

Curriculum planning

Diploma

2009

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Flexibility in Diploma programmes

Realising the potential of additional and specialist learning



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority

Delivering the 14-19 education and skills programme

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Introduction

Diplomas are new qualifications that can be taken at school or college. By 2011, there will be 17 lines of learning available.

The vision for the Diploma is more than just an entitlement to 17 lines of learning. It includes a promise of a personalised curriculum that offers all young people a motivating and coherent learning experience enabling effective progression to further and higher education, apprenticeship and employment with training.

To realise this promise, Diplomas provide access to applied and practical styles of learning to help young people find out about areas of work that interest them.

At the same time, Diplomas keep progression options open. When learners finish a Diploma, they can:

- stay at school or college and do another course – like the next level of Diploma or A levels
- proceed to higher education
- progress to an apprenticeship
- enter employment with training.

Enabling this breadth of progression, while providing a motivating practical and applied learning experience, is the real promise of the Diploma. Designed to be as flexible as possible, Diplomas help students enjoy creative and innovative learning delivered within the consortium's capacity and boundaries. Additional and specialist learning (ASL) has a crucial role to play in delivering this personalised and flexible curriculum offer.

Realising the power inherent in ASL may require new thinking about the construction of the curriculum and flexible approaches to timetabling. Limiting consideration to the qualifications already available in other timetable option blocks may be a sensible approach in the early stages of Diploma development. However, as Diploma programmes grow in size, it will be important to offer more opportunities to consider personalised approaches for ASL, with delivery of qualifications taking place outside the home school or college, for example from an independent training provider, college, or school offering a specialised option.

This lets the Diploma be closely tailored to the needs and aspirations of individual learners, while offering learning providers the opportunity to develop specialised provision they can market to other members of a consortium.

This guidance shows the power of ASL in personalising Diplomas and extends thinking about the possibilities for the use of ASL in Diploma programmes.

Who is this guidance for?

This document is intended for Diploma consortia managers and curriculum planners; teachers; and information, advice and guidance professionals. It outlines programmes and the potential of ASL in developing innovative and creative learning pathways.

The guidance is designed to:

- illustrate how the choice of ASL qualifications can be optimised to meet personal requirements of learners and ensure effective progression
- help curriculum managers see possibilities for developing their consortium's ASL provision
- guarantee that teachers and learners understand requirements for ASL, so that only legitimate combinations of ASL are used, with other Diploma components
- answer questions about the ASL catalogues and how to use them
- provide links to further information, such as websites and other documents.

What does this guidance cover?

This guidance covers the following.

- **Purpose of ASL within the Diploma**

This section explains the purpose of ASL in enhancing the learning across a Diploma learner's programme of study.

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- **Negotiating and constructing learning pathways**

This section provides illustration of how ASL can be used to support different progression opportunities.

- **Harnessing the power of ASL**

This section provides suggestions on how a diverse ASL offer may be developed over time.

- **Using ASL: Catalogues and regulations**

This technical section describes:

- the ASL catalogues and how to use them
- how qualifications become part of the ASL catalogues
- the regulations governing use and combination of ASL qualifications
- the implications of ASL for UCAS tariff points and the Achievement and Attainment Tables.

- **More information**

This section provides the links to external information, such as websites and other guidance.

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Purpose of additional and specialist learning within the Diploma

The Foundation, Higher and Advanced Diplomas are composite qualifications formed of three components:

- principal learning
- generic learning
- ASL.

There is also a Progression Diploma, a subset of the Advanced Diploma, consisting of principal learning and generic learning but no ASL.

All three components have particular functions within the overall Diploma qualification.

Principal learning develops and applies the knowledge and skills that are specific to the line of learning, for example in creative and media, or hair and beauty.

Generic learning develops the broad skills and knowledge necessary for learning, employment and personal development. It includes functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT; personal, learning and thinking skills; a project; and work experience. Together these are designed to prepare young people for entry into employment with training, apprenticeship, or further or higher education.

ASL allows learners to select qualifications to include as part of their Diploma programme. This means that learners can personalise their learning according to their individual ambitions and interests, adding high-quality breadth and/or depth of study to their chosen line of learning.

Although these components are described individually, the connections between them are central to the Diploma. These connections support young people in their development by pulling together and applying learning from different contexts. For example, the mandatory mathematics skills taught through the key stage 4 curriculum can then be further developed by applying them in work-related scenarios in Diploma classes and through work experience.

Through this combination of interlinked components, the Diploma creates a programme of experiences through which knowledge, skills and understanding can be applied and deepened. This development and application of skills and understanding will prepare Diploma learners for the next stage of life, whether that's employment with training, apprenticeship, or further or higher education.

ASL should therefore always be considered within the context of the Diploma as a whole and in respect of the wider benefit it brings to Diploma learners. ASL should support the coherence of Diploma learners' programmes of study and their progression.

Personalising a society, health and development Higher Diploma

The Higher Diploma in society, health and development is designed to introduce learners to children and young people's services, health, community justice and adult social care. Principal learning in this Diploma provides a general introduction to a wide range of potential employment sectors and jobs. For example:

- adult care worker
- art therapist
- children's nurse
- children's social worker
- counsellor
- community safety warden
- dietician
- educational psychologist
- healthcare assistant
- nurse
- nursery nurse
- occupational therapist
- pharmacy technician
- police community support officer
- probation officer
- prosthetics designer
- speech therapist
- victim support worker
- youth offending team worker
- youth worker.

ASL can provide a sharper progression focus. For example, learners taking the society, health and development Higher Diploma in key stage 4 may be interested in following a progression route that leads to nursing. Having a GCSE double award in science as their ASL will be important, as they need to take a level 3 biology course, such as an A level, to progress to many nursing degrees. Other learners taking the same Diploma may be thinking of a career in occupational therapy. They could opt to take art-based courses as their ASL, linked to that career progression route. This could include a GCSE in art but, equally, could be a more vocational qualification, such as a level 2 Certificate in art and design, or a level 2 Certificate in music.

This is the power of ASL, enabling learners to personalise their Diploma by choosing learning and qualifications appropriate to their aspirations and interests.

Progression to higher education

Choosing appropriate ASL will be important for supporting progression into higher education. Higher education institutions provide indicative entry requirements for their courses. These will tell learners and their advisers if specific ASL qualifications are needed for a particular course. Indicative entry requirements for all higher education courses can be accessed via the UCAS website (www.ucas.ac.uk).

In many cases, these indicative entry requirements will list existing qualifications that can be taken as ASL to support progression into higher education. In some cases, entirely new qualifications may be developed.

For example, higher education professionals have been working with employers to develop a new mathematics for engineering qualification specifically for entry into higher education. They believe that existing mathematics qualifications do not expose students to the reality of engineering. Created by a specialist team of engineering and mathematics experts, this ASL qualification provides more specialist preparation than existing mathematics qualifications for those wanting to pursue an engineering degree.

Many universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, say they will accept the Advanced Diploma in engineering and stress the importance and relevance of the new ASL mathematics for engineering qualification.

Progression to apprenticeship

The government is committed to expanding the availability of apprenticeships as part of the strategy for raising the participation age. Diplomas should provide a smooth progression route to both apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships.

The ASL catalogues contain many qualifications that act as technical certificates in apprenticeship frameworks. It may be possible to take these as part of the Diploma, thereby shortening the time to achieve an apprenticeship framework.

The curriculum challenge

QCA, the Diploma development partnerships (representing employers and higher education) and awarding bodies are working hard to ensure that the ASL provision now available for each line of learning provides breadth of choice, the opportunity to specialise further, and creates coherent learning programmes. However, the links formed between various component parts of the Diploma make it a versatile, and therefore powerful, way to construct learning programmes.

ASL adds to the overall power of a Diploma by letting learners create learning programmes that are personally meaningful, motivating and engaging and that enable effective progression. This means the Diploma, as a whole learning programme and experience, becomes more than the sum of its parts.

ASL presents enormous opportunities for developing a personalised curriculum offer for learners at all Diploma levels. Such personalisation delivers interest and engagement for each consortium that, in turn, provides motivation, participation and success. The curriculum challenge is to develop ways to deliver as wide a range of ASL as possible in consortia.

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Negotiating and constructing learning pathways

The following illustrations provide examples of how Diploma learners can use ASL in a variety of ways to make progression routes as wide or as specific as their learning choices require.

Each illustration follows a common sequence: from a learner's aspirations and needs, to thinking about a curriculum that meets those needs, to choosing appropriate ASL qualifications that support curriculum delivery. The examples become increasingly complex.

ASL is a mandatory component of the Foundation, Higher and Advanced Diplomas. To achieve the ASL component of a Diploma, learners must take a qualification or qualifications that meet the minimum guided learning hour (GLH) requirements for the level of the Diploma they are taking:

- level 1 – Foundation Diploma – 120 GLH
- level 2 – Higher Diploma – 180 GLH
- level 3 – Advanced Diploma – 360 GLH.

However, this does not prevent a learner from taking qualifications that exceed the minimum GLH. Indeed, the ASL catalogues, which list all of the qualifications that can be legitimately used as ASL for each Diploma at each level, contain single qualifications that exceed the minimum GLH by up to 50 per cent. ASL must be either the same level as the Diploma or higher.

Keeping options open

Many learners taking Diplomas in key stage 4 may not have a very clear idea of what they want to do in the future. ASL needs to be used here to keep progression options open.

James: A career in business

James goes to an 11–16 comprehensive school. His discussions with his career adviser at the end of year 9 convince him that he wants to progress to a business course at the local college, which accepts the Higher Diploma for progression to any of its level 3 courses.

James's parents want him to attend university, so they have been researching business degree programmes. They think that James needs to keep his options open, but he really does not want to follow an eight-GCSE programme at key stage 4; he likes the idea of the applied learning offered by the Higher Diploma. James's teachers tell his parents at the school open evening that this approach to learning would suit James well.

James decides to take the Higher Diploma in business, administration and finance in key stage 4. However, James knows that he may change his mind over the next two years and that a number of opportunities exist for studying business at post-16. For example, he might want to take the Advanced Diploma in IT or public services, or an A level programme including applied business. Alternatively, he can consider an advanced apprenticeship.

James takes English and mathematics GCSEs as part of his core key stage 4 programme. He is confident that he will pass these subjects. He recognises that languages could be important in a career in business, but he also wants to take an IT qualification. He opts for GCSE in Spanish and a GCSE short course in ICT for his ASL. This solution keeps options open while supporting his interests and aspirations.

Ann: A future in physiotherapy

Ann is in a similar position to James. She knows she would like to work with people and likes the idea of physiotherapy as a career. She opts for the Higher Diploma in society, health and development. Like James, she takes English and mathematics GCSEs as part of her core key stage 4 curriculum. She knows that progression to a physiotherapy course in higher education will require level 3 science qualifications, such as an A level in biology.

To keep her options open, she elects to take the GCSE double award in science as her ASL. From here she could go on to an A level programme or take the society, health and development Advanced Diploma with A level biology as her ASL.

Diploma → Diploma progression

A number of possibilities exist here. Learners can stay in the same line of learning, for example taking a Higher Diploma in key stage 4 and the Advanced Diploma at post-16, or they can study for a Foundation Diploma in key stage 4, progressing to a Higher Diploma taken in one year, post-16, before proceeding to an apprenticeship. Alternatively, learners may decide to change their line of learning as they move up a level.

Joy: Committed to hairdressing

Joy wants to be a hairdresser. She is excited about the possibility of taking the Diploma as part of fulfilling her dream. In key stage 4 she plans to take the Foundation Diploma in hair and beauty studies.

At post-16 Joy plans to progress first to a Higher Diploma in hair and beauty studies, taken in one year at the local college, and then to a hairdressing apprenticeship.

Her ASL for the Foundation Diploma focuses on developing her understanding of the range of techniques available in the hair and beauty sector. This vocational focus builds on her current enthusiasm to maintain motivation and engagement. She opts for the ITEC foundation qualification in hair and beauty therapy studies.

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Nathan: From creative and media to IT

When choosing his key stage 4 options, Nathan is very unsure whether he wants to pursue a career in media or IT. Eventually he chooses the Higher Diploma in creative and media but wants to keep open the possibility of switching to the Advanced Diploma in IT at post-16. To this end, he decides to take GCSE business studies for his ASL. This proves useful regardless of which route he follows post-16. In addition, he takes the GCSE short course in design and technology to deepen his media programme.

Mya: A career in management

Mya wants to pursue a management career within the thriving local manufacturing sector, which offers well-paid, local jobs. She achieves three GCSEs at grade C in English, history, and information and communication technology and two at grade D in science and mathematics at the end of key stage 4.

This is not enough to get a job with a local employer as part of its junior management development programme; that requires a level 3 qualification. The Diploma consortium offers her a place on their one-year post-16 Higher Diploma programme. Her career counsellor advises her that, if she is successful, she can then move on to an Advanced Diploma.

She opts for the Higher Diploma in business, administration and finance, which includes taking a functional skills qualification in mathematics. For her ASL, she wants to deepen her knowledge about accounts and management. She opts for a level 2 qualification in accounting and a Certificate in administrative management. This enables her then to progress to the Advanced Diploma in business, administration and finance.

Diploma → Apprenticeship

Diplomas are intended to prepare learners for work, not make learners job-ready. Progression to an apprenticeship provides job readiness. However, it is possible to take the technical certificate component of an apprenticeship framework while studying for a Diploma.

Graham: From Advanced Diploma to advanced apprenticeship

Graham wants to join the Royal Air Force (RAF) as an IT specialist. This requires him to study for an advanced apprenticeship in communications technology.

Although he has the minimum entry requirements of GCSEs in English and mathematics, and a double award in science, at 16 Graham does not feel ready to join the RAF. Instead he stays at college to take the Advanced Diploma in IT.

The RAF uses the BTEC National Award in communications technology as the technical certificate for its advanced apprenticeship in communications technology, but Graham's consortium does not offer that qualification. However, the neighbouring consortium offers the course, and Graham is able to join their programme. The delivery model is flexible and can be tailored to his needs.

Zubaida: An advanced apprenticeship in electrical installation

Zubaida likes the practical side of science but does not think that higher education is for her. She wants to get a job and earn a living.

She does some background research and finds that being an electrician pays well and will make use of her interest in physics. An advanced apprenticeship in electrical installation seems the best way to progress to working in this area.

Local companies typically recruit advanced apprentices in electrical installation who have a minimum of four GCSEs at grades A* to C, including mathematics. The Higher Diploma in construction and the built environment with a mathematics GCSE will work for her. She takes GCSEs in English, mathematics and information and communication technology as part of her core curriculum.

As ASL Zubaida chooses to take the ABC Award in performing electrical installation operations, combined with a level 2 Certificate in applied science. She feels that this combination, with its practical emphasis, best fits her interests and career goals while providing highly marketable skills.

Her tutors are confident that she will be able to cope with the demands of this selection of ASL.

Diploma → Employment with training

The raising of the participation age to 17 by 2013 and 18 by 2015 is a key aspect of the current education reform and should be considered when thinking about progression to and from Diplomas. Many learners still aim to enter employment at 16 or 17, and not all will do so through an apprenticeship.

Considerable attention should be paid to local employment opportunities with training and how to prepare learners to access those opportunities. ASL can help here, too, by tailoring programmes to meet local employment needs.

Mark: Foundation Diploma to employment with training in catering

Mark is taking the Foundation Diploma in hospitality and GCSEs in English and mathematics. He plans to leave school at 16 for employment with training. He has known for some time that he wants a job in catering, ideally as a chef.

The local catering sector thrives with a number of firms offering employment with training. Work with local catering employers reveals that applicants who demonstrate a real interest in catering and cooking, and have good employability skills, are more likely to obtain one of these jobs.

Mark likes hands-on learning, but his career adviser is concerned that he needs to develop additional general employability skills. Mark and his adviser look for ways to meet Mark's preferred practical approach to learning, address his personal development needs and show his commitment to the catering sector.

They devise the following ASL programme to meet Mark's specific needs:

- level 2 Award in practical food safety in catering: this qualification develops basic knowledge and skills required to operate safely within food-handling environments; it develops practical skills in food safety, and it complements Mark's interests and demonstrates his enthusiasm for working in the sector
- level 1 Certificate in workskills – this is a very flexible qualification that develops general and transferable skills, such as teamwork and leadership; Mark's adviser thinks that it will provide a useful framework to meet his personal development needs, and much of the evidence needed for the portfolio can be generated through Mark's work experience placement
- level 2 Award in nutrition awareness – this will provide Mark with a more in-depth understanding of the principles of nutrition, building on his principal learning; it is a practical programme assessed through a portfolio of evidence, again demonstrating his interest in and commitment to a career in catering.

Diploma → Higher education

Higher education institutions publish their indicative entry requirements for degree and other courses in the spring of each year. These are available on the UCAS website and should be consulted to ensure any mandatory requirements for ASL to progress to a particular programme are met.

Zaheera: Committed to architecture

Zaheera achieves eight GCSEs at grades A* to C. She sets her sights on becoming an architect but appreciates that getting a place to study for a degree in architecture is highly competitive. She reviews indicative entry requirements with her adviser on the UCAS website and finds that the construction and the built environment Advanced Diploma is acceptable to a number of higher education institutions offering architecture degrees. However, the choice of ASL also needs to meet the entry requirements, which stress the need for learners to have a balance of science and humanities qualifications.

She feels she needs to boost the science and mathematics content of her Diploma, so she decides to take an AS level in physics and the level 3 Certificate in mathematics for engineering. She can study for this qualification with the advanced engineering and manufacturing and product design Diploma students at the local college.

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Nawaz: Keeping higher education options open

Nawaz is unsure about his future career. He thinks he might want to become a sports physiotherapist, but he also does voluntary work with young people who have learning difficulties, which he finds very rewarding. Another possibility he is considering is to take a Bachelor of Education degree and train as a special needs teacher.

The indicative entry requirements for physiotherapy from his local university are absolutely clear: he must take an A level in biology or human biology as ASL for his society, health and development Diploma.

He has passed GCSE English, mathematics and science, so he also has the level 2 qualifications needed to progress to the Bachelor of Education degree in primary education. However, his adviser is uncertain as to whether the local university will accept the society, health and development Diploma with A level biology to progress to the Bachelor of Education degree.

Nawaz's adviser phones the local university, who ask Nawaz to come in and talk to the admissions tutor. The admissions tutor is impressed by Nawaz's voluntary work and agrees, as part of the local learning network, to support Nawaz's application. However, the admissions tutor suggests that Nawaz might base his extended project on his voluntary work, writing about special educational needs.

Nawaz complements his project by taking a level 3 Certificate in supporting people with learning disabilities provided by the local voluntary organisation where he currently volunteers and where he plans to undertake his work experience. This provides a total ASL package of 440 GLH.

Harnessing the power of additional and specialist learning

The illustrations provided in the previous section indicate how it is possible to personalise a Diploma using ASL. This section considers features of the delivery infrastructure that need to be in place to make this a reality. Developing such an infrastructure involves a process of evolutionary change as consortia gear up for the introduction of the entitlement in 2013.

Providing the wide range of ASL needed to personalise Diploma learning pathways requires enhanced delivery capacity and achieving economies of scale so that teaching groups are viable. This could be achieved in a number of ways that are not mutually exclusive. All are based on deepening collaborative learning arrangements across consortia.

Other developments also address the need to build deeper collaborative learning arrangements within consortia. For example, the decline in the size of the age cohort, combined with increasing Diploma uptake, necessitate adopting consortia arrangements to deliver smaller GCSE and GCE subjects like modern foreign languages.

Identifying learner needs and aspirations

Personalisation must start with identifying learner needs and aspirations. Increased use of electronic tools, such as iCARD and iPLAN, combined with taster sessions in year 9, facilitate this. QCA's publication *Insights from Diploma pathfinders* (QCA/07/3381) provides more information about the use of these tools.

All those who advise young people – teachers, tutors, mentors and career advisers – should familiarise themselves with the requirements for ASL. For specific advice on their options, including the selection of ASL, learners should be referred to career information and the information, advice and guidance available. This could be a career library, Connexions personal adviser or the career coordinator at the learner's school or college. In addition to these resources, Diploma development partnerships, who develop all Diploma courses, produce information on the specific opportunities each line of learning can offer. Career guidance and Connexions advisers, as well as teachers and mentors, should familiarise themselves with ASL and how the catalogues work.

QCA has worked with Diploma development partnerships to create a series of Diploma progression illustrations that highlight how the different components of the overall Diploma, including the selection of ASL, come together to create particular progression routes. These progression illustrations are available from the Diploma section of the QCA website at www.qca.org.uk/diploma.

Expanding and deepening consortia arrangements

Strong consortium arrangements are key to achieving the economies of scale required to harness the power of ASL to deliver a more personalised Diploma programme. Developing the capacity to offer full Diploma entitlement will inevitably require a strengthening and growth of consortia delivery arrangements.

Consortia may recognise the need to develop new ASL opportunities and designate one of their members as a specialist provider. Existing consortium members may seek to expand their ASL offer to make new qualifications available to other consortium members. New providers may become part of existing consortia, bringing with them new ASL offers.

Consortia can target individual training providers to ensure access to particular ASL qualifications. The development of specialist learning facilities, such as Liverpool's consortium office for delivering the business, administration and finance and IT Diplomas, may provide opportunities to engage with new local training providers.

Consortia may merge or share their offers on a regional scale. Such sharing can be enabled by the use of new technologies and new approaches to learning.

Timetabling

Within evolving consortium arrangements, a variety of strategies can be employed to deliver ASL that enhances the personalised nature of the Diploma offer. However, flexible timetabling arrangements remain essential in providing access to a broad range of ASL. Here the issues are slightly different for ASL provision at post-16 than in key stage 4.

Post-16

While timetabling must be arranged to meet potentially varying needs, post-16 learners are more likely to have a clear idea of their progression. Post-16 Diploma providers may be more direct in terms of developing distinct combinations of ASL within particular lines of learning to meet progression needs.

For example, the Advanced Diploma in creative and media can be tailored for progression to different outcomes by adding ASL qualifications to form named pathways:

- recording – BTEC level 3 Award in music technology, or City & Guilds level 3 in sound engineering
- photography – Certificate in photography, or A level in photography
- computer-aided design / IT pathway – Certificate in computer-aided design, and Extended Certificate for IT users
- business / performing arts pathway – AS in business studies, and AS in performing arts.

Similar pathways can be constructed for all lines of learning at all levels. These can be presented to post-16 learners as timetabled, fully-formed options. This proves feasible provided that enough learners enrol for a particular pathway to make it viable. Linking such pathways to local labour market opportunities or negotiated access routes into higher education could add to their attractiveness.

Alternatively, learners could choose their ASL from existing option blocks. QCA provides a number of helpful curriculum models in *Curriculum illustrations for the Diploma post-16* (QCA/08/3666) as part of the *Design for success* series (QCA/07/3313). The simplest of these is to make ASL available in half-day option blocks aligned across a consortium. Learners can then access ASL from any provider in the consortium. For example, such provision would meet the needs of both Zaheera and Nawaz (see pages 15 and 16) to access the A level and AS level provision they need as part of their ASL.

However, as consortia start to offer more Diploma lines of learning, such models may not be the best way of organising the timetable to ensure access to appropriate ASL. If learners want to take qualifications to prepare, for example for apprenticeship programmes, they may need to access the day-release provision for apprentices in further education colleges or with independent training providers who deliver technical certificates.

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Aligning timetables in key stage 4

Ensuring alignment of timetables so that Diploma components are delivered on the same day in key stage 4 is now widely accepted as being essential. However, learners at key stage 4 also need to participate in the core curriculum, and there is a greater need to keep options open as ideas change about future progression.

QCA's publication *Creative approaches to curriculum planning: Key stage 4* (QCA/08/3667), another in the *Design for success* series, provides several different models. A common feature of many of the models is that ASL is chosen from option blocks not occupied by other Diploma components.

This meets the needs of learners like James and Ann (see page 10), who take one and one-half or two GCSEs as their ASL. On the other hand, such models raise important questions about using ASL flexibly to personalise Diploma learning to meet the needs of all learners, such as:

- How is ASL best provided within an option block?
- What range of ASL can be offered in such models?
- Does the use of option blocks lead to development of a coherent Diploma programme with synergy between components?

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Wolverhampton: An alternative model for ASL at key stage 4

Wolverhampton has a long-standing partnership approach to delivering both the key stage 4 and post-16 curricula. At key stage 4 the citywide offer is based on a curriculum framework that uses contiguous timetabling of option blocks across all schools.

The framework is based on elective participation by any provider; providers choose the courses they wish to contribute to the citywide offer. In this way, specialism and diversity are essential and valued, while respecting institutional agendas, ethos and operation.

Schools and other providers have created key stage 4 networks to deliver the offer. Based on a whole day timetable block, it sits on top of institutional timetables.

The challenge here is how to deliver full entitlement to Diplomas and a wide variety of ASL. Wolverhampton headteachers agree that this can only be achieved by aligning timetables, and they agree, as a city, on a three-day core and two-day option structure. The option days provide the opportunity to offer Foundation and Higher Diplomas.

This system has been developed to offer ASL on one option day per week in year 11. Individual schools, the further education college and local training providers can decide, in each option block, what they want to offer to other consortium members and young people to help them make guided choices in selecting the ASL best suited for their progression and that matches their interests. Because the offer is based on a whole day and is being made citywide, it develops capacity for flexibility while also achieving economies of scale.

The longer time allocated to teaching blocks enables teachers to consider new approaches to pedagogy. Delaying ASL delivery to year 11 allows for an informed choice of qualifications. In addition, as more learners choose or opt for Diplomas, the alignment of the option blocks enables subjects that may become shortage subjects or threatened because of lack of student numbers to be preserved.

Developing full entitlement

Developing full entitlement across an area also offers opportunities for achieving economies of scale. While each Diploma line of learning is distinct, considerable overlap exists between the qualifications offered in each ASL catalogue. ASL teaching groups could, therefore, be formed from learners taking different Diplomas. For example, Zaheera (see page 15) could share classes in level 3 mathematics for engineering with learners on the engineering and manufacturing and product design Advanced Diplomas drawn from across a consortium.

Achieving synergy between Diploma components

Qualifications can only gain entry to a particular ASL catalogue if their content does not overlap by more than about 30 per cent with that Diploma's principal learning component. Nonetheless, there may be considerable scope for delivering parts of an ASL qualification in combination with other Diploma components. Indeed, this may be highly desirable if it enables the ASL qualification to be delivered in an applied way.

For example, ASL qualifications that use portfolio-based assessment could use the work experience component of the Diploma to generate evidence needed to demonstrate attainment of learning outcomes. This is an approach being adopted by Nawaz (see page 16) as he develops evidence for the Certificate in supporting people with learning disabilities. Mark (see page 14) can use his work experience to produce evidence for his level 2 Award in food safety in catering.

In addition, ASL qualifications can be used to certify individual personal development outcomes as part of the development of personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS). For example, Mark could use his personal, social and health education and PLTS programme to work on his Certificate in work skills. Similar approaches could be used to deliver ASDAN qualifications as ASL.

New technologies, new pedagogies

Despite flexible timetabling arrangements, small numbers of students in a particular consortium or centre within a consortium may want to take a specific ASL option. New technologies, combined with new pedagogies, can make this a possibility.

National or regional developments, for example, could make available specific e-learning solutions to deliver particular qualifications. These solutions could be delivered using blended learning with learners sharing experiences with each other and a tutor through blogs, supplemented by occasional face-to-face seminars. Of course, this would require learners to take more responsibility for managing their learning, but that is a highly desirable outcome for a Diploma programme.

Conclusion

National policy is clear: Diplomas should offer to all learners a motivating and coherent learning experience that ensures effective progression to employment with training, apprenticeship, or further or higher education. Within that overall policy, ASL ensures breadth and depth of learning while supporting motivation, coherence and progression. ASL gives learners the chance to deepen or broaden their studies by allowing them to choose qualifications that interest them, thereby supporting motivation.

However, through achieving synergy between the ASL and other Diploma components, as well as learner interests and their progression routes, the real power of ASL can be harnessed to deliver very personalised learning. Achieving this requires:

- excellent information, advice and guidance systems
- up-to-date labour market information to build learning pathways that support progression to employment with training and apprenticeship
- agreed guidelines for progression within consortia
- mapping Diploma offers to higher education requirements
- developing a Diploma delivery infrastructure.

Using additional and specialist learning: Catalogues and regulations

This section provides technical information about the ASL catalogues and regulations for using and combining ASL qualifications.

What are ASL catalogues?

The ASL catalogues provide lists of accredited qualifications that are on offer as ASL. Each Diploma and each level of a Diploma has its own catalogue of valid qualifications.

The ASL catalogues are a dynamic and evolving feature of the Diploma that can be found at www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk/diplomacatalogueselection.aspx. The ASL catalogues for each line of learning are listed at the bottom of the web page. These catalogues are updated termly, so they should be checked regularly to make best use of any new possibilities that become available.

What sorts of qualifications are in the ASL catalogues?

Each catalogue lists ASL qualifications grouped under each line of learning and each level of Diploma. Some of these will be very familiar, for example A levels, AS level, GCSEs and BTEC national awards.

Others will be far less familiar but can provide a strong vocational or occupational orientation for learners who wish to progress into employment with training or apprenticeship. It is worth working with local employers to see how these qualifications can meet their requirements for entry into the types of employment they offer.

How do qualifications get admitted to ASL catalogues?

QCA established a detailed review process for qualifications to be included in the ASL catalogues. This ensures that qualifications put forward by an awarding body for inclusion in the ASL catalogues have:

- a level of overlap with principal and generic learning that does not exceed an agreed tolerance, typically 30 per cent
- appropriate levels of stakeholder support
- suitable progression potential
- appropriate quality-assurance procedures.

This review process requires all qualifications in the ASL catalogues to be fit for purpose within a particular Diploma at a particular level. It also explains why some qualifications available in consortia are not in the ASL catalogues, as they may overlap too much with the principal learning content or not be deemed to support progression. English and mathematics GCSE and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) qualifications are not currently included in the ASL catalogues for any line of learning. However, A level English and mathematics qualifications are available as ASL.

The Diploma development partnerships who design the Diplomas identify the need for new ASL qualifications. Awarding bodies then work with QCA and the Diploma development partnerships to develop the qualification before it is accredited by Ofqual and included in the ASL catalogues.

How are the ASL catalogues best used?

The best way to use the ASL catalogues is to first establish the needs and aspirations of learners, and then develop a plan to meet those needs and aspirations. The ASL catalogues can then be searched, along with the area prospectus, to find possible qualifications that allow this plan to be realised. Some qualifications may not be locally available, and new arrangements may have to be developed to deliver ASL qualifications that meet particular needs.

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What are the rules and regulations for using the ASL catalogues?

The ASL component of the Diploma allows learners the flexibility to be as creative as possible at their level of study, but five key regulations should be met to build legitimate learning pathways.

1. Qualifications achieved as part of ASL must be at the level of the Diploma or above. This should not be a problem – just make sure the learner uses the right ASL catalogue for the Diploma level and line of learning.
2. Qualifications that vary in level according to the grade achieved (for example GCSEs) must be achieved at an appropriate level to contribute towards a Diploma. For example, GCSE grades A* to C count towards a Higher Diploma while grades A* to G contribute to a Foundation Diploma.
3. It is essential to ensure that learners take a combination of ASL qualifications that meet the minimum GLH for the level of Diploma they are studying. The *Diploma aggregation service* will continue to add up ASL qualifications until the required minimum GLH value is met. This does not prevent learners from taking qualifications that exceed this value.
4. Some combinations of ASL qualifications are barred. Each qualification on an ASL catalogue has a barring code. If the ASL component is constructed from several different qualifications, check to ensure that they do not have the same code. Learners can nominate only one qualification of a certain code to contribute to their completion of the Diploma. The exception is qualifications carrying the 'ZZZZ' code – these can be combined with any other qualifications in the ASL catalogue.
5. Check age requirements, as some qualifications in the ASL catalogues can only be taken by learners aged 16 years or over.

Does ASL carry UCAS tariff points?

The Advanced Diploma and its subset, the Progression Diploma, have been designed to prepare learners for higher education. UCAS has therefore assigned both of these qualifications points on its tariff system.

Since the ASL component comprises standalone qualifications, these attract UCAS points in the same way as if they were taken outside a Diploma. The ASL component of the Advanced Diploma has a maximum tariff score of 140 (equivalent to grade A* at A level).

The Progression Diploma comprises the principal learning and generic learning components alone. The UCAS website shows the points for the Progression Diploma only. The score is the same as that applied to the generic learning and principal learning of an Advanced Diploma. To calculate the complete tariff score of an

Advanced Diploma, it is necessary to add the ASL qualifications individual tariff score (up to the maximum of 140) to this amount.

To find out UCAS points for ASL qualifications, visit the UCAS website at www.ucas.ac.uk.

How does ASL contribute to Achievement and Attainment Tables?

ASL qualifications attract Achievement and Attainment Tables points exactly as though they were taken outside a Diploma. This means that if learners do not complete their Diploma within a given period, the ASL they have achieved will still attract Achievement and Attainment Tables points. For more information, visit QCA's Diploma Achievement and Attainment Tables section at www.qca.org.uk/15536.aspx.

If learners do not complete their Diplomas, the ASL they completed will not be lost. Since the Diploma is a composite qualification, any component qualification learners pass will be awarded separately and counted in the Achievement and Attainment Tables, even if they fail to achieve the whole Diploma qualification.

More information

For more information on the Diploma and ASL, including the latest developments and frequently asked questions, visit the following websites.

- QCA – www.qca.org.uk/diploma
- Diploma support programme – www.diploma-support.org
- Department for Children, Schools and Families Diploma website – www.direct.gov.uk/diplomas
- Department for Children, Schools and Families 14–19 website (visit the ‘Diploma communications’ section for a list of Diploma development partnerships) – www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19
- UCAS – www.ucas.ac.uk

About this publication

Who's it for?

This document is intended for Diploma practitioners; consortia managers; curriculum planners; and information, advice and guidance professionals.

What's it about?

This guidance is designed to illustrate how the choice of ASL qualifications can be optimised to meet personal requirements of learners and ensure effective progression. It has also been designed to help curriculum managers see possibilities for developing their consortium's ASL provision. The guidance helps practitioners and learners understand requirements for ASL, so that only legitimate combinations of ASL are used with other Diploma components.

Related information

Insights from Diploma pathfinders (QCA/07/3381)

Design for success (QCA/07/3313)

www.qca.org.uk/diploma

www.diploma-support.org

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