

Details of the Responses to the Consultation on Changes to Diploma Regulation



October 2011

Ofqual/11/5072

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Introduction

The *Consultation on Changes to Diploma Regulation* was conducted to obtain stakeholder views on changes to the regulation of the Diploma. The document set out the fact that changes were considered necessary because the government has indicated its intention to close Diploma Aggregation Service (DAS) from 2013 and it expects awarding organisations that wish to continue to offer this qualification to develop their own approach to doing so. As we currently require awarding organisations to use DAS, it is necessary for us to change the related parts of our existing regulatory requirements. We have also previously identified concerns with the complexity of the administration of the qualification. It will be up to awarding organisations to decide if and how they wish to continue offering the Diploma.

Methodology

The public consultation was open between 13th June and 5th September 2011. Respondents were encouraged to provide responses on the proposals via web-based, email or paper methods.

Respondents were asked to comment on the following:

- The withdrawal of the *Regulatory Arrangements for Component and Diploma Awarding Bodies*;
- Demonstration of aggregation by awarding organisations for component qualifications;
- Whether the proposed approach permits sufficient flexibility;
- Whether a suitable approach is presented for those that wish to offer the Diploma;
- Timeframes for adjustment;
- Whether transitional arrangements will disadvantage learners or centres.

Qualitative analysis

There were 24 responses to the consultation. Of these, nine were from awarding organisations and their representatives. A further four were from sector skills councils (SSCs) or Diploma development partnerships (DDPs). The remaining responses included views from individual schools and local authorities, a teacher association and a learning provider association. We also received two late responses that were not included in the formal analysis but for whom the views were noted. The views expressed in these were broadly in line with the majority of the respondents and no new issues were raised.

There was broad agreement to the approach we set out in the consultation. For almost all the questions there was a positive response to the proposals. In particular, around 80 per cent agreed that we should withdraw *Regulatory Arrangements for Component and Diploma Awarding Bodies* and 75 per cent agreed that the proposals present a suitable approach to ensure that all those that wish to offer the Diploma or its component qualifications in future are able to do so.

The only questions where a majority were not in favour of the proposals were those about whether or not the proposals allowed sufficient time for awarding organisations and centres to respond. Here the results were evenly split, with a small majority feeling that there was insufficient time for these organisations. In contrast, a small majority felt there was sufficient time for learners to adjust to the changes. A majority also felt that the proposed transitional arrangements ensured that learners and centres are not unfairly disadvantaged by the changes to Diploma regulations.

Some responses were given from the perspective of there being few viable options, particularly in the context of the government's intentions on the future of DAS. Some of these respondents noted that ideally their preference would be for the current arrangements. Others were content that the changes would be made but would prefer that the qualification were removed altogether. Both these groups, where they supported the proposed approach, tended to agree with the proposals as being the only feasible option available at this time rather than necessarily their preferred approach.

In particular, some felt there was now a real issue with the 'currency' of this qualification. It was previously developed as part of a nationally promoted pathway, which gave it a particular position and status. As this is no longer the case, some think this provides a reason for the qualification to be withdrawn. However, others noted the support for the qualification in certain sectors and the positive impact it has had on specific groups of learners.

As the quantitative analysis summarised above illustrates, the main concerns raised were in relation to the timing of changes. Here the key issues raised were around

whether the proposed timescale give awarding organisations, and centres in particular, enough time to adjust to the new position. There is, however, a good deal of agreement as to the substance of these proposals and a clear expectation from the Department for Education that DAS will be closed in September 2013. This suggests, therefore, it is appropriate for us to consider how the concerns raised can be addressed within the timeframes proposed in the consultation.

Some questions of how learners' interests will be protected were also raised. This was mainly in terms of how learners will be given the opportunity to complete qualifications, particularly when they re-sit. There were also questions about the safeguards that will be put in place to ensure that any new qualifications that are developed will be subject to the appropriate scrutiny.

It follows that to implement these proposals will require us to put in place some detailed arrangements for awarding organisations to confirm whether they intend to continue to offer the Diploma or not, and give us undertakings as to how they will protect learners' interests whatever their decision.

Quantitative analysis

Question	Agree	Disagree	No response	Total
1. Do you agree that we should withdraw <i>Regulatory Arrangements for Component and Diploma Awarding Bodies: Recognition Requirements and Operating Rules (Version 3)</i> ?	19 (79%)	3 (13%)	2 (8%)	24 (100%)
2. Do you agree that awarding organisations that wish to award the Diploma should be required to demonstrate to us that they will be able to aggregate the results from the component qualifications?	22 (92%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	24 (100%)
3. Does the proposed approach permit sufficient flexibility to allow the development of new qualifications that build on Diploma component qualifications where there is demand for them?	20 (84%)	2 (8%)	2 (8%)	24 (100%)
4. Do the proposals present a suitable approach to ensure that all those that wish to offer the Diploma or its component qualifications in future are able to?	18 (75%)	4 (17%)	2 (8%)	24 (100%)
5. Do the timeframes allow sufficient time for adjustment for a) awarding organisations, b) centres and c) learners?	A 10 (42%)	11 (46%)	3 (12%)	24 (100%)
	B 10 (42%)	12 (50%)	2 (8%)	24 (100%)
	C 12 (50%)	10 (42%)	2 (8%)	24 (100%)
Question 6: Will the transitional arrangements ensure that learners and centres are not unfairly disadvantaged by the changes to Diploma Regulations?	13 (54%)	5 (21%)	6 (25%)	24 (100%)

Recommendations

The Ofqual Board agreed to take forward the recommendations from the consultation to withdraw the *Regulatory Arrangements for Component and Diploma Awarding Bodies: Recognition Requirements and Operating Rules (Version 3)* in 2013 when the government closes DAS. Until then, the arrangements for the Diploma will remain the same, with provisions put in place for re-sits in 2014. Beyond that, those awarding organisations that wish to offer the Diploma will be able to do so if they put in place alternative arrangements to award the qualification.

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