaison with schools to ensure the Diploma curriculum is coherent.
- Qualification to teach 14–16-year-olds.
- Additional statutory responsibility for 14–16-year-olds in providing supervision on site when not in classes and reports to parents.
- Any additional activity needed to safeguard younger students including Criminal Records Bureau checks.

3.5 Schools will need to consider for their staff:

- Time for liaison with colleges to ensure the Diploma curriculum is coherent.
- How the core curriculum can be organised to ensure that the school timetable meshes with the college part.

4. How much more will the Diplomas cost?

4.1 The LSC has already done some work on costing some elements of the Diploma. What is needed now is a cost for delivering the whole Diplomas for 16–19-year-olds as this gives us the starting point for costing Diplomas for 14–16-year-olds. 14–16-year-olds will have additional curriculum requirements to meet the National Curriculum.

4.2 Where will there be savings? It is unlikely that there will be larger classes for 14–16-year-olds in the practical elements of the Diplomas; indeed there may be an argument for saying that classes for the younger students should be smaller. It is possible that the core elements of the Diploma, delivered mainly in schools, will be able to be in slightly larger classes than in post-16 simply because schools are already organised to teach larger core classes in Key Stage 4. However the key question is how the core in a Diploma course matches the core National Curriculum.

4.3 If a school has to provide a different core curriculum for students on Diplomas, it will cost more. If students are at college for their practical options whilst other students are covering core areas there will need to be extra core classes for the Diploma students. If the core in Diplomas needs to be more integrated into the Diploma curriculum, it may not be possible to run Diploma and any other core classes together. Will it be possible, provided the practical elements are at the same time, to provide the same core for students on different Diplomas? If students from the same school are at the college on different days for different Diplomas (highly likely) all the above will be even more complex. Until we have the answers to some of these questions it is not possible to see if there will be any savings in schools. At the moment it looks as if the new Diplomas are likely to lead to more choice in schools, not only for the “option” part of the curriculum but also within the core—and choice is always more expensive.

4.4 The principle that students should not be double funded is important so we need to consider where the savings in schools are when some students are taught elsewhere for part of the week. There is one simple way of estimating the savings through students attending another institution. For all schools you can calculate the unit cost of a lesson—how much it costs that school to put on one extra lesson per week throughout the school year. For an 11–16 secondary school outside London in 2006–07, the cost is about £1,600 for one lesson in a 30 period week. If we assume that the students on a Diploma course are spending the equivalent of one day a week at the College, then the theoretical saving to the school is six lessons at £1,600 or £9,600. This assumes that a whole class of students from the option block goes to the college and that the school runs its option blocks in the times the students are at college so that they rejoin the school for the core curriculum and there is no need to put on additional core classes. As explained above, this ideal scenario is very unlikely. Even if 20 students (approximately a whole class in a KS4 option scheme) were all taking Diplomas, they are unlikely to be the same Diploma or even on the same day of the week and it is highly unlikely that all the students will have come from the same option class in the school. It is far more likely that they will have reduced four or five classes by four or five students.

4.5 Another way of looking at it is to consider the amount the school receives per week for each student and reduce it at an appropriate rate for the students being taught at the college. The typical 11–16 school used in the above example receives £3,500 per Key Stage 4 student. A very simple model would be to assume that the student is at the college for one day per week, so the school can contribute 1/5 of the amount per student or for 20 students £14,000. However there are several problems with this. First of all the school provides more than simply 30 lessons for each student, there is all the pastoral and support time and the student has also to contribute to the administration and site running costs for the school and these are unlikely to change simply because 20 students are out of school for one day. So perhaps it would be fairer to take only 1/7 of the amount per pupil or £10,000 for 20 students. It is not satisfactory to use the Age Weighted Pupil Unit to estimate the savings per student because many authorities use elements of the site costs per pupil in the calculation of their AWPU and so the AWPU varies in make up throughout the country. Again any saving depends on a class group of students from the school going on the same day of the week to the college. Schools where a significant proportion of students choose Diploma courses will make some savings but savings are unlikely until at least 40 (two groups) of students are involved and the range of Diplomas chosen is small.

4.6 There is an inherent extra cost in the new curriculum—schools will become smaller because, in effect some 14–16-year-olds will be part-time in the system. Schools will not be able to get more 14–16-year-olds to fill the gaps because all 14–16-year-olds are already in the system. It is unlikely but possible that there could be some reorganisation of secondary provision where very large numbers of students go part time to college at 14–16 so that two small schools could amalgamate knowing that a large Key Stage 3 cohort would be a predominantly part-time Key Stage 4 cohort but the opportunities will be limited and not apparent for some years until we know the take-up of the new Diplomas.

4.7 The real problem with either of these calculations is that they depend on all the students being out of school on the same day, all coming from the same option subjects in the school so that the school can offer fewer classes in their option blocks. It also assumes that it is not necessary to change any of the core classes. It is very unlikely that all these conditions will be met. If as a result of some pupils choosing to take Diplomas, a school has to offer fewer subject choices in their option blocks, you are constraining the curriculum of those students not choosing to take the Diplomas.

4.8 In summary, what are the additional costs in the system?

- More choice at 14 will cost more. The most efficient timetable is one for a totally core curriculum.
- The additional provision is in practical areas where the class sizes will be smaller than classroom based subjects.
- The cost of collaboration in itself is considerable.

5. How can the funding system support the new curriculum?

5.1 The simplest way would be to extend the LSC system for 14–16-year-olds undertaking Diploma courses. Schools would have to plan and enable their students to choose their Key Stage 4 course early in Year 9. The combination of a plan and a funding system for Diplomas on the same basis as 16–19-year-olds on Diplomas would then operate. The funding rate for a Key Stage 4 student would need to recognise that their curriculum will include more taught hours than a post-16 student. The school receives the funding for the students on Diplomas on this new rate and purchases through a collaborative any elements of the Diploma that it cannot deliver itself.

5.2 There would need to be some adjustment of the local authority funding for the school. The local authority funding formula would apply for those students not on Diploma courses. There would need to be some further abatement to correct for the institution costs inherent in the LSC funding model—in the same way that local authorities already correct for the post-16 funding (but with more regulation and clearer guidelines so that there is some coherence and fairness across local authorities). The school would be accountable to the LSC for the delivery of their planned Diplomas for Key Stage 4 students just as they will be accountable to deliver their planned provision for post-16. The planning element in the formula is essential as we are assuming Diplomas will grow steadily both in number of courses available and take up for at least the first 10 years of the programme.

5.3 The LSC funding rate for all Diploma courses will need to take into account the cost of the necessary collaboration. If this element of the funding is in the student rate, then the schools and colleges taking part in the collaborative jointly fund the organisation of the collaborative.

5.4 The first essential step is to be clear about the structure and content of the Diplomas. It is not possible to plan a sensible funding system unless we are clear about what activities schools and colleges will be expected to provide and what activities will no longer be needed. The LSC formula for post-16 is fundamentally based on an analysis of the costs of providing a course and is a very good place to start an analysis of the new Diplomas once we are clear about their structure and content.

5.5 It is difficult to see how a funding system for 14–19 Diplomas based on actual student take-up can fit into the Dedicated Schools Grant and multi-year budgets. Even in the first year of a multi-year budget, the local authority has to know in November the level of the DSG for the following April. It is highly unlikely that all Year 9 students will have made their choices for Year 10 courses in time to influence the level of DSG.

5.6 There will need to be a balance between planning and funding stability, particularly in the first years until all Diplomas are in place and the system has settled down. Schools will need to plan in January to March for the following September Diploma starts and know that the funding is stable, even if some students change their minds between March and September (not unknown amongst 14-year-olds).

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by the Association of Colleges (AoC)

INTRODUCTION

1. AoC is pleased to provide evidence to the Committee on the most wide ranging and potentially culture-changing curriculum development for many years.

2. The introduction of the Diploma is an opportunity for the value of skills, technical expertise and sector competence to be recognised as equally valuable to the economic and social success of the nation as learning through the traditional routes, be they academic or an Apprenticeship.

3. Colleges fully subscribe to this vision and want to make it a success. Our evidence is presented in this light—a sector with the greatest experience of delivering the skills agenda to young people determined that the high quality, applied learning approach will be implemented and maintained. As recent AoC research states—

There is clear and strong support in colleges for the principles of the reform. This is supported by evidence that colleges are trying to give that support practical expression.⁶

4. Where colleges have concerns, these are expressed in the submission but are balanced by action on the part of AoC to have them addressed. A summary of points discussed include:

⁶ AoC research “Preparing for Diploma Delivery—college concerns and how to address them” January 2007.

- A recommendation that a statement is produced by Sector Skills Councils and Awarding bodies to indicate the direction of travel for the new qualifications, allowing colleges time to prepare for change.
- A desire for colleges' expertise to be fully utilised at developmental and operational stages.
- A recommendation that language must be explicit and emphasise the practical and vocationally related learning style that underpins Diploma pedagogy—the distinctiveness of the Diploma needs to be emphasised, and its relationship with, and separateness from, existing qualifications explained.
- A desire for a robust approach to ensure that industry standard equipment and professional staff always deliver Diplomas and that there is no dilution from this high standard.
- Concern that employers will demonstrate sufficient engagement in some areas.
- Concern that some schools may be holding back some Diploma development by choosing not to engage with the process or by a “wait and see” strategy.
- A recommendation that league tables may be holding back Diploma development rather than supporting it, and a suggestion that partnership targets and performance indicators would be more appropriate drivers of high quality, inclusive provision, rather than individual institutional measurement.
- An observation that there are examples of strong leadership reflected in strong Diploma partnerships in some areas, and that naturally developing partnerships work best but a recognition that there is a co-ordination and development role needed in other areas.
- A confirmation that the Increased Flexibility Partnerships have the most expertise and should be harnessed to support delivery and workforce development; but an anxiety that IFP partnerships are under threat in some areas because from September it will lose its ring-fenced status.
- A reinforcement of the commitment of principals, many of whom have already invested heavily in 14–19 delivery.
- An observation that partnerships need stability in which to establish themselves, to increase capability and to build better facilities.

What progress has been made on the development of Diplomas to date? Where have been the sticking points?

5. Progress is being made to plan, with SSCs now handing over to awarding bodies their required content to the awarding bodies, following consultation with employers. This is a challenging process because it is new and because sectors' individual vision for “their” Diploma needs to be rationalised into a coherent suite of qualifications which have the capacity to deliver generic as well as sector specific skills and knowledge.

6. Given the number of agencies involved, and with the benefit of the first round of development, we suggest that a development framework is designed that provides clear guidance to SSCs on aspects of Diploma shape and design, such as the incorporation of common elements (QCA is currently undertaking work on common units and elements).

7. So far, only statements of outline content by SSCs and QCA guidance on the structure of the Diploma have been released into the public domain, following the extensive development period. This has been a frustrating wait for providers, keen to know how the content will translate into a qualification specification and, critically, into an assessment regime. Colleges will seek, as information becomes available, to align their current curriculum practice to emerging curriculum developments and will wish to begin the process of staff development, well ahead of implementation. Time is of the essence.

8. Given the significance of the curriculum development, AoC has pointed up the need for a “narrative” on progress that it could communicate to the sector and which would help colleges feel closer to the process.

9. To this end, the AoC workshops in the Spring with DfES support will provide practitioners with the first opportunity to see the awarding bodies' work in progress and provide colleges with the opportunity to feedback on the principal learning elements at a formative stage in the qualifications' development.

10. We believe practitioners should have more of a say in the design and development process. Their expertise as educators is critical in translating employer needs into relevant learning programmes. There need to be more opportunities created for colleges to play their part in influencing the development of Diplomas.

11. Colleges' perception of the development process is they were held at arm's length in the early stages. More recently, AoC at strategic level, and colleges working directly with SSCs, have had a greater input which we believe is essential to ensure that the emerging qualifications are deliverable and motivational for young people.

12. Where AoC and colleges have been involved, this has been a positive experience and we would hope and expect that colleges may have the opportunity to input earlier in future rounds. Colleges have significant experience in programme development and can offer a valuable insight into what will work with young people.

13. AoC therefore very much welcomes the invitation from QCA to form focus groups of practitioners for each line of learning to comment and feedback on the qualifications currently under development and leading on from the SSCs' work on content.

14. AoC has concerns about the current perception of the Diploma learning experience, based on the language used in the publications that are currently in the public domain. AoC research shows colleges have some anxiety that the distinctive, sector-related flavour of the Diplomas, as conceived by the SSCs and built on practical, experiential learning in workshop or studio, may, in some colleges' words, be being "watered down".

15. AoC's conversations with DfES and with QCA in January 2007 have reassured us that there is no dilution or diversion, either from the original intention intended, or from the vision for Diplomas.

16. But we all recognise that the next stage of the development process will be critical to ensure that the high quality, vocationally related, practical and competence-based characteristics of the Diploma are explicit. The language used in the specification and assessment criteria will need to reflect this.

17. AoC has offered to work with DfES and QCA as they develop their communications strategy, emphasising the importance of indicating the distinctiveness of the Diploma from other learning routes and the need to communicate these to young people, parents and their advisers.

What role have employers and Sector Skills Councils played in the development of Diplomas?

18. AoC has welcomed the central involvement of SSCs in the development of the Diplomas. Colleges need to be assured that the qualifications they are being asked to deliver are relevant and fit for purpose, and see SSCs, as employer representatives, as important partners in this process. AoC has recently set up a Strategic Skills group, from which the SSDA/AoC Skills Working Group has been formed. The purpose of this group is to encourage direct communications between the Sector Skills Councils and colleges as providers of skills training, including the Diplomas. AoC sees this as a significant development in light of the Leitch report recommendations that SSCs will play in future a central role in qualification reforms.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

19. We remain concerned that the level of engagement and commitment by employers to the Diploma remains unknown. There are many excellent examples of employer engagement that colleges have built up over the years and that they will be able to exploit for the benefit of Diploma learners. But it remains the case that, particularly in those colleges leading partnerships in more rural areas, concerns remain as to whether sufficient, high quality work experience placements will be offered by local employers. Through its direct relationship and its Strategic Skills Group, AoC will be encouraging SSDA to work with employers to raise awareness and commitment on their part.

*Who is responsible for the co-ordination and development of Diplomas? and
Is there a case for a stronger co-ordinating role for one of the agencies involved, or for the appointment of a senior responsible officer or champion?*

20. This is an interesting question, given that this is a unique curriculum development, involving many partners operating in a new way and accepting responsibilities that they have not had before. The development has had two stages so far, managed by QCA on behalf of the department. We see QCA's role as central to providing clear and unequivocal guidance to SSCs, to awarding bodies and to providers, working closely with QIA on the support programme for schools and colleges.

21. The operational stage, involving schools and colleges in collaborative partnerships is particularly complex, and AoC can see that there may be the need for a stronger, on-going co-ordinating role. An overview needs to be taken, for example, of the impact of revised funding arrangements and the potential for disjuncture; the relationships between, and efficacy of, LAs and LSCs in relation to Diploma development; the impact of contestability; the evenness of provision and the choice available to learners; and, critically, the stability of Diploma partnerships.

22. The appointment of Sir Alan Jones, Sir Mike Tomlinson, Professor Deian Hopkin and Professor Michael Arthur as champions for the Diplomas is an extremely welcome move, both to act as advocates with industry and HE and to provide an overview to ensure the precise purpose and distinctiveness of the new qualification. The engagement of HEIs and employers with the Diploma is absolutely critical, because it will be the signals that admissions officers and recruitment officers give to young people that will inform the future choices they make. The success of the Diploma will depend on those signals.

23. So there may well be a case for a co-ordinating role to be extended further, though we do not seek a solution that increases bureaucracy.

Is there a clear system for accrediting and awarding the Diplomas?

24. QCA undertook, through its consultants, a detailed and complex piece of work, successfully involving all stakeholders to determine the system. AoC was a member of the external stakeholder group. We were impressed by the way the different interests were balanced by the consultants and a workable system devised.

25. The broadest possible marketplace has been created for Diploma development which AoC believes will encourage innovation and creativity. Overall "Ownership" and awarding of the Diplomas is yet to be determined.

26. On a related matter, there remains the question of how much the Diploma is likely to cost. AoC has been working with the regulator more generally as she investigates the level of fees charged for registration for qualifications by awarding bodies. AoC has signalled generally that the level of fees is rising incrementally year on year and that colleges already spend £150 million pounds a year on examination registrations.

What are current levels of teacher/lecturer training activity in preparation for Diplomas? Is this sufficient to make Diplomas a success?

27. AoC is pressing to ensure that maximum benefit is obtained by colleges from the natural staff development window at the end of the summer term 2007.

28. We have been talking to the DfES about ways in which the specialist and generic skill sets that will be required by practitioners to successfully deliver the Diplomas could be identified ahead of that window. This mapping exercise of skills, which has been suggested by the department, is warmly welcomed by AoC. AoC has suggested that this research could be used by colleges as they undertake their regular staff appraisals in the summer term, which would identify staff development needs in preparation for QIA training planned for Autumn 2007.

29. AoC is keen that strategies are devised that maintain the momentum in schools and colleges for preparation and development, regardless of whether or not they are selected in the first round of Gateway. We want to build on the work undertaken at the Diploma workshops. Particular attention needs to be paid to lifting and supporting those who are disappointed not to go through in the first round. Their support needs must be attended to as much, if not more, than the success for Gateway applicants.

30. We fully support QCA and the DfES in their intention that Diplomas should only be taught by professionals with specialist experience and industry knowledge.

31. Colleges are concerned that inexperience of vocationally related learning in many schools may lead some schools to believe that Diplomas can be taught by existing, non specialist staff and in an exclusively classroom based setting.

32. Robust messages on the nature of Diploma delivery, the requirements for industry standard equipment and highly qualified specialist staff need to be demonstrated in practice, to allay these concerns. These messages need to be contextualised within the requirements on partnerships.

33. The Spring AoC Diploma workshops will be used to signal what support for colleges is being planned. DfES has agreed to ensure the plan currently under development will be available for delegates at those conferences. Additionally, AoC has invited QIA to speak at the workshops and to indicate what training will be available, so that colleges are in a position to plan in good time.

34. AoC is also advocating the need for training and information for careers advisors in schools and colleges. Similarly there needs to be training in place for the tutors and specialist lecturers who monitor learners' progress and provide advice on progression opportunities.

35. We have suggested that publicity for the Diploma must define and clearly distinguish it from the applied GCSE at level 2 and applied A levels at level 3. The attributes of the Diploma route that make it distinctive and different need also to be emphasised in literature for parents, and must be in place ready for the Autumn term. Given the pressures to develop area prospectuses and common timetables and to start providing advice to young people and their parents in the Autumn term, this training and material needs to be prioritised even over practitioner development.

What is the current level of co-ordination between colleges and schools in local areas? and What are the barriers to co-ordination?

36. Where there has been a tradition of Increased Flexibility Partnerships, which have been addressing the needs of 14–16-year-old learners in partnerships between schools and colleges, collaboration is strong and well established, usually with the college as lead partner. IFP colleges' perception is that generally they have not been as involved as they would have liked; they see next stage of development as an opportunity for their co-ordination and delivery experience to be harnessed.

37. Colleges' greater experience in delivering sector-related learning means that they are well-placed to steer and support development in partners, and many have expressed a desire to use their existing expertise as potential mentors for others. Our research indicates colleges would like to have a formal, recognised role in which their expertise is used for the benefit of Diploma development.

38. AoC research has shown that there are different pictures emerging locally in respect of partnership formation and development. Some colleges are reporting that local authorities are taking a strong and positive lead to ensure that schools and colleges can work together to pool their strengths and expertise. In other areas, some colleges are expressing frustration that their own desire to embrace the Diploma and go forward in the early stages is not shared by school partners.

39. There are concerns about some resistance from some schools to the Diplomas and a concern that underperforming students will be directed elsewhere to undertake Diploma learning, rather than through genuine partnership working.

40. AoC has suggested that the time may be right to reconsider how league tables operate; there could be an argument for moving away from individual performance measures for individual schools and colleges to collective targets and performance measures for local partnerships, now that it is the intention that young people's needs will be met through partnership working.

What are the lessons that can be learned from areas where there is strong co-ordination on 14–19?

41. AoC recommends that QIA would be well advised to harness colleges' experience and expertise and build this into their support programme. For example most IFP colleges will already be involved in hosting learning visits, and could, with the right resourcing, offer other support, that might include management advice, teaching and learning demonstrations and pedagogical development, mentoring and so on. AoC would be pleased to support any such approach.

42. Partnerships have developed different local and area models to prepare for Diploma delivery, including the appointment of co-ordinators, these being funded through LSC. AoC has had positive feedback that these dedicated appointments have significantly and positively influenced the development of new partnerships and smoothed the path between more reticent partners.

43. From September, funding for Increased Flexibility Programmes—the bedrock on which Diplomas will be built—will be removed from ring-fenced, LSC control and pass to LAs to administer and will be subsumed within the wider budget for the provision of 14–16-year-olds. Concerns exist that there is therefore the real risk that existing IFP teaching provision and local arrangements (that include LSC funded co-ordinators) may not necessarily continue to receive funding in the same form or, in some cases, risk being discontinued altogether. Should this happen, expertise would be lost and fragile partnerships be at risk.

44. AoC has agreed to work with the DfES to advise them of any loss of co-ordinator posts or other adverse consequences following the change in funding arrangements. AoC has agreed with the DfES to set up an AoC focus group that will be available to advise the department on Diploma issues, including the use of co-ordinators. We hope that this will meet for the first time in the Spring.

What are intermediary bodies such as LAs and LSCs doing to foster co-operation?

45. AoC research shows that there are good examples of strong leadership being demonstrated by LAs in co-operation with LSCs, although there are also examples where there is a less pro-active stance being taken, or one which appears to be weighted in favour of schools, rather than encouraging true partnership working as indicated in the White Paper—"14–19 Education and Skills—2005".

46. Often colleges, building on existing good practice and local relationships are seizing the initiative and there are reports of much work being undertaken by colleges behind the scenes.

47. Co-operation and collaboration seems to work best where it builds on existing relationships and natural alliances. The well established employer links that colleges already have in place are seen as critical to the success of Diplomas.

How engaged are head teachers and college principals in the Diploma agenda?

48. College principals are committed to the Diploma as, for most, the delivery of skills training is central to their mission.

49. Many Principals are questioning how the Diploma will fit alongside or supersede current delivery. Most colleges will currently be delivering BTEC National Diplomas at level 3 and BTEC First Diplomas at level 2 (or equivalents). These are tried and tested qualifications that are sector specific and which contain the level of specialism that already are highly successful in offering an alternative progression route to Higher Education and directly into jobs. These have so far been successful in meeting the requirements of young people who are ready to commit to a particular sector. They have been proven to be motivating and have successfully retained young people in full time education.

50. Colleges expect the Diploma—as the qualification with a specific brief to contribute to the up-skilling and education of the future UK workforce—to offer a similar opportunity to young people, with similar, practical workshop and studio based learning for those learners who seek sector related learning for employability.

51. AoC's view is that existing qualifications should remain available alongside the Diploma until the Diploma is embedded and has earned its place as a respected learning route. AoC research has shown there is a preference by colleges, as the Diploma develops and gains popularity with learners and parents, for the best of existing qualifications to be incorporated within it. AoC has already held talks with Edexcel on this matter and is encouraging their development of more flexible qualifications.

52. In relation to the commitment of School Head Teachers, the position as reported by the college sector and reflected in AoC research is that a mixed picture is emerging.

53. Unlike colleges, who are totally familiar with the pedagogy and different approaches required to the management of applied, practical learning, the adoption of the Diplomas by schools will mark a significant shift in culture and curriculum management.

54. Some, understandably are adopting a “wait and see” approach, which is frustrating for some colleges who are keen to take up the Diplomas in the first round, but who have been unable to secure willing partners.

55. Some colleges suspect that league tables, and concerns about the commitment to larger programmes (with the risk that this might pose to league table positions), may be inhibiting some schools from participation.

How are the rules on post-16 expansion likely to affect the rollout of Diplomas?

56. The new presumption for expansion that now applies to colleges as well as schools creates another layer of complexity in the new approach to young people's education, now that institutions need to work collaboratively to deliver the curriculum. It also presents an added risk to partnership development.

57. Allowing more providers to expand does not necessarily have the effect of increasing choice, but can act in the reverse direction to diminish the range of options open to young people. Given the natural effect of the falling birth-rate—only just compensated for by a predicted rise in participation as more young people stay on longer in full time education—school sixth forms and colleges expansion can only dilute the volume of learners and make the management of their learning more problematic. Size does matter, in maximising the potential for viable groups, offering a wider choice of options and the spread of learning lines, from Apprenticeships to Baccalaureate. Recent research has shown that larger sixth forms perform better than those with fewer students.

58. AoC has referred in this submission to the need for stability and certainty in order that partnerships can plan for Diploma delivery and continue to invest in resources and expertise.

59. Colleges, which are absolutely committed to the new approach to 14–16 education, have already demonstrated that commitment through considerable investment in 14–19 education, as evidenced by LSDA research. The opening of new provision can have a significant disrupting effect, not just on one neighbouring institution, but on a whole area. And we are not persuaded that the presumption can be justified in that it always drives up quality—rather it could deplete the local supply of sector specialists and dissipate resources.

60. Some institutions thinking of major capital build projects tell us they no longer have the confidence in their projections of capacity and take up of specialist subjects by young people, due to the uncertainties in the local market. This may lead to risk-averse behaviour in the future, which cannot be helpful to the implementation of such innovative curriculum reform.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by the University and College Union (UCU)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. UCU believes that the curriculum for 14–19-year-olds should give young people the fundamentals of communications, literacy, numeracy, information technology and lifelong learning on which to base further and deeper learning for employment and/or further study. In its post-16 stages this phase of education and training should further develop knowledge and skills needed for adult life which may include more specific occupational skills.

2. The union was disappointed in the direction taken by the Government in the White Paper, 14–19 Education and Skills (February 2005), particularly over the proposed introduction of specialist Diplomas.

3. The union felt that the creation of another separate route and set of qualifications for young people would maintain the divide between the academic and applied/vocational routes and the lack of status and esteem in which this latter route and qualifications had been held. The union had supported the Tomlinson proposals for an overarching Diploma at four overlapping levels.

4. The fatal flaws in the introduction of both GNVQs and Curriculum 2000 led to a lack of confidence in such reforms amongst young people, parents, teachers and lecturers. A principal fault in the introduction of both sets of qualifications was the speed with which they were started which did not give sufficient time for considered piloting, testing and evaluation.

5. UCU fears that similar mistakes are being made in relation to the introduction of specialist Diplomas.

6. The union considers that the time line for the introduction of the first five of the 14 lines of the specialist Diploma, with a subsequent roll-out of the remaining lines to 2013, is too tight. We believe it will not allow proper and realistic piloting and evaluation, publication and dissemination of syllabus content and supporting materials or workforce development to support teaching the Diplomas.

7. The actual purposes of the specialist Diploma may be problematic as they seem intended to serve multiple and perhaps conflicting purposes.

8. UCU is concerned that because each of the specialist Diplomas is being developed by a separate employer-led group, the balance between the three elements making up each Diploma—an element of principal learning, additional/specialist learning and generic learning—may be very different.

9. UCU is concerned that those developing the Diplomas for employers and Sector Skills Councils may not have the curriculum expertise required.

10. Apart from possibly at partnership or institutional level, UCU is not aware of any current teacher/lecturer activity in preparation for the Diploma. Indeed one of our main concerns is around the timeline for the Diplomas being such as to allow sufficient time for such activities. There would appear to be a total lack of concerted action by those responsible for the creation of programmes of workforce development. The change envisaged in the establishment of the Diplomas needs considerable workforce development.

11. It is our understanding that single awarding bodies will be responsible for awarding the full Diploma but that any awarding body can create the units that make up the full Diploma. This seems a sure recipe for confusion and delay between the awarding bodies themselves, and between the regulator and the awarding bodies.

12. The Education and Inspection Act gives local authorities the statutory responsibility to deliver an entitlement to all 14–19-year-olds to access the Diploma. But it is not clear what powers local authorities will have to enforce the entitlement or to ensure the introduction of all the Diploma lines within a local area.

13. In terms of co-operation and collaboration at local level, UCU is uncertain as to the current level of coordination between schools and colleges in any local area.

14. There is still much that is unknown about the final funding of Diplomas.

15. UCU considers that overall the information, advice and guidance services for young people are in a state of turmoil and confusion and may not be in state to offer the quality of advice and guidance necessary.

16. Competition between institutions—whether school-school, college-college, or school-college—can severely damage the capacity and willingness of colleges and schools to work in partnership to deliver the Diplomas.

17. There has for a number of years been a glaring disparity between the funding of schools and colleges for similar work. One of the practical outcomes of this is the disparity between salary levels for teachers in schools and lecturers in colleges. UCU calculate this still to be significant.

RECOMMENDATIONS

18. UCU recommends that the start date for the first five Diplomas should be postponed a year and that they should be introduced in September 2009, and the remaining Diplomas rolled out until 2014.

19. UCU also recommends that the review of A levels in 2008 promised when the 14–19 White Paper was published, should be brought forward and widened to consider progress on the introduction of Diplomas. We would urge that further consideration is given to the introduction of an overarching Diploma in which both A levels and the Diploma could be located.

20. UCU recommends that the actual roles and responsibilities of the principal “players” [ie QCA, DfES and the Skills for Business Network] are made clear and there is a clear understanding where ultimate responsibility for delivering specialist Diplomas lies.

21. We understand there are at least six agencies responsible for work-based development in support of the Diplomas. We recommend that all these agencies are brought together with the teacher and lecturer unions to begin to identify the issues involved in the delivery of Diplomas and the consequent workforce development needed. To date this has not happened.

22. UCU recommends there is a clear government commitment to closing the funding gap between schools and colleges post 2010.

UCU

23. UCU represents 120,000 academic and academic-related staff in universities, FE colleges, adult and community learning and prison education services. All UCU members have a strong interest in the development of specialist Diplomas for young people aged 14–19. UCU members working in higher education will be admitting young people achieving these new qualifications. UCU members in further education colleges and prison education will be delivering specialist Diplomas in partnership with schools, work-based learning providers and employers.

SPECIALIST DIPLOMAS

24. UCU believes that the curriculum for 14–19-year-olds should give young people the fundamentals of communications, literacy, numeracy, information technology and lifelong learning on which to base further and deeper learning for employment and/or further study. In its post-16 stages this phase of education and training further develops knowledge and skills needed for adult life which may include more specific occupational skills.

25. The union considers that the terms academic and vocational are not useful when describing 14–19 education and training. We prefer the terms “general” and “applied” education and training. In a world where specific skills that may be required in the workplace rapidly become obsolete given the pace of technological change, the term ‘vocational’ for a curriculum for young people is a misnomer. Similarly “academic” knowledge and skills have application in employment.

26. UCU would like all young people to have the opportunity and an entitlement to develop the more general skills which can provide the basis for developing more specific occupational skills for employment and for adult life.

27. NATFHE, one of the unions making up UCU, had long-standing policies on 14–19 education and training. The aim of these was the creation of a coherent and inclusive curriculum and set of qualifications that recognised and valued the full range of young people’s achievements.

28. Although NATFHE had reservations about the possible implications of some of the recommendations of the Tomlinson Working Party on 14–19, which reported in late 2004, it supported them as they were aimed at achieving a coherent and inclusive curriculum and qualifications framework. The union was disappointed in the direction taken by the Government in the White Paper, 14–19 Education and Skills (February 2005), particularly over the proposed introduction of specialist Diplomas.

29. The union felt that the creation of another separate route and set of qualifications for young people would maintain the divide between the academic and applied/vocational routes and the lack of status and esteem in which this latter route and qualifications had been held. The union had supported the Tomlinson proposals for an overarching Diploma at four overlapping levels.

30. It considered that this would have provided the motivation for those young people who were currently often alienated and de-motivated by the national curriculum and more academic qualifications, and could provide challenge and stretch for the more able young people in the age cohort. An overarching qualification would have given the opportunity for assessing the “softer” of the key skills such as problem-solving, team work and lifelong learning so valued by employers. It would also have given more opportunity for mixing components of general education and the applied curriculum.

31. Despite its disappointment in the direction set out by the 14–19 White Paper, NATFHE considered that it was important to work with all partners and stakeholders to ensure that the development of specialist Diplomas was a success. We felt that young people and the 14–19 education and training system could not afford yet another missed opportunity to develop a quality curriculum as well as qualifications in this area.

32. The fatal flaws in the introduction of both GNVQs and Curriculum 2000 led to a lack of confidence in such reforms amongst young people, parents, teachers and lecturers. A principal fault in the introduction of both sets of qualifications was the speed with which they were started which did not give sufficient time for considered piloting, testing and evaluation. The specifications for these qualifications did not arrive in schools and colleges until after teaching on them had started. Curriculum materials had not been published and the necessary workforce development had not happened.

33. UCU fears that similar mistakes are being made in relation to the introduction of the specialist Diplomas.

34. The union considers that the time line for the introduction of the first five of the 14 lines of the specialist Diploma, with a subsequent roll-out of the remaining lines to 2013, is too tight. We believe it will not allow proper and realistic piloting and evaluation, publication and dissemination of syllabus content and supporting materials or workforce development to support teaching the Diplomas. UCU would argue that the start date for the first five Diplomas should be postponed a year and that they should be introduced in September 2009, and the remaining Diplomas rolled out until 2014.

35. UCU would strongly urge also that the review of A levels in 2008 promised when the 14–19 White Paper was published, should be brought forward and widened to consider progress on the introduction of the Diplomas. We would urge that further consideration is given to the introduction of an overarching Diploma in which both A levels and the Diploma could be located.

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF DIPLOMAS

What progress has been made on the development of Diplomas to date? Where have been the sticking points?

36. It is difficult for UCU to know what progress has actually been made in the development of the Diplomas or what have been the sticking points as UCU, along with the other teacher unions, has not been party to the detail of the developments. The teacher unions have been invited to QCA conferences and briefings on the Diplomas, and some of the Diploma Development Partnerships, such as that for engineering, have included serving teachers and lecturers but others have not.

37. Teachers and lecturers who will actually deliver the new Diplomas should be seen as key partners in reform and not passive deliverers of an externally determined model. Teachers and lecturers will be motivated to work towards a new system of Diplomas over a development period only if they are included in developing curriculum models, modes of assessment and approaches to learning and teaching. The role of teachers and lecturers has not been made explicit in the designing or the delivery of the new Diplomas. This will not inspire teachers' confidence to deliver imposed curriculum specifications/courses.

38. UCU is concerned that the following may be sticking points within the development of Diplomas:

39. Purpose—The actual purposes of the specialist Diploma may be problematic as they seem intended to serve multiple and perhaps conflicting purposes. They seem to be intended to provide learning programmes for disaffected young people, for those who have failed to get five A*–GCSEs—the benchmark at 16, for those wanting to pursue a high quality employer-recognised qualification and those wanting a more “applied” route to higher education. There may be particular issues for those taking the specialist Diploma pre-16 where in some subject areas there may be legal barriers to workplace experience.

40. Content—UCU is concerned that because each of the specialist Diplomas is being developed by a separate employer-led group, the balance between the three elements making up each Diploma—an element of principal learning, additional/specialist learning and generic learning—may be very different. It is also likely that the balance of these three elements will be different between the different levels of the Diploma. This may render their application by end users difficult (be they employers or education establishments) as comparisons and equivalences between achievements among the Diplomas may be difficult, as well as both horizontal and vertical progression within and between the different lines of the Diploma. We are also worried that the content between Diplomas and between levels, does not at this stage appear to be consistent in terms of the knowledge and skills and demands made on the learner.

41. The exclusion of apprenticeships from the Diploma framework may make progression from the Diplomas to full apprenticeships problematic.

42. Assessment—Making assessment within the Diplomas “fit for purpose”, clear, understandable and affordable. Some of the elements of the Diploma will be graded, whilst other parts will need “mastery”, ie will need to be passed.

What role have employers and Sector Skills Councils played in the development of Diplomas?

43. The Government's intention was that employers should play a leading role in the development of specialist Diplomas. It is our understanding this has happened through the involvement of the relevant Sector Skills Councils on the Diploma Development Partnerships. However it may well be that both the involvement with employers in their Sector Skills Councils and their involvement with the Development Partnerships may be patchy and vary between the different lines of the specialist Diplomas. As we have stated above, our concern has been with the involvement of practising teachers and lecturers in developing Diplomas. UCU is concerned that those developing the Diplomas for employers and Sector Skills Councils may not have the curriculum expertise required and that they are having to adapt a pre-determined template for them which may not necessarily match their needs. We are also concerned that the awarding bodies who do have the expertise in designing qualifications have not as yet had a central enough role, and the role they have may conflict with their position as producers of existing comparable qualifications.

Who is responsible for the coordination and development of Diplomas?

44. It is our understanding that the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority with the DfES and the Skills for Business Network are responsible for overall lead, coordination and development of the Diplomas. The detailed work on developing the Diplomas has been given to Diploma Development Partnerships led by the appropriate Sector Skills Council. Further, it is our understanding that there is an implementation group at the DfES for 14–19 policy and that developments on the Diploma are reported to this body. UCU is represented on this implementation group. Clearly all would benefit if the actual roles and responsibilities of the principal “players” were made clear and it was defined who exactly is going to take ultimate responsibility, especially if the development of Diplomas becomes problematic, as UCU believes it will.

Is there a case for a stronger co-ordinating role for one of the agencies involved, or for the appointment of a senior responsible officer or champion?

45. UCU believes that the role of QCA and its partners should be sufficient for coordination of developments around the specialist Diplomas. To appoint a senior responsible officer or champion may well confuse matters and lead to problematic lines of communication between the main stakeholders. Nonetheless, we refer to our response above stating that there does need to be greater clarity as to roles and responsibilities and which agency or department is ultimately responsible.

Is there a clear system for accrediting and awarding the Diplomas?

46. There appear to be clear systems emerging for accrediting and awarding Diplomas. However UCU does have some concerns about how understandable some of these systems will be especially those around assessing the Diplomas. There are issues around the grading of the Diploma overall; for example which units within the Diploma will require pass/fail results and not be graded; for which units will there be “compensation” allowed from other parts of the programme, and which units where “compensation” will not be allowed; and how functional skills will be embedded within programmes and assessed.

47. Additional complications for the process of creating the new Diplomas and establishing a clear system for accreditation and awarding arise from the decision to create a “free market” in awarding the Diploma and constructing the units that will go to make up any Diploma. It is our understanding that single awarding bodies will be responsible for awarding the full Diploma but that any awarding body can create the units that make up the full Diploma. This seems a sure recipe for confusion and delay between the awarding bodies themselves, between the regulator and the awarding bodies. It will also be very confusing for young people, parents and end users such as employers and higher education institutions.

TEACHER AND LECTURER TRAINING

What are current levels of teacher/lecturer training activity in preparation for Diplomas? Is this sufficient to make Diplomas a success?

48. Apart from possibly at partnership or institutional level, UCU is not aware of any current teacher/lecturer activity in preparation for the Diploma. Indeed one of our main concerns is around the timeline for the Diplomas being such as to allow sufficient time for such activities. There would appear to be a total lack of concerted action by those responsible for the creation of programmes of workforce development. The change envisaged in the establishment of the Diplomas needs considerable workforce development.

49. Although school teachers, college lecturers and work-based trainers all have experience of some part of the areas covered by the Diplomas, all will need additional support for areas that are relatively new to them: school teachers in vocational/applied work, college lecturers and work based trainers in working with under 16s and in the delivery of the National Curriculum.

50. All those working on the new Diplomas, as well as requiring professional development in areas that are particularly pertinent to them, need to be brought together with teachers, lecturers and trainers in the spread of partner organisations to develop the curriculum and materials across the Diploma curriculum no matter where it is delivered. Teachers need to pick up on what happens in colleges, work-based training and with employers; lecturers and trainers need to know what has happened in schools. In a survey of NATFHE members on their experiences of work in colleges with students under 16, one of the chief complaints made was the lack of information from schools about the students they were expected to teach.

51. UCU, in association with the Institute for Learning, the professional body of post-compulsory teachers and lecturers is in the process of surveying its members as to the continuous professional development on offer to college lecturers, including that around 14–19 education and training. We will be happy to share the results of this with the select committee. In two surveys conducted by UCU branches, the development and training on offer for work with under 16s in colleges was minimal.

52. LEACAN, a national network of local authority advisers inspectors, advisers, officers and consultants working on 14–19 surveyed their members on 14–19 developments. (LEACAN “Challenges facing partnerships” 2006). The questions they asked included a number around the priority given to staff

development within local authority strategic planning. They found that although the majority of local authorities are planning to upskill staff to deliver the Diplomas, some had not targeted either staff development or workforce reform for the Diplomas within their strategic plans. LEACAN commented:

53. “The current situation may have implications in terms of local authorities’ capacity to work towards introducing the proposed curriculum reform measures, considering that a significant proportion of vocational provision is currently delivered in school by school staff with limited sector experience.”

54. LEACAN also asked the respondents to their survey to identify the key barriers to delivering the Diplomas. The two most mentioned responses were “engagement and will” mentioned by 96% of respondents, and “capacity and skill” mentioned by 85%. LEACAN considered the high response rate on the first barrier demonstrated that schools were either poorly informed or antagonistic to the changes or expected the whole initiative “to go away”. It may be that a concerted effort to deliver workforce development that was rooted in the real experiences of teachers, might begin to build some of this engagement and will.

55. The LEACAN survey indicated that even where there was a willingness to engage with the 14–19 agenda, the “distance to be travelled” to 2013 and full roll out of the Diplomas, is significant. Many of the LEACAN respondents commented on the lack of infrastructure and questioned the feasibility of building capacity required with no explicit and sustainable funding stream for support. LEACAN went on to comment:

56. “There were concerns about the availability of appropriately qualified staff to deliver the specialist learning components of the Diplomas.”

57. The report went on to describe comments from respondents that there were current difficulties around recruitment of staff and the challenge of accessing high quality staff development, including the issue of getting staff released for training, and the fact that in many cases capacity is currently insufficient to meet the potential demand that might be made by delivering the Diplomas.

58. We understand there are at least six agencies responsible for work-based development in support of the Diplomas: the Training and Development Agency (TDA), Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), The Specialist Schools Trust, The Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL), National Schools Leadership College and the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA). No organisation representing teachers and/or lecturers is in touch with all these agencies. UCU has good working relations with LLUK, CEL and QIA, but not with the TDA, Specialist Schools Trust or the National Schools Leadership College. The position is reversed for the school teacher unions. UCU has asked repeatedly at the DfES 14–19 Implementation Group that all these agencies are brought together with the teacher and lecturer unions to begin to identify the issues involved in the delivery of Diplomas and the consequent workforce development needed. To date this has not happened.

59. It is worth remembering that although the first Diplomas are aimed to be delivered in September 2008, to be ready teachers and lecturers will need to start on training and development by at least September 2007. Given the long summer break this would seem to indicate that such workforce development programmes should be ready by June/July 2007. It would be helpful if the six agencies concerned with the delivery of such programmes consulted the organisations representing the teachers and lecturers who will be actually teaching the new programmes at the earliest opportunity.

CO-ORDINATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

What is the current level of co-ordination between colleges and schools in local areas?

60. The recent Education and Inspection Act gave the strategic lead on 14–19 to local authorities. Other recent statements seem to give local authorities the lead role in 14–16 provision and the LSC on 16–19. UCU is unsure how these arrangements will work in practice. For example who arbitrates if a local authority’s strategic lead role leads it to decisions on 16–19 that conflicts with those of the LSC in respect of this provision?

61. There are additional complications in that both local authorities and the LSC are subject to current and recent restructuring and change. The Further Education and Training Bill currently before Parliament will abolish local LSCs. In their place the LSC, after three reorganisations in five years, is creating 153 local teams which will largely be coterminous with local authorities. This could mean greater integration between decision making in the local authority and LSC in respect to 14–19. However there are concerns about how local voices will be heard by the regional LSCs and whether LSC local teams have the status and power to negotiate successfully with local authority officers.

62. The Nuffield Foundation is conducting a long term review of 14–19 education and training. In its most recent Annual Report 2005–06, it describes the lack of capacity at local level in the LSC and in local authorities. The Report quotes the LGA in saying that local authorities have shed many of their post-16 specialists and had “staff, skills and resources stripped out” The latter indeed are no longer even local education authorities but Children’s Trusts sometimes with an educationalist in overall charge, sometimes not. Many unitary local authorities, are very small and may not have the staff to carry out the functions envisaged in the 14–19 Implementation Plan.

63. The Education and Inspection Act gives local authorities the statutory responsibility to deliver an entitlement to all 14–19-year-olds to access the Diploma. But it is not clear what powers local authorities will have to enforce the entitlement or to ensure the introduction of all the Diploma lines within a local area.

64. Local co-ordination is not assisted by the Gateway process for the introduction of Diplomas. It is rigorous which UCU welcomes. It is also lengthy and somewhat bureaucratic. Possible providers of the Diploma have been asked to form consortia to put in expressions of interest at a point when the Diplomas had not been completely designed. These consortia were asked to indicate how many learners were likely to take the Diplomas: a difficult task with the uncertainty about the content of the Diplomas and with many other qualifications still being offered in this part of 14–19 education and training.

65. In September 2006 the DfES published more detailed criteria for selection of eligible partnerships to deliver each of the Diplomas, and interested consortia had until December 2006 to submit more detailed proposals. The results of this are expected in early 2007. Such a process makes the timetable of the delivery of the Diplomas even more problematic, giving around a year for the successful partnerships to make their preparations for delivery, including the necessary staff development and training.

66. The LEACAN Report had asked a series of questions about local authority preparations around the introduction of Diplomas. The results are not encouraging. Although all the local authorities responding indicated that they were auditing their curriculum provision as part of their 14–19 developments, many also indicated their inability to match current provision to that required for the Diplomas. Future planning was difficult when details and resources required were unknown.

67. The report concluded that there was “significant distance to travel in order to move from a random and sometimes opportunistic approach to planning across a local authority area to a more structured, coherent and agreed delivery.” Although the majority of local authorities managed the strategic oversight of 14–19 development through a Strategic/Executive/Task Group consisting of representatives from providers and strategic partners, there seemed to be no discernable pattern for other structures or groups involved in supporting 14–19 developments. LEACAN stated “that the pattern at local level appears to be driven by a combination of opportunity and circumstance there is no consistency in the structures/groups responsible for 14–19 development. Care should be taken in assuming such structures exist and they have common features.”

68. In terms of co-operation and collaboration at local level, UCU is uncertain as to the current level of coordination between schools and colleges in any local area. We assume that it is patchy even within one area. Where schools and colleges are already in partnership then it may be expected that the co-ordination is at least satisfactory. From investigations made at the start of the Increased Flexibility funding for 14–16-year-olds, NATFHE found that relationships between one college and a number of schools could vary greatly, with good coordination reported in some and others “dumping” school pupils with behaviour problems or before external examinations or Ofsted inspections. The LEACAN report noted that the majority of vocational provision for students over the age of 16 is delivered independently and thus these schools feel little need to co-ordinate. Choice of vocational courses currently on offer in schools for young people 14–16 is limited. The average choice is between two or three lines. “The capacity to deliver all 14 lines at three levels will be logistically difficult as we do not currently have the staff to do this.”

What are the barriers to coordination?

69. As we have already stated UCU does not yet have a detailed picture of what is happening on the ground with regard to the introduction of the Diplomas. To the ever present difficulties of partnership working, which a leading FE practitioner once likened to “the suppression of mutual hostility in pursuit of funding”, we would argue that certain characteristics of the introduction of the Diplomas makes co-ordination at local level even more difficult. We would identify the following:

70. Precarious funding—the introduction of Diplomas has been preceded by a Pathfinder programme across 39 areas in England to test and pilot various aspects of the 14–19 reform including cross-institutional collaboration. Whilst the final evaluation report identified nine key legacies including examples of best practice, the Nuffield Report reported that funding for these Pathfinders combined with the other uncertainty around the Diploma introduction, militated against the dissemination of this good practice. The Report stated that the Pathfinders “are often not in a position to form sustainable networks of trust.”

71. There is still much that is unknown about the final funding of Diplomas. In relation to funding for the Diploma for 14–16-year-olds, the final details of this funding are awaited but there are still a number of important issues to be addressed, such as funding to sustain teaching in schools where many 14–16-year-olds are “off-site” taking Diploma programmes at colleges, work-based trainers or employers. For colleges there are questions of how necessary activities that are not teaching, such as lunch time and supervision between lessons, are going to be funded.

72. Timetable—as we have attempted to indicate we would argue that the whole timetable for the introduction of the Diplomas is too fast as there are still too many unknowns for those who are intended to deliver these programmes. If the “playing field” is not yet completely known, this cannot help local coordination and collaboration.

73. Uncertainty from the Gateway process—Again as we have already indicated because the Gateway process is both lengthy and somewhat bureaucratic, the results of who will actually first deliver the Diplomas is as yet unknown. The period from when the results are known and the first actual delivery of the Diplomas will be relatively short and, it is UCU's contention, too short for proper preparation and workforce development.

74. Information, advice and guidance—The key to successful introduction of any 14–19 curriculum change, especially one involving young people and their parents/carers taking crucial decisions as to future routes of learning and achievement depend on the quality of the information, advice and guidance available to young people, their parents and carers. UCU considers that overall the information, advice and guidance services for young people are in a state of turmoil and confusion and may not be in state to offer the quality of advice and guidance necessary.

75. These services have been through a number of re-organisations, the latest being the creation of Connexions. Since the publication of the Green Paper, *Youth Matters* (2005) the intention has been to give local authorities the overall responsibilities for information, advice and guidance for young people, although the Green Paper suggested that schools and colleges should have the right to directly contract for such services if those under the responsibility of the local authority were considered not be of a high enough quality. Some have suggested that this could lead to fragmentation of these services.

76. The Government in its “Next Steps” response to the consultation on *Youth Matters* has modified these proposals. Nonetheless there has to be some concern that the information, guidance and advice services will be sufficiently strong and robust enough to give the independent and impartial information and advice that young people will require when making crucial decisions about what learning programmes to take from the age of 14.

77. The evaluation of the DfES 14–19 Pathfinders revealed that the division of responsibilities between schools' career staff and Connexions advisers has been ambivalent. If the new arrangements for IAG are to be shared between local authorities, Children's Trusts and schools and colleges, then the coordination of such work must be made transparent to all the providers named. Local partnership arrangements set up by Children's Trusts must effectively incorporate schools' work on children's well being and pastoral care, as well as individual advice and guidance for pupils.

78. Institutional competition: In the judgement of UCU the largest barrier to co-ordination between schools and colleges is the focus on institutional competition that lies at the heart of government policies towards both schools and colleges. At the very least there can be seen a contradiction between the institutional co-operation and partnership which the government seeks to underpin its plans for 14–19 education, and especially the delivery of the Diploma, and the competition between institutions.

79. This can be seen in the White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All* (2005) and the Education and Inspection Act 2006 which focus on institutional diversity, specialisation and the creation of new school sixth forms with reinforcement of school autonomy, parental choice and competition for the most able learners at 11 and 16.

80. This kind of institutional competition is underpinned by the existing mechanisms of the school performance tables with their focus on the importance of the five A*–C GCSE benchmark at 16. Colleges will increasingly face the severe penalties of competitive tendering for all or part of their provision, should it fall below what is perceived as good or excellent. Thus many believe that individual institutional performance has been incentivised at the expense of collective thinking and area planning.

*What are the lessons that can be learned from areas where there is strong co-ordination on 14–19? What are intermediary bodies such as LAs and LSCs doing to foster co-operation?
How engaged are head teachers and college principals in the Diploma agenda?*

81. UCU is unable to give responses on these questions as we do not have the information on these issues as to what is happening at local level.

How are the rules on post-16 expansion likely to affect the roll out of Diplomas?

82. We have argued above that competition between institutions—whether school-school, college-college, or school-college—can severely damage the capacity and willingness of colleges and schools to work in partnership to deliver the Diplomas. The new procedures and rules on post-16 expansion, including extending the presumption to colleges that the most successful should be able to expand, and introducing competition for 16–19 provision in localities where this is judged to be weak, may affect adversely the roll out of Diplomas in some areas. Potential partners in these areas may be focused on preserving their existence rather than working to collaborate on qualifications that are as yet unknown and untested.

CONCLUDING POINTS

83. As we have already stated, UCU would have preferred to see an overarching Diploma along the lines recommended by the Tomlinson Working Party. We have also stated that given the recent history of qualification change we do want the work on Diplomas to come to fruition. But UCU has severe reservations as to whether Diplomas can fulfil the ambitions of the Government, again most recently described in the Leitch Report. Diplomas will have to coexist with GCSEs and A levels and with successful known and respected “applied” qualifications such as BTEC National awards. In UK education there is always the ever present danger of academic drift with “vocational” qualifications for young people becoming more general so that they can be taught in schools. Despite the avowed intention that Diplomas must be delivered by partnerships of schools, colleges, work-based trainers and employers, this possibility hangs over the proposed Diplomas.

84. UCU would identify a number of additional barriers to the ones we have already described, to successful delivery of Diplomas:

85. Disparities in pay and professional status—There has for a number of years been a glaring disparity between the funding of schools and colleges for similar work. Even the Government now acknowledges this and is committed to reducing the funding gap from the current 13% to 8% by 2008 and by another 3% by 2010. This however will mean that there is still a 5% funding gap which works to favour schools over colleges. One of the practical outcomes of this is the disparity between salary levels for teachers in schools and lecturers in colleges. UCU calculate this still to be significant. It is a source of great anger among college lecturers that they are paid so much less for teaching what increasingly are the same students. With the introduction of Diplomas and increasing numbers of young people being taught in both schools and colleges, these pay differentials become ever more difficult to justify and serve to lower the morale and willingness of college lecturers to become completely involved in the preparations to deliver the Diplomas. Similar disparities exist in the professional status of school teachers and lecturers. In September 2007 Qualified Teacher Status is being introduced for college lecturers. This has not equivalency with Qualified Teacher Status in schools. The position will be that school teachers with QTS (Schools) will be able to teach in FE colleges, yet lecturers with QT(Learning and Skills) will not be able to teach in schools. This disparity of esteem and status continues to rankle with FE and does nothing to promote collaboration and partnership.

86. The engagement and willingness of schools to engage with the 14–19 agenda—With so many initiatives hitting schools at present there are doubts about how they will cope with Diplomas. There is in addition cynicism following the decision not to implement Tomlinson, and a fear that Diplomas will be a second-class option. Finally, where schools are at present, varies enormously, in terms of experience, local links and staff expertise to deliver vocational provision.

87. The uncertainty and instability in colleges—The multiplicity of initiatives and policies facing schools has resulted in uncertainty and doubts, and is mirrored in the uncertainty and instability in colleges because of the introduction of contestability and colleges are under threat where quality of provision is considered weak or even “coasting”. There are also major changes proposed in the very recently published Leitch Report on future skills, which proposes that all adult vocational learning is turned over to the employers through Train to Gain programmes and individuals through learning accounts.

88. Funding—We have highlighted some concerns on the part of both schools and colleges around funding and its uncertainty. For schools the issues are around off-site delivery and the cost involved. For colleges the concern is especially the cost of non-teaching activities. The biggest issue overall is uncertainty. This includes concerns about the volume of future funding and the resources needed to sustain Diploma provision.

89. Communication and understanding—The Government is talking about a three year pilot for each Diploma wave. It is hoped that this will lessen the concern surrounding stage 2 (the working up of the qualification). The DfES Implementation Plan calls for communication strategies around the introduction of the Diploma. UCU has made the point in the DfES 14–19 Implementation Working Party that all too often these communication strategies are aimed at the leaders and managers of institutions and agencies rather than the practitioners who will actually teach, lecture and train on the new Diploma programmes. We still await plans for the kind of communications strategy that will garner ownership among practitioners for the Diplomas.

Memorandum submitted by EEF

ABOUT US

1. EEF, the manufacturers' organisation, has a membership of 6,000 manufacturing, engineering and technology-based businesses and represents the interests of manufacturing at all levels of government. Comprising 11 regional associations, the Engineering Construction Industries Association (ECIA) and UK Steel, EEF is one of the UK's leading providers of business services in health, safety and environment, employment relations and employment law, manufacturing performance, education, training and skills.

2. EEF welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry into 14–19 Specialised Diplomas (SD). We feel that with their introduction from 2008, specialised Diplomas have a key role to play in helping to tackle some of the gap that exists between academic and vocational paths through the education system. One of our major concerns is that the introduction of Diplomas must fully reflect the needs of employers.

3. In particular, EEF is keen to ensure that a robust, attractive and valued specialised Diplomas is created for engineering. As a result, we will be seeking assurances that the SD in Engineering fulfil the following criteria. That it:

- provides an attractive and well-regarded alternative to the purely academic route to an engineering career;
- encourages suitable young people to try practical experience of Engineering;
- provides a sound basis for an Apprenticeship in Engineering (either level 2 or level 3) or other job with training; and
- provides a basis for entry into further education (FE) or higher education (HE).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

4. Specialised Diplomas have the potential to provide a real alternative to academic qualifications for 14–19-year-olds. However, it is important that their place in 14–19 provision is clear, with the right young people taking them. It is essential that the lessons of both the GCSEs in vocational subjects, and the Young Apprenticeship schemes are learnt. The way in which the new Diplomas are delivered and promoted will be key to their success.

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF DIPLOMAS

What progress has been made on the development of Diplomas to date? Where have been the sticking points?

5. EEF is a member of the Engineering Specialised Diploma Development Partnership, which devised the content and structure of the Diploma within the guidelines issued by government.

6. Engineering is one of the first SDs to be introduced, which EEF welcomes. We hope that it will build on the success of the Young Apprenticeship in Engineering, which is inspiring young people of above average ability to learn in new ways and achieve high levels of skills while remaining within the school environment.

7. There was some confusion at the beginning of the process over whether an SD would be a proxy for elements of an apprenticeship framework (ie would an SD level 2 graduate be able to top up their learning subsequently in the workplace in order to achieve an Apprenticeship). In the end it was agreed that SDs would not perform this function, but that (for example) an SD level 2 graduate would be very well-prepared to start an Advanced Apprenticeship.

8. The engineering sector is also aware of the need for the Advanced level of the Diploma (level 3) to prepare a young person for progression to university. With this in mind, the original specification was designed so that a strong pass at level 3 would be (in theory) acceptable for entry to an engineering degree at the very best universities in the country.

9. However, we have concerns that other sectors are not aiming so high in their development of level 3 SDs, and that this may force compromise of the content and level of Engineering, simply to ensure equivalence.

What role have employers and Sector Skills Councils played in the development of Diplomas?

10. The Science, Engineering, Manufacturing Technologies Alliance (SEMTA)—as the sector skills council for most of manufacturing—has taken the lead for the Engineering Specialised Diploma, and has worked with five other sector skills councils (SSC) to ensure the SD is acceptable. Improve—the SSC for the food and drink manufacturing sector—is leading on the Manufacturing SD, again in partnership with other relevant SSCs.

11. In addition to EEF's representation on the Engineering SD Development Partnership, several companies were represented, and other employers were encouraged to contribute via the website and consultation events held across the country. EEF promoted these activities to its members and the wider engineering community.

Is there a clear system for accrediting and awarding the Diplomas?

12. We strongly recommend that lessons are learned both from the success of the Young Apprenticeship scheme, and from the GCSE in Engineering. While the Young Apprenticeship (although not yet widely available) is well regarded and supported, the GCSE in Engineering is struggling to give young people the kind of education which was envisaged.

13. There is some evidence from awarding bodies that the low achievement rate in GCSE Engineering is due not to poor quality work on the part of the students, but rather to learning centres failing to apply the correct procedures and assessments. Students are therefore being penalised, despite producing good or excellent projects, because they do not meet the specification (for more information, see Edexcel Examiners' Report on GCSE in Engineering Summer 2006).

14. It is imperative that this does not happen to the SD, and therefore both its content and assessment criteria must be understood and accepted by teaching centres.

15. It must be recognised that it will not simply be enough to provide access to these qualifications—their success will come from a number of factors:

- Promotion—Specialised Diplomas are not designed to be an easy option. They will be rigorous and demanding. They must therefore be part of the “offer” to young people across the ability range, not just to low achievers.
- Delivery—the partnerships delivering Diplomas will need to work closely together to ensure that the strengths of each learning provider (school, college, employer, etc) are used.
- Achievement—it is not enough for young people to study vocational subjects, they must also achieve. The GCSE in Engineering is an example of a qualification which is currently failing to provide young people with the necessary achievement to enable them to progress.
- Progression—young people must be able to move forward after the Diploma in whichever direction is most suitable for their aspirations and abilities—this means the Diploma must prepare them for further study, work, apprenticeships, and higher education.

TEACHER AND LECTURER TRAINING

16. We refer to the point on GCSE Engineering above, which would appear to indicate that teachers and lecturers are failing to follow the correct procedures, and students are suffering as a result. Teacher/lecturer training for Diplomas must be more rigorous, and provide them with sufficient information.

CO-ORDINATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

17. We commend a recent publication from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) entitled *Provision for learners aged 14–16 in the further education sector—an initial report*, which documents the particular concerns of FE colleges in teaching this age group. The main concerns are:

- the full cost of provision is not covered by the additional income received (68% of respondents cite this as a major concern);
- the use of specialist workshops and staff inhibits the growth of post-16 provision; and
- teaching and support staff do not feel that they have the specialist skills and experience necessary to teach pre-16 learners.

18. Other concerns are the:

- disproportionate use of management time to ensure collaboration works; and
- schools using courses as a “dumping ground” for difficult pupils.

19. Taking these concerns into account, and addressing each with robust measures, should reduce the barriers to co-ordination between schools, colleges, training providers, and employers.

20. It is also of value to note what colleges report to be the main benefits of engagement with per-16 provision, namely:

- improved relationships with local schools;
- part of the college's social mission;
- improvement in retention and achievement of those who subsequently enrol in college courses; and
- improvement in college recruitment.

21. We also draw the Committee's attention to a Local Education Authority Curriculum Advisors' Network (LEACAN) report published in October 2006, *Challenges facing partnerships: current developments towards implementation of 14–19 reform in local authorities*, which reports the findings of a survey of 54 local authorities, and their views on their preparedness for a whole range of issues relating to the introduction of Specialised Diplomas. Of particular concern are the current low levels of engagement with vocational learning in some areas, and the lack of planning in terms of continuing professional development (CPD) for staff to support the new curriculum. It also found that 96% of respondents cited reasons relating to "engagement and will" as one of the most significant barriers implementing the new National Entitlement.

CONCLUSION

22. EEF welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry into the 14–19 Specialised Diplomas. While we have identified some areas of concern in our submission, we do remain confident of the positive contribution that Specialised Diplomas can play in raising skill levels of 14–19-year-olds.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by Geoff Stanton

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The questions set by the select committee suggest that it intends to focus on possible problems with the management of the Diploma development process. Whilst these certainly exist, a more fundamental issue is the fact that design of the process itself, as originally laid out by the DfES, is seriously flawed.

- It is linear rather than iterative, with the consequence that some important influences on the design come in to play too late or are at risk of being neglected altogether.
- It equates the development of a Diploma programme with the development of a Diploma qualification.
- It starts in the wrong place, and neglects existing good practice with regard to both qualifications and learning processes.
- It wrongly assumes that putting employers in charge of the design will ensure that they and learners will value the results.
- It wrongly assumes that the best way to identify employer needs is to ask them to specify learning outcomes.
- It fails to embody lessons that should have been learned from previous and related government initiatives.

2. Without recognition of these flaws, there is a risk that any recommendations made by the Committee will simply result in the wrong thing being done better.

3. I also refer to two other issues that go beyond the development process itself.

- The misguided threat to abolish competitor examinations in due course.
- The extent to which the implications of the entitlement to access to all 14 lines of the Diplomas have been thought through.

4. An overall issue is the extent to which constructive debate about this extremely important development is being stymied by overblown official claims that conflate ambitious aspirations with what can actually be guaranteed. At the same time, public comment on the development process by key partners seems to be being discouraged on the grounds that this might undermine the successful establishment of the Diplomas. My own position is that the success of the Diplomas depends on an honest recognition of the problems and challenges that exist.

MY BASIS FOR MAKING THIS SUBMISSION

5. I have considerable experience of curriculum development of vocationally relevant programmes for 16–19-year-olds. I was involved in this at a national level during a total of 11 years at the Further Education Unit (a predecessor of LSDA), including 8 years as its Chief Executive. This included the opportunity to observe the development of NVQs and GNVQ at close hand. I have undertaken college level development work as a Head of Department and Vice Principal. Over the past 10 years, I have undertaken numerous R&D Projects and written research papers for agencies such as the Association of Colleges, the LSC, LSDA, IPPR, and City and Guilds. This has included work on employer engagement. I have given evidence to two previous Education Select Committees. I am currently a member of the advisory committee of the Nuffield Review of 14–19 Education, and Chair the Advisory Group of the ESRC Research Centre into Skills

Knowledge and Organisational Performance (SKOPE). I have been elected to Fellowships of the College of Teachers and of City and Guilds. I am a visiting Fellow at the University of Greenwich School of Education and Training. I write in a personal capacity.

EXPLANATION OF KEY POINTS

Using a linear rather than iterative development process

6. The process as defined in the White Paper and the subsequent implementation plan is essentially linear—a series of stages that follow one another sequentially, each the responsibility of a different agency or expert group. In fact, successful development work needs to be cyclical, involving a series of iterations in which the requirements for:

- certain learning outcomes, of value to employers and Higher Education;
- a valid and affordable assessment regime that supports learning; and
- manageable learning programmes that engage learners via motivating and challenging activities influence each other from the start.

7. A well known problem with developing these requirements sequentially, and using the outcomes to drive the rest of the process, is that not all desirable outcomes can be effectively assessed or taught, whilst some outcomes that are required in order to encourage learning processes that are necessary if the learner is to become engaged or to progress are omitted. Other common problems are that more outcomes are specified than can be addressed in the time available, and that outcomes are specified in sequence that does not allow for the stages of development that a learner has to move through. All these problems were demonstrated by the first five sets of “Diploma contents and Learning outcomes” that were published in July 2006.

8. Despite serious problems with the volume, level and abstract nature of some of the learning outcomes produced, in July 2006 the Schools Minister Jim Knight welcomed their publication saying:

“This is an exciting time for education. The first Diplomas are really taking shape and they provide a vision of the future of learning for 14–19-year-olds [. . .] The Diplomas will offer all students a real alternative to the traditional route”

He also claimed that “A growing sense of momentum is building within schools and colleges who are keen to get on with delivering reforms.” The evidence for this was that “every single area of the country has already expressed an interest in offering the Diplomas when they are ready for teaching in 2008.” It is certainly the case that few wanted to be left out of the “gateway” process, with the prospect of extra resources that this offers. Most are also excited by the prospect of a new approach to 14–19 provision. This does not mean that they are impressed by the development work so far.

9. An Ofsted inspection report on Centres of Vocational Excellence in a major city, that hopes to build its future 14–19 provision around Diploma consortia, to help it address particular problems of underachievement at 16, reported in December 2006 that:

“One major area of concern regarding the new Diplomas was discussed. There is widespread apprehension about the low practical content of the Diplomas. There is concern that the craft and technician level skills that are needed will not be developed sufficiently. There is also a worry that the high theoretical content of some of the Diplomas will exclude students who currently respond well to a more practical approach to learning.”

10. Indeed, another and very important consequence of this linearity is that those with experience of implementing learning programmes of the type required, and involving the type of student that most needs to be reached, have yet to be involved significantly in the process of developing the Diplomas.

11. In tacit recognition of problems with the specifications as produced by the Development Partnerships in July, QCA instituted a process of developing “criteria” that had to be met before the content could be handed over to Awarding Bodies for conversion into qualifications. One effect of this has been to introduce considerable delay such that by the deadline in December 2006 by which submissions to pass through the “gateway” had to be made, providers and consortia still did not know exactly what the content of the first five Diplomas would be, despite the fact that they were required to provide evidence that they were in a position to deliver it.

Developing a Diploma programme as well as a Diploma qualification

12. Heavy emphasis is being placed—rightly in my view—on the nature of the learning experiences that Diploma Programmes should provide.

“Specialised Diplomas are qualifications that will provide an exciting, stretching and relevant programme of learning for all young people [. . .] Diplomas will give young people a real alternative to traditional learning styles [. . .] Above all, Specialised Diplomas will help young people of all abilities to realise their potential.”

13. However, in terms of the development process, it is the development of qualifications that is being given priority.

“The qualification development process will continue until March 2007, at which point awarding bodies submit qualifications to QCA for accreditation. Prior to this, there will be two checkpoint consultations, probably around November 2006 and February 2007, to ensure that the emerging qualifications meet the needs of all parties. Accredited qualifications will be published by September 2007, in advance of first teaching in September 2008”

14. The implication is that the development of learning programmes takes place after the publication of the accredited qualifications, with the involvement of teaching staff being reduced to that of being the recipients of staff development programmes that will equip them to deliver the new products. Whilst some staff, particularly in secondary schools, will need considerable support, many staff, particularly in colleges, already have considerable experience in delivering and designing programmes of applied learning that work for both learners and employers. Firstly, it is wasteful to neglect their potential contribution to the development process. Secondly, it is highly likely that they will find themselves being asked to deliver qualifications that fail to provide a basis for the learning experiences that they would want for their learners and that the learners have been led to expect.

15. This is not just a theoretical possibility. It has happened before. Ofsted criticised GNVQs on exactly these grounds—that despite their titles and the claim to be work-related they were far less practical than learners expected.

16. What about the promised “checkpoint consultations?” Do these offer some hope? The one promised for November 2006 seems not have taken place, so a lot could depend on the one promised for March 2007. But are those responsible for the design and delivery of learning programmes to be amongst those consulted? The omens are not good. When the content and the learning outcomes were published last July, it was stated that

“It is anticipated that the contents of the Statements of Content will be subject to further refinement and iteration as the qualification develops.”

17. However, it transpired that this meant, in the first instance at least, further consultation with employers to ensure that their needs were being met. There was no systematic consultation with experienced vocational teacher and trainers.

Starting in the wrong place, and neglecting existing good practice

18. Rather than the design of learning programmes being the last stage in the development process, there is a strong argument for making them the starting point for Diploma development. Unless the learning experiences are attractive, motivating, develop a variety of talents—and are different from the conventional fare—Diplomas will not be a viable alternative to GCSEs and A levels for most learners. And however well their content meets employer requirements (an issue that I shall address later), participants will not survive to the end of the programme unless the learning process works for them. There are plenty of examples of vocational and applied learning processes that are known to work well, that can be drawn from current practice in BTEC, OCR and City and Guilds Programmes, from the innovations explored in the increased flexibility programme, and from some apprenticeships. Given the importance of providing “a real alternative to traditional learning styles” why not see how far such approaches can be enhanced to ensure that employers needs are met, rather than spending so much initial development time on the re-specification of content?

19. I say “re-specification” because even before the Development Partnerships started their work, there were good examples of qualifications that already went a good way to meeting the requirement of the “Principal Learning” component of the Diplomas. BTEC Firsts and Nationals are well established, and in the latter case often manage to meet the requirements of both employers and universities. The newer OCR Nationals exist at levels 1, 2 and 3, as the Diplomas will need to, and have been designed in consultation with Sector Skills Councils.

20. The Government initially stated that:

“We expect that, at the outset, Diplomas will be constructed largely out of existing qualifications and units of qualifications.”

However, the Development partnerships, despite their lack of experience in specifying content for qualifications, appear to have decided to start afresh rather than to build on what already existed.

21. Exactly the same happened during the development of GNVQs. The initial plan was for existing qualifications to be used as a starting point, and the development schedule assumed this. Because the developers decided instead to start with a clean sheet, and assumed that qualifications development was easier than it actually is, the schedule slipped badly, and the programmes had to start without the final details being available to centres, and containing faults that had to be remedied with two years. It is crucial that this does not happen again with Diplomas.

Wrongly assuming that putting employers in charge of the design will ensure that they and learners will value the results

22. I venture to suggest that if—in return for being “put in the driving seat” as the White Paper described it—Sector Skills Councils had been required to guarantee that employers in their sector would give preference to applicants with the relevant Diploma they would have refused the commission. In the UK system there are no means by which individual employers can be held responsible in this way. Again, we have experience to show this. The occupational standards embodied in NVQs were specified by “Industry Lead Bodies”, predecessors, in this respect, of SSCs. Nevertheless, by no means all NVQs were given preferred status by the relevant industry.

23. This is particularly the case when the qualification is being used to gain entry to the industry, as opposed to facilitating subsequent progression within it. It is likely to remain the case that many employers will use performance academic qualifications as a means of selecting new entrants, because—rightly or wrongly- they assume that the best candidates will have these.

24. Incidentally, despite the history of NVQs, and GNVQs that were derived from them, the DfES still found it possible to issue a press release in July 2006 claiming that the Diplomas were unique because:

“For the first time employers have been seriously engaged in the development of qualifications from the start.”

It was incorrect to assume that the best way to identify employer needs was to ask them to specify learning outcomes

25. I shall not spend long on this, since this is now water under the bridge, but the means by which it was planned to determine the requirements of employers was naïve and is likely to be ineffective. Employer needs are very important to understand, but even they are not all expert at defining these needs, still less agreeing them. Asking them to define these needs in terms of qualification content and learning outcomes requires additional expertise and was certainly a step too far in most cases. To take an analogy, if you want a building to serve the purposes of its intended users that is not best done by asking them to produce the technical design from which the builder will work.

26. In any case, now that the Diplomas are no longer being described as vocational, it is not at all clear why it was logical, in the words of the “White Paper”, to ask SSCs to “design the Diplomas” and:

“to put employers in the driving seat, so that they will have a key role in determining what the ‘lines of learning’ should be and in deciding in detail what the Diplomas should contain.”

The failure to learn from previous initiatives

27. In general, the track record of qualifications designed by government or its agencies is not a successful one. For instance, GNVQs—for which there were very similar ambitions to those now being expressed by the Diplomas—were initially designed barely more than a decade ago, and had to be modified several times during their short life. They have now disappeared altogether, and their replacement at level 3—vocational A Levels—were described by Ofsted as being “neither Vocational nor advanced” and many providers have reverted to the use of BTEC National Diplomas which they find much more fit for purpose.

28. Given this one would have thought that considerable attention would have been paid to the lessons to be learned. However, I have already drawn attention to several aspects of the GNVQ experience which we seem to be a serious risk of repeating.

The threat to abolish competitor examinations is misguided

29. The 14–19 White Paper stated:

“The qualifications that will be available to young people in future will be GCSEs, A levels and Apprenticeships and those that fall within one of the lines of the Diploma. We will progressively move to a position where we fund only those qualifications consistent with the programmes and Diplomas described in this document.”

30. For a government keen on competition and choice as a means of driving up standards, this is a curious position to take. If the Diplomas prove as effective as the government hopes then surely no such action should be necessary. However, if learners in the post-compulsory phase find that other qualifications better suit their purposes, and are accredited by QCA, why should they be prevented from taking them. It seems, that despite all the rhetoric, the government may not be confident that Diplomas could otherwise stand on their own two feet in the market place.

31. There is another problem with this position. It assumes that all legitimate needs can be met by GCSEs, A levels and Apprenticeships. Of these, only apprenticeships are strongly vocational, leading to an ability to perform to workplace standards. It has been made increasingly clear that Diplomas are not intended to do this. However, access to good quality apprenticeships cannot be guaranteed in all localities and in all occupational areas, since this depends on the availability and willingness of suitable companies.

Therefore, there has to be a college-based alternative available, of the type provided at present by institutions that facilities such as training restaurants, commercial standards hair-dressing salons, and motor vehicle workshops.

Is the promised entitlement realistic?

32. In its press release of December 2005, the DfES referred to:

“A national entitlement which will mean that every young person will be guaranteed a choice of all 14 specialised Diplomas—alongside the existing curriculum—no matter where they are in the country.”

This is the one really new aspect of the Diploma proposals. Despite the rhetoric, the qualifications themselves do not really break new ground. However, have the implications been worked through?

33. Since not all 16-year-olds will be ready to move on to level three Diplomas, each of the 14 lines will have to be offered at three levels. And judging by the initial designs, some Diplomas will have options within them. Furthermore, some Diploma lines will prove more popular than others, meaning that duplicate offers of some lines will be required before a viable group exists in others, or less cross subsidy will be required from the popular to the less popular lines

34. It is possible to do some calculations about the total cohort size that needs to exist in a locality before this entitlement can be guaranteed, and some researchers have undertaken this, with challenging results, but no official calculations have been put forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

35. As a matter of urgency, teachers and trainers with experience of designing and delivering programmes of applied vocational education should be asked to suggest what learning processes should be promoted by the qualifications currently being designed in specific vocational areas. In future, the development process should involve them from the start.

36. The “checkpoint consultation” about the Diploma content and learning outcomes, proposed for March 2007, should involve such practitioners, and further development should only go forward once it is clear that an effective basis exists for programmes that offer the alternative learning styles being promised.

37. A particular concern exists about the learning outcomes being put forward in some lines for the Principle Learning component at levels 1 and 2. Committee members should ask to see what is currently proposed, and should take advice on whether this is fit for purpose.

38. When the first Diplomas are ready for accreditation, a comparison should be made as to the quality of their design when compared to that of existing qualifications such as BTEC Diplomas, OCR Nationals and City and Guilds work-related qualifications. This should not be undertaken by QCA, since its position as an independent regulator is compromised by its heavy involvement in Diploma Design.

39. Work on future Diplomas should start with an evaluation of existing relevant qualifications, and should aim to either embody their proven good practice or to demonstrably enhance it.

40. Ofsted should be asked to identify the problems that arose during the development and implementation of GNVQs, and those responsible for Diploma development should be asked to explain the steps being taken to avoid similar problems arising again.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by the Trades Union Congress (TUC)

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Trades Union Congress (TUC) is the national centre for trade unions representing 6.5 million workers in 65 affiliated trade unions. The TUC welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Select Committee’s inquiry into the ongoing development of the 14–19 Specialised Diplomas. These new qualifications are central to the Government’s aim of developing high quality and popular vocational pathways for young people.

1.2 It is therefore imperative that great care is taken with the planning and implementation of the introduction of the Diplomas in order that they can achieve their maximum potential. The Select Committee’s inquiry offers a timely opportunity to address key challenges on this front and also to address some longer-term issues, especially the implications of the recommendations in the final report of the Leitch Review of Skills.

THE POLICY CONTEXT

1.3 Along with many other stakeholders, the TUC had welcomed the recommendations of the final report of the Tomlinson Working Group on 14–19 Reform and expressed disappointment that they were not fully implemented by the Government. However, the TUC did agree that the 14–19 White Paper set out the foundations for an improved vocational offer for young people. Since then the TUC and its affiliated unions, in particular the education unions have been supporting the Government in its efforts to introduce the Diplomas as successfully as possible.

1.4 The publication of the final report of the *Leitch Review of Skills* has heightened the importance placed on the successful implementation of the Diplomas. The TUC welcomed the commitment in the report to introduce compulsory education and training up to age 18, although this was qualified on the basis that a change in the law would only be implemented once it could be shown that the Government was on track to successfully deliver the new Specialised Diplomas.

1.5 This means that effective delivery and take-up of the Diplomas in the first instance will be key to transforming the 14–19 landscape. But the downside is that early teething problems with implementation could significantly delay the move to introducing a requirement on young people to remain in education and training up to 18. This would be a huge disappointment and would make it very difficult for the Government to achieve its target of increasing post-16 participation rates to 90% by 2015.

1.6 The structure of this submission addresses the three main issues highlighted in the Select Committee's press notice but it also covers some related and longer-term issues that we think the inquiry should also be considering. It should be noted that the TUC submission draws heavily on the submissions to the inquiry made by the affiliated education unions.

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF DIPLOMAS AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

1.7 A major concern of the TUC and its affiliated unions is that the introduction of the Diplomas does not lead to a repeat of the problematic phasing in of the "Curriculum 2000" reforms. These reforms were hampered by inadequate testing, piloting and evaluation and other limitations relating to the development of curriculum materials and workforce development programmes. There are concerns that the relatively tight timescales for phasing in the new Diplomas could lead to similar problems, especially as a number of other reforms are to be implemented in 2008–09 (eg introduction of the revised Key Stage 3 National Curriculum and the new functional syllabi for maths and English GCSEs).

1.8 The TUC is particularly concerned that the new Diplomas are not viewed as qualifications that are inferior to GCSEs and A levels and largely aimed at students who are not deemed capable of pursuing the traditional academic route in school. This would further embed the entrenched divide in the UK between general and applied learning and would prove hugely damaging to the Government's stated aim to bridge this divide and to offer opportunities for all young people to achieve their full potential. It is therefore crucial that if the Diplomas are going to succeed in a significant way, young people and their parents need to be convinced from the very beginning that these qualifications are accorded a high status by schools and colleges, and also of course by employers. It is also crucial that young people and their parents are given appropriate and timely advice and guidance about the new Diplomas and the Government should prioritise this in their ongoing reform of careers advice for young people.

1.9 Teaching and support staff in both schools and colleges (and the leadership in these institutions) need to be well prepared in advance of the introduction of the first set of Diplomas. In addition to meeting workforce development provision for teaching and support staff, schools and colleges will need to be in a position to demonstrate to young people and their parents that the new Diplomas will offer educational and labour market opportunities on a relative par with the GCSE/A level route. In order for this to happen, it is imperative that a strong partnership approach between trade unions and the relevant government bodies and agencies is in place whilst the Diplomas are being designed and developed.

1.10 There are currently a number of mechanisms in place to enable trade unions to participate in the ongoing design and development of the Diplomas. There are a number of trade union representatives on the DfES 14–19 Stakeholder Group, but there are no trade union representatives on the higher level 14–19 External Advisory Group chaired by the Minister. Trade union involvement in the Diploma Development Partnerships (DDPs) appears to be more patchy, although in principle Union Board members on the relevant Sector Skills Councils should at least be getting a report-back on progress.

1.11 In spite of these consultative mechanisms, there are a number of concerns among some of the education unions in particular that there has not been adequate consultation with the bodies representing the workforce in schools and colleges during the design and development stage of the Diplomas. Ultimately this workforce will be responsible for delivering these qualifications and it is imperative that they are fully equipped to undertake this role from day one of implementation.

1.12 The TUC is therefore recommending that the Government reviews the existing consultative and stakeholder engagement arrangements in order to look at means of improving proactive input by trade unions representing the workforce in schools and colleges. Workforce development planning is one particular area where it is essential that trade unions and the relevant government agencies are working closely together.

1.13 While the TUC is not in a position to provide detailed responses to all the questions in the press notice relating to the design and development of Diplomas, we are certainly aware of general concerns (e.g. recent reports of comments by the Chief Executive of the QCA that “people felt there was a lack of clear management” of the process).⁷ If nothing else, the Select Committee should call for an immediate and rapid review of the existing management process in order to pinpoint any problem areas that could be resolved fairly speedily.

1.14 However, it is inconceivable that the existing framework for managing the process could be significantly changed at this stage and the focus should be on identifying and resolving blockages and also improving the overall collaborative approach. There are also a number of longer-term issues relating to the design and development of the Diplomas, in particular relating to the role of employers, which are covered in the final section of this submission.

CO-ORDINATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

1.15 Effective co-ordination between schools and colleges must be at the heart of the rollout of the Diplomas and there are a number of challenges in making sure that this occurs uniformly across all local authority areas. A recent 14–19 implementation update by the DfES highlighted that “there is considerable variation in how far people have progressed in implementing 14–19 reform” and that this has been influenced by a number of factors,⁸ including involvement in previous pilots and also the prioritisation given to this reform agenda by each local authority.

1.16 The two bodies leading the co-ordinated delivery of Diplomas will be local authorities (LAs) and the local partnership teams of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). While LAs have been given the lead role, the LSC will also be pivotal, not least because it has direct responsibility for the funding of post-16 learning and skills provision. What is not yet clear is what the exact institutional relationship will be between the LSC partnership teams and the LAs in implementing the Diploma programme at the local level and how this will be reflected in a co-ordinated approach between schools and colleges.

1.17 It is too early to provide an assessment of the Gateway process whereby consortia of providers have put forward bids to deliver the Diplomas. However, it is essential that the Government also looks forward to the implementation phase and ensures that all local authorities are adopting a strategic approach and establishing structural mechanisms in support of this, such as servicing high-level task groups that involve all major partners in the locality. The TUC is particularly concerned that trade unions representing the workforce in local schools and colleges are given the opportunity to have a real say in the strategic approach adopted at the LA level. And the regional LSC must continue to ensure that there is a coherent and strategic 14–19 agenda across the piece at the regional level.

1.18 Whilst there is a need for a degree of flexibility in the coordination of delivery of Diplomas at the local level (eg to meet the particular needs of rural areas), it is also important to recognise that there must be an infrastructure to deliver on some key commitments. For example, it is not clear what the arrangements will be to ensure that each local authority meets the 14–19 National Entitlement commitment or to ultimately deliver all 14 Diplomas in the locality. There is a case for some degree of prescription by Government to ensure some level of uniformity around the coordination of activities by schools/colleges and the LA and LSC, both before and after implementation of the Diplomas. The final section of this submission also raises some concerns in this area in relation to the recommendation in the final report of the Leitch Review of Skills to further streamline the LSC.

1.19 Finally, there are increasing tensions between the new collaborative approach required to underpin planning and delivery of Diplomas at the local level and the Government’s increasing emphasis on giving schools greater autonomy and this needs to be addressed. Furthermore, while it is welcome that the Government is currently looking at reforms to the assessment and testing of school pupils that will give greater emphasis on measuring the progress of all pupils, the introduction of Diplomas will potentially raise further question marks around this aspect of educational policy. With many more secondary pupils accessing a number of different educational institutions in the locality, league tables based on individual school performance will become increasingly anomalous and not truly reflective of these new patterns of learning.

⁷ As reported on the BBC Education website, *Wide concerns over new Diplomas*, 5 January 2007.

⁸ “A Message from Jon Coles, Director 14–19 Reform”, *14–19 Education and Skills Implementation Update*, DfES, Autumn Term 2006.

 SOME LONGER-TERM ISSUES

1.20 The success or otherwise of the new Diplomas will to a large extent depend on the willingness of employers to support the new initiative and the TUC believes that the Select Committee should be addressing this central issue in its current inquiry. For example, there will be a much greater call on employers to provide work experience placements than at present as a result of the introduction of the Diplomas and related government initiatives.

1.21 The final report of the Leitch Review has recommended giving employers an even bigger say on the design of the new Diplomas but it says much less about the reciprocal obligations that should be required of employers. There is a need for the Government to press all the employer bodies to make a clear commitment that they will be urging their constituents to support the introduction of the new Diplomas by giving them due recognition in their recruitment processes and also by providing a greater number of work experience placements than at present. If employers do not make a viable contribution to the rollout of the Diplomas, their status in the labour market will be seriously undermined and this will seriously devalue their worth among young people and their parents.

1.22 There are also concerns among a number of stakeholders about the extent to which the *Leitch Review* has proposed a largely employer-led skills system rather than the social partnership model advocated by the TUC. In regard to the 14–19 agenda, there is a particular concern about the recommendation to give employers even more control over the design of the Diplomas in the future by giving the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) an even greater remit. The TUC has therefore stated that it will be “calling on Government to set out a framework to give employees and trade unions a significant voice in the new institutional skills framework that will be established as a result of Lord Leitch’s recommendations [and that] in particular, unions will need to have a significant stake in the new Commission for Employment and Skills and also increased representation on the relaunched Sector Skills Councils.”⁹

1.23 It is particularly important that the workforce, through trade union representation, is able to influence the new powers that SSCs are to be given around the design and approval of vocational qualifications. A recent report by the Sector Skills Development Agency highlighted the benefits of sectoral approaches in other countries incorporating a significant employee voice in sector bodies, which ensures “that both the wider public functions of qualifications and the sector-specific needs of employees are met”.¹⁰ At present SSCs are only obliged to have one union representative on their governing Board and the remainder are generally employer representatives. It is imperative that this framework of representation on SSCs is rebalanced to ensure that the design of vocational qualifications in the future meets the needs of young people and the workforce at large as well as the needs of employers.

1.24 There are also a number of longer-term funding issues in relation to the increasingly important role that FE colleges will play in the delivery of the new Diplomas. In particular, there remains an urgent need for Government to address the funding disparity between FE and other parts of the education system. The Government has made a welcome commitment to reduce this funding gap over time but there needs to be greater urgency on closing this gap completely as soon as is feasible. In addition, the continuing disparity between salary levels for teachers in schools and lecturers in colleges (estimated to be around 10–12% by UCU) will become even more difficult to justify as more college staff take on joint responsibility for teaching secondary school pupils undertaking the new Diplomas.

1.25 The TUC is also concerned that the recommendation in the final report of the Leitch Review proposing further streamlining of the LSC does not undermine its important role in contributing to the planning, coordinating and funding of the Diplomas in the coming years. It is not feasible to expect an employer-led skills system to replicate this role and there should be a clear recognition that the LSC should continue to have a high-level role in working closely with local authorities to ensure effective delivery of the Diplomas both in the rollout phase and also over the longer term.

1.26 Finally, the TUC remains concerned that the full potential of the new Diplomas will continue to be undermined by the competition that they will face from the pressure on pupils from all quarters to continue to pursue the GCSE/A level route. On this basis, there is a strong case for the Government to widen the planned review of A levels in 2008 to consider whether there is a case for further integration between the new Diplomas and GCSEs and A levels. In this context, the recent proposals by Government on widening access to the International Baccalaureate are interesting and it is welcome that schools and colleges offering this qualification will also have to offer the new Diplomas.

January 2007

⁹ Reaction to Pre-Budget Report, TUC Press Release, 6 December 2006.

¹⁰ *Lessons from Abroad*, Sector Skills Development Agency, 2006.

Memorandum submitted by SkillsActive

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT SKILLSACTIVE

1.1 SkillsActive is an employer led organisation recognised and licensed by Government as the Sector Skills Council for Active Leisure and Learning. We have been charged with leading the skills and productivity drive within the Sport and Recreation, Health and Fitness, Playwork, The Outdoors and the Caravan Industries.

1.2 We are working with and for the sector to:

- advise government and influence decision makers;
- promote the image of the sector to the public;
- ensure the quality of training and qualifications;
- help people find the jobs and training they need;
- Elp the industry attract and retain the right staff; and
- attract funding to meet employers training needs.

1.3 SkillsActive is a registered charity and a membership organisation for employers and voluntary organisations in our sector. We receive funding for our core functions from the Sector Skills Development Agency, as a result of being licensed by government.

1.4 We work in close partnership with the Department for Education and Skills, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Devolved Administrations and the Home Country Sport Councils to deliver our programme of activities. SkillsActive's work is directed by a Board of Trustees, which meets every two months.

1.5 SkillsActive works with employers to set national occupational standards for training and qualifications in the sport and recreation, health and fitness, playwork, the outdoors and the caravan industries.

14–19 SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS—DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF DIPLOMAS

What progress has been made on the development of Diplomas to date? Where have been the sticking points?

Good progress has been made in spite of significant problems around changing deadlines, guidance etc. There has been a great deal of perceived political maneuvering between agencies and not enough joined up working. Sector Skills Councils have collaborated well between each other but feel that QCA, SSDA and DfES could have been more joined up in the development of the Diplomas.

What role have employers and Sector Skills Councils played in the development of Diplomas?

Sector Skills Councils have played a central role around employer skills needs and engagement.

Who is responsible for the co-ordination and development of Diplomas?

It is often hard to tell as it seems to have changed as time has gone on—this has caused problems as it raised employer expectations regarding their role in content definition, before much was then re-written by the QCA.

Is there a case for a stronger co-ordinating role for one of the agencies involved, or for the appointment of a senior responsible officer or champion?

Yes but this has already happened before the Committee meet.

Is there a clear system for accrediting and awarding the Diplomas?

We do not feel that this is the case as yet. We feel that QCA should have been working on this at least 12 months ago instead of waiting until it is almost time to offer them.

TEACHER AND LECTURER TRAINING

What are current levels of teacher/lecturer training activity in preparation for Diplomas? Is this sufficient to make Diplomas a success?

This is hard to pin down, much is made about money being available but not much about what is actually happening on the ground.

CO-ORDINATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

What are the lessons that can be learned from areas where there is strong co-ordination on 14–19?

Partnership is the key to success in this area.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA)**INTRODUCTION**

1. This memorandum represents AQA's response to the invitation from the Select Committee to submit evidence in connection with the Select Committee's inquiry into the new 14–19 Specialised Diplomas, the first lines of which are due to be taught in schools and colleges from September 2008.

2. This memorandum offers background information on the preparatory work AQA has been undertaking with City & Guilds. The memorandum then addresses those of the questions posed by the Select Committee in its published terms of reference on which AQA takes a view.

3. AQA is the UK's leading Unitary Awarding Body and, as a long-standing provider of high quality general qualifications at GCSE and A level, the awarding body of choice for schools. We are an educational charity so all our income from examination fees goes into running and developing our examinations and other services to schools and colleges. We place great emphasis on engagement with our stakeholders in educational centres to ensure we are fully meeting their needs. As the UK's main Awarding Body, one of our primary roles is to engage with our regulators and policymakers on issues of curriculum design and wider educational and assessment policy, utilising our educational research department which has a considerable international reputation. One of our priorities is the effective use of innovative technology to facilitate and modernise assessment techniques. AQA is pioneering the introduction of new methods of electronic assessment and marking that increase accuracy and reliability while maintaining and enhancing the integrity of the examination system.

4. AQA strongly supports the concept of the new Diplomas. They will provide education in vocational contexts which will be more relevant to many young people than what is currently on offer and hopefully will increase motivation, success and therefore retention beyond the age of 16.

5. AQA and City & Guilds announced a partnership for the development and delivery of Specialised Diplomas on 3 February 2006. The largest unitary awarding body in the UK and the leading provider of vocational qualifications in the UK were convinced that, working in partnership together, they could provide the most comprehensive curriculum offer across all 14 lines of learning. Schools and colleges could access a wide choice of coherent progression pathways with the administrative simplicity of one point of contact. The resources of the two awarding bodies would provide a variety of means of support for deliverers especially in the all important initial years of this new qualification.

6. Over the past year, the partnership representatives have worked with the lead Sector Skills Councils for the first five Diploma Development Partnerships in Construction and Built Environment, Creative and Media, Engineering, Health and Social Care and Information Technology as they have progressed through the process of employer and public consultation towards publication of the draft Diploma structure and indicative content for all five Specialised Diplomas.

7. The partnership has contributed to discussions with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and Department for Education and Skills (DfES) on such issues as the content and structure of the Diploma, its assessment, moderation, verification and reporting mechanisms and whether or not the Diploma should be awarded an overall grade.

8. The partnership has discussed with QCA the possible format and assessment of the Functional Skills units and has contributed to discussions with QCA, DfES, the Federation of Awarding Bodies and the Joint Council for Qualifications on a variety of matters to do with accreditation, regulation, assessment and awarding of Specialised Diplomas.

9. Later in 2006, QCA commissioned AQA to carry out technical work on the new Specialised Diplomas. This important contract was primarily to devise a methodology for grading the Diplomas. In taking the lead on this work, AQA assembled a project team from the awarding bodies and expects the work to be completed by the end of February 2007. However, an initial recommendation on the grading system was submitted to QCA and DfES in December.

10. As a final introductory comment, we believe there should be a monitoring programme for the introduction of any new national qualification system that involves ensuring that teaching and management systems in schools are coping, as well as the assessment system. In this case, the results delivery mechanism is different and complex and will also need to be monitored.

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

Design and development of Diplomas

11. *What progress has been made on the development of Diplomas to date? Where have been the sticking points?*

12. The introduction to our memorandum offers AQA's views on developments to date.

13. In response to the second question, we have some concerns over the timetable. Principal Learning units, which constitute approximately 50% of the qualification, could not be commissioned until the qualification criteria were published on 30 November 2006. These require endorsement by Diploma Development Partnerships (DDPs) in March prior to submission to QCA on 30 April 2007 for accreditation. Although this timetable is just feasible, it is tight and carries risks to the quality of the units as a result.

14. Although the Extended Project Pilot tender has been let to AQA and another awarding body, it will not be completed until autumn 2008, after teaching begins for specialised Diplomas. Level 1 and level 2 projects follow the same development timetable as Principal Learning and will not be piloted. The all important Functional Skills qualifications have undergone limited trials but pilots will not commence until September 2007 and will not report before teaching begins for specialised Diplomas.

15. The inclusion of so many unpiloted components in a new portmanteau qualification produces a high level of risk. It will, therefore, be important for all involved to recognise the importance of evaluating the various aspects of the Diplomas in the light of operational experience and be prepared to make modifications to ensure that any lessons learnt are applied in practice.

16. Development of the course specifications for the Principal Learning units is currently underway. However, assessment materials cannot be developed until technical issues relating to the approach to assessment and grading have been resolved by QCA. This resolution is not expected until the end of January, significantly compressing the development period since proposals are due to be submitted for endorsement by the Diploma Development Partnerships in March, prior to accreditation by QCA at the end of April. There are clear risks to the quality of the assessment materials as a result and it will be crucial for the technical issues to be resolved, on schedule, by the end of January.

17. Where proposals have been made by the Diploma Development Partnerships (DDPs) for specific units of Additional and Specialist Learning (ASL) to be developed, the proposed development timetable is very tight. At present, only indicative content has been set out by the DDPs for these units but the deadline for fully developed assessment units is 31 May. There are clear risks to quality from this timetable and, since the ASL units are optional for students, awarding bodies may conclude that the risks of attempting these development outweigh the benefits.

18. *What role have employers and Sector Skills Councils played in the development of Diplomas?*

19. Through the DDPs the SSCs have played the lead role in designing the content of the Diplomas.

20. However, that well intentioned process has also caused some problems, as the awarding bodies and practising teachers were not involved until after the content and learning outcomes had been published in June 2006. A great deal of remedial work has had to be carried out, including the retrospective drafting of subject and qualification criteria, in order to make sure that the content can be organised into manageable teaching and learning (as well as testing) specifications, which are comparable across lines. For the remaining lines of learning it will be important to ensure that the roles of the various organisations and the criteria requirements under which they are working are clear from the outset. The involvement of practising teachers in the Diploma specification process would help to diminish the need for retrospective drafting.

21. *Who is responsible for the co-ordination and development of Diplomas?*

22. Our understanding is that overall responsibility at official level rests with Jon Coles, Director, 14–19 Reform Group at DfES.

23. *Is there a case for a stronger co-ordinating role for one of the agencies involved, or for the appointment of a senior responsible officer or champion?*

24. We very much welcome the recent appointment of a professional project manager for the Diploma and would encourage the application of a rigorous project management approach for the remainder of the work. We also welcome the establishment of the 14–19 Chief Executives' Group chaired by Phil Hope and Jim Knight where the Chief Executives of the many organisations that can contribute to the success of the Diploma meet to discuss progress and issues. However, we believe this group, and the project as a whole, needs to move rapidly to establish the precise roles of all the organizations represented and the specific contributions they will make to its success, along with firm timescales and commitments to deliver.

25. *Is there a clear system for accrediting and awarding the Diplomas?*

26. AQA is the leading body for expertise on technical, assessment grading issues in the UK. As referenced in our introduction, we have been commissioned by QCA to conduct a six month project to advise on the grading system for the first tranche of Specialised Diplomas. Our Project Team is composed of experts from within AQA and consultants from other Awarding Bodies and QCA itself, and the Project Director is Dr Mike Cresswell, AQA's Director General. We reported our recommendations on the grading method at the end of December to QCA, which is then responsible for advising the Secretary of State. Our Final Report, outlining the rationale for the recommendations more fully, will be submitted to QCA at the end of February.

27. Although our work is not yet complete, the technical experts are already clear that the Diploma grade should be generated on the basis only of candidates' work in the Principal Learning and Extended Project. These elements of the Diploma incorporate PLTS (Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills). QCA has accepted our advice on this issue. In addition, we have recently advised that it would be unwise to produce a grade for the Additional and Specialist Learning, as it is not possible to ensure comparable grading standards for students choosing different routes through ASL or between the lines of learning. Our December report to QCA also included recommendations on matters such as the number of grades required at each level of the Diploma and the impact of hurdles for the functional skills on Diploma outcomes.

28. It is pertinent to record that all the awarding bodies are on record as being opposed to awarding Diploma grades because of the risks involved in terms of fairness to students and the credibility of the Diploma. However, assuming that the policy decision which has been made to grade the Diploma is irrevocable, AQA believes that the recommendations in the interim report submitted at the end of December provide a sensible minimum-risk basis for doing so. The recommendation for grades to be based only upon Principal Learning and the Project is crucial to reducing the risks involved in grading the Diploma. Nonetheless, significant risks remain and it will be essential to monitor closely the achievements being recorded for the first Diploma students during their courses. This will enable the robustness of the proposed grading method and the utility of its results to be partially tested and confirmed before the first grades for the Diploma as a whole are issued. It is important to note that adjustments may still be necessary to the grade standards set in the first years of the Diploma as information accumulates about the utility of the overall results.

Teacher and lecturer training

29. *What are current levels of teacher/lecturer training activity in preparation for Diplomas? Is this sufficient to make Diplomas a success?*

30. There is much goodwill towards the Diploma, as teachers recognise that programmes leading to existing general qualifications do not offer a diet that is suited to some students, who then fail to gain appropriate qualifications that will hold them in good stead for working life. The consequential disillusionment and under-performance of a minority of young people has long been a priority target for DfES and the Diploma is the latest attempt to provide a qualification that is motivating for learners, relevant to their life beyond full time education and recognised and valued by employers.

31. However, that general level of goodwill needs to be made effective by the recruitment of teachers with relevant sector experience and the provision of appropriate CPD for existing teachers. AQA, working in partnership with City & Guilds, will, in common with all the awarding bodies, be working hard to deliver early information about the requirements of the specifications. There is a serious role for government to play in fully supporting those efforts, ensuring that funding regimes are in place and, in particular, that opportunities for work experience (a fundamental requirement of all Diploma programmes) are available throughout the UK, whether in urban or rural areas.

CO-ORDINATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

32. *What is the current level of co-ordination between colleges and schools in local areas?*

33. We believe this is extremely variable. There are some excellent examples of an integrated approach involving all 14–19 providers, but there may also be a risk that the long-standing history of competition between school sixth forms and colleges might make this difficult to achieve for some.

34. *What are the barriers to co-ordination?*

35. Undoubtedly the existence of Performance Tables has contributed to a greater degree of competition between schools, which are subject to those pressures, and colleges, which may not be. Certainly schools have been working hard to avoid losing able students to colleges in their area, leading to the development of new courses in popular, emerging subjects which were formerly more often found in colleges (Psychology, Sociology and PE, for example).

36. *What are the lessons that can be learned from areas where there is strong co-ordination on 14–19?*

37. Experience suggests that it takes a minimum of five or six years to encourage the regional co-operative ethos and to build the administrative infrastructure which is essential for a successful area partnership.

38. We strongly welcome the Gateway process for approving consortia delivering the first Diploma courses. AQA believes it is essential to ensure that the Gateway process continues to prioritise competent delivery over achieving target volumes if the Diploma is to be a long-term success.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by the National Forum of Engineering Centres (NFEC)

NFEC is a self-funding, self-help membership body of professionals in FE and HE in FE. Our members include employers, group training providers, professional training companies, specialist schools and academies, as well as over 80% of FE colleges or departments.

An independent advisory body, NEFC's main interest is in the 14–19 agenda, the worked-based 16+ sector and lifelong learning. Members across the UK share a commitment to the achievement and exchange of best practice in, and to the consistent delivery of, best-quality learning in engineering and technology.

Revenue generated from membership and commercial consultancy and other sector clients is dedicated to providing NFEC members with practical, problem-solving assistance without charge or at reduced cost.

NFEC operates through seven regional organisations, regular regional seminars and a twice-yearly national conference. A particular strength of NFEC is its close links with awarding and other bodies in the engineering industries and professions. Among these are:

- Key Sector Skills Councils such as SEMTA, the Engineering Employers Federation, and the Engineering Council UK; professional institutions.
- Organisations in the academic and vocational education infrastructure, among them QAA and QCA, HEFCE and LSC, SSDA, Ofsted.
- Awarding Bodies including EAL.
- Organisations responsible for quality improvement, such as Subject Centres and Quality

Improvement Agency (QIA) and the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) To the best of NFEC's knowledge, no comment in this submission is made upon matters before a court of law or in respect of which court proceedings are imminent.

NFEC SUBMISSION

What progress has been made on the development of Diplomas to date?

The National Forum of Engineering Centres (NFEC) is able to give informed evidence on the design and development of the Specialised Diploma (SD) in Engineering.

NFEC was involved in the development of the SD in Engineering and maintains close links with the EDDP. There were presentations, workshops and general discussion on the Engineering SD at NFEC's last two half-yearly national conferences. NFEC is playing a pivotal role during the Stage Two development, and is a member of the EDDP "Delivery Group".

The Terms of Reference for the Delivery Group throughout Stage Two are:

1. Promote and disseminate the Diploma in Engineering to key stakeholders.
2. Advise the project team on the evolution of Stage One deliverables:
 - Revision of level 3 by the Task and Finish Group.
 - Pathways through the Specialist Component of the Diploma.
 - 11–19 Skills Framework Strategy.
 - Progression into and out of the Diploma and the links with FE, HE and apprenticeship routes.
3. Support the development delivery and assessment aspects of the Skills Framework Strategy.
4. Contribute towards the development of the qualification specification through the Project Team in partnership with Awarding Bodies.

5. Support the development of the Work—Related Learning Strategy, including a Guidance Resource for the effective engagement of employers and deliverers.

6. Advise on Diploma implementation and delivery, including applied learning, widening participation, special educational needs, and gender stereotyping.

7. Work with DFES Workforce Projects to enable effective development of learning materials and resources, as well as a continuing professional development programme for all delivery professionals.

The Gateway process is near completion. Consortia had to register interest in joining the SD pilot phase in December 2006.

Where have been the sticking points

Although NFEC looks forward to helping move forward the Diplomas from design phase to implementation, we do so disappointed that the government ignored the Tomlinson Report's recommendations for achieving parity of esteem as between academic and vocational qualifications.

Providers and educationalists were not consulted in any meaningful sense about the design of the SDs. Today's "demand-led" system makes the same mistake of the "provide" system of the 70s and 80s. It is "isolationist", in the sense that, as with "provide", the nature of that "demand" is as defined by officials and not as by a synthesis of the views and experience of those directly—involved: employers, providers, educationalists and learners.

NFEC nonetheless moves on, and is committed to providing the best implementation models possible, as well as to monitoring the development of the SD in engineering and to providing informed, practical advice and comment.

What role have employers and Sector Skills Councils played in the development of Diplomas?

Consortia of Sector Skills Councils were responsible for the first year's work on developing the specifications. As to be expected, given the difficulty in engaging SMEs and micro—organisations, the employer voice heard was mainly that of the larger organisations. Yet in engineering 93% of all employers are SMEs, and it is doubtful that their needs are being met.

In particular, it is very difficult to envisage the necessary wholesale engagement by SMEs to the SDs given the unrealistic requirement for employer engagement.

Who is responsible for the co-ordination and development of Diplomas?

The SSCs and the employers they represent.

QCA, however, is responsible for developing a meaningful structure to meet the requirements of a nationally—recognised qualification framework. QCA will engage with award bodies to ensure content, context and assessment are fit for purpose.

The SSCs nonetheless intend to remain the custodians of the Diplomas. Tensions may therefore arise, and thought should be given to an appropriate means of resolution.

Is there a case for a stronger co-ordinating role for one of the agencies involved, or for the appointment of a senior responsible officer or champion?

QCA should be authorised to ensure qualifications are fit for purpose.

Is there a clear system for accrediting and awarding the Diplomas?

NFEC assumes that the SD is regarded as any other qualification and therefore the QCA's responsibility. But as we move to a demand—led system, QCA's position may alter with employers and their representatives becoming increasingly involved in accreditation and the awarding of qualifications.

NFEC strongly opposes the parcelling-out of responsibility for SD to various hands. It is crucial the watching brief on ensuring national standards across the sectors remains with a single body and not be diffused among competing and overlapping bureaucracies. This body must ensure the consistent application of appropriate and sound learning principles, teaching, cognitive approaches and assessment tools.

QCA has demonstrated its competence to do so.

TEACHER AND LECTURER TRAINING

What are current levels of teacher/lecturer training activity in preparation for Diplomas? Is this sufficient to make Diplomas a success?

As educators were in any practical sense excluded from the SD design phase, it is not surprising that lack of clarity has ensued.

Too few practitioners have yet come to grips with the Diplomas and their implications for learning processes and outcomes. NFEC is preparing proposals for engaging practitioners, and for this reason accepted the invitation to join the EDDP Delivery Group for the Phase Two development.

Lecturers and, to a lesser extent, teachers are prepared for the SD content requirements. Not so learners, however, for the SD demands a root-and-branch change in the way learners learn. This is of major concern to colleges and schools, given the significant lead—in time required, investment in staff training, continuing staff development and CPD, additional resources in terms of consumables and the capital investment required in equipment and improved workshop areas.

The DfES Standards Unit and QIA are promoting “learning by doing”. This is an investigative and practical approach that relies upon the co-operation of employers, but to make the transition from ‘initiative’ to demonstrable accomplishment requires adequate funding, not least for practitioner support. NFEC was the project manager for the DfES in engineering during Phase Two.

Besides the funding question, the other great unknown is whether employers are up to engagement on the scale envisioned by the SD’s designers.

NFEC questions whether employers can or will offer the necessary work—placement hours. Overall, it is difficult to see how the “entitlement” of Diplomas can be achieved in the cities, never mind in rural districts. This will be more acute with SMEs and in rural areas.

NFEC remains concerned that the appropriate level of continued professional development required is under—estimated and that there is not enough investment to secure productive employer engagement on the scale SDs require to make them worthwhile. Work also needs to be done to “join up” providers to share best practice and to avoid duplication. In all of this, NFEC is well—placed to play a lead role for engineering.

CO-ORDINATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

What is the current level of co-ordination between colleges and schools in local areas?

There are examples of excellent partnerships throughout the UK, but they need to be evaluated, modelled and trailed in other areas. The big problem is that nobody is pulling together these examples of co-ordination

Although there are generic lessons to be learned in effective employer engagement and developing win—win scenarios, a vocational or specialist initiative is required to fuel commitment, develop regional networks and self—help groups, as well as to create national support for best practice.

NFEC is developing a databank of short case studies of best practice as a first step to raising awareness and setting benchmarks. We will pilot vocational working groups regionally, and then establish a national network to taking a lead on best practice.

What are the barriers to co-ordination?

1. Unrealistic design and costing:

Officials neither considered nor costed the actual detail of delivering specialist Diplomas. It is also doubtful that officials grasp the scale and pace of the changes in teaching and learning required.

The new approach is investigative, practical and industry—based. It needs to be resourced, and practitioners ably supported. Effective delivery assumes provision for the additional costs, including capital investment, practitioner—development and continuing staff support. The Gateway process pump—primes, but the end cost will greatly exceed levels of overall support, current and proposed.

Nobody knows, because nobody has been told, whether there will be enough financial backing, let alone where it is to come from. The new approaches to learning, employer engagement, flexibility in delivery within formal consortia, and continued CPD all increase the per—learner—cost. At present, most school/college working arrangements are not on a commercial basis, and are small—scale loss—leaders.

2. Pay disparities:

The new ‘demand-led’ market requires co-ordination between colleges and schools. Yet funding per learner is set unequally as between colleges and schools, penalising the former.

There is also the issue of disparity of pay between teachers, trainers and lecturers. At the top end, teachers receive higher salaries than the rest, and at the bottom, trainers are the poorest paid. Such divisive disparities are self-defeating, and cannot be allowed to continue in a system reliant upon joint delivery and curriculum overlap.

Doing the same work for unequal pay is a great divider of colleagues, as history shows us.

3. Dispersion of accountability:

Great confusion prevails over the question: “Who is accountable, who owns responsibility for the learner, especially when he or she is learning in a place of work?”

The arrangement of work—based learning placements needs to be seen not as a mere exercise in logistics but as integral to management structures and to the learning process.

It will be difficult to apportion and onerous to administer responsibility for pastoral care when pupils will be expected to travel between and learn in schools, colleges, and the premises of private trainers and of employers. Consider, for example, what might happen were an employee not required to declare any convictions under his or her normal conditions of employment is now asked to give such information. He or she may feel entitled to refuse. The possible legal ramifications are immense.

How is a “safe” environment to be maintained and “adult” contact to be vetted in organisations that are not set up for isolating “children” from adults? Particularly at KS4, but really at all ages up to 18, young people are now legally “children”.

EDDP has documented important Health and Safety issues and barriers, but it is doubtful whether many smaller employers—engineering’s majority employer—know much about the SD or about EDDP’s H&S advice, and if they do, whether they would be able to act on that advice?

4. Self-interest:

Self-interest is inherent in any business arrangement. Colleges and other providers are required to act no longer as a public service but as pseudo—businesses. They will be driven to resist co-ordination unless there is a clear commercial advantage, and in many cases there will not be one. In partial and informed Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) at Key Stages 3 and 4 is a fundamental requirement.

5. Timetable logistics, transport, and specialist—centre access:

Virtual environments may help, but are not a total solution.

What are the lessons that can be learned from areas where there is strong co-ordination on 14–19?

Barriers there certainly are, but there are also solutions and they are found daily but not necessarily passed on. Problem-solving is scattered across the country, so needs to be collated, reviewed and developed into best—practice guidelines by local networks.

What are intermediary bodies such as LAs and LSCs doing to foster co-operation?

Not taking the soft option, NFEC trusts.

The Gateway process and subsequent pilots will tell us much about the extent to which LA and LSC cooperate, and how in turn they foster other collaborations. The Gateway, it seems, will be a success. But it will cherry—pick organisations with a history of success; and existing collaborators known to provide results. The Gateway has yet to demonstrate that it can develop a workable national roll—out model.

How engaged are headteachers and college principals in the Diploma agenda?

The Gateway process is oversubscribed, evidence of active engagement

How are the rules on post-16 expansion likely to affect the rollout of Diplomas?

It is too early to say with confidence.

There are conflicting statements from government and government agencies on the future of the BTEC qualifications: how will the SDs interact or relate with BTEC? What will be the relationship with the SDs and apprentice frameworks? Or with HE progression, in particular the relationship with the Foundation Degree programmes?

Much more work needs to be done on the types of qualification and how they relate, as well as upon progression arrangements post—the introduction of SD.

The “entitlement” is extremely ambitious, and so are the timescales. It is fanciful to assume that employers will give the level of support that a successful national rollout across all the Diploma streams will require.

It would be useful to see the Gateway pilot analysis on the investment required in employer—staffing hours, additional costs and other financial investment to make a national entitlement programme work.

While employers are supporting education they are not producing. NFEC members await with interest the development of a demand—led system that does not provoke employer-organisations into justified outrage at the unrealistic cost to them and to UK plc. Our members—among them, employers, teachers, and trainers—have much to offer in the development of such a Specialised Diploma system in engineering.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC)

INTRODUCTION

This submission addresses the Committee’s concerns regarding the design, development and future roll-out of the new Diplomas first announced in the 14–19 Education and Skills White Paper.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is a Government-funded public body that exists to improve the skills of England’s young people and adults in the interests of having a workforce of world-class standards. We are responsible for planning and funding high-quality education and training for everyone over 16 (except higher education) in England, including provision in school sixth forms. The range of qualifications and programmes that the LSC funds is diverse, and includes AS and A levels, Advanced Vocational Certificates in Education (AVCEs), National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and Apprenticeships.

The LSC has a central role to play in driving forward the reform of 14–19 education. The Government introduced 14–19 reform in order to encourage young people to continue learning after compulsory school age by offering a broader choice of courses and qualifications across a wider range of subjects and skills.

More 16–18-year-olds are participating and succeeding in learning than ever before. The longer-term vision of the LSC is for at least 90% of 16–18-year-olds to be engaged in learning by 2015. We therefore want all young people to get the learning that is right for them and this means delivering a broader curriculum offer.

The LSC is therefore working with the DfES to support the introduction of the new Diplomas, particularly supporting the Diploma Gateway which will select the partnerships that will be the first to deliver the Diplomas in 2008.

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF DIPLOMAS

1. The LSC remains confident that the new Diplomas will be ready for September 2008. We have been involved in the development of Diplomas from initial design through our representation and involvement with the Diploma Development Partnerships (DPPs) through to close collaboration with delivery partners in submitting consortia proposals to the Diploma Gateway. We are fully in support of colleges, independent training providers and schools who in partnership are able to offer a high quality opportunity to young people in 2008.

2. We have worked to gain employer support for these qualifications through our newly established partnership teams, through briefings and working with our statutory Young People’s Learning Committee. The LSC delivered the employer engagement workshops at the recent DfES 14–19 regional conferences and whilst concern was expressed about the ability to recruit enough employers to deliver the work experience component of the new Diploma, there remained overwhelming support for the need for a high quality vocational and applied route to enable all young people to experience success in their 14–19 learning.

3. The Diplomas in our view retain significant support from the UK's leading employers and companies, who are also committed to supporting implementation. There also remains keen interest within the FE system for the Diploma and there has also been a high response to the opportunity to offer the first five Diplomas in 2008. Colleges are involved in the large majority of the 324 consortia wishing to pass through the Gateway with the potential for offering places to over 200,000 learners.

4. We believe good progress has been made in ensuring Diplomas are ready for 2008 and fully support the innovative design of the Diplomas with their design led by employers through the broad-based Diploma Development Partnerships with their representation from colleges, HE and schools as well as employers. The timescale, though tight, is for us appropriate as we are committed to urgency in raising the quality and improving the choice of learning opportunities for all young people. This remains our top priority for 2007–08 in our published annual statement of priorities. The full document is attached with this submission.¹¹

5. We remain supportive of the strategic partnership between DfES, QCA, the DDPs and awarding bodies to deliver the Diploma qualifications as it mirrors the collaboration required by colleges, independent training providers and schools at a local level to deliver Diplomas on the ground. We do not support a stronger co-ordinating role for any one of the agencies involved, though we have been supportive of recent moves to streamline and clarify project management and governance arrangements of the Diplomas. The recent appointment of Diploma champions especially the choice of Mike Tomlinson is, we think, wholly positive.

TEACHER AND LECTURER TRAINING

6. The LSC has been involved in discussions about the £45 million package of support for workforce development for roll-out in 2007–08 and supports the collaborative development of the different programmes by organisations involved in pre- and post-16 work.

7. We would also like to see support for consortia who do not pass through the Gateway for 2008–09 as well as a package of workforce development to be available for those pastoral managers, teachers, lecturers and guidance professionals who have a role in advising young people and will need to know more about the make-up of the Diplomas and possible progression routes in order to advise young people of career pathways.

8. We also support the programme of Learning Visits to enable principals, 14–19 managers, headteachers, LA and LSC colleagues to understand 14–19 reform in different localities. We have organised, promoted and funded visits ourselves to Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP) colleges to showcase successful collaborative practice in vocational and applied learning. We view this IF programme as being the true precursor of the collaboration required for Diploma delivery and we have been keen to pass on the lessons learned by IFP partnerships with regard to partnership delivery, quality assurance, health and safety, costs and funding.

CO-ORDINATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

9. As indicated above the LSC has long experience of promoting collaboration and partnership between 14–19 providers to maximise benefits for learners. The first cohort of learners for the Increased Flexibility programme was in 2002 and the similar Young Apprenticeship Programme is now in its third year. Both programmes require colleges and schools to work in partnership to deliver quality programmes for 14–16 learners in vocational areas of learning. Evaluation of the programmes has been consistently encouraging and the programmes have provided innovative ways of combining elements of academic and vocational learning at all levels.

10. There is concern from some colleges that good partnerships led by colleges through the Increased Flexibility programme have been disrupted by “new” LA- and school-led partnerships to go through the Diploma Gateway. This has not been the intention of the Gateway which has sought to build on historic and an existing culture of collaboration, but reinforces the need for vigilance at the Gateway stage to ensure that good proposal writers do not prosper at the expense of experienced and committed partnerships.

11. The restructuring of the LSC has enabled us to offer more support to consortia and partnerships of colleges, schools and training providers. LSC partnership teams can work more effectively with their 14–19 LA counterparts as boundaries are now coterminous and enable funding to be aligned in support of strategic improvement priorities. We continue to work directly with LAs to develop the local partnerships of schools, colleges, providers and employers necessary to offer a wide choice of learning for all young people in an area.

12. The LSC also brings significant research experience and knowhow into the conditions that make partnership work. We are working with the DfES and QCA currently to develop a toolkit to improve partnership self-assessment and are organising conferences and workshops for LSC and LA colleagues in February and March to develop thinking around the critical success factors that make partnership and collaboration work.

¹¹ Not printed.

13. We do have concerns that some schools in some areas have indeed not realised the implications of Diplomas and in particular the 2013 entitlement for all learners to have access to all lines of the Diploma and fear that such schools may not engage sufficiently. We feel that it is important for this to happen not just for the status of Diplomas but also to enable collaboration, specialisation and sharing of expertise. We suggest that the DfES and partners accelerate the pace of communication about the Diplomas and accompanying reform as soon as possible.

14. It is our belief that college principals and head teachers are indeed well-informed about the Diplomas but that knowledge now needs to involve all members of the workforce at colleges, training providers and schools.

15. We do have some concerns that the oft-repeated line that the “bar will be set high” for the Gateway may throw out worthwhile proposals and, without sensitive handling, may actually lead to the break-up of some consortia. Whilst supportive of the need for quality provision we expect that there should be a good spread of providers both in terms of regions and sectors. We need also to have in place a reliable process that will properly support consortia to apply again for 2009–10 and not let consortia drift apart. The LSC will make it a priority for 2007–08 to support all consortia, not just those who pass through the Gateway for 2008.

16. The major concern for colleges is funding. Colleges have concerns that funding via schools will not guarantee sufficient and sustainable funding for 14–16 delivery. The LSC is working intensively with the DfES to ensure that delivery of the Diplomas is incentivised and does not sideline or threaten existing successful provision pre- or post-16. We also share the concerns of colleges and training providers that the premature phasing out of BTEC/City and Guilds vocational qualifications may lead to less choice for learners and the loss of a successful alternative route to level 2 and level 3 achievement.

17. We intend to ensure also that our responsibility to plan and expand provision for 16–19-year-olds takes into account the requirements of the new Diplomas both in terms of relevant provision, capital requirements and building design. We are next month providing input to a Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) conference that will examine these issues. We are working closely with the DfES to ensure that policies on academies, competitions, presumptions and expanding successful provision work in favour of young people in all areas but especially where provision to encourage participation and pathways into learning may be absent.

18. Finally, securing high quality learning for 14–19-year-olds is a responsibility we share with our partners. We are working closely with all our partners to support the effective introduction of the new Diplomas which we see as key to achieving our and the DfES aspiration of at least 90% participation by 2015.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by Mark Snee¹²

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The development of the Manufacturing Diploma cannot properly be said to be “employer-led”. SSCs cannot be regarded as a “proxy” for employers.
- Tight timescales mean that employer consultation and discussion has been and continues to be inadequate.
- The project is dominated by people with an HE, FE or Training Provider background.

2. THE PARTNERSHIP

The Manufacturing Diploma Development Partnership (MDDP) comprises five Sector Skills Councils who, together with a firm of consultants, are sharing a budget for the work of around £400,000. Improve is the “lead” SSC.

3. THE PROJECT TEAM

3.1 Each of the five SSCs has assigned employees to a Project Team.

3.2 The expertise and qualifications of the members of the Project Team has not been reported to the Steering Group but it appears that the recent employment of most is Further Education, Training Provider or Trade Association.

¹² Managing Director, Technoprint plc, Leeds and employer representative on the Manufacturing Diploma Development Partnership Steering Group, nominated by Proskills SSC.

4. THE CONSULTANTS

The Project Team is assisted by a firm of consultants with a predominant background in Higher Education, either as lecturers or researchers.

5. THE EMPLOYER-LED STEERING GROUP

5.1 The Project Brief specified a Steering Group comprising 18 employers, nominated by the SSC partners. The Steering Group has met three times to date. At none of the meetings has there been more than a very small number of current manufacturing employers present (6, 4 and 1 respectively for the three meetings). At all three Steering Group meetings employers were significantly outnumbered by Project Team members and officials.

5.2 The employer contingent includes former employers and training personnel who are retired from industry and a number whose primary current employment is as training providers.

5.3 The Chair of the Steering Committee does not appear to be a current manufacturing employer.

6. EMPLOYER CONSULTATION EVENTS

6.1 The numbers of employers attending public consultations events is believed to be in single figures or just into double figures. Two colleagues from manufacturing companies who attended consultations in Huddersfield and Northampton were critical of the conduct of the events.

6.2 Drafts of the Manufacturing Diploma's Principal Learning are being taken to further public consultation events in the next few weeks (30 January and 8 February). The drafts are not yet complete and have not been seen, discussed in detail or approved by the Steering Group. Discussion by the Steering Group on whether to postpone the events (which had already been organised by the MDDP) were constrained by the tight timetable for completion of the work. Attendance lists for the consultation events are currently dominated by representatives from the education sector.

7. DIPLOMA CONTENT/FITNESS FOR PURPOSE

7.1 It is impossible to say at present whether the Diploma design will lead to the development of qualifications that are any better than previously accredited qualifications, such as the GNVQ or AVCE Manufacturing. As things currently stand, the Government may have spent a large amount of money on the 14–19 Diploma programme and generated inferior qualifications.

7.2 It is stretching credibility to claim that the Manufacturing Diploma has been produced by employers. Whether the final content will have credibility with employers is open to question at present.

8. RECOMMENDATION

8.1 Whilst there appears a willingness by the Project Lead to address the employer involvement issues, more than half the time for the Diploma design has passed and we are faced with extraordinarily tight timescales for completion over the next few months.

8.2 Proper employer engagement and debate are only likely to take place if the timescales for the Diploma development are relaxed.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by the Edge Foundation

INTRODUCTION TO THE EDGE FOUNDATION

Edge is an educational foundation with the aim of raising the status of practical learning and vocational learning.

SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS

1. *Summary*

The concept of Specialised Diplomas is good—although they would be much better within an overarching system along the lines proposed by Sir Mike Tomlinson.

Most people do not understand what is being attempted by introducing the Diplomas, there is insufficient emphasis on implementation and project management, and the time-scales are unrealistic.

It is critical that we start small, imposing rigorous quality control, and ensure early success (in terms of young people moving on to good jobs and continuing and higher education). Expansion should then follow demand.

The current time-scales are unrealistic—some would say dishonest—and unless relaxed the Specialised Diplomas will fail as have very many similar initiatives over previous decades.

2. *Learn from history*

- There have been lots of great ideas and policy pronouncements—often they have been very poorly implemented. Ensure absolutely top class project management.
- New vocational qualifications have been the playground for policy makers and we have failed many times before. Specialised Diplomas must not be seen as: “for other people’s children”, as “just another initiative”, or be subject to “academic drift” in order to satisfy traditional HE requirements. Be very strong on quality control—especially re work experience and authentic practical learning (learning in realistic working environments, working with expert practitioners, reflecting on experience and combining theory and practice).
- Even when initiatives have started with an emphasis on quality and getting the “product” right, they have been allowed to expand rapidly with little control and no effort to resolve the evident problems (eg Foundation Degrees). Start small, ensure very high quality, focus on raising demand before expansion.
- The passion and commitment of vocational enthusiasts has sometimes prevented healthy dissension and honest discussion taking place—it quickly becomes “unacceptable” to appear negative, even when (as is the case here) time-scales are clearly inappropriate. Actively seek knowledgeable critics and listen to what is not being said by those charged with implementation.
- Often many interested parties and the wider public do not understand the rationale or aims of new initiatives. Give much greater emphasis to effective communication.
- targets and time-scales have often been unachievable, and the difficulties hidden. Be honest about complexity and time-scales.

3. *Specialised Diplomas are part of wider, more complex change*

Specialised Diplomas are part of a much wider transformation of education that is taking place here and abroad, and requires major shifts in attitudes and practice in a number of areas including:

- (a) the more active engagement of students and parents;
- (b) teacher training and enabling experts to “teach too”;
- (c) advice on future learning and careers; and
- (d) employer engagement.

Edge is investing in innovative and major projects in these four areas and would be pleased to provide further information.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by Amicus

Amicus is the UK’s second largest trade union with 1.2 million members across the private and public sectors. Our members work in a range of industries including manufacturing, financial services, print, media, construction and not for profit sectors, local government, education and the NHS.

INTRODUCTION

City & Guilds has a long history of providing alternative qualifications for those in schools and colleges whose career choices are neither straightforwardly academic nor vocationally specific. From Foundation Courses through CPVE to the Diploma of Vocational Achievement to GNVQ, City & Guilds staff have developed and managed these “pre-vocational” or “general vocational” awards. Now City & Guilds is working with AQA, the largest unitary awarding body, to develop the full suite of the new 14–19 Diplomas.

What follows is a very high-level summary of some of the main concerns of amicus members working on the development of the Diplomas. This has been put together by Amicus members and representatives who work in the front line across AQA and City and Guilds.

STATUS

The history of GNVQ—still burned on the minds of some of the members working on the Diplomas—was one of innovative approaches to learning and recognition of achievement—some successful and others not—which were not allowed to mature and develop because they were viewed through the eyes of decision-makers who saw excellence only in traditional academic terms. The “academic–vocational divide” ended up turning GNVQ into a pale and thus unattractive copy of GCSE and A level and consequently guaranteed that they were seen as inferior. This was not inevitable from the first and indeed there was some excellent work done early on which identified that GNVQ developed skills of self-reliance, teamwork and evaluation (which underpin success in higher education and in employment) in a way that academic qualifications did not. The failure to implement the full Tomlinson vision suggests the new Diplomas will start with disadvantage and second-rate status built in.

We are also getting indications that only the former polytechnic universities will take it seriously in terms of UCAS tariff.

CONCEPT

The Diplomas repeat the design principle of GNVQ in that they are sectorally specific (though not occupationally specific). There are concerns that this may be misguided. The Diploma Development Partnerships are approaching their work in significantly different ways, undermining the commonality of style and approach learner and teacher expect to see in qualifications badged with a single title. Sector Skills Councils which themselves are new and disparate are struggling with their role here and are approaching it diversely. There are particular concerns that the degree of detail of specification and of depth of knowledge and understanding required differs across the work of the DDPs.

In terms of Employability, the ultimate purpose of the Diplomas, the sectoral split also provides challenges. There is a case to be argued that all the Diplomas should share a much bigger common core—employer’s real need is for well-motivated, inquiring learners who have developed skills of learning, working with others, communicating, self-confidence and problem-solving rather than sector-specific knowledge.

TIMESCALES

The five months awarding bodies have to develop the new awards is the shortest development period ever for a major series of qualifications. If it is achieved it is difficult to see how the new awards can combine rigour, consistency, quality and manageability. There is no time to test the work against reality and the expectations and expertise of a wide field of those who might contribute and improve the awards. Schools in particular have a major staff development task for which time is short.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Urge on Ministers reconsideration of the rejection of the main thrust of the Tomlinson report—ie reform the whole 14–19 curriculum, not just the “vocational” side.
- DfES to take a much stronger line on the DDPs to ensure they work in a more collaborative way and to ensure consistency of output, in terms of quantity, level and approach of content.
- DfES to reconsider the balance of content of Diplomas, to ensure the balance of sector-specific and general skills, knowledge and understanding meets real learner employment needs for their future, rather than the narrower perspective of particular sectors.
- Timescales be reconsidered by Ministers, to ensure this important new initiative is not undermined by rushed and poor quality development processes.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by Afasic

INTRODUCTION

Afasic is the UK-wide parent-led charity representing children and young people with speech and language impairments. Speech and language impairments can arise as a consequence of other disabilities such as hearing impairment or cerebral palsy, in which case they are described as secondary speech and language impairments. However, Afasic primarily represents children and young people with specific speech and language impairments, that is to say those who do not have any other form of disability. More than 1 million children and young people in the UK have some degree of difficulty with speech and language. While speech and language therapy enables some of them to overcome their impairments while they are still young,

1 in 500 has a severe and persistent speech and language impairment that will affect them throughout their lives. Children and young people with speech and language impairments may have difficulty with any or all of the following:

- interacting appropriately with other children and adults;
- acquiring literacy and numeracy skills;
- accessing the curriculum at school or college;
- making friends and acquiring social skills; and
- understanding the world and acquiring independence skills.

Speech and language impairments are a “hidden” disability. Young people with speech and language impairments look no different to anybody else, so their disability is not immediately apparent. It may not even be obvious from their speech. Many young people with speech and language impairments may appear superficially to talk quite fluently. They may well have developed “coping” or “masking” strategies that conceal the real extent of their difficulties from anyone who is unfamiliar with speech and language impairments, and, regrettably, as awareness of these disabilities is very poor, young people will meet few people who understand their needs. The small number of professionals who specialise in speech and language impairments usually work with pre-school or school-aged children. The assumption appears traditionally to have been that most children with speech and language impairments “grow out” of their difficulties, so there is no need for adult services to cater for them. Even though we now know that speech and language impairments do not necessarily “go away”, there does not appear to have been any change in this assumption, and so many young people with speech and language impairments, of secondary school age and older, fail to have their needs met or even recognised. A further complication is that the nature of speech and language impairments means that many young people are not able to form any clear understanding of or explain how their disability affects them. Some do not even appreciate that they have a disability. Thus they find it difficult to seek the support they need.

Young people with speech and language impairments generally have normal intelligence levels, but their attainment levels are often depressed by their disability. As a result, they tend to underachieve at school. Although there are exceptions, most young people with speech and language impairments go on to FE colleges after leaving school at 16.

AFASIC’S CURRENT EXPERIENCE OF FURTHER EDUCATION

Many of our members and callers to our helpline tell us that their experience of FE is often very disappointing. The failings appear to be at all levels but particularly notable are:

- An assumption that most students on “mainstream” courses, ie courses not specifically for students with learning difficulties or disabilities are “normal”, and a consequent failure to recognise that many such students actually have various types of special needs and to provide the support necessary to meet those needs.
- The poor liaison between tutors on mainstream courses and tutors in learning support departments, with a complete failure to adequately integrate the support students need within their courses.
- The complete failure of tutors on mainstream courses to understand the issues that affect a student with speech and language impairments and to address these adequately within their course.
- Many FE courses, even at NVQ level 3, do not equip students with the professional skills they require to obtain a job in the field they have supposedly been trained for.
- Many students, especially those with speech and language impairments and other disabilities, require not only training in job-related skills but also in other essential life skills which they rarely receive.
- There is often no proper advice to ensure that students enrol on courses that will actually equip them for the world of work. All too often it seems to be the case that advisers (principally schools and Connexions advisers) are more concerned with ensuring that students do something so that they are accounted for, than with taking the time to help the student and his or her family identify the most appropriate way forward for them. As a result, FE often ends up for many students being simply a way of filling two years, rather than part of a structured educational path that actually leads to employment and a fulfilling adult life.
- Similarly, there is often little if any support to enable students leaving FE to move into the world of work. At the very least students need guidance on developing the necessary interview skills, and writing CVs. Many students, such as those with speech and language impairments, who generally have poor communication skills and low self-esteem as a result of years of struggling at school, need much more intensive support to enable them to move on from FE into employment. This is rarely forthcoming and so it is easy for many young people to “give up” at this stage and settle for a life characterised by unemployment interspersed, perhaps, with a series of dead-end casual jobs.

- There are real issues around access to examinations for students with speech and language impairments, and other disabilities, and also for other students who find formal written examinations difficult. Where “academic” testing is not essential, other ways need to be found of assessing students’ skills and enabling them to gain accreditation.

THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SPEECH AND LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENTS

Their learning profile and special needs mean that students with speech and language impairments need holistic services that equip them with:

- practical work skills they can transfer to the workplace;
- proficient literacy and numeracy skills;
- functional communication and social interaction skills, including speech and language therapy as needed;
- independence and life skills, such as understanding and using money, including in the (more abstract and less obvious) form of cheques, credit cards etc;
- organisational and planning skills, eg remembering appointments and turning up for them with any necessary information etc; and
- being able to cope with change, or other unexpected problems eg a train being cancelled, or traffic being diverted because of roadworks.

Currently, this sort of integrated support structure tends to be confined to the specialist courses for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. These, however, are generally pitched at a very low (entry or pre-entry) level and are rarely suitable for students with speech and language impairments who are often working towards level 2 or even level 3 qualifications. It is true that most FE colleges have learning support departments, but these need to be wider in scope and integrated more fully into the courses students are taking. The intake of some FE colleges consists very largely of students with special needs and others who have underperformed at school and, if their needs are to be met, the FE system needs to be much more inclusive, taking the needs of students as their starting point, rather than the traditional way they have done things. This should ensure that all students who require it would have ready access to the support they need, if necessary within small specialised units. This, in turn, would mean post-16 skills training forming an integral part of the path that leads from the dependence of childhood to the fulfilment of employment and an independent adult life.

14–19 specialised Diplomas

It is difficult to comment in detail on the proposed Diplomas as so little is known as yet about their format and content. In principle, Afasic is strongly in favour of an alternative, less academic route for young people who lack the interest or aptitude for “A” level-type qualifications. We are, however, concerned that Phil Hope, the Minister for Skills, was recently quoted as saying that the Diplomas “were not vocational”. We are unsure what was meant by this, but an approach that emphasises the writing of essays, or compilation of detailed project work, over the acquisition, practice and thorough understanding of more practical skills is likely to be too demanding for many young people with speech and language impairments, and, it must be said, others with various special needs, or who are simply not engaged by a formal, academic approach to learning.

It is important to understand the impact of speech and language impairments on the way that our young people learn. Generally speaking, mainstream education is delivered through the medium of language, and this is fine for people with strong verbal skills, who can put together and deliver an essay or presentation relatively easily, and have no trouble reading and absorbing large amounts of written text. Young people with weak language skills, though, find this extremely difficult and daunting and, over time, become increasingly disenchanted with education and develop very low self-esteem. Yet, young people with speech and language impairments are capable of learning much, including achieving adequate literacy and numeracy skills and holding down many skilled and responsible jobs. They simply need to be taught in a way that is accessible to them, that is to say through carefully managed and structured practical experience.

It is very much our hope that the proposed specialised Diplomas will provide this type of education and training. If they do not, they will fail to meet the needs of young people with speech and language impairments, and indeed of many other young people who currently are unable to access the academic style that is still the norm within (school-based) education.

One other factor to be borne in mind is that young people between the ages of 14 and 16 are still nominally at school. Those with special needs, which includes young people with speech and language impairments, are entitled to appropriate support. Some young people with special needs have statements which place a legal duty on their LA to provide them with the specified support. It is important that the increasing use of FE colleges to educate these young people does not lead to any compromise in the support they receive. As few FE colleges have access to speech and language therapy, and few staff even in colleges’ own learning support departments have any knowledge of speech and language impairments, there can be no

complacency about this. Ideally with the increasing integration of the 14–19 education sector, the support systems for special needs would be aligned more closely with the protection of statements extended to all young people in education (up to the age of 19), not just those in schools.

FINAL COMMENTS

The outlook for young people with speech and language impairments whose needs have not been recognised and met can be bleak. Many face lives of social deprivation characterised by periods of unemployment, or intermittent casual work. Some drift into anti-social behaviour and crime (a study conducted in 2004 by Professor Karen Bryan of the University of Surrey found that 60% of inmates in a Young Offenders Institute had speech, language and communication difficulties). Yet others face lives blighted by isolation and poor mental health.

A positive experience within education, and particularly within the 14–19 stage, that recognises and meets their needs could help young people with speech and language impairments avoid the poor outcomes many of them face now, and play an important part in facilitating a successful transition to adult life for the young people Afasic represents.

Students need to leave full-time education equipped with skills that will actually enable them to obtain and retain employment. This means that FE colleges, and other providers, must have a realistic understanding of, and give accurate information about, the types of jobs their courses provide training for. This does not always happen at the moment, leading to confusion and disappointment for many students. For example, some students enrol on catering courses expecting them to lead to jobs as a chef or other high-level position, only to find that they have not acquired the necessary professional skills and can only secure a dead-end job helping in the kitchen or waiting at tables.

One way of avoiding this would be by moving away from college-based provision for what are supposedly vocational courses towards more “apprenticeship”-type courses for the majority of young people who leave school at 16. If well organised these should offer a clear route into employment through on-the-job training with back-up from FE colleges for the classroom-based elements of the course including, for those who need it, training in life skills and other special needs support. If such a system were able to guarantee employment, and a defined career-path, to all students who completed the course satisfactorily, this would provide a clearer and more direct route into employment for many young people, particularly for those who find this more difficult than most, such as young people with speech and language impairments.

We very much hope that these inquiries will lead to educational and training provision for young people with speech and language impairments that genuinely meets their needs and enables them to move into adult life with the confidence and skills that will equip them to make a success of their lives.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by *GoSkills*

INTRODUCTION

GoSkills is the Sector Skills Council for Passenger Transport. Our remit covers the following industries: bus, coach, taxi, private hire, community transport, driving instruction, rail, light rail, tram, airports, ground handlers, airlines and transport planning. This response to the Education and Skills Committee’s New Inquiries into Skills is provided in the context of the passenger transport sector and reflects the situation faced by employers in the sector.

Our responses to each of the questions raised follow.

POST-16 SKILLS TRAINING

CONTEXT

What should we take from the Leitch Report on UK skills gaps? What are the demographic issues which need to be taken into account in skills policy?

From a perspective of the Passenger Transport, the key issue is more one of skills shortages rather than skills gaps. Our industries know that they have much more to do in terms of attracting into employment a workforce drawn from a wider demographic than currently.

As regards skills gaps, operators have an interest in a workforce with good employability skills including basic skills. There is some evidence that jobs involving foreign languages are being offered selectively to foreign nationals.

Are the measures that we have available to assess the success of skills strategy robust?

Although qualifications are a reasonable proxy for skills there is perhaps a need to support such measures with an agreed national methodology for the measurement of productivity gain through skills acquisition should be implemented to provide robust benchmarking data.

NATIONAL POLICY/ISSUES

Are the Government's priorities for skills broadly correct—for example, the focus on first “level 2” qualifications?

Level 2 is the threshold for employability and is therefore critical to all industries and to all individuals. The priorities in relation to level 2, Skills for Life and apprenticeships are broadly correct for our sector. We welcome the Leitch Report's recognition of a “wage premium” for level 2 NVQs assessed in the workplace.

However, the focus on “first” in relation to the level 2 target is problematic for a number of reasons:

- there is a significant difference between pre-employment level 2 qualifications and work-based qualifications. Five GCSEs (particularly where the five exclude English and Maths) do not contribute to employability. It would be more appropriate to enable some individuals (eg those without a level 3 qualification) to access a first vocational/occupational qualification at level 2 even where they have already achieved five GCSEs;
- there is an ageing workforce and we are increasingly reliant on the development and re-development of the existing workforce. The restriction to “first” level 2 can present a barrier to older individuals who have changed careers or who have previously obtained level 2 qualifications that do not contribute to their employability or current job role; and
- there is an ageism factor in that the level 2 entitlement is more likely to benefit younger people. This can also put employers in a difficult position if they are only able to offer training to younger employees who do not hold a level 2 qualification, particularly where a group of individuals of different ages enter employment at the same time. It is possible that this situation will deter some employers from offering any training leading to qualifications at all.

How do other targets, such as the “50% into HE” fit with the wider skills agenda?

The great majority of job roles within the passenger transport sector are at level 2 with some at level 3. Although there are some higher level job roles (eg in engineering, transport planning, air traffic control and operational management), the 50% target has limited relevance to the sector. Operators are showing increasing interest in Foundation Degrees as a route for upskilling employees.

What is the extent of joined-up working between Government departments, particularly, the DfES and the Department for Work and Pensions?

We welcome the Leitch Report's emphasis on the integration of employment and training.

Do current funding structures support a more responsive skills training system? How could they be improved?

The current arrangements for public funding of work-based learning have failed the passenger transport sector.

The Sector represents c3% of total national employment yet attracts less than 0.3% of total LSC funding for sector-specific skills.

The current funding structures are quite rigid and are therefore not particularly responsive. The emphasis on targets such as level 2 drive funding and qualifications. This is particularly problematic for SMEs and the self-employed (the latter frequently found in taxi and PHV driving) who do not always find the approved qualifications and training appropriate and who also have difficulty in accessing funding.

We welcome the Leitch Report's recommendation that all public funding for work-based learning should go either through Train to Gain (for employers) or through reformed individual learning accounts.

Is the balance between the public, employers' and individuals' contribution to learning appropriate?

In the passenger transport sector the bulk of skills funding is provided by employers. Very little support is available from the public purse. And it is the norm in passenger transport for driving skills to be funded entirely by the employer rather than the individual, as is the case in the LGV industry.

We believe that Train to Gain should develop in practice into the holistic offer it already is on paper; that is, the basic skills and level 2 entitlements (as reformed—see our comments on the question relating to the existing level 2 entitlement above) should be delivered free of charge but employers must expect to make a financial contribution towards the achievement of higher level qualifications. There needs to be a clearer

integration of business support and skills brokerage and an agreed national methodology for the measurement of productivity gain through skills acquisition should be agreed and implemented to provide robust benchmarking data.

SUPPLY SIDE

Is there a case for a less regulated supply-side system with fewer intermediary agencies and bodies? What are the potential risks and benefits of such an approach?

There is a buoyant private training provider industry. These providers survive by selling training that employers are prepared to pay for. However, there are no quality checks on these providers and the provision is not always tied to national occupational standards. Employers are, to a certain extent, at the mercy of the providers as they have limited opportunities to assess or judge quality.

Publicly funded provision is quality assured and embraces qualifications agreed by employers on a national basis. These benefits could be lost if the supply side were less regulated. Leitch has recommended that SSCs accredit qualifications and that only these are eligible for public funding. We welcome this. However, it is essential that there continues to be national regulation of qualifications eligible for public funding in the interests of a level playing field between sectors, industries, employers and awarding bodies.

What do national and regional agencies currently do well? How are bodies such as the Regional Skills Partnerships working?

We recognise the criticisms of the complexity of the skills landscape made by Leitch. We are puzzled that no clear prescription was offered, although an inference might be drawn in relation to his comments on the London Skills and Employment Board and its meaning for the London RSP.

Does the LSC need to be the subject of further reform?

The impact of the recent reforms is not yet clear. It would be advisable to assess the impact of the recent reforms and the proposals in Leitch prior to considering further reform.

What is the typical experience of a college or other provider who wants to put on new provision in response to local employer demand?

Colleges and other providers are free to offer training commercially. Where the cost of the training is covered by the purchaser, colleges and other providers are able to move quickly to deliver the required training.

Do we need to consider any further structural reforms in terms of which institutions provide what kind of learning?

DEMAND SIDE

Employers:

What should a “demand-led” system really look like?

We shall be getting very close to a demand-led system were the Leitch Report to be implemented in full.

Do employers feel like they are shaping skills training—for example through Sector Skills Councils?

Employers in the passenger transport sector have engaged with the skills agenda and contributed extensively to the development of our emerging Sector Skills Agreement. However, employers are often frustrated when they seek to access public funding and discover that this is driven by national priorities rather than their own company needs. Additionally, the current training infrastructure offers limited opportunities to the sector and again it can be frustrating for employers when they are unable to find the right training. For example, there are no Centres of Vocational Excellence specifically for the bus and coach industries as the criteria adopted by LSC or their designation make it a difficult model to apply to these industries.

Do employers feel closely involved with the design of qualifications?

Employers in the passenger transport sector are positive about their involvement in qualification design. There are, of course, differences in employers' requirements and therefore there is an ongoing need for negotiation with awarding bodies.

Should employers be further incentivised to take up training? If so, by what means?

Incentivising employers through the modalities suggested by Leitch will be problematic in passenger transport. Although a case for a compulsory levy is strong in those industries where self-employment is the norm (taxi, private hire and driving instruction), the notion would be resisted by most trades bodies, although welcomed by most of the regulators. There is no case in the rest of the sector, whose training record is for the most part creditable. Licence to Practise has been overtaken by existing or forthcoming European legislation on licensing of certificates of professional competence. There is little appetite from a highly regulated sector which funds much of its own skills requirement for Skills Academies. More realistic incentives would be a voluntary levy in the form of a membership scheme delivering tangible benefits to employers and individuals, coupled with the development of a more integrated Train to Gain scheme (see our comments above). *GoSkills* plans to introduce such a membership scheme early in 2007.

DELNI has recently consulted on the benefits of incentivising employers to offer apprenticeships. There is a case for doing this in England as well, particularly to support SMEs in developing their internal capacity to support apprenticeships. It may also be appropriate to consider this in the context of first level 2 qualifications, particularly if new criteria result in larger, less-occupationally specific qualifications.

However, please see comments above in relation to the potential negative impact of restricting funding to “first” level 2s.

What is the role of Union Learning Reps?

We see an important role for ULRs in relation to work-based learning in partnership with employers and SSCs. It is essential that SSCs, as strategic bodies, work closely with UnionLearn and ULRs, as well as with employers. We recommend the close involvement of ULRs in the rollout of Sector Skills Agreements. We plan to hold a joint conference with the TUC on our Sector Skills Agreement.

What roles should employment agencies play in facilitating training?

Learners:

What is the typical experience of someone looking for skills training?

What information, advice and guidance is available to potential learners?

What is available for those with the very lowest skill levels, who are outside of education, training and the world of employment?

What is the role of the new Learner Accounts? What factors should be considered in their design and implementation?

APPRENTICESHIPS

What should apprenticeships look like? How close are they currently to this vision?

Employers have different requirements from apprenticeships but most employers in the passenger transport sector welcome an industry-wide framework.

Employers value the NVQ and also the technical certificate components as these are seen as developing a broad range of understanding and skills. There is currently no negative feedback on the existing frameworks.

What parts of the current apprenticeship framework are seen as valuable by learners and by employers, and which less so? Is there a case for reform of the framework?

Generally the NVQ is viewed as the most valuable component of the framework with Key Skills usually viewed as the least valuable. The issues around Key Skills usually relate to the difficulty in aligning Key Skills requirements to specific job roles.

The current “Apprenticeship as a Qualification” project is not being well received in the sector. Employers are keen to have a period of stability. Many have developed internal systems to support the current framework and are not keen to undertake potentially costly revisions. Additionally, partnerships between providers and employers are working well with all parties clear on their contribution.

Are the number of places available appropriate, and in the right areas, and at the right level?

Most of the apprenticeships undertaken in the sector are undertaken via employers who hold National Contracts with the LSC. Large employers have not identified any difficulties.

The major issues for the sector are in relation to the lack of training provision available. This means that those employers who are unable to establish and run apprenticeship schemes themselves are not able to access appropriate provision. *GoSkills* is working with training providers (particularly CoVEs) to try and improve provision and then to raise employer demand for the new provision.

What is the current success rate for apprenticeships?

Apprenticeships are offered by larger employers in the sector, with apprentices usually in paid employment. As a result, completion rates are generally high—over 60% across the sector and over 70% in some industries. This is significantly higher than the national average for all sectors.

What can we learn from practice in other countries with apprenticeship systems—ie Scotland and Wales?

Extension of the frameworks to adults will be beneficial to the sector.

QUALIFICATIONS

Do the qualifications which are currently available make sense to employers and learners?

Employers in the sector find the current system straightforward. There are comparatively few qualifications for the sector and most of the key qualifications have been designed by employers.

Is the Qualifications and Credit Framework succeeding in bringing about a rationalised system? Is there a case for further rationalisation?

The QCF is likely to cause confusion. Employers in the sector consider the current system to be flexible enough and there is a general view that qualifications should not be too flexible as too much flexibility can distort the focus and aims of the qualification. Employers like to know what qualifications mean and have a preference for sharply defined and focused qualifications.

It is unclear how the QCF will rationalise provision as it is likely to create a proliferation of new units and pathways through qualifications. There is no need for rationalisation of qualifications for the passenger transport sector.

14-19 SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF DIPLOMAS

What progress has been made on the development of Diplomas to date? Where have been the sticking points?

GoSkills is a partner in the Engineering Diploma Development Partnership led by SEMTA. We will convene the DDP in Travel and Tourism.

Considerable progress has been made in engaging employers in the development of the Diplomas. The content for the new Diplomas has been discussed with employers and feedback from employers has had a significant impact on content.

The sticking points have been primarily in relation to decisions around assessment and ownership. Much of the initial development work on content was carried out by SSCs prior to decisions by QCA on the assessment model. Some SSCs including ourselves reported their concerns over the possible consequences of this planning flaw to SSDA at an early stage. Although content was provided, it was not in the format required for assessment and this meant that some work had to be re-visited. This will obviously not be the case for the later Diplomas as the learning from the first phase will inform the work on later Diplomas.

What role have employers and Sector Skills Councils played in the development of Diplomas?

Sector Skills Councils have contributed to employer engagement and the development of content: *GoSkills* has been involved in the Engineering Diploma. We have liaised with employers in the rail, bus and coach industries to secure their input into the project. As well as involvement via the DDP and Diploma specific consultations, we have worked through our network of Regional Business Advisors to ensure that employers have had numerous opportunities to comment and have received regular updates.

As a result of engagement with employers on the Engineering Diploma and via our ongoing work to raise awareness of the new Diplomas, we have secured support for the Diplomas in the sector. *GoSkills* will be co-ordinating the development of the Travel and Tourism Diploma from January 2007 and we have already generated interest and support throughout the sector.

Who is responsible for the co-ordination and development of Diplomas? Is there a case for a stronger co-ordinating role for one of the agencies involved, or for the appointment of a senior responsible officer or champion?

Co-ordination has been an issue throughout the development. Whilst the multi-agency approach is beneficial in securing support, it also creates confusion around responsibilities. There is a case for one of the agencies being allocated a lead role. This lead role should extend to the ongoing review and revision of Diplomas.

Is there a clear system for accrediting and awarding the Diplomas?

This process is still evolving.

TEACHER AND LECTURER TRAINING

What are current levels of teacher/lecturer training activity in preparation for Diplomas? Is this sufficient to make Diplomas a success?

We have no comments to make on this and the succeeding questions.

CO-ORDINATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

What is the current level of co-ordination between colleges and schools in local areas?

What are the barriers to co-ordination?

What are the lessons that can be learned from areas where there is strong co-ordination on 14–19?

What are intermediary bodies such as LAs and LSCs doing to foster co-operation?

How engaged are head teachers and college principals in the Diploma agenda?

How are the rules on post-16 expansion likely to affect the rollout of Diplomas?

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by Association of Learning Providers (ALP)

INTRODUCTION

1. The Association of Learning Providers (ALP) represents the interests of a range of organisations delivering state-funded vocational learning. The majority of our 440 member organisations are independent providers holding contracts with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for the delivery of Apprenticeships programmes, with 110 delivering Jobcentre Plus (JCP) provision and 50 contracted to Ufi for the delivery of learndirect. We also have circa 60 colleges in membership. In addition to these members, we have a number of non-delivery organisations such as the ALI and QCA as Associate Members, which means that ALP offers a well rounded and comprehensive perspective and insight on matters relating to its remit.

2. In this response we have restricted our comments to those questions specifically related to our role as the representative organisation for providers of vocational learning. We would be delighted to give oral evidence to the Committee should this be required.

POST-16 SKILLS TRAINING

Context and ALP's key points in response to Leitch

3. ALP has welcomed Lord Leitch's recommendation that the timetable for introducing a genuinely demand-led system for state-funded skills training should be brought forward to 2010.

4. A fully contestable demand-led system for skills is the only way to meet the enormous challenges that Lord Leitch has outlined in his report. Under the various government and LSC initiatives to improve standards over the past five years, all providers have had ample time to ensure that their skills provision can

be tested by the forces of competition. As Lord Leitch says, the choice of the provider should lie entirely with the employer or the individual learner. We cannot have it both ways, saying that we provide a good service to employers and then expect “protected” business to still be handed to us.

5. We would add in this context that the Education and Skills Committee’s recommendations in its report on Further Education in respect of a more open learning supply market and direct contracting with the LSC were, in our view, extremely helpful in moving forward the debate on the national skills strategy.

6. Lord Leitch’s proposals are almost entirely consistent with those put forward by ALP in its submissions to the review. Lord Leitch said that the great majority of public funding for adult vocational skills in England should be routed through the employer-focused Train to Gain programme and the new Learner Accounts for individual learners. ALP was pleased that the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has been tasked to encourage effective competition between providers for the funding.

7. The Association is also pleased that Apprenticeship places are projected to rise to 500,000 by 2020, with its members currently reporting that they can meet plenty more demand from employers for places. While welcoming the role that the sector skills councils will have in the design of apprenticeships, ALP is cautioning that the councils should not be allowed to discard the gold-plated elements of apprenticeships that have enabled them to become a highly regarded quality brand.

8. Lord Leitch’s support for government plans to bring back Learner Accounts is very encouraging. ALP is offering to play a full role in the design and development of the pilots which will be launched next year.

9. ALP has welcomed Lord Leitch’s addressing of the critical issue of matching skills provision to securing sustainable employment for the jobless. The Association has argued that state skills provision should be entirely the responsibility of the LSC with personal advisors in Jobcentre Plus offices referring their clients on for appropriate training. Lord Leitch’s recommendations fell short of this (although the matter will be reviewed again in 2010), but ALP is greatly encouraged by the emphasis on basic skills provision being essential to securing long-term employment.

10. The Association also believes that it was right for the Review to consider how providers are rewarded for placing people in employment and whether the financial incentives should be weighted more to each client successfully staying in a job well beyond 13 weeks.

11. The one major disappointment in the Report is that even though Lord Leitch refers to Scotland and Wales both having all-age universal information, advice and guidance systems, he was only able to recommend a merger of guidance services for adults in England. ALP considers it vital that England should have an independent all-age service that ensures that young people and young adults are getting the right advice on their post-16 education, training and employment options.

12. On the question of measures to assess the success of the skills strategy, we would argue that strong demand from employers and individual learners for particular training programmes speaks for itself. While we recognise the need, especially on accountability grounds, for certain PSA targets, we believe that emphasis should be on ensuring that the design of programmes is going to result in good demand that will lead to positive outcomes for both the economy and social cohesion. Our view is that there has been too much interference in terms of planning provision rather than responding to market demand and this has limited the potential of the skills strategy to make an impact. However, Lord Leitch’s recommendations and the comments made by the LSC’s chief executive in his speech to the AoC conference suggest that matters should significantly improve.

13. ALP acknowledges that given a finite amount of public funding, successful demand has to be “managed”. We have submitted proposals to the DfES, LSC and the Leitch Review on this issue (please see later section on “demand side”).

NATIONAL POLICY

14. Since the first of the skills white papers was published in 2003, ALP has been strongly supportive of the broad direction of the Government’s skills policies. It has been the pace of reform that has caused frustration among our members.

15. ALP has pointed to the following areas that should be at the core of future strategy:

- the skills agenda must be owned and led by employers;
- the education system should concentrate appropriately, but not exclusively, on the development of the vocational curriculum for all students from age 14 in order to increase their chances of success in the world of work;
- the basic skills issue needs to be overcome, not only for young people, but also for those in the workforce that currently lack basic skills, to ensure far more people gain vocational qualifications at levels 3 and above; and
- the country needs a network of learning providers expert in focusing on the needs of individuals and employers.

16. With the assistance of the reports by Sir Andrew Foster, Lord Leitch and the Select Committee, we believe that the Government is on the right track in pursuing these priorities.

17. Other targets, such as the “50% into HE”, have not posed a major concern for our members. We have consistently argued that vocational learning provision should offer progression to higher education if desired and there are many examples, for instance, of full apprentices going on to study for a degree. At the same time, we believe that more could be done to encourage young people to choose vocational learning as a high quality route from the age of 14. According to a report Skills in Business from the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), drop-outs from higher education courses are currently costing the country £250 million per year, almost a quarter of the entire budget for work based learning (WBL).

18. Lord Leitch’s recommendation for the agreement of joint targets between the DfES and DWP was a major step forward in encouraging a long overdue joined-up approach between the two departments. In fact, ALP made representations to DfES ministers on this issue over four years ago, not long after the LSC had come into operation.

19. The case was well made in Lord Leitch’s interim report and the skills white papers that improving adult skills is a fundamental imperative for the economy’s competitiveness over the next 15 years, because demographic trends point to there being not enough young people to meet the expected growth in jobs. This means improving the skills of adults in work and of non-employed adults.

20. Since 2001, responsibility for addressing this issue has been mainly split between two government departments, the DfES and DWP, and their respective agencies, the Learning and Skills Council and Jobcentre Plus. In giving evidence in January 2006 to the two Commons select committees which monitor the work of these departments, ALP called for the split to end.

21. In a follow-up submission to the select committees which was subsequently passed on to the Leitch review team, ALP set out a proposal that all funds for the support and training of unemployed people be transferred from DWP, via DfES, to the LSC. This was based on our belief that the current characteristics of the unemployed, especially those on incapacity benefit, mean that the gap between their current levels of employability and the expectations and demands of employers are greater than they had ever been.

22. The answer to filling that gap and enabling perhaps a million people to get back into work is training. The traditional focus of Jobcentre Plus (JCP) on job finding as the main objective is too simplistic and would prove ineffective if continued. Acquiring basic skills in areas such as numeracy, literacy and IT is essential to help successful jobseekers to stay in work for a long time and ALP feels strongly that responsibility for this lies best with one agency, the LSC.

23. Independent training providers have and should continue to have a valuable role in delivering the training needed by unemployed people. Many have high achievement rates that have been gained by tailoring training to specific job outcomes. The LSC should ensure that the delivery of training, including basic skills, does not exclude small providers—particularly those who have had little experience of working with the local LSCs, but have real experience of working with this particular client group.

24. As an example of the need for closer working between the LSC and JCP, ALP received reports towards the end of 2006 that despite winning contracts for the provision of ex-JCP basic skills contracts under LSC funding, providers were having immense difficulties in getting referrals of clients from local Jobcentres. Two possible reasons have been put forward: that ESF-funded provision is siphoning off eligible referrals before they reach the new contractors; or that the LSC’s funding priority on learning rather than work is dissuading JCP advisers from making the referrals when they are targeted on job placements. Whatever the reason, the situation is unsatisfactory.

25. A long recognised, but little addressed, obstacle to more young people and adults gaining qualifications to make them more employable has been the LSC’s ring-fencing of the majority of its budget for programme delivery by further education colleges only. Historically the distribution of funds has been balanced against work based learning.

26. Until recently, ministers and policymakers had made no attempt to hide the fact that this continued imbalance five years after public statements of intent to change matters has been driven by a political imperative to safeguard college infrastructure. An end-result, however, has been the maintaining of an alarmingly high drop-out rate from the education system of 16 and 17-year-olds encouraged to study academic courses wholly inappropriate to their needs and aspirations. It is also an important factor in employers’ complaints about the lack of suitably skilled young people entering employment.

27. ALP feels that Sir Andrew Foster’s review of further education and the Select Committee’s subsequent report have made an important contribution to addressing the issue. Sir Andrew recommended that colleges should become primarily focused on addressing the skills needs of the economy. At the same time, he made clear that the delivery of future skills programmes should be fully contestable, ie by good quality providers of any type able to deliver the particular learning required.

28. ALP’s warm welcome to Foster’s recommendations and the FE white paper was slightly tempered by a belief that not all colleges should be mandated to concentrate on the employability agenda. In other words, a mixed-economy system should recognise that there are “horses for courses” where some colleges should stay focused on their community learning strengths, which can still provide individuals with skills suitable for the jobs market.

29. We also believe that the Government and the LSC should be much bolder in making existing learning programmes contestable as a means of advancing the national skills strategy. The rate of opening up this funding has been far too insignificant in size and far too slow. In relation to the analysis in the interim report of the Leitch Review and the need to increase the skills of adult learners, an accelerated action plan is required to open up the LSC's funding streams to allow increased work based learning provision if significant inroads are going to be made by 2020 in reducing Britain's productivity gap. We are pleased that Lord Leitch's final report and his specific recommendations on this issue reflected this view.

30. A logical extension of the conclusion that colleges should be more geared towards skills delivery is that there is no longer the need for differentiation between FE and WBL funding.

31. ALP's chairman, Martin Dunford, pointed out to the Select Committee in January 2006 that from his own company's considerable experience of working in partnership with the FE sector, good colleges should do well out of contestability. In short, any long-term strategy in response to Lord Leitch's analysis of the country's future skills needs should have full contestability of virtually all LSC and JCP provision at its core.

32. Lord Leitch addressed the question of who pays for skills and ALP has supported comments made by ministers since the beginning of 2005 that employers should make more of a financial contribution to training supported by the state. However, despite representations made by ALP at the Skills Alliance on the subject, no firm strategy has been forthcoming from the Government on how business should be prepared to accept this.

33. ALP members report that there has been some acceptance from employers who have been approached by independent providers about the Train to Gain programme that they should contribute financially to the cost of the training. But there are also reports that in some instances, the good intentions have been dashed by other providers then approaching the same employers and offering the training for free. In this context, it is worthwhile noting the comments of Mark Haysom, the LSC's chief executive, from his AoC conference speech: "I still see many examples where employer engagement strategies are designed to extract money from the LSC—with offers of fully funded provision—rather than genuinely seeking to meet the needs of those employers. The truth here is that if we are to meet the challenges of the future we have to raise our game higher, to lever in more funding for skills from employers and individuals." Mr Haysom went on to promise a further consultation exercise on funding and ALP looks forward to playing a full part in it.

SUPPLY SIDE

34. ALP was well aware of the debate surrounding the effectiveness of the various agencies and bodies in the post-16 education and training field, which reached a crescendo in the lead-up to the publication of Lord Leitch's report. In the end, Lord Leitch did not take a torchlight to the apparently mooted "bonfire of the quangos" and this issue was not a major concern for us.

35. Only six years after the disbanding of the Training and Enterprise Councils, there is little appetite among ALP's members for a wholesale tearing up of the present arrangements. This is despite our common complaint that we have to spend a lot of time explaining to officials in the successor organisations what work based learning actually involves vis a vis college provision.

36. While concerns remain about the overall effectiveness of the LSC (please see our comments below about the launch of Train to Gain), we believe however that the "Agenda for Change" programme should be given a chance to succeed. Shortly before Christmas, the ALP board met Mark Haysom and his senior management team at the Council to discuss the way ahead and our members are pleased with how the LSC's "Agenda for Change" reforms are currently progressing. The LSC's wish to prioritise the skills needs of those looking for work in line with Leitch's thinking is also a major step forward.

37. Arguably, the biggest frustration among our members about the way things have been run in recent years relates to the inquiry seeking views on providers wanting to put on extra provision in response to local employer demand. Over the last two years, for example, the success of the Apprenticeships has attracted unprecedented demand from young people and employers alike. However, surveys of ALP's members revealed that providers often had to turn employers away because of a shortage of funding, especially in respect of places for young adults over the age of 19. Lobbying of ministers and the LSC by ALP has resulted in additional monies being secured, but the experience has emphasised the shortcomings in the current funding regime. We hope that acceptance of Lord Leitch's recommendations on increased Apprenticeship numbers up to 2020 and a more demand-led system will mean that the need for this type of lobbying will diminish.

38. In a similar vein, the early months of the national roll-out of the Train to Gain programme have not been without their "wrinkles". At the same time that the Select Committee was commenting on direct contracting in its report on FE, some providers, who had been awarded large Train to Gain contracts, found that they were unable to deliver the provision on their own. This led to sub-contracting arrangements that involved "management fees" that were far in excess of regional tender guidelines when direct contracting would have been a more efficient and cost-effective option. Following representations made by ALP, the

LSC has worked hard to sort out this and other issues related to the programme. The Council has acknowledged that the national roll-out and tendering arrangements has proved more bureaucratic than was intended or necessary.

39. ALP is now confident that with procurement based on contestability, Train to Gain is on course to be a highly successful programme which is truly responsive to demand, bringing a new approach to skills development which is of benefit to the employer, the learner and the economy. In fact, such is the popularity of Train to Gain that several providers who had moved firmly ahead in response to employer demand before final contract allocations had been made are now reporting that they have delivered their year's allocation during the first three months of the programme! The LSC will be looking to allocate much of the 20% regional response funds to help such providers meet the employer demand they have uncovered.

DEMAND SIDE

40. "Demand led" has been an established part of the skills vocabulary for a few years and yet it hasn't always been clear what people have meant by the term.

41. ALP was happy to see the phrase feature regularly in the speeches of ministers and senior officials as an assurance that overall policy was moving in the right direction. However, as we entered 2006 and before the publication of the FE white paper, there was a danger of it being regarded as a piece of well-intentioned rhetoric rather than a policy that was being translated into action on the ground.

42. It was the lack of clarity behind its meaning that prompted ALP last year to submit a separate paper to the Leitch Review, LSC and the DfES on what a demand-led system should look like (a copy of the paper which includes an executive summary is appended to this submission). As the paper states, the system should be informed annually by the needs as expressed by the sector skills councils (SSCs) and regional skills partnerships (RSPs), which should drive government training policies and priorities.

43. These would identify the skill needs and product lines (apprenticeship frameworks, full/part-time qualifications etc) that the Government will fund and those that will need to be funded by employers/individuals.

44. In the ultimate fully open market, any "approved" provider should be free to build their own business via direct sales/marketing and any referrals from brokers, free of pre-determined "contract caps" recognising that they will nevertheless be operating in an ultimately financially capped market. This is in reality true of most markets and is fully understood by most businesses.

45. Funding agencies, such as the LSC, Ufi and Jobcentre Plus, should show much greater transparency in how budgets are allocated and contracts are awarded, eg by publishing guidelines issued by a national office to their regional offices. The role of intermediaries or brokers should be clearly and tightly defined, ie they should not interfere with a genuine choice expressed by an employer or learner.

46. The paper argued that we should plan for a system that will deliver real time, fully customer responsive arrangements in two to four years time, ie by 2010-11, and ALP was therefore encouraged by Lord Leitch's subsequent support for this proposition.

LEARNERS

47. With regard to the typical experience of someone undergoing training (as opposed to "looking for" training—see below our comments on advice and guidance), the experience should be good and often outstanding. In publishing his final annual report in December 2006, the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning described the headline inspection data for work based learning as "very impressive".

48. Over half of the grades recorded last year were either top ones or twos, prompting the Chief Inspector to remark that this was "an extraordinary achievement for work-based learning providers". He added that independent providers had now earned their place as integral and equal parts of further education.

49. Nearly five years after the issue of unfair measurement of work based learning provision was first highlighted, the ALI report says that new valid comparisons to be made between learners' achievements in different parts of further education and training are likely to reveal work based learning as being more successful and effective than before. The majority of the ALI's work concerns LSC-funded provision, yet the Chief Inspector was also able to report that the inadequacy rate for New Deal provision is now zero.

50. ALP has welcomed the Chief Inspector's observation that the Government's policy of introducing "contestability" into post-16 education and training can work effectively to raise standards further and more promptly to eliminate poor provision. The report comments that the better delivery of work based learning by commercial providers is a major justification for a more open learning market.

51. Yet we don't pretend for a moment that all training provision is good. It is totally unsatisfactory for young people to suffer poor quality training simply because the nettle has not been sufficiently grasped and action taken to remove poor provision. This must be tackled as a priority—poor provision gives the whole sector a bad name and can leave vulnerable young people unable to achieve their full potential. At the same

time, coasting provision must be given notice to improve, as the FE white paper proposed, with a strict deadline to achieve any improvements required. All our young people deserve an excellent start to their working life.

52. It is not right for any part of the delivery sector to be artificially protected. Decisions should be taken with a view to ensuring high quality training is available for all young people, and ideally allow them some choice of route or provider.

53. There should be more freedom for appropriate young people to undertake part-time vocational (work based) learning during statutory education. It will be important for schools to work, not just with colleges but also with work based learning providers, to offer their pupils the best “education” to suit their needs. This needs to be the core requirement of the developing specialist Diplomas.

54. As stated earlier, ALP considers it vital that like Scotland and Wales, England should have an independent all-age service that ensures that young people and young adults are getting the right advice on their post-16 education, training and employment options. During the Leitch Review, ALP expressed strong support for this position as articulated in greater detail by Careers England in its submission to the Review.

55. To repeat what we have said on many occasions, we constantly hear of many young people that would be better suited to the work based route being steered towards staying on in school or going on to college. We believe that many of these young people are not getting the truly independent and impartial careers information, advice and guidance (IAG) they need to make the right choice of route. All young people, regardless of ability, need this independent IAG—and need it at a far earlier stage than tends to be the case for most young people currently. Too often schools fail to ensure their pupils (especially the higher achievers) get independent IAG, preferring instead to try to persuade them to stay on at school. We have even been told of some schools that actually do not allow work based options to be brought to the attention of their pupils.

56. We believe that the move to put careers guidance to schools/Children’s Trusts is disastrous—there are too many vested interests involved. The only solution is a completely impartial IAG universally available to ensure best choice of pathway chosen.

57. Even young people who take the decision to leave school and seek an alternative route are not always pointed to the best way forward for their abilities and aspirations. Many simply enrol at the local college, often onto an inappropriate course, sometimes leading to qualifications employers do not value/want. In fact, some college courses now designated as “Programme Led Apprenticeships” are not preparing the young person adequately to move on to an Employer Led Apprenticeship. They finish their “course” but are unable to progress further without “remedial” action if they are to enter into the work based route successfully. This is not effective use of taxpayers’ money and can leave the young person disillusioned and much more likely to opt out of training completely.

58. Of particular concern to our members is the lack of a proper and effective Foundation Learning strategy. Many young people leaving school lack the basic skills necessary for employment—they are all too often simply not ready even for Entry to Employment (E2E), the recognised “pre-Apprenticeship” programme, but at this time no realistic alternative option is available. As a result many are ending up in the Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) group—indeed statistics are showing that the number of NEETs has risen steadily despite all the Government’s efforts raise skills levels, particularly for young people.

59. The FE white paper considered proposals to improve the learning experience of young and adult learners and ALP welcomed a number of its positive features, including:

- the development of an entitlement to learners up to age 25, which will cover advanced apprenticeships and other training up to level 3;
- the introduction of adult learner accounts; and
- progress on a new framework for accrediting learning which should benefit both the learner and the employer.

60. Despite the problems with ILAs in England (they have worked well in Scotland and Wales), which were explored in great detail by the former select committee, we support the reintroduction of Learner Accounts as a key component of a demand-led system. The key to avoiding the mistakes of last time is to ensure that only quality-approved providers are supplying the “purchased” provision. Safeguards also need to be built in against encouraging deadweight provision.

APPRENTICESHIPS

61. We firmly believe that properly implemented, Apprenticeships are one of the best options for developing the skills of many young people. There is an additional advantage that Apprentices are actually in employment as they develop these skills, a fact often not fully realised by those outside the sector.

62. Last July when a member of the Select Committee put the question to the Secretary of State, our understanding was that the completion rate for Apprenticeships had risen to 53% and was continuing to increase at a rate well on course to meet the LSC's 75% target. We were subsequently encouraged when Mr Johnson used his speech at the Labour party conference to say that increasing Apprenticeships places would be his priority for the Comprehensive Spending Review—the only reference to the CSR in the speech.

63. As indicated earlier, our surveys have indicated that many more employers would like to become involved in Apprenticeships but current funding restrictions are preventing many from participating. Age restrictions are also adversely affecting take-up. This is leaving many young people under the age of 25 unable to get on a suitable programme and many of their employers disillusioned with the system.

64. Apprenticeships are the most truly demand led skills delivery programme there is—an employer and young person seeking training for a labour market based skill need already identified as economically necessary. Too often unnecessary barriers are put in the way and motivated young people and employers are “turned off”, and much needed training fails to take place. Employers put off from Apprenticeships all too often offer only limited training targeted at their own short-term employer need rather than a comprehensive Apprenticeship programme with its broader, more transferable, elements included.

65. While we support moves for the sector skills councils to have a properly defined role in the design of qualifications (and ALP's members have formed sector networks to liaise closely with the councils on all matters of mutual interest), we are concerned about reports that some SSCs are looking to water down the common elements of Apprenticeships for their sectors. ALP does not wish to see ten years of hard work undone in terms of establishing Apprenticeships as a highly regarded post-16 education and career-building option.

QUALIFICATIONS

66. Although we were disappointed that Tomlinson was not adopted in full, ALP supports the FE white paper's proposals on qualifications, in particular the new framework for accrediting learning. We are working closely with bodies such as the QCA, QIA and LLUK on the qualification reforms for both learners and trainers to ensure that the system recognises the particular characteristics of work based learning.

14–19 SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS

67. Rather than trying to predict what specific skills might be needed in the future—a singularly futile exercise if past experience is anything to go by—there needs to be a focus on developing the basic and more “generic” skills during statutory education and then to concentrate on job specific skills in the workplace. It is essential that policy initiatives and implementation strategies can respond swiftly to demand, from both individual and employer. Whilst strategies can often all too easily seem to become supply side driven, it is also clear that greater involvement of practitioners is needed from the earliest stages of their development, to ensure that they are workable, and do not have unintended (damaging) consequences elsewhere. Currently we are very concerned that the development of the new specialist Diplomas is going off in the wrong direction.

68. There is a real and widely held fear that the concept of specialist Diplomas, which was designed to introduce young people to the type of vocational training they would all have to tackle at some stage (including graduates) and actually start to develop some usable skills, is being hijacked by the world of general education. They are in danger of becoming just another academically based part of the curriculum, offering students just a knowledge of skills and work. To be successful they need the widespread involvement of employers in a real work environment, offering a valuable “world of work” introduction to all students, together with a rigorous and more detailed introduction to skills for the many at age 14 who would be better suited to a vocational, rather than academically based, curriculum.

69. The providers who have this employer contact and involvement at the core of their operations are work based learning (WBL) providers. These are predominantly independent providers, but do include a proportion of FE colleges. Currently the 14–16 Partnerships that are being formed to develop this exciting and vital new curriculum are predominantly based around schools and colleges, with many schools feeling they can do it themselves, and indeed can “go it alone”. The lack of automatic involvement of WBL providers, bringing with them the employers so vital for this key initiative to be successful, will lead to the failure yet again to bring the concept of vocational/skill development that every youngster will eventually have to embrace into the core curriculum for all 14–16-year-olds.

APPENDIX

THE LEITCH REVIEW OF SKILLS

INTRODUCING A “DEMAND-LED” SYSTEM: A PROPOSED APPROACH FROM THE ASSOCIATION OF LEARNING PROVIDERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Association of Learning Providers (ALP) strongly supports the principle of a demand-led system in the interests of employers and individual learners.
2. The goal should be to develop an account/voucher approach as the route to deliver a truly “demand-led” market for the dispersal of publicly funded skills monies.
3. This should be reached within 2–4 years.
4. All LSC-funded providers should have access to what is currently referred to as FE college and WBL funding.
5. National and regional skill needs should be agreed with sector skills councils and regional skills partnerships.
6. Government PSA targets should be regularly reviewed in the light of point 5 above
7. A new series of skill products should be agreed and listed by the LSC and the other funding agencies, indicating which ones they will be prepared to fully or part fund.
8. Eventually employers and individuals should be able to “claim” their training package with any “approved” provider of their choice.
9. For all programmes, it should be the quality of the provider’s service and performance, not the type or size of provider, which should determine the awarding of a contract.
10. During an interim period of two to three years, providers should agree one-year funding envelopes of LSC funding based on an agreed plan. They should however be able to “vire” between approved skill products to meet real-time in year demand from employers/individuals.
11. The interim period should trial at least two methods of enabling the LSC to re-allocate money “in year” from under performing providers to those “in demand”.
12. Payments to providers should ultimately be made monthly against invoice.

1. *The need to define “demand-led”*

The Association of Learning Providers, which represents Britain’s vocational and work based learning providers, strongly supports a national skills strategy based on a demand-led system.

The Further Education White Paper brought forward the re-positioning of the current publicly funded skills arrangements, envisaging a more rapid move towards a system that more directly responded to the immediate “demands” of employers and individuals. It re-introduced the concept of learning accounts, re-opening the ideas of a decade ago which explored the possibility of a “voucher” system—one whereby individuals and possibly employers used redeemable training vouchers to pay, or part pay, for publicly funded skills training.

This new, or if not new, accelerated thinking, challenges both the pace and some of the tenets of the Learning and Skills Council’s *Agenda for Change* proposals. Overall the white paper’s proposals fully support the move towards a fully “open market” provider infrastructure that ultimately is able to respond and deliver training instantly to the demands of both employers and individuals. ALP applauds the determination to move away from a supply-side dominated market to a demand-side model.

When the proposals were published in March, ALP’s chief executive, Graham Hoyle, was quoted as saying: “The white paper is a further step in a series of government reforms on skills provision that have been heading in the right direction for some time. However, we believe that the forces of global competition require a more urgent programme for action if skills gaps are to be closed. The Government needs therefore to be much bolder in opening up existing provision as well as new provision to new providers.”

ALP understands that Lord Leitch may make a similar recommendation his final report on the Review of Skills and we are very encouraged by this.

That said, ALP also believes that the changes envisaged are profound and need to be planned with care and a full understanding of the implications of such changes. It also realises that there will be many tensions and even contradictory objectives to be accommodated.

Responding to a queue of voucher holders whilst needing to maintain budgetary control and operate within the planning guidance of both sectoral (sector skills council) and regional (regional skills partnership or city-region) voices will not be a simple nor straightforward operation. Meeting government priorities and targets offers up further tensions; for example, what might be the implications for the mix of programmes within Train to Gain and outside it, such as apprenticeships and Skills for Life?

If there is more local autonomy, we need to consider what challenges are posed for contracting with providers and consistency in approach. We will certainly want to avoid post-code lotteries for employers and learners in terms of provision. Indeed the future desired picture is immediately reminiscent of the tensions being experienced within the National Health Service where the demands from the population and the constraints of both government priorities and funding are rarely if ever evenly matched.

The final report of the Leitch Review can therefore make a very important contribution to the national skills strategy by addressing some of these issues and moving us beyond rhetoric that has been interpreted in different ways. It is important because the term “demand-led” raises expectations, particularly among employers, that if there is a demand for a particular programme, eg apprenticeships, then it will be met. The system also needs to recognise better that employers find the frequent funding cut-off for training provision for employees at age 19 very difficult to comprehend. In other words, we need to find ways to avoid disaffection among employers and learners if demand cannot be fully met, even if it is for perfectly valid reasons.

While not pretending to have all of the required solutions, this ALP paper suggests how a truly demand-led system could be introduced.

2. *No skewed or protectionist market after 2010*

The first thing which is very clear is that a “real-time” responsive system will not be found unless it is built solely on a network of providers who are prepared and competent to operate within a culture of immediacy, flexibility and customer responsiveness.

Artificial protection of any provider or type of provider, whether that be via a loaded funding system or any other skewed market mechanism, will quickly end hope of any meaningful progress.

The principle should be clearly laid down for all programmes that it is the quality of the provider’s service and performance, not the type or size of provider, which should determine the awarding of a contract.

We should plan for a system that will deliver real time, fully customer responsive arrangements in two to four years time, ie by 2010–11. While we welcome the attempt to inject some urgency into the reforms, we have great difficulty understanding why, according to the White Paper, it should require a further five years after 2010 to open up the adult skills budget from 40% to 50%.

3. *How a demand-led system should be informed*

The system should be informed annually by the needs as expressed by the sector skills councils (SSCs) and regional skills partnerships (RSPs), which should drive government training policies and priorities.

These would identify the skill needs and product lines (apprenticeship frameworks, full/part-time qualifications etc) that the Government will fund and those that will need to be funded by employers/individuals.

In the ultimate fully open market, any “approved” provider should be free to build their own business via direct sales/marketing and any referrals from brokers, free of pre-determined “contract caps” recognising that they will nevertheless be operating in an ultimately financially capped market. This is in reality true of most markets and is fully understood by most businesses.

Funding agencies, such as the LSC, Ufi and Jobcentre Plus, should show much greater transparency in how budgets are allocated and contracts are awarded, eg by publishing guidelines issued by a national office to their regional offices.

The role of intermediaries or brokers should be clearly and tightly defined, ie they should not interfere with a genuine choice expressed by an employer or learner.

4. *A proposed approach to making the system work*

In the interim, there needs to be a short period of two to three years whilst the provider market is re-positioned and prepared for the new arrangements. Care will need to be taken not to commit funds to existing providers that unfairly position them when the new arrangements come fully into place.

During this interim period, all providers should be invited to draw up two to three year plans showing how they anticipate delivering against the outline skills needs as expressed, for example, by the LSC. This should show the range of LSC funded products and their expected mix. One year funding “envelopes” should then be agreed and a contract awarded.

Providers should then be free to respond to real time employer/individual demand, by viring across the outline product mix as real demand dictates. Providers should keep the LSC regularly informed about how the actual “mix” is changing to enable the LSC and DfES to understand what is happening in the market. Providers should be free to change the mix of provision, in response to real demand without having to modify or reconcile the contracted resources. The actual mix and notional costs will inform the negotiation of the following year’s contract.

Such an arrangement however will cause a major problem where providers prove unable in the event to find enough “customers” to make full use of their contracted resources. Clearly it would be unacceptable for any provider to retain significant funds for delivery not in the event carried out. Compounding the problem would be the unavailability of transferring the resources to another provider whose products were in demand from either employers or individuals, or both.

A contract/arrangement should be developed that effectively allows the LSC to re-call money from the provider “in-year” where total delivery is clearly going to fail to meet—in total—the volumes previously agreed. Such an arrangement will be difficult as providers will be naturally and optimistically inclined to argue that all will be right later in the year. Nevertheless this should be explored and trialled. This will enable a level of cash to be transferred “in-year” to providers better able to respond to real-time demand. Complete openness and honesty on the part of providers would enable such an approach to work. It would nevertheless be quite easy for unscrupulous providers to abuse such an approach—if only for a year.

5. *An alternative approach*

A second approach would release a portion of the budget at the start of the year, with the LSC retaining the balance to allocate throughout the year against clear and proven demand. This might superficially appear similar to the *Agenda for Change* proposal for a core/commissioned approach. It would be different however in that it would be used for “in-year” transfers of funds, and the up front contract would offer far less than the 90–95% or even 98% core suggested under *Agenda for Change*.

Year 1 might offer 60% of the total budget up front, with 40% to be accessed progressively during the year. Year 2 might offer 40% up front, with year 3 offering 20%, prior to possibly a completely real-time responsive system in year 4.

Once again, this does not offer a perfect solution and it would still enable some providers to “work the system”. It would nevertheless offer a simple way to move towards a full real time demand led system, progressively transferring the funding arrangements to the new system, offering both providers and the LSC time to identify and remedy flaws or weaknesses as they go.

Under the second approach, the initial allocation could be profiled and automatically paid. The allocation of additional funds, allocated mid-year against actual demand, could be done in the same way. It also might, however, offer the possibility of these additional funds only being paid one month in arrears on receipt of an invoice, possibly trailing this as the new and more normal method of payment of the future, and certainly the logical method in the real-time demand led system.

This would, however, represent a major and potentially difficult change for many, but not all, providers. It is the more normal method of transacting business in the wider business world. Using the interim period carefully would enable all providers to re-visit their cash-flow plans and make appropriate new arrangements where necessary. Whilst this might cause some disquiet amongst some providers, it would be a small price to pay in moving to the truly open market.

It may be that such a move might present too big a risk to the provider infrastructure, even though providers have had years to adjust to the general direction of the Government’s reforms, eg as set out in the launch of the *Success for All* initiative in 2002 and John Healey’s speech at the AoC conference in November, 2003. Good providers have nothing to fear from contestability and therefore the move to a real time demand led approach should not be jettisoned. We should simply focus on finding a cash-flow answer to that specific issue. Not an impossible task!

6. *Interim arrangements*

Urgent discussions should be started involving the LSC, DfES and, critically, providers to consider fully the complex issues that will arise from such a radical change in approach and the opportunity should be taken to pilot several different approaches. The examples above are cited simply to initiate a debate to ensure all of the implications of proposed changes are identified and explored, and where appropriate piloted.

Other vital issues that need to be thoroughly explored with providers include payment arrangements. During the interim period, ie the next two to three years, the agreed funding “envelope” might ideally need to include a payment profile that would be paid without the need to reconcile “actuals” against performance. Under the first approach set out above, the flow of “actual” data would trigger the need to review the contract mid-year either to increase or reduce the agreed funding.

The need for greater financial contributions by employers and learners in respect of some skills programmes is recognised and supported by ALP. However, the implementation and timing of such a policy should be fair so that undue advantage is not given to certain programmes or types of learning. As ALP has urged the Skills Alliance, we also need a properly coordinated strategy to persuade employers and learners that they should be contributing more financially to their learning at higher and intermediate skill levels

A communication strategy is also needed to explain to employers, learners and providers the agreed definition of demand-led. The communications should cover how, why and when demand-led provision will be introduced. This is vital in terms of managing expectations, particularly among employers.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by Institute of Directors (IoD)

ABOUT THE IoD

1. The IoD was founded in 1903 and obtained a Royal Charter in 1906. It is an independent, non-party political organisation of 52,000 individual members. Its aim is to serve, support, represent and set standards for directors to enable them to fulfil their leadership responsibilities in creating wealth for the benefit of business and society as a whole.

2. The IoD's membership is drawn from right across the business spectrum. 85% of FTSE 100 companies and 73% of FTSE 350 companies have IoD members on their boards, but the majority of members, some 70%, comprise directors of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), ranging from long-established businesses to start-up companies. IoD members are entrepreneurial and their organisations growth-orientated. More than two-fifths export. They are also fully committed to skills and training: 97% of members' organisations provide training for their employees, compared to 65% of employers in England.

14–19 SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS

3. One of the questions raised by the Committee in the press notice of 30 November 2006 announcing its skills inquiries concerned the role played by employers in the development of specialised Diplomas. According to the website of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the qualifications are being developed by Diploma Development Partnerships (DDPs), "led by the relevant Sector Skills Councils as representatives of employers."¹³ The IoD has no further information about the constitution of the DDPs, or the work they have been conducting to facilitate employers' input into the composition of the Diplomas. This may have been very thorough. However, a general concern does remain about any tendency to portray Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) as the "voice of business", particularly of small employers. For instance, in a representative survey of 500 IoD members conducted in March 2006, less than a fifth (19%) had heard of the Sector Skills Development Agency or the Sector Skills Councils, and only a handful (3%) were active participants.¹⁴

4. The IoD has also conducted recent (as yet unpublished) research on members' awareness of specialised Diplomas. Directors were asked to assess their level of knowledge about the new qualifications. The results were as follows: Very high/high—6%; Low/very low—24%; Never heard of specialised Diplomas—70%.¹⁵

5. Given that the Diplomas have not yet been introduced, and that the programme will not be fully implemented until 2013,¹⁶ the fact that a high proportion of IoD members has not heard of the qualifications may not be surprising. Nevertheless, the result suggests that few IoD members have been involved in developing Diplomas.¹⁷ It also indicates that the Diploma programme currently has a relatively low profile in the business community. This latter point will require addressing if the impact of the qualifications is to be maximised. Moreover, although much of the Diplomas' extended vocational provision will be supplied by schools directly, the Government wishes all those pursuing a vocational route to have "some good quality engagement with employers".¹⁸ Low awareness of Diplomas among businesses could work against that ambition.

¹³ [ixhttp://www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?sid=3&pid=224&lid=186&ctype=Text&ptype=Single](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?sid=3&pid=224&lid=186&ctype=Text&ptype=Single)

¹⁴ Source: Q1 2006 IoD Business Opinion Survey (fieldwork conducted 20–31 March 2006). The telephone survey was carried out by GfK NOP using a representative sample of 500 IoD members.

¹⁵ This is unpublished data from Q3 2006 IoD Business Opinion Survey (fieldwork conducted 02–10 October 2006). The telephone survey was carried out by GfK NOP using a representative sample of 500 IoD members.

¹⁶ Source: Specialised Diplomas—your questions answered (Department for Education and Skills, October 2006), p 2. The document is available on the DfES website at: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19/documents/14-19%20DfES%20Diplomas%20insert_06.pdf

¹⁷ Having said this, a separate question in the same research survey revealed that approximately one in ten IoD members were involved in developing courses or qualifications with SSCs. It is possible that some of these members may be helping to develop Diplomas.

¹⁸ 14–19 Education and Skills (Department for Education and Skills, Cm 6476, February 2005), paragraph 7.16, p 55. See also paragraph 7.14, p 54.

6. A further factor critical to the successful delivery of the Diplomas is adequate professional development for teachers, a point raised by the Committee in its press notice and recognised by the DfES in its December 2005 Implementation Plan.¹⁹ According to this Plan, the design of teaching and training materials for the first five Diploma lines is due to be completed by June 2007, with professional development for staff commencing in the 2007–08 academic year. The scale of the project makes the avoidance of slippage imperative: the Government estimates that 50,000 young people will start Diplomas in 2008, requiring 5,000 teaching and support staff to be trained to deliver them.²⁰

POST-16 SKILLS TRAINING

National Policy/Issues

7. Skills deficiencies are one of IoD members' prime concerns. The proportion of members' organisations reporting skill shortages (in the wider labour market) and skill gaps (in a company's own workforce) far exceeds the national picture.²¹ Additionally, whereas research by the Learning and Skills Council indicates that skills-related recruitment difficulties and the proportion of employers affected by skill gaps has stabilised or declined in recent years, the IoD's surveys show skill shortages and gaps to have intensified in members' organisations. The impact of these skills deficiencies can be very damaging, increasing operating costs, holding back growth and stymieing innovation.

8. The principal weak spots in the country's education and training system, and in the current skills stock, have been well-documented, most recently in the Leitch Review. Broadly speaking, the IoD believes that the Government's priorities for skills are appropriately targeted, especially the focus on increasing the proportion of the working age population with basic and level 2 skills. Consequently, the IoD supports the Train to Gain programme, though we are aware of anecdotal criticism that it isn't yet sufficiently flexible in the range of qualifications it supports. Moving forward, the scheme should also be able to help meet employers' needs for skills of a higher level than level 2.

9. Other priorities and targets, such as the aim to increase the proportion of adults qualified to level 4, are also important. This is particularly true for IoD members, who typically require more than half of their employees to be qualified to degree level or above. With regard to the Public Service Agreement target to increase participation in higher education towards 50% of those aged 18–30,²² IoD research on the competitiveness of the graduate recruitment market suggests that about a quarter of IoD member organisations recruiting graduates consider there to be too many. However, the majority of graduate-recruiting IoD member organisations believe there to be either about the right number, or too few. For the latter, particular shortage disciplines include engineering and science.

10. Finally, standards in education cannot be divorced from wider considerations about adult skills. Whilst over 70% of the 2020 workforce has already completed compulsory education, most of the recent growth in skills in the working population has come as a result of better-qualified young people entering the workforce and less-qualified older workers leaving it. It is vital that due emphasis is given to what happens in schools. Unfortunately, too many young people continue to leave education without mastery of the "3Rs" or a level 2 qualification. This only serves to perpetuate adult skills deficiencies.

Supply side

11. The research that the IoD has conducted into members' views on the performance of government agencies involved in skills development has generally produced rather downbeat results. The level of knowledge about the role and objectives of bodies such as the Learning and Skills Council, Sector Skills Councils and Regional Development Agencies tends to be rather low.

12. In terms of the responsiveness of the further education (FE) system to employers' needs, however, many IoD members appear to have had more positive experiences than the picture sometimes painted of this sector. A survey in March 2006 showed that 46% of IoD members' organisations used further education colleges to train some of their employees.²³ 55% of those using FE colleges to train employees considered the quality of training provided to be good or better. Only 8% considered it poor or very poor. A variety of other links were also uncovered, with 18% of those surveyed having been contacted by a college for views on the courses it provided, and 16% contacted by a college asking about the organisation's skill needs.

¹⁹ 14–19 Education and Skills Implementation Plan (Department for Education and Skills, December 2005).

²⁰ *Ibid*, paragraph 3.38 (Figure 3.5), p 55; and paragraph 3.31, p 54.

²¹ See: *Who do we think we are? A profile of the IoD membership* (Institute of Directors, March 2006), p 45. One possible explanation for the degree of disparity might lie in the characteristics of members' organisations: growth-oriented businesses that compete on the basis of high skills.

²² For the latest data on the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR), see *Autumn Performance Report 2006. Achievement against Public Service Agreement targets* (Department for Education and Skills, Cm 6992, December 2006), p 53. The provisional figure for 2004–05 is 42%, representing no change on the final 2003–04 figure.

²³ Source: Q1 2006 IoD Business Opinion Survey (fieldwork conducted 20–31 March 2006).

Demand side

13. The Committee questions whether employers feel like they are shaping skills training, for example through the SSCs. The research that the IoD has carried out on this issue is referred to in paragraphs 3 and 11 above, and shows only a small minority of IoD members to be currently involved in an SSC. Perhaps partly as a consequence of this limited level of involvement, IoD members' views on the performance and usefulness of the SSCs thus far tend towards the modest.

14. However, turning to the Committee's query as to whether employers feel closely involved with the design of qualifications, the evidence from the IoD's research is very encouraging. Over a third of IoD members surveyed by GfK NOP in October 2006 said that they or their organisation were involved in the development of courses or qualifications.²⁴ Of those involved in qualification development, most were engaged with universities, awarding bodies and further education colleges.

15. On providing incentives to increase the take-up of training—particularly among small employers—this remains a much better approach than introducing compulsory investment in training, which the IoD opposes.²⁵ For consistency, any further incentives should most probably be channelled through the Train to Gain programme. It is vital that Train to Gain be promoted effectively to employers, for example through representative organisations such as the IoD. The recent changes of name that have marked the evolution of the initiative (from the Employer Training Pilots, to the National Employer Training Programme, to Train to Gain), are unlikely to have helped bolster its profile among businesses.

Apprenticeships

16. The last research the IoD conducted into Apprenticeships was published in 2003.²⁶ Two key weaknesses were highlighted in particular: the quality of work-based training provision and framework completion rates. The transformation of the first of these must be regarded as a remarkable success story. In 2001–02, 58% of work-based learning providers were judged by the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) to be inadequate to meet the needs of learners. By 2005–06, the proportion had fallen to 12%.²⁷

17. Although Apprenticeship success rates have also improved, 60% still do not complete the whole framework.²⁸ The recent ALI annual report noted that Apprenticeship success rates lower than 50% persisted in many areas of learning, a situation the Chief Inspector described as “wholly unacceptable”.²⁹

18. The IoD disagreed with the Government's decision to incorporate the ALI's remit within the new Ofsted, and has concerns about the possible consequences for adult learning. At the very least, this is a very sensitive time to pass responsibility for inspecting programmes such as Apprenticeships to a new organisation.

19. With regard to Apprenticeship frameworks themselves, the IoD made a number of recommendations in its 2003 policy paper, such as permitting the inclusion of other industry standard qualifications as alternatives to the NVQ; replacing the key skills qualifications with a minimum entry requirement of GCSEs at A*–C in English and mathematics; and the inclusion of Technical Certificates into all Apprenticeships. The rules on Technical Certificates were modified in 2005, with the effect that the knowledge element of an Apprenticeship no longer has to take the form of a separate qualification. Clearly, the appropriate content of Apprenticeships is determined by SSCs in consultation with employers in their sector. Nevertheless, as a guiding principle, the theoretical knowledge underpinning an Apprenticeship should be protected as a central feature.

Qualifications

20. It has become a received wisdom that the qualifications system is confusing, convoluted and difficult for employers to understand. A large number of qualifications is taken automatically to breed bewilderment and uncertainty.³⁰ In fact, the IoD's research in this area has shown the situation to be far less clear cut. An NOP survey of IoD members in September 2005 showed that 66% of directors were familiar with the range of vocational qualifications in their sector. 53% thought that the number of qualifications in their sector was about right, 17% that there were not enough, and only 11% that there were too many.³¹ A further IoD survey

²⁴ Unpublished data from Q3 2006 IoD Business Opinion Survey (fieldwork conducted 02–10 October 2006).

²⁵ Though more limited forms of compulsion may be appropriate in certain circumstances. For instance, IoD members support the concept of “licences to practice” for workers such as electricians, plumbers, care home staff and railway track maintenance engineers. Introducing licences to practice might also have the beneficial consequence of helping to raise the status of vocational qualifications.

²⁶ *Modern Apprenticeships: an assessment of the Government's flagship training programme* (Institute of Directors, August 2003).

²⁷ The Final Annual Report of the Chief Inspector (Adult Learning Inspectorate, December 2006), p 7.

²⁸ *Further Education and work-based learning for young people—learner outcomes in England 2004/05* (Learning and Skills Council, ILR/SFR10, 11 April 2006), Table 7.

²⁹ The Final Annual Report of the Chief Inspector (Adult Learning Inspectorate, December 2006), p 6.

³⁰ The same presumption has driven the Government to reduce the number of business support schemes.

³¹ *Vocational qualifications: current issues, Government responsibilities and employer opportunities* (Institute of Directors, January 2006, pp 4–5).

conducted in October 2006, whose results have not yet been published, revealed slightly less decisive results, but still with a majority of members familiar with the range of vocational qualifications in their sector, and just a small minority considering there to be too many vocational qualifications.

21. It is true that 115 accredited awarding bodies and a national qualifications framework containing more than 4,000 qualifications sound large numbers. There are also many thousands more awards developed by awarding bodies in response to employer and learner needs that are not recognised in the national framework. However, the UK is a modern capitalist market economy, with 4.3 million businesses, where employment is increasingly specialised and where there are many different types of jobs. That there is consequently a variety of awarding bodies offering many different qualifications is not surprising. It is also a good thing—an effective market in qualifications should result in awarding bodies competing to develop and offer courses and qualifications that meet the needs of employers and learners. It is also worth noting that a single employer will not be faced by all of these qualifications at once—the organisation will primarily be concerned with the range of awards in its economic sector. A focus on the overall number of qualifications can therefore be misleading.

January 2007

Supplementary memorandum submitted by Institute of Directors (IoD)

In view of the Education and Skills Select Committee's discussion of the development of new Diplomas for 14–19-year-olds at its meeting on 17 January, I am writing to clarify the IoD's position on this important issue.

I am particularly concerned that the IoD's view may have been misunderstood, and that members of your Committee may have been left with a completely misleading impression about where the IoD stands.

You will recall that the IoD's Head of Education and Skills, Mike Harris, submitted written evidence on 5 January, and this stands as an accurate representation of our views.

In his questions to oral witnesses on 17 January, Rob Wilson MP referred to our written comment that "The IoD has no further information about the constitution of the DDPs, or the work they have been conducting to facilitate employers' input into the composition of the Diplomas". This statement was not remotely intended as criticism; it simply meant what it said: that we were not in a position to offer the Committee any detailed insight on this particular point. Our written evidence naturally concentrated on those issues where we could contribute survey evidence from our members.

Mr Wilson went on to suggest that the IoD had been excluded from consultation on the new Diplomas. This is simply not the case. As Dr Ken Boston and Karen Price both noted in response to questions, I have met both the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and e-skills to discuss the full range of their activities. I consider that we have a good dialogue with these important bodies.

Employer involvement is central to the success of the new Diplomas and the IoD remains keen to contribute on behalf of our members. It would be quite wrong for your Committee to be left with the impression that the IoD had been excluded from these discussions, but it also remains true that an extensive communication process will be needed to really involve a wide range of businesses in the process.

I would be grateful if you could add this note to the official record in order to ensure that the IoD's position is clearly understood.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by 157 Group

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The 157 Group of large General FE Colleges serves 0.5 million students and together have a turnover of approaching £1 billion. It is likely that many of the citizens undertaking Skills training will be served by these colleges.

2. The memorandum outlines the key role that FE Colleges can play in developing and delivering the government's skills strategy. This starts with leadership of the 14–16 vocational curriculum through to the awarding of foundation degrees. At 16+ the majority of students with less than five A–C GCSE grades are to be found in General FE colleges. Most of them have vocational ambitions but many employers would consider them lacking employability skills. If this tail of underachievement is to be tackled, serious investment is required in students studying at level 2 and below. It should be possible for some lower level NVQ qualifications to be achieved in college facilities where effective work simulation can take place. Colleges should be encouraged to develop flexible roll-on, roll-off facilities for year round recruitment. The DWP 16 hour rule should be consigned to the dustbin.

3. The need at a regional level for the LSC, Development Agency and Skills Partnership to work together to a shared agenda is highlighted. Self regulating networks of providers emerging at sub-regional level are advocated to take forward the role currently undertaken by LSC regional offices. The broker network should be seen as a temporary catalyst leading to a much strengthened interface between provider networks and employers. The interface with schools and local authorities is equally important. Further major structural and institutional changes should be resisted. IAG for adults can be delivered by colleges and Local Authorities with good web based back up as part of their existing customer networks. The LSC, JC+ and the LA must agree a local strategy for serving the non-waged that is set out in the Local Area Agreement and is part of the funding negotiation between the LSC and the LA over the Adult and Community Learning budget.

4. The impact of the rising fee expectation needs to be measured carefully and actions taken to protect communities with low family incomes and a weak economic base to avoid a widening of the participation gap. Current policies may also have an adverse impact on level 3 adult participation and this will need to be monitored.

5. An extension of “licence to practise” is advocated backed by legislation and an implementation timetable led by Sector Skills Councils. Train 2 Gain should be extended to level 4 qualifications. The HE target should include the full range of qualifications and encompassing adults up to the age of 40. There should be a “test the nation” challenge to encourage everyone to test their numeracy and literacy skills that links to Learning Accounts and Learner Records.

6. Apprenticeship programmes should be extended to level 1 and 4 with brokers charged with expanding the number of apprentice places being offered by employers.

7. Finally the need to speed up progress on the development of a Sector Skills Councils led national adult qualification framework is signalled. They should link to the “licence to operate” and “master craftsman” status in each sector. It is necessary to ensure that the basic skills curriculum and the funding methodology link to these frameworks and that a unitised curriculum is fundable.

INTRODUCTION

8. The 157 Group of Colleges represent 23 of the largest General FE Colleges in England with 0.5 million students and a combined turnover approaching £1 billion. Together they cover the nine LSC regions and play a key role in delivering the Government’s Skills agenda. 157 Group Principals seek to fulfil the wish expressed in paragraph 157 of Sir Andrew Foster’s report *Realising the Potential* “[. . .] to explain the services Colleges give to society and how colleges can make a significant contribution to the economy and to developing fulfilled citizens”.

CONTEXT: LEITCH AND THE SKILLS STRATEGY

9. The Leitch Report clearly and rightly articulates the key role that skills play in the prosperity of the UK economy. It highlights the gap between the skills profile of the UK population with our key competitors. It particularly emphasises the gap at Levels 3 and 4, the Advanced Technical, Supervisory and Intermediate Management level. These are areas where FE colleges can and do make a major contribution. Given the reputation of colleges as one of the more responsive and flexible parts of the education system it is reasonable to ask why we have this problem.

10. In part, it is a reflection of the strong academic focus of the English education system which seeks to produce graduates, following a relatively short full-time study route, at a relatively young age in areas often with limited vocational applications. Many of these graduates in turn choose to follow a career in the academic or the public sector. The graduate intake into commerce and manufacturing, especially into medium and smaller sized companies, is less well developed than in many other countries.

11. The Government recognises the need to strengthen the vocational/technical routes at level 2 and 3, in particular by encouraging the growth of Apprenticeships and then to encourage part-time degree level study using the practical Foundation degree as a key vehicle.

12. Colleges have grasped this part-time route with enthusiasm given the sector’s tradition of National and Higher National Certificates. Too often Universities have looked to the full-time route converting their Diplomas to full-time Foundation degrees. It is much more likely that firms will support their promising employees in their 20’s and early 30’s to continue their studies if the provision is directly relevant to their work and if it is delivered in a sufficiently flexible fashion. For the larger firm this may be in the work-place, for the smaller company it will often be in the employee’s own time and needs to be delivered using the maximum support from modern e-technologies supported by workshops and ready access to tutors on-line. The University for Industry might have developed along these lines but it has instead focused on short cost effective, just-in-time learning materials. Regrettably, the proportion of Advanced Apprentices continuing to Foundation degrees is still small. The author’s institution is currently working with British Telecom to deliver a Foundation degree that follows on from an Advanced Apprenticeship, but this is not currently the norm. An early extension of Train 2 Gain to the level 4 NVQ and Foundation Degree areas could be a valuable stimulus to these developments.

13. Many employers grumble that graduates follow interesting but academic degree programmes that have little relevance to their future career path. This is why they talk of graduate apprentice programmes. These are typically in-house company programmes used to bring graduates up to the level of their younger apprentice trainee standards. This route is only peripherally recognised by the main-stream education system. Though some HE institutions, such as Staffordshire University, are willing to accredit these in-house programmes their currency rests largely on the reputation of the company providing such training. It is clearly worth exploring the accreditation of in-company training programmes below HE level in parallel with the Sector Skills Councils' work devising sector wide approved qualifications. Such programmes can be mapped against the sector standard, not necessarily to force the company to fill in the gaps but rather to provide portability for the employee who may wish to develop their learning into a full qualification. They might do this with the help of Individual Learning Accounts in their own time or with help from a future employer.

14. Behind this current landscape is the debate about the new 14–19 Specialised Diplomas. It is fair to say that these Diplomas will have to be skilfully designed and positioned if they are not just to become a means of bolstering the academic route with the lightest of vocational seasoning.

15. Educationalists often forget that productivity depends on more than the skills of the workforce. However good the skills and qualification systems, productivity will also depend on levels of capital investment and the skills of leadership and management that bring together capital and labour and apply them to meeting a well identified market opportunity. A weakness at any point in this triangle can have significant implications for productivity and competitiveness. For maximum impact government needs to focus on the three elements. It is increasingly recognised that leadership and management skills are a key precursor in any organisation to a workforce development plan. This is recognised by Regional Skills Partnerships, such as that in the West Midlands, who have, in partnership with the RDA invested strongly in Leadership, Management and Enterprise development in medium sized companies who can provide the key drivers of economic growth in a regional economy.

16. It should also be noted that the skills of the workforce do not necessarily equate to the number of pieces of paper that each employee obtains during their career. The Government should be careful that it is measuring the right target. It is instructive to reflect on why the Government wishes to move from targets in schools that focus on five GCSE's at level C or above and is now concerned to capture the distance travelled by each student. They have recognised that our current system has a very long trail of underachievement that threatens not only our economic prosperity but also our social well being. The move from achievement at specific times to achievement when each individual is ready is to be applauded. This must be carried through into the post-16 funding model. The bulk of this long tail find themselves on Foundation, level 1 and 2 programmes in FE colleges. With the disappearance of low skill jobs intensive work is required to move these students up to level 3 standards. Some of this remedial work can be carried out through a more joined up approach to 14–16 education with colleges entrusted to the lead role for the vocational strand which would include the new specialist Diplomas.

Recommendations

1. Government should support the part-time Foundation degree route through the FE sector with its legislative plans to allow FE Colleges to develop and validate Foundation degrees.
2. Companies should be incentivised to train their workforce to Advanced Apprenticeship and Foundation degree level by the extension of Train 2 Gain to level 3 and 4 qualifications.
3. Sector Skills Councils should map and accredit company training schemes in such a way as to enable employees to convert this learning into full qualifications possibly through the support of Individual Learning Accounts.
4. The new specialist Diplomas must provide a genuine route into vocational education. This is only likely to be achieved by a significant input and support from the FE sector.
5. The Government should consider productivity and competitiveness as the interaction of leadership and management, human and physical capital investment. This requires joined up thinking and policies. At a regional level this can be encouraged by the Regional Development Agencies and the links between leadership, management and enterprise can be explored through the Regional Skills Partnerships.
6. The Government should build on the moves towards personalised learning in schools by strengthening the funding of level 1 and 2 students in college post-16. This will enhance the effectiveness of remedial work on the long tail of underperformance inherited from the schools sector.
7. The Government should enable colleges to take the lead role in vocationalising the 14–19 curriculum through appropriate funding structures and planning expectations including a lead responsibility for the introduction of the new specialist Diplomas

 NATIONAL POLICY/ISSUES

17. Like all policy priorities the focus on “level 2” qualifications runs the risk of distorting the market. There is much evidence that despite the demonstrable value of level 3 qualifications, many industries and individuals are prepared to leave their qualifications at level 2. This is particularly pronounced in construction and service sectors such as retail, hairdressing and catering. There is a culture of good enough. Paradoxically where there is a clear requirement at level 2 of a “licence to practice” in areas such as health and care and increasingly in construction there is clear evidence of a willingness to pay. Colleges have consequently seen a drop in fee income as a result of the right to a first level 2 with out a pick up of fees at level 3 to compensate. The level 3 Train 2 Gain trial in the West Midlands and the North West has been a near disaster as it attempts to persuade level 3 students to pay 50% of the fees. Initial enrolments were minute. With ministerial support the rates have now been reduced to about one-third. The effectiveness of this move is currently being tested. This however should be a strong warning sign that the swift move to raise fee contributions, endorsed by Leitch needs to be reviewed. There is a real danger that the result will be a reduction in level 3 achievements over the coming years. This is a key area for the economy.

18. The 50% target has always been arbitrary. In the UK we have had a relatively tight policy over access to HE at 18+ but high retention and achievement rates. Other countries have had a more open access approach but with high wastage rates. The UK system is relatively cost effective. If the evidence shows that retention and achievement can be maintained then the target has its merits. A more significant measure might be the proportion of the population qualified at level 4 by say age 40. This would then encourage those in employment to continue their education and training well into their career and embrace NVQs, Higher Diploma and Certificates plus a range of Professional qualifications such as Accounting Technician, Care Manager etc.

19. Colleges still have to cope with a range of funding and data systems despite the government being the ultimate funder in each case. Core LSC funding has different requirements from work based learning (apprenticeships), which differs from Train 2 Gain, which differs from European Social Fund projects, which differs from Individual Learning Accounts, which differs from a range of Job Centre+ funding streams which differs from HEFCE funded programmes. We await the promised transfer of all funding for training the unemployed from JC+ to the LSC. Even if this happens it is possible that different funding approaches will apply. Perhaps Job Seekers can be a key group to trial Individual Learning Accounts.

20. Funding structures are still strongly predicated towards the achievement of full qualifications. Provider performance is also measured against full qualifications. This militates against a flexible response except in the cases where the employer or student is willing to fully fund the training. It is the largest single complaint from employers that unless they sign up their staff for a full qualification then they can receive no funding support. The whole Train 2 Gain initiative is predicated on the achievement of the qualification. 50% of the funding is generated from the enrolment and the rest is paid on full achievement. Most employers focus on the skills needs of their staff not the qualification. Employees tend to have a greater interest in the qualification because it offers portability. There must be something wrong with our qualification structure if there is such a significant gap. It is noticeable how few employers are actively involved with their Sector Skills Councils and recognise that the qualifications have been designed to meet there needs.

21. Qualifications need to be structured into relatively small components of study that develop worthwhile skills but don't cover everything that might be required in all circumstances. These core skills can have separately funded extension studies to meet particular employer's needs. The core forms the basis of the national framework and the Sector Skills Councils' map and accredit the extension curriculum. There should be a general presumption that an employer knows his needs best. The Sector Skills Councils' would assist SMEs to build a curriculum to meet their needs. It could be that the national core attracts generous public funding regardless of level and the employer pays for the majority of the extension skills.

22. It is difficult to give a clear answer to the balance question. The government's line that the balance of benefit to the community or the individual is a key determinant is eminently logical. It needs to be overlain with an understanding of the ability to pay issue. Many large General FE Colleges find themselves at the heart of deprived communities with family income levels well below the average. In Stoke-On-Trent for example income levels are 25% below the West Midlands' average. It is in such communities that the impact of government policy is most pronounced and where the needs for skills are most urgent. Price elasticity of demand is high and education and training are the areas to suffer when disposable income is at a premium. The family experience and state of the local job market do not make the benefits of high skills and qualifications immediately obvious. It becomes a leap of faith. Over seven years Stoke-On-Trent College built up student numbers from 24,000 to 40,000 but in the last three years they have fallen back to 30,000. The trend looks set to continue as increases bite. If the college doesn't apply the increases it risks insolvency.

Recommendations

1. Review carefully the impact of fee increases on participation before implementing the Leitch recommendations in full.

2. Explore the benefits of extending the licence to practice requirements across most craft and professional areas and then review the policy on free provision.
3. Extend the target age for achieving level 4 qualifications to 40 and embrace NVQ 4 and professional qualifications.
4. Monitor closely the trend in achievement of level 3 qualifications and in sectors where there is currently little level 3 training explore the needs for employer and employee incentives.
5. Focus all government education and training funds through a single channel and require the funder to devise an integrated funding and data collection system.
6. Reduce the scope of Vocational Qualifications to a national core, generously funded and encourage employers working with their Sector Skills Councils to develop extension training that fits their specific needs.
7. Develop a system of funding support that reflects both the balance of community/ individual benefits and the situation of deprived communities with low income and poor qualification profiles.

SUPPLY SIDE

23. Leitch suggests that the LSC becomes a funding conduit rather than a planning body for adult provision. The government envisages a planning partnership at local level for 16–19 provision between the Local Authority and the LSC. Skills training doesn't comfortably divide at 19+. It is arguable that apprentice training and adult skills training are a continuum. In both cases employer engagement is crucial. A strong FE sector with well developed local networks should be able to develop and sustain strong supply chain structures with employers. The American Community College model demonstrates this very successfully in many states. The current training broker network should be seen as an interim measure to kick start that relationship. It can easily become another bureaucratic hurdle to overcome rather than a catalyst. It brings a significant financial overhead that reduces the money available to support training. Interesting work is currently being undertaken to identify the contribution colleges make to the local economy based on USA and Canadian models.

24. The current FE Sector is very diverse with some large college and private sector providers and many smaller providers. There has been significant rationalisation in recent years, in part performance driven (encouraged by the LSC and Inspection regimes) and in part finance driven. Train 2 Gain is encouraging collaborative working either through regional or sector groupings. Often these groups encompass both private and public sector providers. By funding these groups through lead institutions who are held responsible for meeting contract volumes and quality standards a national system is beginning to develop that reduces the need for intermediaries. The next step is to entrust these networks with the task of identifying local training needs through their supply chain networks. This becomes the self regulation system that is enjoyed by the American Community College system. Incidentally this model fits well with the move to enable FE colleges to accredit Foundation degrees.

25. If the LSC continued to operate at regional level it could deal with five or six such groups which might each serve an area akin to a county (replacing the local offices of the LSC). The sector specific structure could operate as a matrix with specialist providers in each network cooperating across a region and with national sector skills academies. The 157 Group of colleges are well placed to act as change agents to develop such networks given their size and quality standing.

26. The idea of self regulating networks is attractive as all will have an interest in the performance of the group as a whole and none will want to face exclusion. The Government through the LSC can drive this process forward through the funding lever.

27. The LSC currently is an effective mechanism for translating government policy into operational process. It provides the funding conduit and it is able to measure and report progress towards national targets. The government will always need some organisation to carry out those functions. In many parts of the country the LSC regionally has developed strong working relationships with the Development Agencies and the Regional Skills Partnership. This triumvirate is well placed to review regional priorities and measure progress. In the West Midlands this is well supported by a Regional Observatory that maps the region's economic health and skills profile.

28. As the sector continues to grow in maturity and confidence so empowerment should increase and inevitably the need for an LSC infrastructure will decline though not disappear. Rather like brokers, organisations such as the Quality Improvement Agency and Centre for Excellence in Leadership should be regarded as interim bodies that will help the sector towards high performance and self regulation and then wind themselves up or be directly supported by the sector as is the case with the AoC.

29. The current situation faced by colleges and other providers wishing to respond swiftly to employer demand is one of some frustration. All contacts that require T2G funding have to be referred to a broker even if the company and provider have an established and effective relationship. Brokers will require significant information, may put the work out to competitive tender and may take some time to provide an employer account number that is the key to funding. If the employer doesn't want a qualification on the approved list either no funding is forthcoming and the college is seen as unresponsive, or a protracted

negotiation may take place with the local LSC office, the outcome of which is uncertain. Problems also arise if the employer is designated as large or if some of its activity falls outside regional boundaries. At such times it is difficult to recognise the LSC as a national organisation. Usually problems can be resolved but sometimes the delays are unacceptable, especially from the perspective of an employer who interprets it as government red tape.

30. Further structural reform is often unwelcome and can significantly distract managers from their prime improvement targets. Lord Foster in his report strongly backed an incremental approach to reform rather than structural reorganisation. Given a whole series of very positive improvement indicators across the sector it may be more appropriate to look at the interface between college and employer and between college and schools and local authorities rather than redefine institutions. This has already happened and will continue to happen with the right incentives. Providers know they have to meet quality benchmarks and survive in a tough financial climate. The need is to ensure that like independent school academies and trusts, colleges are seen to fit within a local 14–19 curriculum offer as full partners with the local authority. At the same time for adult provision the reach needs to be greater and hence the advocacy of sub-regional networks serving a broad business and mobile adult student community. The emerging leadership from within the sector, given appropriate encouragement and support will effectively move the agenda forward.

Recommendations

1. Support and encourage networks of providers to develop strong training supply chains with employers, using brokers as a catalyst in the early stages but ensuring that they don't become a bureaucratic obstacle to close employer/provider links.
2. Encourage the development of self-regulating provider networks with lead providers that work with the regional LSC to serve sub-regions. These networks would assume the functions of local LSC offices as they demonstrate maturity.
3. Encourage close working relationships between the regional LSC, Skills Partnerships and Development Agencies to address regional priorities and track performance.
4. Engage in a dialogue with the sector to identify how it sees the relationship with supporting agencies change as it grows in maturity.
5. Urgently address the relationship between employer, provider, broker and the LSC to remove obstacles to timely and responsive delivery of training such as artificial geographic boundaries or undue bureaucratic process.
6. Focus on the interface with employers and schools/ local authorities rather than changing institutional structures. Encourage through funding and development initiatives the emergence of self-regulating networks that will facilitate that interface.

DEMAND SIDE

31. In classical economics the demand comes from the buyer with the purchasing power and supply comes from the producer with the product the consumer wants at a price they are willing to pay. In education and training there is such a market for products such as consultancy and management training largely untouched by the public sector. Business Schools such as Warwick, though in the public sector, derive the bulk of their income from charges to business. To date the bulk of funding for FE Colleges has come from public sources, typically 70–95%. For many private providers operating in the apprenticeship market the picture is similar. It is generally accepted that the planned and public funded model is appropriate up to the age of 19 (and beyond in substantial measure for HE). With the level 2 entitlement and the soon to be introduced level 3 entitlement up to 25, this model continues for “young adult” learners. Where the state funds the training it quite reasonably sets the rules which is where the conflict with employer “demand led” starts to bite. If the state believes that education is an entitlement and a strategic necessity for the nation for all up to 18 it is likely to have to shoulder the lion's share of the cost.

32. For the adult workforce the upskilling imperative is obvious to the nation as it faces international competition. This isn't always so obvious to employers many of whom are small and see themselves serving a local market untouched by international competition. Their response is often to stay small or seek to recruit from the pool of skilled labour that someone else has trained. Large firm, in general, have always taken their training responsibilities seriously. Without government intervention it is still not clear that SMEs would act any differently from the historic norm, driven by the short term profit imperative. It is far from clear that Sector Skills Councils have had much impact on the SME sector. The providers and to a lesser extent the brokers have been able to “bribe” some reluctant employers into accepting free training for their workforce but this is hardly “demand-led”. As we have seen recently take up of level 3 qualifications has been patchy when a 50% contribution has been sought.

33. As suggested above a tradition of a highly skilled and qualified work force is unlikely to happen by voluntary means alone. Leitch has hinted at legislation to follow if voluntary agreements supported by the CBI don't deliver. Where licences to practice are required in industries such as gas, road haulage and financial services the training takes place and the employers and/or the employee willingly pay for it. In much

of Europe it is recognised that this approach is necessary and desirable. It ensures that basic standards of performance and safety are likely to be delivered. It also confers status on those who have achieved the licence. The state enjoys significant financial savings and can use their funds to assist market flexibility. Examples of this would include the urgent retraining needs where a major redundancy has occurred such as with Rover in the West Midlands or to assist regeneration areas where employer demand is weak and the community has only a small proportion of highly skilled workers. Such support would need to be combined with other measures to create the job opportunities by for example planning the relocation of public bodies to those areas where the workforce is being upskilled.

34. Qualifications that are designed around licences to practice rarely seem to generate the same level of disagreement amongst employers. The focus on the compulsory licence to practice rapidly brings the employers to the table. It is the next logical step forward having established the Sector Skills Councils and it will propel them to the next stage. One word of caution, work with the training providers to ensure that the curriculum to be delivered is realistic and achievable.

35. With the legal backing of mandatory licences the Trade Union Learning Reps will act as an effective police force to secure compliance. This inbuilt training and development requirement will help firms and Learning Reps working with their local college partners to develop effective workforce development plans; something that many firms still lack. In parallel to this approach it is vital that support and training is provided for management so that they have the skills to develop their organisation and its work force. This is exemplified by the work done by the West Midlands Regional Skills Partnership. The traditional stick and carrot approach.

36. Employment agencies will need appropriately qualified staff to meet employers requirements. They will be in the same position as any other company and will have to respond accordingly if they want to stay in business.

37. The supply side ever ready to grasp the opportunity will be ready and waiting to deliver the training. The evidence is available where such legally created markets exist. The only point to watch is that this compulsion is not used as a weapon to restrict supply and force up wages. The timescales for introduction need to be carefully planned and signalled well in advance. Success rates for appropriately skilled and qualified staff who have received the necessary training and support should be high, unlike the systems operating in the accountancy and legal professions. The system is to guarantee standards of competency not to ration. This principle is already largely accepted in the apprenticeship structures for young entrants. It may be sensible to extend the adult apprenticeship initiatives which operate in pilot form across some parts of the country.

Recommendations

1. Introduce “licence to practice” requirements for most employment sectors over a planned timeframe with legislative backing for non compliance.
2. Require Sector Skills Councils to lead on the development and implementation but bar them from any delivery responsibilities to prevent any conflict of interest.
3. Use government funding that will be released to support workforce reskilling in areas of redundancy and regeneration supported by employment generation initiatives such as public sector relocation schemes.
4. Use the Union Learning Reps to police the introduction of licences and help them to build proper workforce development schemes in all companies.
5. Complement this with subsidised management development programmes for companies to enable them to develop their companies and the workforce.
6. Employment Agencies as for all companies will take the necessary steps to ensure that they can supply labour who can meet the standards required.
7. The supply side will respond to a clear market opportunity.
8. It is essential to ensure that the system is used to achieve the necessary skills standards not as a rationing mechanism to force up wages.

LEARNERS

38. There has been a tendency recently to over play the role of employers in education and training and underplay the role of the individual. The individual must be at the centre of the education system. Employers come and go, they expand and contract. The individual has a long working life and family responsibilities to honour and the state has a role to ensure that individuals can prosper both socially and economically. No one should be more motivated than the individual to ensure that they have those social and economic skills. The education system has a duty to ensure that motivation and those skills can blossom.

39. The FE sector post-16 sees too many young people who haven't prospered and are lacking motivation. It isn't just a school issue but clearly schools have a significant role to play. In the author's own College with over 2,000 16–18-year-old students only 11% have recorded both maths and English qualifications at GCSE grade C or above. These are all students with vocational aspirations and we face a mountain to climb to get them to a standard that industry would recognise as employable in the two or three years they are likely to stay with us. Too many give up and add to the NEETs totals at 17+ storing up problems for the future. We and many similar colleges across the country do have a significant impact on those young people as the rapid improvement in student numbers qualified to level 2 demonstrates. The Government needs to recognise and embed that role from 14+ with colleges working in partnership with the schools sector turning a two year experience into a four or five year development programme; given our expertise that should be a lead role. A key task is to attack the numeracy and literacy deficit in a vocational context. The initially encouraging results with the Young Apprentice scheme should encourage the government to embed that as a key element in the 14+ entitlement.

40. There will not be enough quality employment placement opportunities to enable all young people to have a meaningful workplace experience 14–19. It is possible to improvise using part-time jobs and family connections but it will continue to be necessary for colleges to provide quality realistic work simulation opportunities. The qualification system should formally recognise this and licence colleges to deliver NVQ1 and in some cases NVQ2 qualifications away from the workplace. This shouldn't be the norm but should be legitimate in certain prescribed circumstances. It is now not unusual for a Technical Certificate to be achieved in College, to then be converted to a full NVQ framework in the work place.

41. Adults looking for training have a mixed experience. Traditional evening courses are available and in some cases day or block release ranging from basic skills to degree programmes. This provision is not as plentiful as it used to be with the focus now on work based training. This can be a problem if your employer is not supporting work based training. Learndirect from the University for Industry is a flexible alternative though the nature and range of programmes is limited. Some colleges seek to make learning on demand a reality through learning resource centres. This could be supported by the LSC at relatively modest cost. The current funding methodology tends to discourage learning methods that involve less direct learner contact. Individuals often complain about the focus on a September start and courses running for a full year. It tends to be the economics rather than curriculum issues that discourage more flexible offerings from colleges.

42. Employees currently in employment but seeking to change career direction can find it difficult to meet the "on the job" requirements without giving up their current employment. There is a reasonable range of provision for those who are currently unemployed though the continued existence of the "16 hour" rule frustrates the rapid acquisition of new skills. In areas where student demand is high such as construction training, the lack of employers willing to take on trainees to gain the NVQ qualifications can limit the places available for adults.

43. Information, advice and guidance is available from most colleges and Connexion services. Learndirect on-line provides a nationwide coverage. A broad range of information is available on the internet but isn't always easy to find. If IAG centres are backed up by quality web based information a reasonable job can be done. Union Learning Reps can also be a conduit for IAG with the appropriate training support. It would be sensible to exploit the local council network as they assume a greater role in supporting economic growth.

44. For those with little experience of qualifications or employment there is a role for the adult and community service to act as a focus working with the voluntary sector and neighbourhood support groups. This could be a key duty when Councils negotiate their ACL budgets with the LSC. Local Area Agreements lead by local authorities would set out a strategy that the LSC could fund with coordinated support from the relevant central government department (Education, Work and Pensions, Communities)

45. Learner Accounts are being trialled at level 3 and given the history need to be carefully managed. The key is that the user should only be able to cash them with quality approved providers. Clearly the relatively poor uptake of level 3 qualifications indicates this is a appropriate area to target.

46. Another key target group should be those with Basic Skills needs. There is an initiative currently trading under titles such as "Test the City" and "Test the Company" which aims to get people to find out about their basic skills needs. There is a case for rolling this out as "Test the Nation". Give everyone a voucher that entitled them to a free numeracy and literacy test. Following the test the voucher would be exchanged for a card that would, like an eye test identify the skills training required. Again using approved providers the individual would be entitled to free support and a further test to record progress at the end of the period. This would fit with the national scheme to provide everyone with an electronic training record. It would provide a much more effective picture of basic skills levels across the nation and the card could easily double as the Learning Account. It would be topped up with training funds according to the current level of skills and previous spending.

Recommendations

1. Give the colleges the lead role in developing the vocational agenda from 14+ with a requirement that all schools participate in the programme.
2. Focus intensive support on those at 16+ in colleges who come with few formal qualifications.
3. Allow full NVQ1 and some NVQ2 qualifications to be delivered by colleges that have appropriate facilities to simulate work place training.
4. Support the development of flexible roll-on roll-off facilities in colleges to support year round enrolment. Ensure that funding doesn't discourage the development of flexible remote learning routes.
5. Consign the 16 hour rule to history.
6. Focus IAG support through local authority and College advice centres with a quality national web site back-up.
7. Require the LSC, local authorities and Job Centre+ (supported by the relevant government departments) to work together with the voluntary sector and neighbourhood teams to produce a strategy and funding directed at reaching those with few qualifications who are currently outside the world of work.
8. Learner Accounts should be combined with the computerised learner record. Use of learner accounts should be through LSC quality audited and approved learning providers.
9. A "Test the Nation" campaign should be rolled out nationwide to get everyone talking about numeracy and literacy skills. This will give a clear picture of the nation's real skills levels and bring many back into formal study with subsequent testing to measure progress. It can be linked into the Learning Accounts/Record system.

APPRENTICESHIPS

47. Apprenticeships currently appear to be fit for purpose. Apprenticeship routes seem to require differential amounts of training which may imply different degrees of difficulty whilst notionally being at the same level. This may not matter if the outcome effectively meets the needs of employers. The brand could be strengthened at both ends by the national roll out of Young Apprentice, Adult Apprentice and Graduate Apprentice routes. Apprenticeships need to be keyed into the licence to practice requirement proposed above.

48. Key skills are increasingly coming to be accepted as a crucial element in the full framework model. It should be possible to secure further integration of these skills into the NVQ. Technical Certificates are a useful complement to the in-work NVQ element that can be delivered by trainers in partnership with the employer.

49. Providers of full time FE courses and work based training providers need to work closely together to ensure effective access at 16, 17 and 18 to the apprentice route. Apprentice training providers need to work closely with colleges and universities to strengthen progression to foundation degrees or NVQ level 4 qualifications. These could be a route to "Master Craftsman" status.

50. Entry to Employment, the pre-Apprenticeship route should be retitled Foundation Apprenticeship to emphasise the feeder structure. A clear alternative for those not yet job-ready that parallels full time Entry and Foundation courses in college should be developed which could carry the E2E title.

51. A key role for T2G brokers could be to promote apprenticeships with all employers. The base is still too narrow.

52. Success rates on apprenticeships have shot up in the last three years. We can realistically expect 60% success rates by the summer of 2007. This compares with the low 30s for full frameworks in 2002-03 and is reaching comparability with full time vocational qualifications delivered in colleges.

Recommendations

1. Investigate the difference in size and difficulty between apprenticeship qualifications at notionally common levels.
2. Develop the brand with a national roll out of Young Apprentice, Adult Apprentice and Graduate Apprentice.
3. Introduce a new Foundation Apprentice qualification and retarget the E2E qualification at those not yet job-ready.
4. Improve the progression links between full time college vocational courses and apprenticeships at 16, 17 and 18 and strengthen the progression routes on to foundation degrees and NVQ4 qualifications.

5. Identify level 4 qualifications with “Master Craftsman” status.
6. Set T2G brokers targets for generating new apprenticeship places with employers.

QUALIFICATIONS

53. The qualification system still appears a mystery to many employers. For 16–18-year-olds we have not yet achieved the unified structure advocated by Tomlinson. With care it should be possible to describe the three routes as vocational (NVQ/ Apprenticeships), academic GCSE/GCE, and hybrid (specialist Diplomas). It is sad that we haven’t chosen to build the Diplomas out of the well established and BTEC Diploma products. These are used extensively in schools and colleges and have a strong vocational flavour. Working with the Sector Skills Councils they could have been updated and would have provided a continuity that has been lacking with the succession of General National Vocational Qualifications, followed by Applied GCEs.

54. The adult framework can be made to look very complicated with a plethora of awarding bodies or relatively simple if the focus is on level. The Sector Skills Councils are charged with rationalising the system in conjunction with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. If the recommendation above to identify a core that forms the national framework is accepted and that extension studies that meet particular employers needs are endorsed by the SSC then the system will look relatively straightforward. If these are keyed against the licence to practise and master craftsman standards then the role of the qualification system is clear and can be related to the academic route and university entrance standards.

55. This system needs to be reinforced with a national standard system for testing and developing numeracy and literacy skills. These skills will be a prerequisite for licence to practise status.

56. If the SSCs are developing the qualification structure it has to be questioned whether examining bodies add value by each developing their own syllabus and assessment methodologies.

57. Any funding methodology must be able to fund any part of a qualification that leads towards a national core framework. This reinforces the need to quickly develop a qualification and skills profile for each individual student.

58. The pace of progress towards this core qualification framework with a fundable unitised curriculum is a cause for concern.

Recommendations

1. Consider building the specialist Diplomas on the existing BTEC framework.
2. Encourage the SSCs to rapidly develop core frameworks that link to licence to practice and master craftsman status.
3. Ensure that a similar national is in place for basic skills that links clearly to the frameworks.
4. Review the need for awarding bodies to devise separate syllabus and assessment methodologies.
5. Ensure that any funding methodology supports a unitised curriculum.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by the Nuffield Review of 14–19 Education and Training

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The question addressed in this memorandum is: What is available for those with the very lowest skill levels, who are outside of education, training and the world of employment? Our focus will be on England.

Main points

1.1 *Participation in education, training and employment among 16–18-year-olds.* Despite an increase in the proportion of 16–17-year-olds in full-time education between 1992 and 2003, and taking into account the increase in the size of the cohort in recent years, considerably more 16–17-year-olds were not in education and training in 2003 than in 1992.

1.2 *How many young people are outside education, employment and training?* The proportion of 16–18-year-olds not in education, employment or training increased from 10% at the end of 2004 to 11% at the end of 2005 (to a total number of approx. 220,000 at the end of 2005). Certain groups of young people are over-represented in this category.

1.3 *Young people classified as NEET (not in education, employment or training)*. Efforts should be made to counteract the pejorative and homogenising force of this term.

1.4 *Why young people move out of education and training post-16*. Decisions post-16 are mediated by a range of factors and the process is often far from linear and rational, and may rely on unpredictable factors such as informal networks, peer group influence and serendipity.

1.5 *Categories of young people as policy priorities; young people in jobs without training*. Creating better education and training provision for those in work without training at 16–17 should be one of the main policy priorities, as well as providing for those (negatively) classified as “not in education, employment or training”.

1.6 *What is available to encourage young people back into education, training and employment? Recent initiatives—impact and limitations*. There is a plethora of current initiatives to encourage young people back into education and training, or into employment (from active labour market policies to education-based policies and area-based policies), but they form a fragmented picture and had limited impact.

Recommendations

1.7 *Case-specific provision*. Three key factors in case-specific provision are: individualised provision, availability of support, and progression routes.

1.8 *Context-sensitive policy*. There is a need at the policy formation and implementation level for context-sensitive policy that uses a holistic view, and takes account of the wider social, labour market, and educational context and of the more immediate context of the stakeholder institutions and actors.

Further information is available in *the Nuffield 14–19 Review Annual Report 2005–06* (Geoff Hayward, Ann Hodgson, Jill Johnson, Alis Oancea, Richard Pring, Ken Spours, Stephanie Wilde and Susannah Wright. Oxford University, October 2006).

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 The Nuffield Review was established in 2003, by the Nuffield Foundation, to provide an independent review of every aspect of 14–19 education and training in England and Wales. It is directed by Richard Pring (Lead Director, University of Oxford), Geoff Hayward (University of Oxford), Ann Hodgson (Institute of Education, University of London), Jill Johnson (UCAS), Ewart Keep (SKOPE, Cardiff University), Gareth Rees (Cardiff University) and Ken Spours (Institute of Education, University of London). Researchers serving the Nuffield Review are: Alis Oancea, Stephanie Wilde and Susannah Wright.

2.2 A core group of nearly a hundred people drawn from schools, colleges, universities, government departments and agencies, voluntary bodies, employers, examination boards and private training providers helps the Review with submission of evidence and with critical examination of findings at a range of seminars.

3. FACTUAL INFORMATION

3.1 *Participation in education, training and employment among 16–18-year-olds*

Figure 1 below provides a snapshot of participation in education, training and employment among 16, 17 and 18-year-olds for two years—1992 and 2003—based on administrative data for England. All figures in normal font relate to 1992, all those in italics are for 2003. Black figures on the left of ovals and rectangles indicate values for 16-year-olds, normal font in centre for 17-year-olds and black figures on the right for 18-year-olds. The top line in the Figure indicates the size of each age cohort (in thousands) for the two years in question. Notice that the size of each age cohort increased between 1992 and 2003. For example, the number of 16-year-olds in England increased from 550,300 to 654,800. The next line of boxes indicates the proportions of each age cohort participating in either full- or part-time education or training, and the proportion not in education or training. Note that the proportion of each age cohort in full-time education increased, between 1992 and 2003 but the proportion in part-time education and training decreased, the result of a sharp decrease in participation in the work-based route. The proportion of 18-year-olds not in education and training declined, the result of increasing participation in HE. However, it is the 16 and 17-year-olds that concern us in this memorandum. The evidence indicates that the proportion of these age groups not in education and training increased since 1992 as the economy recovered from recession. Taking account of the increase in the size of the age cohort over the time period this means that considerably more 16 and 17-year-olds were not in education and training in 2003 than in 1992—the complete opposite of what government policy over the last decade intended for these age groups.

who were inactive in the labour market remained stable at 4%. In an analysis of the groups that are over-represented in the NEET classification, the following groups were identified:

- young people “looked after”;
- teenage parents;
- young carers;
- young people with chronic illnesses or disabilities and victims of accidents;
- suicidal young people;
- young people suffering from mental illness;
- young people engaging in risk behaviours involving smoking, drinking alcohol and serious drug misuse; and
- young people involved in crime.

3.3 *Young people classified as NEET (not in education, employment or training)*

The term “NEET”, though established in the literature and in the policy discourse, has no real substance, referring as it does to a statistical residual category (although it is sometimes used as if it had substance). Problems occur when this category is used as a “black box”, with little detailed descriptions of those young people who are classified as such, thus undermining as their individuality, identity and defining characteristics. Further, the common collocation of NEET with “group” compounds this, implying as it does common characteristics between those classified in this group, which, after all, includes individuals engaged in activities as diverse as: caring for an elderly relative, parenthood, engaging in criminal activity, coping with a serious physical or psychological illness, searching for suitable education and training provision, travelling or being on a “gap” year. A key difference here is between those who have chosen their particular situation and those who had little choice. Therefore, there is no such thing as a “NEET group”, and we should make efforts to counteract the pejorative and homogenising force of this term. These young people are not a homogeneous “group”; rather there is a high degree of heterogeneity regarding how young people became classified as NEET, their future plans, their attitudes to employment and training, their backgrounds, participant networks and levels of personal and social capital (or lack of them). The path to becoming classified as NEET may be associated with many different issues, including socio-economic, educational, cultural, regional and sub-regional factors. Teenage pregnancy and parenthood are a significant factor within the group of young people classified as NEET. There are many structural barriers in place to discourage young pregnant women and young mothers from engaging in education and training. This is a complex issue, embedded within societal and generational expectations. Some young mothers explicitly plan for motherhood first, education later.

3.4 *Why young people move out of education and training post-16*

Young people’s decisions at 16 are mediated by their aspirations, experience and motivation, as well as by their participant networks and the opportunities (subjective and objective) they perceive to be available to them. Various factors are involved in the “journey” young people make into and within (and perhaps out of, and then back into, and then out of again) the labour market and education and training. This process is often far from linear and rational, and may rely on unpredictable factors such as informal networks, peer group influence and serendipity. Perceptions of time are also of relevance here. Returning to education and training at a later stage is not straightforward for many of these young people, which may be at least partly because of the “channelling” of young people at a relatively early stage in their education, and the “filtering” function of GCSE results. The notion of lifelong learning, and the flexibility of FE is questionable within a context of multiple deprivation for some young people, which makes it very difficult for them to return to education and training. In addition, pedagogy and institutional ethos play a crucial role, as young people are discouraged from returning to an institutional context at a later stage if they found their earlier contact with it gruelling and dispiriting. The CEO of the Rathbone charity, Richard Williams, describing the difficulty for young people who do not respond well to institutional frameworks and authority, said there are “more opportunities to fail with more frequency and greater intensity if you do not relate to formal institutions” (Nuffield Review workshop contribution). Further, institutions resonate in various ways with different young people. This raises the central question of what the 14–19 system, institutions and assessment structures have to look like to be attractive to young people. One particular issue is the persistence of the belief that reforming and developing qualifications increases participation, even though this has repeatedly been proved mistaken over the last decade. This is linked to the lack of policy memory identified in the Nuffield Review Annual Report 2004–05, and the problem of “whirlwind” change. Instability makes the system incomprehensible. Indeed, it is possible that the constant stream of initiatives bewilders young people and their parents, an unintended consequence which is contrary to the desired effect. In addition to this, there is the problem of the lack of effective and sustained long-term evaluation and assessment of previous initiatives.

3.5 Categories of young people as policy priorities; young people in jobs without training

Recent policy documents have emphasized the need to reengage young people classified as “NEET”. However, with raising post-16 participation being the main policy aim, it would seem that creating better education and training provision for those in work without training at 16 and 17 should be one of the main priorities, as well as providing for those (negatively) classified as “not in education, employment or training”. Young people in jobs without training have not been a policy priority in recent years, arguably because they do not feature as a negative statistic (since they are participating in employment). However, their employment may be routine, low-level tasks, which arguably demand less explicit training input than level 2 and level 3 apprenticeship programmes. This type of work is characterised by a high turnover of staff or “churn”. Therefore, incentives for employers and young people to devote time and resources to training may be limited. There is a danger that young people move horizontally in the labour market, between various precarious, low-level, routine and poorly paid jobs. Further, many jobs available to 16–17-year-olds are JWT: any training available is normally not more than induction and specific for-the-job training. This may explain the persistence of the proportion of young people in JWT, despite the policy intention that precisely this group would be attracted into apprenticeship. In addition, those classified as “ILO unemployed” and those classified as “economically inactive” require particular attention appropriate to their situation. Further, issues of teenage pregnancy and gender issues are significant in this context.

3.6 What is available to encourage young people back into education, training and employment?

Recent initiatives impact and limitations: There are a number of current initiatives to encourage young people back into education and training, or into employment. The initiatives can be divided into three main areas: active labour market policies (such as apprenticeship and the New Deal for Young People), education-based policies (such as Connexions and EMAs) and area-based policies (such as Excellence in Cities, which is now known as Aimhigher). Table 1 covers a selection of some of the more high-profile recent and current initiatives. Column A provides the context of each initiative, column B, refers to its main evaluation(s), while column C provides brief assessments (on the basis of the evaluations) of the impact and limitations of each initiative.

Table 1

SELECTED POLICY INITIATIVES DIRECTED AT YOUNG PEOPLE OUTSIDE EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

<i>A. Initiative</i>	<i>B. Research/evaluations</i>	<i>C. Issues</i>
Excellence in Cities — Introduced in three phases, 1999–2001 — extended to post-16 education in 2001 as Excellence Challenge (now Aimhigher)	Ireland, E and O’Donnell L (2004) <i>Post-16 and post-18 transitions: initial findings</i> . Slough: NFER.	Some improvements were identified, but it proved very difficult to ascertain whether these were due to Excellence in Cities or to other unrelated factors.
Education Maintenance Allowance — pilot 1999, 2000 — roll-out 2004 (announced in 2002 Spending Review)	Maguire, S, Middleton, S and Thompson, J (2006) <i>Young people and the labour market: Evidence from the EMA pilot database</i> . Loughborough: Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP). Middleton, S, Perren, K, Maguire, S, Rennison, J, Battistin, E, Emmerson, C and Fitzsimmons, E (2005) <i>Evaluation of EMA pilots: Young people aged 16–19 years Final report of the quantitative evaluation. Research Report 678</i> . Nottingham: DfES.	The pilot study showed that a smaller proportion of young people were classified as long-term NEET in the EMA pilot areas, which could be linked to the availability of EMA (14.4% compared with 23.3% in the control areas, pp 21–22). However, there is a problem of “deadweight” because many young people would continue in education and training without EMAs; the increase in those engaging in education and training has been offset by a reduction in those following the work-based route.

A. Initiative	B. Research/evaluations	C. Issues
Increased Flexibility Programme — Introduced 2002	Ofsted (2005b) <i>Increased flexibility programme at Key Stage 4. HMI Report: 2.361</i> [online]. At: www.ofsted.gov.uk, accessed May 2006. Golden, S., O'Donnell, L., Benton, T. and Rudd P.(2005) <i>Evaluation of increased flexibility for 14–16-year-olds programme: Outcomes for the first cohort</i> . Slough: NFER.	There are problems with the selection of pupils to engage in IFP, which can lead to further discrimination against pupils at risk of disengagement. Further, there are also problems with the quality of some provision, attendance and attainment on the part of participants, as well as organisation problems, such as transport and timetabling, and concerns about the sustainability of the programme. FE is not properly equipped to deal with 14–16-year-olds in terms of numbers, facilities and professional development.
Entry to Employment (E2E) — recommended in the 2001 Cassels Report on modern apprenticeships — pathfinder phase August 2002–July 2003 — national roll-out 2003	Spielhofer, T, Mann, P and Sims, D. (2003) <i>Entry to Employment (E2E) Participant Study. Final Report</i> , Learning and Skills Development Agency, October. Gentleman, S (2006) <i>Promoting positive progression from E2E</i> . Research Report 052310. Learning and Skills Development Agency.	The participant study registered overall positive experience of young people in the pathfinder programmes. However, the gains reported were more at the level of personal development and jobsearch skills and much less at that of literacy and numeracy. Moving learners to level 2 is not a requirement of the E2E framework, but providers are incentivised to achieve it. Further, the growth of a range of pre-E2E programmes (such as the n2n—“No to NEET”—project in Bedfordshire and Luton) suggests that the level 2 targets may be too advanced, and may even militate against the progress of those classified as core NEETs.
Entitlement to Level 2 provision. — announced in 2003 <i>21st Century Skills</i> White Paper — trialled 2005–05 — extended 2005–06 — rolled out 2006–07	Anderson, A, Brooke, B, Doyle, A, Finn, D and Moley, S (2006) <i>Understanding young people in jobs without training</i> . Research Report 736. Nottingham :DfES.	Young people are not always aware of this entitlement. This also applies to employers, who are not necessarily supportive of level 2 education and training, as it is not specifically job related. Young people point to the need for “brokerage” or third party intervention to help them access level 2 provision and entitlement. ³²
Learning Agreements — pilot April 2006	Anderson, A, Brooke, B, Doyle, A, Finn, C and Moley, S (2006) <i>Understanding young people in jobs without training</i> . Research Report 736. Nottingham: DfES.	It is still very early in this initiative, but the pre-pilot highlighted the data problems in tracking young people in JWT.

(Pre-pilot phase report)

³² See Anderson, A, Brooke, B, Doyle, A, Finn, D and Moley, S (2006), p 30: “They’d probably be a bit annoyed because they’re paying me and I’m not there when they need me [. . .] they can’t really employ someone else when I’m somewhere else because they’re still paying for me.”

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

4.1 *Case-specific provision*

At the level of the individual and institutional actors, there is a need for flexible and case-specific provision with regard to post-compulsory participation. There can be no “one-size-fits-all” solution. Three key factors in case-specific provision are: individualised provision, availability of support, and progression routes.

- Individualised provision is necessary, particularly options for those whomay not thrive in the traditional pathways, for various, possibly interlinked reasons, including:
 - Problems dealing with authority.
 - Mental health issues.
 - Learning difficulties.
 - Behavioural problems.
 - Carer roles and young parents.
 - Substance abuse.
 - Family breakdown.
 - Homelessness.
- There is a need for support for these young people, in order to promote their inclusion in learning communities.
- The provision needs to offer progression routes, rather than merely “warehousing”.

Of course, some of these particular factors are catered for within current provision. However, it may be of a fragmented and piecemeal nature, which demands an unrealistic level of self-determination from vulnerable young people. There is a need for alternative models of provision which can operate in a case-specific way, respecting the wider needs of the individual. This would enable access to learning communities and allow the three above-mentioned factors to be provided within one context. One example of this is Rathbone, which operates at national level (www.rathbone.org.uk). However, such provision may be localised and small-scale, such as the Midlands-based project, Skidz.

4.2 *Context-sensitive policy*

In conjunction with this, there is a need at the policy formation and implementation level for context-sensitive policy that uses a holistic view, and takes account of the wider social, labour market, and educational context and of the more immediate context of the stakeholder institutions and actors. This needs to include:

- Sufficient acknowledgement of the various types of relevant context (social, economic, political and educational) operating at various levels (local, regional, national, EU and international).
- Integration and coherence of policy formation and implementation across the types and levels of context outlined above (eg educational and family policy; training opportunities and labour market regulatory frameworks; lifelong learning and support for mature learners and older workers, as well as the health service, the criminal justice system and the social services).
- Sufficiently open interpretations of context (openness of the policy process to alternative discourses and experiences in terms of defining the problems, prioritising aspects of the context, setting aims, choosing potential solutions and their time-scale).
- Adaptability to constant and unpredictable changes in the contexts outlined above, and particularly in the political environment, with regard to education and policy formation.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by the Local Government Association (LGA)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The recent LGA publication *Prosperous communities—beyond the White Paper* presents evidence that the sub national economies that matter most for delivering economic prosperity, including labour markets and the skills needed to service them, are at a sub-regional level—ie the level of cities, city regions and shires.

2. Given the importance of sub-regional labour and skills markets, we believe that LSC decision making powers and budgets need to be devolved to this level. We are concerned that the current proposals for restructuring the LSC contained in the Further Education and Training Bill might make sub-regional engagement more difficult for the LSC.

3. On the demand side, local authorities have a crucial role to play in engaging local employers and learners and responding to their skills needs and the needs of the local labour market. We are concerned that the Leitch Report does not recognise this role. For example, the review proposes that Skills and Employment Boards being developed by local authorities and their partners should be subordinated to a national Commission. We believe that instead Skills and Employment Boards should be strengthened by the devolution of decision making powers and commissioning budgets to them.

4. Local authorities have strategic leadership of 14–19 education and must lead collaboration between the LSC, schools, colleges and employers in further developing and implementing 14-19 specialised Diploma courses and ensuring that skills development for students continues in the work place, once Diplomas are completed. We believe that the regionalisation of the LSC will undermine this local authority role. As this agenda progresses, local authorities must emerge as the single strategic leader for 14–19 years education. This would end the confusion caused by the joint leadership roles of the LSC and local authorities and would be in the best interests of learners and employers.

SUB-REGIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

5. The LGA's recent publication *Prosperous communities—beyond the White Paper* demonstrates that the sub-national economies that matter most are sub-regional (ie single cities, city-regions and shires with their counties and districts). This extends to labour markets and the skills demands they create.

6. For example, 78% of journeys to work take less than 40 minutes and 70% of house moves are less than 20 miles. Statistics like these demonstrate that local housing and labour markets are sub-regional. Industrial clustering also happens at the level of the city, or around a transport hub, or in a shire. Skills needs reflect labour demand based on this sub-regional industrial clustering. We are currently working on producing more detailed evidence of the importance of the sub-regional level to economic governance issues and this will be published at the end of January.

7. Therefore, in order to respond to the particular characteristics of local labour markets a devolved framework for skills is needed that empowers local authorities and their partners at the national, regional and local level to work at the appropriate level to address local skills needs. However, we are concerned that proposed legislation on further education appears to be moving in the opposite direction.

SUPPLY SIDE

8. Given the importance of the sub-regional level, we believe that the LSC needs a clear focus at this level, to ensure strong, effective local collaboration between it and local authorities, further education institutions and local businesses. This requires statutory requirements on establishing local and sub regional LSCs and ensuring they co-operate with local authorities in the Further Education and Training (FE) Bill. We also believe that funding structures should support a skills training system that is responsive to the needs of sub-regional labour markets. Devolved decision making within the LSC should include devolved budgets and the ability to agree which courses and training programmes to fund locally.

9. However, the Further Education and Training (FE) Bill currently going through Parliament appears to be moving in the opposite direction, removing the statutory local LSCs which operate at a sub-regional level and replacing them with nine regional councils. Under the new regional structure there will be 147 local partnership teams, corresponding to the areas of county and unitary councils. While the LSC argue that this national and local structure will allow them to engage more effectively with local partnerships, we are concerned that in fact it will make sub-regional working more difficult.

10. For example, and of particular concern, during the Lords second reading debate on the FE Bill, Lord Adonis, for the Government, explained what the abolition of the current single Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Council would mean in practice:

“This means that, for example, instead of the local learning and skills council that currently covers the whole of Greater Manchester, there would be 10 local LSC partnership teams. Each one would cover a local authority and they would be grouped into three areas: the city of Manchester, Greater Manchester north and Greater Manchester south. Those sorts of arrangements would be replicated elsewhere.”

(www.publications.parliament.uk/hansard)

We do not believe that this kind of an arrangement, splitting up the current Greater Manchester LSC into three areas, will improve LSC engagement with city-wide or sub regional partnerships seeking to address skills levels at the level of the labour market. This is because the three areas proposed do not correspond with labour and skills markets operating at the city wide level.

11. The LGA would like to see the clause in the FE bill which proposes to abolish the 47 local LSC councils and establish nine regional councils replaced with a power for the LSC to establish local committees, in consultation with local authorities and local partners. The proposed regional LSC structure in the FE Bill also appears to conflict with proposals in the Local Government Bill on the LSC enshrining stronger local engagement between LSCs and localities, in particular a duty to cooperate on Local Area Agreements (LAAs) covering all key local services.

 DEMAND SIDE

12. We welcome the Leitch report's emphasis on the need for the skills market to be more responsive to employer and learner demands and the importance of a joined up approach at a local level (at the point where the customer receives the service).

13. However his report pays little attention to the role of councils in helping join up local public provision and engage with local stakeholders. It is weak in terms of the importance of "place" in policy making and does not appear to take into account the fact that the different regions, counties and cities in the UK face different demographic and employment challenges for which geographically-based responses are likely to be most appropriate.

14. We believe that local authorities must lead engagement between employers and learners and ensure skills provision meets their needs and the needs of the local economy. Local authorities are also themselves major employers and have statutory duties under the 2006 Education and Inspections Act to ensure provision of 14–19 years education is sufficient and meets local needs. We believe that local authorities must eventually emerge as the single strategic leader for 14–19 education. This would end the confusion caused by the joint leadership roles of the LSC and local authorities and would be in the best interests of both learners and employers.

15. There are already examples of the development of local Skills and Employment Boards that are emerging from LAA/City Region discussions. These seek to join up provision at the local level by engaging with local partners and respond effectively to the skills needs of the local labour market.

16. We are concerned that the Leitch Review proposes to formalise these Skills and Employment Boards and subordinate them to a national Commission. We want to see local Skills and Employment Boards strengthened, with commissioning budgets of their own and stronger powers to set local priorities and joined up commissioning and provision by local partners.

14–19 SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS

Design and development of Diplomas

16. The LGA's understanding is that there has been variable development to date on the five initial Diploma lines. *Construction and the Built Environment, Engineering, Health and Social Care* and *IT* seem relatively well advanced. However, there is some way to go in identifying concrete programmes for *Creative and Media*, possibly due in part to the breadth of skills to be made available through that Diploma and the relatively advanced and embedded existing NVQ foundations for the first four topics.

17. There is some concern that small and medium sized employers may not have had enough input into the design of Diplomas given their relative importance in local economies. Employers will need to support Diplomas to ensure they become a "credible currency" and provide work placements and work experience positions to students.

18. Our understanding is that, ultimately, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) must be responsible for the design process, co-ordination and development of the Diplomas. It is important that Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) have a major input on the content and scope of skills to be included in the Diploma area for which they are responsible. However, to ensure co-ordination across the curriculum and suitable flexibility and coherence with regard to assessment, the QCA must be the ultimate co-ordinating body. This is particularly important where students take certain elements of one or more Diplomas, eg *Creative and Media* and *IT*. Again, QCA should be at the centre of designing accreditation and award of Diplomas as the independent and authoritative qualifications body, in close consultation with stakeholders through the SSCs.

Teacher and lecturer training

19. The Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) and Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) are working together to implement a programme of training and continuing professional development for teachers. However, local authorities are concerned that the rapidity with which training needs to be undertaken will mean teachers and relevant support staff will not be adequately prepared. The specialised Diploma is a new way of working for both students and teachers and requires new methods of assessment, planning, and support for students. Certain elements of the Diploma programmes, to be implemented by December 2008, will be familiar to teachers. However, the full vocational elements, relationships with other institutions, employer placements and pupil tracking, assessment and support methods may be new to them.

20. It is also important that School Improvement Partners and local authority school improvement and performance officers receive sufficient training to support schools effectively in the new developments.

Co-ordination between schools and colleges

21. The current extent of co-ordination between schools and colleges varies from area to area and also from course to course. Some subjects or course programmes may be more locally co-ordinated than others. However, the picture generally is one of much improved and closer linkages between schools and colleges, particularly in the context of previous inspection regimes which emphasised the 14–19 years phase and joint planning between institutions, the local Learning and Skills Council and the local authority. Further, a number of helpful lessons were learned by local authorities from the DfES's 39 14–19 pathfinder areas.

22. In the context of these developments, many areas have developed highly innovative models of co-ordination between schools and colleges in devising new course programmes. A notable example, is Knowsley and Wolverhampton. In more rural settings, where transport to different centres for certain course aspects is of major importance (and requires additional time and money), Shropshire has developed some interesting approaches, for example.

23. Local authorities should have single strategic leadership for 14–19 years education, leading local partnerships with powers and influence over policy, decision making and budgets. Such powers are necessary to enable schools and colleges to increase collaboration. This collaboration is very important at this crucial time in the evolution of specialised Diploma courses and the professional development and employer engagement needed to support them.

24. It is also important to note the implications of the Leitch Review of Skills for specialised Diplomas and co-ordination. The Review barely mentions the role of the local authority, which given its strategic lead and statutory duties with regard to core and optional course provision for 14–19-year-olds, is unfortunate. We presume that the Government wishes to use the 14–19 phase as a crucial springboard for up-skilling the future workforce and embedding the culture of skills development. The LGA and local authorities are keen to see further progression for students who have completed specialised Diplomas. Nineteen should not become “the new sixteen” where learning or up-skilling stops. Further, the role of employers in ensuring progression for students who have completed specialised Diplomas is crucial. Employers, who have worked with schools, colleges, the local authority and other local partners, should ensure that they take further steps to develop workforce skills. It is important that 14–19 specialised Diplomas, post-16 skills and adult skills training are joined up in a coherent way and part of a continuum both for learners and employers. The National Institute for Adults Continuing Education, a member of the LGA “family”, remarked in response to the Leitch Review that, “the dislocation of adult skills policy (as shown in the Review) and 14–19 policy is stark”.

January 2007

**Memorandum submitted by The National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers
(NASUWT)**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and NASUWT's Key Concerns

NASUWT believes that the development of policy in respect of post-16 skills training and 14–19 Specialised Diplomas should seek to tackle disparity of esteem between academic and vocational learning, address issues of learner disengagement and disaffection from education and training and should be developed in a way that does not lead to increases in bureaucratic and workload burdens for teaching staff and school leaders.

The Government's Priorities for Skills

In progressing its priorities for skills, the Government will need to consider effective approaches to increasing levels of employer involvement in education and training.

Coherence in the development and implementation of skills education policy

The Government needs to assess the extent to which the delivery of policy in respect of post-16 skills and training and the 14–19 Diplomas is undermined by the involvement of a considerable number of “arm's length”, publicly funded quangos and take appropriate action if required.

Supply of skills training

There is no compelling case for expanding the proportion of post-16 skills training delivered through the private sector. Current patterns of provision are generally fit for purpose and ensure sufficient diversity within the system.

Developing a demand-led system

The development of a demand-led system must not lead to an over-emphasis on the claimed needs of employers to the detriment of the legitimate views and expectations of other key stakeholders.

Advice and guidance for learners

Action to reform the provision of independent information, advice and guidance for learners post-14 should inform the further development of policy and practice in respect of adult learners.

Apprenticeships

As part of its work to secure more effective engagement of employers in skills education and training, the Government should consider what action will be necessary in order to engage more employers in supporting and providing worthwhile work-based learning opportunities.

Specialised Diplomas—specification design and development

The Government needs to ensure that more effective central co-ordination of the design of the Diplomas is put in place to ensure that the concerns that have been expressed about aspects of Diploma design, including the purpose and function of the extended project and the need to ensure that Diplomas do not represent a limiting of future learning options for young people working towards them, can be addressed effectively.

Specialised Diplomas—teacher and lecturer training

More effective central co-ordination of the development of Diplomas will generate the clarity necessary to develop a more coherent set of messages upon which effective communication and CPD strategies can be built.

Specialised Diplomas institutional co-ordination

Effective collaboration between institutions will only be achieved if there is a fundamental review of the way in which local learning providers are held to account for the work they undertake with students.

INTRODUCTION

1. NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee Inquiry into Post-16 Skills Training and 14–19 Specialised Diplomas.
2. NASUWT is the largest union representing teachers and head teachers throughout the UK.
3. NASUWT's analysis is based upon the work of its representative committees and other structures made up of practising teachers and lectures working in the sector. The issues highlighted in this response reflect the key concerns expressed by members and the aspirations they have for the future of the sector within which they work.

BACKGROUND AND NASUWT'S KEY CONCERNS

4. NASUWT believes that the development of effective policy in respect of post-16 skills training and the 14–19 Specialised Diplomas are important priorities for Government. Therefore, NASUWT is concerned that the Education and Skills Select Committee has allowed respondents only a relatively short period of time within which to make written submissions.
5. NASUWT takes written submissions to the Committee very seriously and seeks to provide evidence that will support the Committee in its deliberations on educational policy. As a democratic and lay-led organisation, the Union seeks to ensure that its submissions are reflective of the views of its membership. This requires an adequate period of time within which to consult with members about their experiences and perspectives on matters subject to inquiries by the Committee. NASUWT has found it extremely difficult to undertake this consultation in the depth it considers satisfactorily within the limited amount of time made available by the Committee for this inquiry.
6. However, NASUWT will continue to consult its members on the key areas of concern highlighted by the Committee in its inquiry remit and would very much welcome the opportunity to expand upon the points made in this submission through the submission of oral evidence.
7. Notwithstanding the unsatisfactory circumstances described above, this submission sets out the key issues from NASUWT's perspective on post-16 skills training and considers the development of the 14–19 Specialised Diplomas within this wider context.

8. In relation to the agenda established by the Leitch Review of Skills and the 14–19 White Paper, published in February 2005, the Government has identified a number of strategic challenges facing the United Kingdom. Particular concerns include the fact that approximately 50% of all 16-year-olds fail to achieve a level 2 qualification and that the low staying on rate for 16–17-year-olds by international standards has significant implications for the ability of the United Kingdom to develop an effective skills base in the longer term.

9. In developing its perspective on these issues, NASUWT has emphasised the disparity of esteem between so-called vocational and academic learning which has led to an elitist over-emphasis on the needs and achievements of a relatively small number of learners at the expense of a more balanced view which recognises and values the importance of skills-based learning.

10. NASUWT notes that recent educational debates on these issues have stressed the need for employers to play a major role in education and training. This concern is reflected in the terms of reference for the Inquiry. Despite continual allegations by employers about the general lack of skills and knowledge demonstrated by an apparently growing number of school leavers, employer investment in training and high-quality worked-based learning opportunities remains pitifully marginal by international standards. NASUWT believes that many of the problems associated with post-16 skills training will never be completely resolved without direct Government action to secure more comprehensive and effective employer support for education and training. Without this support, NASUWT believes it is unlikely that the United Kingdom will be able to meet the wide range of current and future economic and social challenges that all industrialised nations will continue to face.

11. In developing the ability of the United Kingdom to meet its current and future skills needs, securing effective reform in the 14–19 sector will be essential. In its work in this area, NASUWT has set out some clear principles upon which effective reforms should be based. These include:

- the need to develop and implement policy that does not lead to increases in workload for teachers or headteachers or that distracts them from their core responsibilities for teaching and leading teaching and learning;
- action to embed within the education system greater parity of esteem between so called academic and vocational learning;
- tackling the root causes of disaffection with education and disengagement from formal learning;
- ensuring that policy is developed and implemented in collaboration with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), NASUWT and other social partners represented on the Workforce Agreement Monitoring Group (WAMG);
- implementing change that makes use of the skills, talents and expertise of all members of the existing teaching workforce; and
- the need to tackle long standing patterns of occupational segregation and the development of approaches to reform that tackle discrimination and actively promote equality and diversity.

12. While NASUWT has articulated these principles largely within the context of 14–19 reform, the Union believes that effective progress in all areas of skills training policy must incorporate these general principles in order to ensure that reform leads to effective, equitable and sustainable change.

THE GOVERNMENT'S PRIORITIES FOR SKILLS

13. NASUWT believes that the Select Committee is right to seek to assess the extent to which the Government's priorities for skills are broadly correct with particular reference to the Government's focus on level 2 qualifications. NASUWT shares the view that level 2 qualifications represent a useful benchmark against which the ability of learners to acquire and develop further essential skills and knowledge can be measured. For this reason, NASUWT fully supports the Government's provision of free access to education designed to support the acquisition of level 2 qualifications for learners aged 25 or under. NASUWT also supports the Government's proposal to extend this entitlement to level 3 qualifications.

14. NASUWT believes that the development of skills at this level is important within the context of the training and development of the school workforce. While such skills development is important, the Union is concerned that practice may develop where staff are expected to access learning at this level in their own time and, for those over the age of 25, make a significant financial contribution to the costs of their own learning. NASUWT takes the view that, given the importance of workforce remodelling for the implementation of key Government education policies, there is a strong case for assessing the extent to which the terms of the entitlement to lifelong learning should be extended in respect of the school workforce.

15. However, NASUWT recognises that the Government, in making decisions about the allocation of finite public resources, is entitled to expect appropriate contributions to be made to the establishment and extension of this entitlement by employers, given the direct benefits to employers of increasing skills levels within the workforce. Therefore, NASUWT maintains that the Government has struck an appropriate balance between its responsibilities and those of employers by putting in place a cut-off age of 25 for learners to access state-funded education designed to support the acquisition of level 2 qualifications.

16. This balance of responsibilities between Government and employers emphasises the need, within the current UK context, for far greater employer involvement and investment in lifelong learning. While the Government is right to take the view that employers need to play a greater role in investing in skills training, it is essential that effective steps are taken to secure higher levels of sustained employer investment. The evidence provided by the UK's experience in comparison to other industrialised countries, suggests that the policy of successive Governments, based largely on exhorting employers to increase their investment in skills training, has yet to yield the change in employer attitudes and behaviour that the Government seeks and requires.

17. For this reason, NASUWT believes that there is a need to examine whether developing a system based on compulsory employer contributions to skills education would help the United Kingdom to meet the levels of employer investment seen in other countries. NASUWT believes that a detailed investigation of policies and practices in countries with higher levels of employer investment could identify approaches that might be adapted for implementation within a UK context.

COHERENCE IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SKILLS EDUCATION POLICY

18. NASUWT notes the Committee's interest in the ability of key central Government departments, particularly the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI), to co-operate and co-ordinate their activities in relation to skills education effectively.

19. Consistent and effective inter-departmental co-ordination is essential if further improvements to the skills-base of the labour force are to be secured in the longer term. However, NASUWT believes that a more pressing concern for the Committee should be the significant number of publicly-funded quangos involved in developing and implementing policy within the 14-19 and post-16 skills sectors. NASUWT believes that the excessive distribution of responsibilities between such bodies leads to the potential for the development and implementation of policy to become incoherent and subject to conflicting organisational perspectives and agendas.

20. NASUWT maintains that there is an urgent need to review the number of quangos involved in policy in this area and to assess the extent to which key responsibilities and activities could be undertaken more effectively by central departments. NASUWT notes that the Welsh Assembly Government has taken the responsibilities formally undertaken by Education and Learning Wales (ELWa) and the Curriculum and Qualifications Authority for Wales (ACCAC) back into central control in order to secure more effective delivery of qualification and skills policy. NASUWT welcomed this development and continues to highlight the fact that the development of skills policy in Scotland and Northern Ireland is undertaken with a far greater degree of central departmental control than in England.

21. NASUWT has particular concerns about the remit and activities of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) at both national and local levels. The LSC has a significant amount of influence and power over patterns of provision of post-16 learning, given its almost exclusive responsibility for allocating public money to support provision. In light of these significant responsibilities, it is unacceptable that the extent and nature of the LSC's accountability for its actions remains unclear and that its consultation with trade unions and other legitimate stakeholders appears to be variable and incomplete in comparison to the LSC's engagement with employer representatives. Action needs to be taken to ensure that more appropriate accountability and consultation arrangements for the LSC are established by Government as a matter of urgency.

SUPPLY OF SKILLS TRAINING

22. Current provision of post-16 education and training is distributed between school sixth forms, sixth-form colleges, colleges of further education and providers in the private sector. Given the different and distinct contributions of each form of provision, NASUWT believes that the current balance of provision is broadly correct and believes that there is no evidence that substantial reform of current provision patterns would make any meaningful contribution to raising standards of attainment.

23. In particular, NASUWT would have significant concerns about any further attempts to increase the proportion of provision sourced from private sector organisations. While it is the case that some private sector training provision is of a very high standard, NASUWT notes that a key remit of the newly formed Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) is to tackle the poor quality of provision within much of the private sector. In NASUWT's view, the substandard skills education and training provided by the private sector organisations targeted by the QIA results from the poor terms and conditions of employment in many of these settings which prevent the development of the quality of provision seen in the public sector.

DEVELOPING A DEMAND-LED SYSTEM

24. NASUWT acknowledges that the provision of post-16 skills education and training must be responsive to changing needs and demands but it is important to ensure that a balanced approach to the views of all legitimate stakeholders is taken into account in this respect. NASUWT is particularly concerned that if the development of a demand-led system is translated into a disproportionate emphasis on the

perceived needs of employers, unmediated by the perspectives of teachers, lecturers, learners, Government and other stakeholders, the risk of patterns of provision being developed in incoherent and non-inclusive ways will be increased significantly.

25. While the need to involve recognised trade unions as the legitimate representatives of workers within the skills education and training sector is essential in the development of coherent and responsive policy, the trade union movement continues to acknowledge its central role in supporting the engagement of its members in lifelong learning. The role of Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) is critical in this respect. As accountable workplace representatives of employees, ULRs are in a unique position to ensure that skills development and training becomes a central element of collective bargaining. Through this activity, and the provision of individual advice to members, ULRs ensure that the views and aspirations of members are articulated effectively and are able to enhance employer practices and policies through informed dialogue and discussion. NASUWT's own network of over 350 ULRs continue to provide evidence of the importance of this role through their support for members in securing more effective and tailored Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities to support their career and pay progression as well as enhancing their professional skills and expertise.

26. It is essential that the Government and trade union movement sustain their commitment to developing the ULR role as an effective and representative means by which the needs of employees can be taken into full account in the provision of skills education and training opportunities in the workplace.

ADVICE AND GUIDANCE FOR LEARNERS

27. NASUWT welcomed the Government's commitment, set out in its Green Paper on youth policy, *Youth Matters*, to revitalise the provision of independent Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) for young people in respect of their decisions about future education, training and employment opportunities. Through this commitment, the Government has recognised that meaningful reform within the 14–19 sector, which seeks to provide a greater range of opportunities for learners, will not be realised in practice unless young people can receive clear, well-informed and impartial support for their consideration of their future education, employment and training options.

28. However, NASUWT believes that access to such advice and guidance is also essential for adult learners. Currently, adults seeking advice about skills education and training have a limited number of sources of independent IAG. Information from providers, while often comprehensive and readily accessible, is not independent as the advice and provision are derived from the same source. Such advice is unlikely to indicate the full range of options open to those seeking information from other providers. Useful information about skills education and training can be obtained from the Jobcentre Plus service but often these services are targeted towards particular groups and can be difficult for all learners to access. It is essential that the Government works to ensure that all learners have access to external sources of independent IAG as part of broader policy to support the education and training of all adult learners.

APPRENTICESHIPS

29. Within the schools sector, NASUWT has continued to monitor the implementation of the Young Apprenticeship scheme closely and notes that the evaluation evidence for the scheme indicates significant levels of satisfaction on the part of learners, teachers and providers. However, NASUWT notes that the Young Apprenticeship programme is, of necessity, relatively small scale, with approximately one thousand learners in each yearly cohort. Nevertheless, there are ongoing concerns about the use of extended off-site learning periods for young people and the extent to which schools are supported through the development of non-bureaucratic quality assurance processes to ensure that pupils receive a standard of education comparable to that provided directly by schools. The development of work-based learning opportunities in the 14–19 sector will need to be monitored carefully in order to ensure that learners receive the input and guidance they are entitled to and that the way in which such related learning fits into broader curriculum and qualifications reform is coherent and recognises young people's learning in an effective and motivating way.

30. The Young Apprenticeship scheme has been developed with a clear focus on employers with good records of supporting work-based learning. In many respects, the relatively small scale of Government-supported apprenticeships programmes allows for placements to be made in supportive and well-organised employment contexts. If the Government plans to extend the use of apprenticeships as a way of supporting the acquisition of vocational skills and qualifications, many more employers will need to become involved in programmes of this type. As part of its work to secure more effective engagement of employers in skills education and training, the Government should consider what action will be necessary in order to engage more employers in supporting and providing worthwhile work-based learning opportunities.

SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS—SPECIFICATION DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

31. The design and development of the 14–19 Specialised Diplomas is critical to the success of the Government's wider skills education and training policy.

32. NASUWT is concerned about aspects of work to develop the specifications for the Diplomas. In particular, the differing priorities and perspectives of the agencies and bodies given responsibility for taking forward the design of Diplomas has led to concerns being expressed about the finalisation of the Diploma specifications. The desire of the Government to ensure that the design of the Diplomas is 'employer-led' has resulted in this work being undertaken by bodies without adequate expertise and experience in designing national-level qualifications.

33. NASUWT is concerned that there appears to be a lack of strategic management of the design and development of the Diplomas. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has sought to oversee effectively the development of the Diplomas but has been hindered to some extent by the distribution of responsibilities among a wide range of different organisations. The Government needs to ensure that more effective central co-ordination of the design of the Diplomas is put in place to ensure that the concerns that have been expressed about aspects of Diploma design can be addressed effectively. These include the purpose and function of the extended project and the need to ensure that Diplomas do not represent a limiting of future learning options for young people working towards them.

34. NASUWT believes that the DfES needs to take a more proactive role, in collaboration with NASUWT and other social partners, in steering the progress of the design and development of the Specialised Diplomas.

SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS—TEACHER AND LECTURER TRAINING

35. NASUWT recognises that there are significant concerns about the apparently low level of awareness amongst teachers and lecturers of the implications of the 14–19 Specialist Diplomas. In its seminars on 14–19 Diplomas, held during the Autumn of 2006, a key message from practising teachers and lecturers has been that information received by schools and colleges about the Diplomas is often contradictory and is not related specifically to the impact of the Diplomas on the work of teachers and lecturers.

36. It is possible to ascribe this general lack of awareness to the lack of strategic clarity about the way in which Diplomas should be developed and integrated into the existing work of schools and colleges. While NASUWT recognises that raising levels of awareness and ensuring that teachers are given the professional development opportunities they require in order to secure successful implementation of the Diplomas is essential, the Union believes that more effective central co-ordination of the development of Diplomas will generate the clarity necessary to develop a more coherent set of messages upon which effective communication and CPD strategies can be built.

SPECIALISED DIPLOMAS INSTITUTIONAL CO-ORDINATION

37. Extending the range of learning options available to the students in the 14–19 sector will require co-ordination and collaboration between different institutions, given that no single institution will be in a position to offer all the lines of learning set out in the 14–19 White Paper.

38. However, NASUWT believes that the current system of school accountability, based upon Ofsted inspections and performance tables, works against the establishment of effective collaborative arrangements between schools and other learning providers. The accountability regime is designed to support a system of competition rather than co-operation between collaborators and over-emphasises the need for schools and colleges to focus on their own performance indicators rather than addressing through collaboration the needs of all learners within the communities they serve. In a context where students might be educated in more than one institution, it is increasingly anomalous to attempt to hold one institution to account through performance tables and inspection for the performance of students formally on role at that institution.

39. NASUWT believes that effective collaboration between institutions will only be achieved if there is a fundamental review of the way in which local learning providers are held to account for the work they undertake with students. More effective accountability mechanisms would allow schools and colleges to focus more on the work they can undertake in collaboration with other institutions and would thereby help to ensure that the development of collaborative arrangements is supported.

40. NASUWT believes that there is a tension between the need to develop greater collaboration between institutions and the Government's attempts to increase levels of school autonomy. In such a context, it becomes increasingly difficult for local authorities to co-ordinate patterns of post-16 provision. In particular, the right of schools to open or expand existing sixth forms is inconsistent with the need to ensure that local patterns of 14–19 provision are coherent, effective and ensure that meaningful learning opportunities are offered to all learners in all local authority areas. NASUWT is also concerned about the extent to which adequate account has been taken of the capacity of schools to deliver the 14–19 reform agenda in the proposed timescale given other concurrent initiatives including the reform of the Key Stage 3 curriculum, personalised learning and the consequences of the languages review.

January 2007