

The new Diploma – learners and teachers give their views

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Now in its second year of delivery, the Diploma qualification introduced a new way of learning at ages 14–19. While it may be too early to determine precisely whether or not the goals of the Diploma have been achieved, research from NFER and the University of Exeter shows that the majority of Diploma learners are satisfied with their Diploma course and enjoying it.

found they had the opportunity to develop independent learning skills.

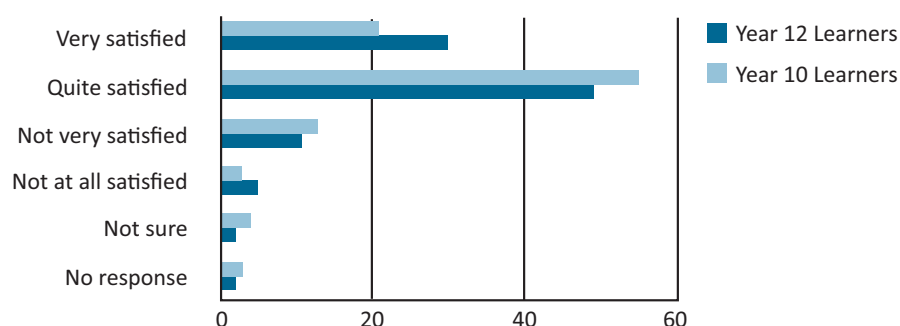
Instead of finding that the Diploma was the easy option, the qualification was generally felt to be challenging, hard work and, for some, involved more writing or coursework than they had previously expected or desired. Indeed, the majority of those interviewed said that they would recommend the Diploma to a friend, but with the

tical working were the most satisfied with the qualification (and therefore, perhaps, best suited to it). The opportunity to study ‘off-site’ was a particular plus point for year 10 students. They liked the atmosphere in the host location, felt they were treated like adults and liked working with other students.

Despite some concerns amongst professionals and ‘non-Diploma’ learners that the Diploma limits the breadth of learning, particularly pre-16, the study found that the first learners to be attracted to the Diploma were swayed not only by its equivalent value in respect of more traditional qualifications, but also by its broad coverage of subjects within a core area or sector of interest.

When it came to future aspirations, the perception of learners was not that the Diploma would limit their progression, as some critics have suggested – rather, the Diploma was generally considered by learners to support progression to higher education. Almost half of year 10 Level 2 Diploma learners were considering progression

Levels of learner satisfaction with the Diploma (%)



Learners considered the Diploma to be interesting and different from other learning experiences, welcomed the applied or ‘hands-on’ approach to learning, appreciated the links with the world of work and

proviso that their friend had a real interest in the line of learning and was prepared to work hard.

Survey responses showed that pupils with a preference for teamwork and prac-





onto a Level 3 Diploma, and more than half of year 12 Diploma learners planned to go on to higher education.

Information, advice and guidance (IAG) played a part in learner satisfaction. The more satisfied a year 10 learner was with the IAG they received prior to commencing the Diploma, the more satisfied they reported being with the course. However, the Diploma experience had not been quite as expected for some students, due to a lack of clear guidance around issues such as subject content, learning style and, particularly, the balance between practical and theory-based learning. In addition, the most common reason cited for not taking a Diploma, by students who chose an alternative qualification, was a lack of knowledge about the qualification.

Teachers generally reported a high level of personal and professional satisfaction from involvement with the Diploma, believing that it involved a different teaching and learning experience to other qualifications. They valued the opportunity to use a holistic teaching model (although this related more to some lines of learning than to others) and the encouragement of independent learning, and reported greater use of interactive teaching techniques and less dependence on textbooks and worksheets. They also welcomed the link between theory and the application of knowledge to the world of work.

There was a significant amount of 'buy-in' from the staff involved, who seemed to largely support the ethos and approach of the qualification and commonly felt that a

proportion of the issues experienced so far were simply 'teething problems', which might be associated with the implementation of any new qualification. For some others, however, the logistical implications of collaborative working across a consortium were a far more significant concern and this will be a notable challenge to be overcome in future.

Further information

www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/research/projects/implementation-impact-diplomas/

The introduction of the Diplomas for 14–19 year olds is a central part of the previous government's reform of 14–19 education and represents a major innovation in educational opportunity for young people in England. Diplomas are delivered by consortia which include schools, colleges, training providers, employers and higher education institutions (HEI). They will be offered at three levels and across 17 lines of learning which are being implemented in four phases (from September 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011).

