



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority

Delivering the Higher Diploma to post-16 learners

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Introduction

This guidance communicates key messages to centres planning to deliver the Higher Diploma for post-16 learners over one year from September 2009. In 2008 the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the Learning Skills Council (LSC) agreed to monitor the progress of the Higher Diploma for post-16 learners over one year and publish interim findings in April 2009. The information below is principally drawn from visits to six consortia delivering the Higher Diploma over one year. This guidance gives key messages from the centres visited and is likely to be of interest to centres planning for future Diploma delivery. The full findings from the research, which was undertaken by the LSC, will be available later in the year.

The key messages from the interim findings are listed below.

- The providers surveyed are able to offer the full 800 guided learning hours (GLH) in a one year course.
- Providers recognise that meeting the 800 GLH requirement is challenging.
- The post-16 Higher Diploma attracts additional funding from DCSF and LSC for each post-16 learner recruited, but there is some evidence that centres are unaware of this additional funding. For more information on post-16 Diploma funding go to www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19.
- The Diploma curriculum is an enriched programme offering many of the elements of an entitlement curriculum.
- Achieving success in all three functional skills is seen as an equally challenging aspect for learners and a range of strategies is being developed to target support where it is most needed.

We also have evidence from our discussions with consortia on the post-16 Higher Diploma that:

- learners are enjoying the course
- practitioners believe that it is a motivating course and a positive addition to the level 2 qualifications available to learners

- additional and specialist learning (ASL) can be a very motivating feature of the course, particularly where it has been personalised to allow for specialist curriculum provision
- learners should have access to high quality information, advice and guidance (IAG) before enrolment so that they are prepared for the demands of the course.

Case study: East Northants consortium

The consortium consists of five schools and Tresham Institute of Further and Higher Education. It is delivering post-16 Higher Diplomas in creative and media, engineering, and society, health and development as one-year courses. Learners move between the centres using transport provided by the consortium. Teachers also move to other centres. For example, functional skills teachers deliver their subject to each Diploma group in turn on an eight week cycle, contextualising the functional skills teaching to the relevant line of learning. In the course of the week, learners attend one tutorial session with their pastoral tutor and peers in their home centre.

Enrichment and entitlement in the Higher Diploma for post-16 learners

The post-16 Higher Diploma delivered over one year provides a rich and motivating experience that embraces much of the enrichment and entitlement curriculum. It is an integrated, coherent and motivating programme that supports the delivery and achievement of personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS), which are a feature of a good entitlement curriculum.

The programme may include a range of interactions with employers and local companies including working on a brief set by an employer, community links and applied learning activity as part of the principal learning component. These offer the opportunity to transfer knowledge, skills and understanding in a variety of different contexts. Tutorial time and IAG delivery is integrated into the Diploma curriculum to support learner achievement and progression. Centres are able to plan work experience placements to fully support the Diploma learning that is taking place and work placements can also contribute to work on the Diploma project.

While post-16 timetabled sport, music, dance and drama can be difficult to accommodate, the interim findings from the research suggest that some learners are taking part in sport and recreation activity offered by the school or college outside the timetabled curriculum.

Additional and specialist learning (ASL)

Post-16 learners who have chosen a Diploma often have a number of possible progression routes in mind. Good IAG on enrolment will support them in their choices. Learners are likely to require – and be motivated by – ASL that is related to that progression route and/or the sector(s) involved in their Diploma, especially where learning is more specialist. There is evidence from the early research that some colleges have been able to offer a good choice of specialist learning.

A broad based ASL offer is likely to encourage recruitment and motivation. Diploma partnership provision is needed to offer an appropriately wide range of opportunities to meet different needs. It is recommended that consortia are fully aware of the needs of learners and plan progression routes early in the academic year so that learners are aware of all their local progression opportunities, including the Advanced Diploma, employment with training and apprenticeships.

The accreditation of prior learning is an important aspect of the Higher Diploma over one year. The ASL that a consortium offers, including the possibility of accrediting prior learning, gives learners the possibility of a truly personalised and stretching curriculum. For example, learners could be offered a choice of smaller qualifications to complete the requirement, more specialised learning, and/or qualifications at level 3 where appropriate.

Functional skills in English, information and communication technology (ICT) and maths

The interim findings from the consortia visited found that the successful delivery of functional skills is currently seen to be a significant challenge for centres. The nature of the post-16 Higher Diploma over one year means that learners are at various stages in their understanding and achievement of the three functional skills. Supporting learners in their achievement of functional skills qualifications is essential for both their achievement of the Diploma and also for their future life skills in these subjects. Planning for the most efficient use of the functional skills assessment windows is required to support learner achievement. The aim is to provide a personalised programme of support for learners across each of the three

functional skills. Many centres have allocated time for discrete functional skills lessons, particularly in English and maths, as well as embedding the application of functional skills within principal learning. Tailoring provision and delivery to individual learners and maximising opportunities for contextualisation and practice of the skills are important aspects of planning for the delivery of functional skills. Many centres are also planning to use the final term for more intensive functional skills once the principal learning has been completed. This extra support aims to maximise the time available in the curriculum. Other strategies to use include supported drop-in learning centres and one-to-one coaching sessions as part of a personalised support approach.

Case study: North Hertfordshire Strategic Area Partnership Group

North Hertfordshire College delivers post-16 Higher Diplomas in society, health and development, creative and media and information technology. A full teaching week of approximately 23 hours is allocated to the Diploma curriculum over a three-term academic year. Timetabling is based on a whole day model of 09.00 to 16.00 or 17.00. All ASL is timetabled on Wednesday. Students who require further support in functional skills have been identified and additional support has been allocated to them. The functional skills assessment plans of different awarding bodies are being trialled in order to judge which would be the most appropriate for Diploma students.

More detailed QCA guidance based on the final LSC research report will be available later in the year. It will consider the challenges that consortia have faced in the first year of delivery and provide an insight into the solutions they have developed.

Information and guidance relevant to the post-16 Higher Diploma over one year

Design for success: Creative approaches to curriculum planning
(www.qca.org.uk/qca_17942.aspx)

Design for success: Curriculum illustrations for the post-16 Diploma
(www.qca.org.uk/qca_18420.aspx)

Funding guidance for centres delivering the post-16 Higher Diploma in 2009/10

(www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19)

Functional skills support programme (<http://excellence.qia.org.uk/functionalskills>)

Other websites of interest

QCA Direct (www.diploma-support.org/communities/QCAdirect)

QCA Direct has been set up by QCA to give practitioners the opportunity to tell QCA about teaching and learning in the first 10 Diploma lines of learning. Practitioners can use this community to get in touch with QCA in three ways: directly using the 'Talk direct to QCA' portal; by completing a survey; or by taking part in one of the QCA-led discussions.

Consortium support guide: delivery 2010 and beyond (www.diploma-support.org/node/20711)

This guide sets out the support available to help deliver Diplomas from September 2010 and 2011.