

National Evaluation of Diplomas

Preparation for 2008 Delivery

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Executive Summary

Background

The introduction of Diplomas for 14-19 year olds is a central part of the government's reform of 14-19 education and represents a major innovation in educational opportunity for young people in England. The Diplomas are being offered at three levels and across 17 lines of learning, and are being implemented in four phases (from September 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011). The first five lines of learning are: Construction and the Built Environment; Engineering; Information Technology; Creative and Media; and Society, Health and Development. They are being delivered by consortia of schools, colleges, training providers, employers and higher education institutions (HEIs) which were successful after applying through Gateway 1.

In January 2008, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and the University of Exeter to conduct the national evaluation of the implementation and impact of Diplomas over the period 2008-2013. **It is important to note that this summary focuses on the findings of the first stage of the evaluation which explored the planning and preparation for the Diplomas prior to their introduction in September 2008.** It presents findings from a telephone survey of 136 Gateway 1 consortium leads (conducted in February 2008), baseline case-study visits to a sample of 15 consortia, and a survey of Year 9 and Year 11 learners in 30 consortia (carried out between April and July 2008).

Key findings

- The new Diploma qualification was welcomed overall, particularly because of the varied learning experience and transferable skills learners would gain. Consortia were keen to deliver this new course and felt that they would be prepared for Diploma delivery by September 2008. Additional support was required for *some* staff in relation to: leadership and management; functional skills; understanding the combinations of additional and specialist learning; assessment and accreditation; employer engagement; and practical teaching approaches.
- The Gateway 1 consortia had established appropriate management structures to deliver the Diplomas and those who were building on existing partnerships benefited from established relationships and practices. The factors that contributed to effective consortia included strong leadership from the consortium leads and involvement of staff with relevant experience, authority, and dedicated time to coordinate implementation.
- The Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) for young people, and for parents and staff who play a key role in advising young people, varied and there was scope for greater consistency across and within consortia. The majority of learners did not recall receiving key information about Diplomas and it was evident that some were basing their decision on whether to take a Diploma or not on a limited and sometimes inaccurate understanding of the qualification.
- The take-up of Diplomas was lower than expected across the consortia and this was particularly notable at Levels 1 and 3. It was evident that many young people chose not to take a Diploma because they did not have a particular interest in the first five lines of learning, or because it was a new and untested qualification. In addition, a notable minority of young people had not heard of Diplomas or had not received information about them. This suggests that there is scope for greater take-up as more

lines become available, the qualification becomes more established, and awareness and understanding increases.

Summary of the Research Findings

Were effective management structures in place? (Chapter 2)

Common management structures were in place across consortia which consisted of, for example, an overall Diploma strategy group in control of decision-making; line of learning operational groups which made strategic decisions about a line of learning; delivery groups of practitioners which made operational decisions about delivery and subject development; and specialist groups focusing on particular issues, such as employer engagement.

The advantages of building on pre-existing partnerships to develop effective Diploma consortia were noted, as these had often already established trust between partners and developed joint practices, such as quality assurance procedures and aligned timetables. For new partnerships, it was generally considered that cohesion would be achieved over time, yet there was some evidence of a degree of tension between some partners (particularly between schools). Other factors which contributed to effectiveness of management structures included the strong, firm leadership of the consortium lead (which included, for example, brokering partnership working and acting as a conduit for information dissemination) and the involvement of staff with the right experience, skills and authority to undertake key roles and coordinate implementation (including the line of learning leads, who were considered crucial).

Some consortia had faced challenges in engaging employers in Diplomas. The local economic conditions and size of companies were seen as the significant factors impacting on the level of commitment received from employers. Moreover, finding enough suitable/quality work experience placements for Diploma learners, given the demand on employers was considered a challenge. Consortia were finding solutions to the challenge of engaging employers, including involving Education Business Partnership Organisations (EBPOs) in taking responsibility for raising awareness amongst employers. It was thought likely that this challenge would increase as the number of Diploma lines of learning increased. There was also scope for more involvement of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and private training providers.

What were staff views on the Diploma content and specifications? (Chapter 3)

The Diploma was welcomed overall, particularly because of the varied learning experience and transferable skills learners would gain. There were, however, some issues raised about:

- a misconception amongst learners and parents that the Diploma would involve more practical learning than it would in reality, creating uncertainty about whether the expected practical focus would materialise;
- the balance between breadth and depth (concerning a debate about whether the Diploma was appropriately broad and offered learners a useful range of skills and experiences relating to a number of topic areas, or whether it was too broad and did not focus on topics in enough depth to allow learners to gain a true understanding and develop a particular specialism, which may be a barrier to entry into employment or higher education);
- the requirement for a learner to pass all of the separate elements in order to achieve the Diploma award (which was considered to be a potential barrier to take-up, particularly the requirement to pass functional skills);

- the need to develop staff skills and expertise to teach certain elements of the Diploma; and
- finding appropriate work experience placements for learners to put their learning into context.

How will Diplomas be delivered? (Chapter 4)

Delivery arrangements were not finalised at the time of the interviews, although the findings give an indication of how consortia were planning to deliver Diplomas from September 2008. Delivery models varied (not only between consortia, but also between different institutions within consortia, and within institutions for different lines of learning) and included the following:

Model A: Shared delivery between a school and FE college / other external provider

Model B: A school delivers none of the Diploma, but sends learners to an FE college for all Diploma learning

Model C: A school delivers the entire Diploma 'in-house' to their own learners only

Model D: A school delivers none of the Diploma, but sends learners to another school for all Diploma learning

Model E: Schools share delivery (learners travel to and from each school)

Model F: An FE college delivers the entire Diploma 'in-house' to their own learners only.

The rationale for a delivery model tended to be pragmatic and dependent on which centres had the capacity to deliver Diplomas, which was largely based on practical and logistical issues (including the existence of staff with relevant skills and expertise and the necessary facilities). However, decisions were also dependent on learner take-up, which was not yet finalised. It was not necessarily the case that learners in a consortium would have access to all lines of learning and levels being offered across the whole consortium.

Shared delivery (Chapter 4)

Shared delivery between centres, involving learners travelling outside their home institution, was planned in all but one of the 15 case-study areas (regardless of reported challenges associated with partnership working). Aligned timetables were in place in most consortia to facilitate shared delivery, but transport strategies varied (with assistance for learners not always offered). Teachers were planning to travel to teach in only a minority of consortia. The main challenges associated with partnership working included competition between centres, quality assurance and logistics. There was a general perception that further logistical issues would be faced as more lines of learning become available and, therefore, more learners take up Diplomas. In general, institutions wanted more clarity about availability of funding to support preparation for, and delivery of, future Diplomas, particularly given the complexity of some models of delivery.

Teaching and learning (Chapters 3 and 4)

Consortia were in the process of developing schemes of work and lesson plans at the time of the interviews. These tended to be localised and were not necessarily consistent across consortia. This was an area in which interviewees would like more support. Some interviewees observed that creative approaches were needed to make some 'dry' aspects of the content exciting for the learner, and some staff reported that they would welcome practical, creative examples of delivery approaches. Most interviewees were positive about the potential benefits of the use of ICT and Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) for teaching and learning. Eight of the 15 case-study consortia had access to a shared VLE at the time of the interviews, while this type of resource was being developed in the other seven areas.

The additional learning offer seemed to be mainly in the form of GCSEs pre-16 or A levels post-16, and few opportunities for specialist learning seemed to be available as yet, particularly pre-16. It appeared that, in at least three case-study consortia, there were plans to co-teach Level 1 and 2 learners initially, as staff did not wish to make a decision at this early stage about which level would suit a learner's ability. There were particular uncertainties in relation to the delivery and assessment of functional skills, leaving some staff feeling unprepared.

Overall, how prepared were consortia for Diploma delivery? (Chapter 4)

Gateway 1 consortia felt that they *would be* prepared for Diploma delivery by September 2008, although they acknowledged the challenges associated with delivering a new qualification. Decisions about Diploma delivery approaches were still to be finalised, and practitioners were still in the process of developing schemes of work and clarifying some issues. However, most were hopeful that these issues would be resolved over the summer months. Overall, there seemed to be a sense of excitement across most consortia about delivering this new course.

Factors assisting preparedness for delivery included:

- an effective consortium and partnership working (facilitated by, for example, a collective willingness and commitment and common quality assurance procedures across partners);
- an effective management structure, involving individuals in leadership and delivery roles who have clear responsibilities and dedicated time to fulfil them;
- good lines of communication between the different management and operational groups responsible for implementing Diplomas, and also between those groups and all other staff within a consortium, so that everyone is aware of Diploma developments; and
- transport strategies and aligned timetables to support shared delivery across partners.

In contrast, factors identified as **hindering preparedness for delivery** included:

- challenges with partnership working, including logistics, cultural and environmental differences between partners, and competition between institutions caused by the protection of individual interests;
- uncertainty about particular issues, including assessment, functional skills, employer engagement and future funding of Diplomas;
- the timing of dissemination of national-level information (including Diploma specifications and promotion materials) which was not received as early as consortia would have liked in order to start planning delivery and assessment and promoting Diplomas to young people (for example, some interviewees felt information should have been available during the summer before learners make their choices, so they could familiarise themselves about Diplomas before giving information and advice);
- resistance to the Diploma amongst some staff, perceived to have resulted from negative media coverage; and
- a perceived lack of staff skills relating to specific elements of certain Diploma lines.

Gateway 1 consortia advised future consortia to prepare for Diploma delivery by having a clear rationale for Diploma delivery, starting to plan early, implementing Diplomas in a manageable way by starting small, exploring existing practice, and embracing change.

What information, advice and guidance strategies were in place? (Chapter 5)

Nationally-produced materials were generally well received and used widely to promote the Diploma and to disseminate information. Although national promotional materials were published in September 2007, there was a widespread desire for such information to be provided earlier (in the previous summer term, for example) to enable consortia to market the new qualification more effectively. Despite Diplomas not being currently available to all 14-19 year olds nationally, many interviewees felt that more publicity would have raised the profile of Diplomas.

A **consortium-wide** marketing strategy was in place in most consortia, although local promotion campaigns were sometimes said to be fairly 'low key' in the lead-up to this first year of delivery. There were good examples of consortium-wide promotional events, including information events for learners and their parents and taster days, that had been successful in raising the profile of Diplomas, and consortia planned further strategies, including the development of Diploma marketing 'toolkits' and promotional DVDs. Connexions advisers had promoted Diplomas to varying degrees in some consortia.

At **institution-level**, IAG varied considerably and there seemed to be scope for greater consistency in strategies across schools. There would appear to be a need for much greater awareness among all staff in partner organisations and among parents, as they played a significant role in guiding learner choices. For example, it was clear that some staff did not have a good understanding of Diplomas and therefore were apprehensive about guiding young people to embark on this new qualification. Some staff were also circumspect about promoting a new 'untried' qualification and did not seem to always give impartial advice to young people.

To what extent do learners understand the Diploma? (Chapter 5)

The IAG strategies adopted by consortia did not appear to be effective in informing learners fully about Diplomas, because the majority of learners did not recall receiving information about key aspects of the qualification and, in general, learners' knowledge and understanding of Diplomas were limited. Evidence revealed that many young people who had chosen to take a Diploma were not fully informed about what their Diploma qualification would involve, including their location of study, how the Diploma would be assessed, and the possible progression routes after completing a Diploma. Furthermore, notable minorities of learners would have liked more information about key aspects of the Diploma. There was also evidence of misconceptions amongst learners about the degree of practical learning involved in Diplomas. These findings suggest that many learners were basing their decisions on whether to take a Diploma or not on a limited, and sometimes inaccurate, understanding of the qualification, and the teaching and learning experience that it would entail.

What were the reasons for take-up? (Chapter 6)

Approximately 12,000 learners across England commenced the new Diploma qualifications in September 2008, which was fewer than originally anticipated by consortia (particularly so at Levels 1 and 3). Nonetheless, given that notable minorities of young people had not heard of Diplomas, or had not been given any information about them, this suggests that, if IAG strategies are improved, there is potential for growth in take-up in the future.

Year 9 and Year 11 learners who had chosen, or were considering taking, a Diploma tended to have lower prior attainment but a positive attitude to school and learning, and tended to be young people who were planning to progress to a work-based route post-16. In Year 9, they were more likely to be boys. Moreover, they were significantly more likely than those who were not intending to take a Diploma to report that they had been given information on Diplomas.

The main reasons why learners *had* decided to study for a Diploma related to:

- an interest in the subject area;
- a perception that it would help them get a job or get into university in the future; and
- an interest in experiencing a different style of teaching and learning.

In contrast, the main reasons for *not* choosing to study for a Diploma included:

- a lack of interest in the subject areas related to the first five lines of learning;
- a preference to take other qualifications and uncertainty about taking a new 'untried' qualification;
- concerns that taking a Diploma would narrow their future curriculum and career choices; and
- a lack of sufficient information about Diplomas and, therefore, a lack of understanding.

It may be that, as the number of lines of learning increase, more young people will be motivated to take a Diploma. Take-up may also improve as the Diploma becomes more established, and Diploma learners progress to employment and higher education.

The majority of schools did not formally target learners for the Diploma, although some staff talked about informal targeting of learners who were considered to have a special aptitude for a line of learning. Some case-study schools, however, operated a pathways system for key stage 4 options choices, whereby learners were grouped according to their ability or preferred learning style and, in these cases, Diplomas were only available to some young people.

Almost all schools had set an entry requirement for Level 2 Diplomas related to young people's achievement in key stage 3 assessments (undertaken by Year 9 learners in English, mathematics and science, with progress assessed against a number of levels). Learners were expected to have achieved Level 5 in at least two of their assessments, and a Level 4 in the other. These requirements were based on the need for learners to have the ability to attain functional skills at Level 2 and the perceived level of challenge in the principal learning.

What training and support was received and are there gaps? (Chapter 7)

Consortia staff had access to a range of both formal and informal training, and support at national, regional and local levels. Views on formal training courses were mixed but, overall, interviewees felt training would have benefited from better targeting (in terms of the professional attending or the stage reached by the consortium), greater practical detail, and by being less generic. Networking at Diploma strategy group meetings was considered useful, as was general networking between curriculum managers and practitioners within and between consortia. One-to-one coaching and advice were welcomed, in order that consortia staff could determine solutions to their own planning and implementation issues. Overall, bespoke means and methods of training and support were favoured.

The findings suggest that additional support was required *for some* staff in relation to the following:

- leadership and management;
- functional skills delivery;
- understanding the possible combinations of additional and specialist learning;
- assessment and accreditation;
- practical teaching approaches; and
- understanding the Diploma in order to give information and advice to learners.

Messages for policy makers and national agencies

Supporting partnerships

- Messages about 'what works well' in terms of partnership working, delivery approaches and promotion should be disseminated. Specifically, examples of good progress in relation to shared quality assurance systems across partners, travel-to-learn arrangements, resource sharing, and employer and HEI engagement would be welcomed by consortia. (Sections 2.3 and 4.2)
- Financial resources need to be available to support those engaged in planning and implementing Diploma delivery at all levels, to ensure that they have sufficient time to plan effectively and attend meetings and training courses. (Sections 2.3 and 4.2)

- Although the case-study consortia were confident that they had the capacity to offer Diplomas from September, consortia may need further support and guidance to help them expand their Diploma offer, and prepare for delivery of all 17 lines of learning. Adequate funding should also be made available to facilitate expansion. (Section 2.4.3)

Continuing Professional Development and guidance

- Consortia may benefit from further information and training in relation to functional skills (delivery models and assessment), assessment processes in general, the project, additional and specialist learning qualification combinations, and practical delivery approaches. (Sections 3.3, 4.1.4, 4.1.6 and 7.4)
- Guidance should be provided to ensure that there is clarity among institutions about whether co-teaching of Diploma levels is acceptable. (Section 4.1.1)
- Training and support should be targeted in terms of the needs of the consortia, the stage at which planning and delivery has reached, and the level and role of practitioners attending. (Section 7.2)
- Government and partnering organisations should continue to monitor provision and support needs throughout Diploma delivery, in response to any changes in the context of 14-19 education (Section 7.4)
- Consortia are likely to benefit from further advice on how to engage employers and find appropriate work experience placements for learners, including creative solutions to doing so (Sections 3.3.2 and 4.1.5)

Promotion and marketing of the Diploma

- Despite Diplomas not being currently available to all 14-19 year olds nationally, many interviewees felt that there should be greater emphasis on a high profile promotion campaign, to raise the profile of Diplomas, particularly amongst learners, parents, employers and HEIs. (Sections 5.1.1)
- Institutions need to receive detailed promotional information about Diplomas at the time that learners are considering option choices – ideally the summer term of the year before learners make their choices. (Section 5.1.1)
- Positive messages about Diplomas and examples of good practice resulting from the evaluation should be disseminated, in order to address any misconceptions about Diplomas. (Section 3.2)

Messages for consortia and practitioners

Developing partnership working

- The rationale for the Diploma offer and models of delivery should be considered carefully, as should methods to encourage staff to embrace change. (Section 4.2.1)
- Consideration should be given to whether the most effective management structures are in place, roles are clearly defined, and whether the staff involved are fully committed. (Section 4.2.1)

- If there is no history of partnership working, consortium leads need to provide strong direction and encouragement to institutions to consider the benefits to their learners of collaboration. (Section 2.2)
- New consortia should learn from the experiences of Gateway 1 consortia. Key messages and lessons learned should be shared by Gateway 1 consortia and there should be opportunities for networking between consortia. (Section 2.2)
- Sufficient dedicated time should be allowed for staff in management and practitioner roles. (Sections 2.3 and 4.2.1)
- Any potential barriers associated with partnership working and collaboration should be addressed by, for example, partners meeting and communicating regularly. (Section 4.2.1)
- Consortia should consider how to maximise employer engagement, for example, by involving EBPOs to manage the demands on employers and/or by encouraging FE colleges to offer placements within their departments. Consortia should also consider creative ways of providing work experience that address issues such as health and safety. (Sections 3.3.2 and 4.1.5)

Continuing Professional Development

- Consortia should consider whether staff have the necessary skills to teach all elements of the Diploma, and the implications of this for training and recruitment of staff. (Section 3.2)
- Those in leadership roles should consider the ongoing support needs of staff in Diploma centres, which might relate to functional skills delivery, assessment, additional and specialist learning qualification combinations, and approaches to practical delivery.

Examples of teaching approaches, lesson plans and resources should be shared between and within consortia in the future. (Section 7.4)

Diploma delivery

- Possible solutions to the logistical challenges of partnership delivery should be shared across consortia, including aligned timetables, transport strategies and teachers / tutors travelling to teach (rather than learners travelling). (Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2)
- The implications of co-teaching of Level 1 and 2 classes should be considered. At a local level, consortia need to ensure that learners are adequately briefed and advised about this, as the outcome could have implications for their learning experience and progression. (Section 4.1.1)
- Consortia should consider the options available for additional and specialist learning and possible opportunities to expand the offer, to ensure that learners have sufficient opportunities to add breadth and/or depth to their learning, depending on their choice of pathway. (Section 4.1.4)

Promotion of the Diplomas and IAG for learners

- All staff, learners and parents should be fully informed about relevant Diploma developments, in order to address misconceptions and to maximise potential take-up. Given the role that school and IAG staff play in informing learners' choices, consortia should ensure that they provide sufficient information about Diplomas to enable staff to give accurate and impartial IAG to young people. (Section 5.1.3)
- There is scope for improving the information and guidance given to young people about Diplomas, as the majority of learners do not recall receiving information about key aspects of Diplomas, and many had a limited understanding of the qualification. (Sections 5.2.1 and 5.3)
- Partners across and within consortia should consider how to communicate information to learners, so that they fully engage with and understand Diplomas in order to make informed choices. For example, learners need to be clear about the course content and mode of learning in order to make an informed choice. (Sections 5.3 and 6.4.2)
- There needs to be greater consistency in IAG standards across and within consortia and where necessary, more opportunities for training for staff who advise young people should be provided, with protected time to attend such training. (Section 5.1.3)

About the study

The evaluation during 2008 to 2013 has two main aims: to review the implementation and delivery of the Diplomas; and to assess the impact of the Diplomas on young people's participation, attainment and progression.

The overall research design for the evaluation provides a complementary mixed-method approach to address the complex range of issues and aims associated with the implementation of the Diplomas. The study has three main strands: surveys of a range of stakeholders in each of the phases of implementation; a longitudinal programme of qualitative case studies comprising visits to 15 consortia in each phase; and statistical analysis of external databases, such as the National Pupil Dataset (NPD), to explore the outcomes and impact of the Diplomas on a larger scale.

To date, the following activities have taken place, which form the basis of this summary:

- **A telephone survey of consortium leads:** a total of 136 Gateway 1 consortium leads took part in the survey which was carried out in February 2008. The survey gathered information on the overall strategy and structure of consortia, prior to the launch of the Diplomas.
- **A survey of learners in Year 9 and Year 11:** the survey was undertaken between April and July 2008 in a representative sample of 179 schools across 30 Gateway 1 consortia. All schools known to be delivering Diplomas in these consortia were randomly divided into two nationally representative samples; half of the sample (92 schools) received questionnaires for all their Year 9 learners, while the other half (87 schools) received questionnaires for all their Year 11 learners. A total of 5,424 learners in Year 9 (32 per cent) and 2,078 in Year 11 (13 per cent) responded. The survey explored, for example, learners' perceptions and understanding of the Diploma, and the reasons why they were planning to take a Diploma or not.

- **Case-study visits to a sample of 15 Gateway 1 consortia:** visits were carried out in 58 Gateway 1 centres involved in Diploma delivery between April and July 2008. These centres were most commonly schools and FE colleges, but also included some sixth form colleges, HEIs and training providers. Interviews took place with 127 staff in a range of roles, including consortium leads, line of learning leads, faculty and department heads, senior managers responsible for curriculum development, and teachers responsible for IAG. Interviews explored the early implementation of Diplomas, prior to their launch, planned delivery models, and the extent to which consortia felt prepared for delivery. A total of 240 learners in Year 9 and 91 in Year 11 were also interviewed about their choice to study a Diploma or not.

Glossary

AVCE	Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education
AQA	Assessment and Qualifications Alliance
BSF	Building Schools for the Future
CBE	Construction and the Built Environment
CEL	Centre for Excellence in Leadership
COVE	Centres of Vocational Excellence
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CTC	City Technology College
DCSF	Department for Children Schools and Families
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EBPO	Education Business Partnership Organisation
FE	Further Education
FSM	Free School Meals
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GOR	Government Office Region
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
IFP	Increased Flexibility Programme
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
NAA	National Assessment Agency
NCEE	National Council for Educational Excellence
NCSL	National College for Schools Leadership
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NPD	National Pupil Dataset
PLASC	Pupil Level Annual School Census
PLTS	Personal Learning and Thinking Skills
PSHE	Personal, Social and Health Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QIA	Quality Improvement Agency
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SHD	Society, Health and Development
SSAT	Specialist Schools and Academies Trust
TDA	Training and Development Agency
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
YA	Young Apprenticeship

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The introduction of Diplomas for 14-19 year olds is a central part of the government's reform of 14-19 education and represents a major innovation in educational opportunity for young people in England. The Diploma programme has its origins in the February 2005 White Paper *14-19 Education and Skills* (Cm 6476) (GB. Parliament. HoC, 2005), where the vision set out is of an education system that:

should provide every young person with a route to success in life through hard work and dedication. To do so, it must provide opportunities that stretch and motivate each young person; interesting opportunities to learn in a variety of different ways, abstract and practical and rigorous qualifications with currency in the worlds of work and of higher education, both here and abroad. p. 22

The Department for Education and Skills' *Implementation Plan* (DfES, 2005), published ten months later, set out how this priority was to be tackled through the introduction of a new programme of Diplomas. In March 2007, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) announced that up to 40,000 Diploma places would be available from September 2008 (although no target numbers were set). Subsequently, DCSF announced that around 20,000 learners were expected to take Diplomas in the first phase of Diploma delivery, although more recent figures, released by DCSF in October 2008, indicated that approximately 12,000 young people have now commenced Diploma courses.

The Diplomas are being offered at three levels and across 17 lines of learning, and are being implemented in four phases. For each phase of implementation, consortia (of schools, colleges, training providers, employers and higher education institutions (HEIs)) have to submit an application to DCSF for each line of learning they want to offer. This application process is known as the Gateway. The first five lines of learning were introduced in September 2008 (Phase 1) by consortia approved to offer Diploma courses. These first five lines are Construction and the Built Environment, Engineering, Information Technology, Creative and Media, and Society, Health and Development.

A further five lines will be available from September 2009 (Phase 2) in Business, Administration and Finance, Hair and Beauty Studies, Hospitality, Environmental and Land-based Studies, and Manufacturing and Product Design. A further four will be launched in 2010 (Phase 3) in Public Services, Retail Business, Sport and Active Leisure, and Travel and Tourism. In October 2007, the Secretary of State announced that a further three new Diploma lines in Science, Languages and Humanities will be added from 2011 (Phase 4).

The Diploma consists of three main components:

- **Principal learning:** sector-related knowledge and underpinning skills needed to progress in relevant sectors.
- **Generic learning:** functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT, development of personal, learning and thinking skills, and a Project or Extended Project.
- **Additional / specialist learning:** a selection of options can be chosen from a catalogue of qualifications to add breadth to the programme of learning or specialist options adding depth to the line of learning.

Diplomas also include learning in the workplace (a minimum of ten days' work experience), and learning through realistic work environments, to enable the development of practical skills and work-related application of learning.

In January 2008, the DCSF commissioned the NFER and the University of Exeter to conduct the national evaluation of the implementation and impact of Diplomas over the period 2008-2013. The formative elements of this evaluation offer an opportunity to refine the Diplomas as they develop, and could be considered as key evidence when the 14-19 qualification offer is reviewed in 2013.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The purpose of the national evaluation is to provide policy makers and practitioners with systematic and robust evidence which will enable them to make informed judgements about the outcomes of the Diplomas for different stakeholders and to make improvements to design and delivery, if appropriate. The evaluation has two main aims:

- to review the **implementation and delivery** of the Diplomas - in terms of the processes and factors facilitating or hindering successful implementation; the structural issues related to design and content; and the systems for planning, organising and resourcing provision and supporting progression
- to assess the **impact** of the Diplomas on young people - in terms of their participation in education and training; attainment of qualifications; and progression to further and higher education, training and employment.

The evaluation will also gather the perceptions and experiences of the Diplomas from a range of stakeholders including young people, parents, teachers, employers and higher education staff.

1.3 Research methods

The overall research design for the evaluation provides a complementary mixed-method approach to address the complex range of issues and aims associated with the implementation of the Diplomas. The study has three main strands:

- **Surveys of a range of stakeholders:** in each phase of the evaluation (coinciding with each phase of Diploma implementation which commence in September 2008, 2009 and 2010), these include a telephone survey of consortium leads; longitudinal tracking surveys of learners and cross-sectional surveys of teaching staff and parents in a sample of 30 consortia; and surveys of HEIs. Two surveys of employers will also be undertaken in 2010 and 2012.
- **A longitudinal programme of qualitative case studies:** comprising visits to 15 consortia in each of the three phases of implementation. Within each of the consortia selected, visits to up to four institutions will take place and interviews will be conducted with strategic and operational staff, learners and consortium partners.
- **Statistical analysis of external datasets** such as the Diploma Aggregation Service, the National Pupil Dataset (NPD) and the Individual Learner Record (ILR), to explore the outcomes and impact of the Diplomas on a larger scale than would be possible through surveys or qualitative data collection.

This report focuses on the planning and preparation for Diplomas prior to their introduction in September 2008, and presents findings from a telephone survey of Gateway 1 consortium leads, baseline case-study visits to a sample of consortia, and a survey of Year 9 and Year 11 learners. Further details about each of the elements are provided in the following sections. Due to the formative nature of the evaluation, during the case-study visits, interviewees tended to focus more on the lessons that they had learned from Gateway 1, rather than on their successes to date. Consequently, the findings in the report highlight the challenges experienced by Gateway 1 consortia, the potential areas for improvement, and the lessons learned, that will be useful for future consortia.

1.3.1 Survey of consortium leads

In the early stages of the evaluation (February 2008), a telephone survey of staff with overall responsibility for leading the Gateway 1 consortia was undertaken. Telephone interviews were achieved with 136 of 146 consortium leads¹. The roles of these consortium leads varied but, most commonly, they included 14-19 strategy managers within Local Authorities (LAs) and senior managers in schools and colleges.

The aim of these interviews was to gather information on the overall strategy and structure of consortia, and the level of their preparedness for delivery, prior to the launch of the Diplomas. In addition to providing early indications of the approaches and issues experienced by the consortia in implementing the Diplomas, data from the survey informed the selection of the sample of consortia for the next stages of the research (surveys of learners and teachers, and case-study visits).

1.3.2 Selection of sample

Using data from the consortium lead telephone survey, and information about the schools involved in Gateway 1 consortia, a **sample of 30 consortia** was drawn **for involvement in the survey strand**. The sample was selected according to the following criteria:

- **Lines of learning and levels offered:** to ensure that all lines and levels were represented in the sample
- **Number of lines of learning offered:** in order to maximise the lines of learning represented within the sample, the sample of consortia was selected to over-represent consortia offering five lines of learning, or between two to four lines of learning, and under-represent those offering one line of learning.
- **School characteristics:** in order to ensure that the sample could be said to be representative of Diploma learners as a whole, the sample was representative in terms of school-level variables (for example, learner achievement, free school meals eligibility and region).

Full details of the sample drawn, and a discussion of the representativeness of the sample, compared with all Gateway 1 consortia, are presented in Appendix A. In summary, the sample was representative in terms of Government Office Region (GOR), and free school meal eligibility at consortium level, and was representative in terms of school type and achievement at school level.

¹ Analysis of the ten consortia that did not participate in the interviews (either because they declined to take part, or were not able to be contacted) indicated that they were spread across six of the Government Office regions and, although they tended to be small consortia (eight were delivering only one line of learning, and all but one had fewer than four schools involved), they did not differ notably from the consortia where interviews were completed.

From this sample of 30 consortia, a **sub-sample of 15 consortia** was selected for more **in-depth case-study work**. This sample was selected to ensure that the following were covered:

- **Lines of learning and levels:** to ensure that all lines of learning, at all three levels, were represented
- **Number of lines of learning:** to include consortia offering different numbers of lines of learning in Phase 1
- **Geography:** to ensure a geographical spread across the GORs, including rural and urban areas
- **Partnership structure and delivery models:** to ensure that the sample included different types of institutions involved in delivery, different partnership structures and models of delivery (for example, pre-existing and new partnerships and different types of institution involved in delivery).

The case-study sample included consortia in all nine GORs and a mixture of urban, rural areas, and types of LAs. All the lines of learning were represented across the consortia, with three consortia offering all five lines of learning, two offering one, and the remaining eight offering between two and four lines of learning. It is worth noting that two of the consortia had been involved in the Diploma Pathfinder Programme. Further details about the case-study sample are provided in Appendix B.

1.3.3 Survey of learners

One of the aims of the evaluation is to explore the impact that the opportunity to undertake a Diploma has on young people's decision-making, and the factors that appear to influence whether a young person in Year 9 or Year 11 chooses to pursue a Diploma as one of the choices available to them.

In order to explore this, a survey of learners in **Year 9 and Year 11** in the sample of 30 Gateway 1 consortia was undertaken between April and July 2008. All schools within this sample known to be involved in Diplomas in Gateway 1 were surveyed - 179 schools in total.

These schools were randomly divided into two nationally representative samples (in terms of region, free school meal eligibility and achievement), and while one half of the sample (92 schools) received questionnaires for all their Year 9 learners, the other half (87 schools) received questionnaires for all their Year 11 learners. Schools were asked to distribute the questionnaires to all learners within the relevant year group - both those who had chosen (or were considering) a Diploma, and those who had not.

A total of 5,424 Year 9 questionnaires (32 per cent), and 2,078 Year 11 questionnaires (13 per cent) were returned, from 72 schools. Learners' responses to the questionnaire were then matched to background information held on the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) and NPD, to explore differences in responses in relation to their background characteristics. It is worth noting that this survey will be repeated in 2010 to identify any changes in the responses of Gateway 1 and Gateway 3 learners. Details of the responding sample of learners are presented in Appendix A.

1.3.4 Case studies

Case-study visits to the sub-sample of 15 Gateway 1 consortia (outlined in Section 1.3.2) were conducted between April and July 2008. The main purpose of these visits was to explore in depth the early implementation of Diplomas, prior to their launch, their planned delivery models, and the extent to which consortia felt prepared for delivery. The visits also examined learners' understanding and perceptions of Diplomas, the information they had received about Diplomas, and the reasons for them choosing to undertake a Diploma or not.

Each consortium case-study usually comprised visits to four institutions planning Diploma delivery in September 2008. Typically, this included two schools and two post-16 providers. These providers included FE colleges, sixth form colleges and, in a minority of consortia, training providers and HEIs. Table 1.1 presents the number of organisations visited across all 15 case-study areas.

Table 1.1 Total numbers of case-study institutions

Type of institution	Number visited
College (including FE and sixth form colleges)	22
School with sixth form	19
School without sixth form	12
Training Provider	3
HEI (including one college of further and higher education)	2
Total	58

Interviews took place with staff in a range of roles. These included consortium leads, 14-19 Strategy managers, line of learning leads, faculty and department heads, senior managers responsible for curriculum development, teachers responsible for information, advice and guidance (IAG) and learners in Years 9 and 11. Where possible, learners who had opted for a Diploma course were interviewed individually, while group interviews took place with representatives of those who had not chosen to take a Diploma. Details of the total numbers of interviews achieved are presented in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Numbers of interviews achieved

Type of interviewee ²	Number of interviews completed
Consortium level strategic staff, including Consortium lead /14-19 strategy managers	16
Other consortium staff including senior managers and operational staff (at institution level)	111
Year 9 learners intending to take a Diploma in 2008	117
Year 9 learners <u>not</u> intending to take a Diploma in 2008	29 group interviews (123 young people in total)
Year 11 learners intending to take a Diploma in 2008	33
Year 11 learners <u>not</u> intending to take a Diploma in 2008	11 group interviews (58 young people in total)

² Consortia staff have been grouped in this way as interviewees often had dual roles.

The views of staff and young people are presented in this report. In relation to some aspects, the number of consortia where a view was expressed is given. This is to provide some guidance on the extent of an experience or approach within the 15 case-study consortia. However, in considering these figures, it is worth taking into consideration that, during the interviews, respondents were not all asked identical questions with a range of responses, as they would be on a questionnaire. Rather, the views expressed in response to a semi-structured set of interview questions will reflect the issues, priorities, concerns and context for each interviewee.

1.4 Structure of the report

Chapter 2 of the report examines the structure and management of Gateway 1 consortia. It also explores perceptions of the factors that facilitate or inhibit consortium effectiveness and cohesion.

Chapter 3 focuses on case-study interviewees' views on the Diploma specifications and curriculum content for each line of learning, and the different components of the Diploma.

The models of Diploma delivery planned in consortia teaching from September 2008, and the factors facilitating and hindering preparedness for Diploma delivery, are explored in **Chapter 4**.

Chapter 5 provides an overview of the national, consortium and institution-level strategies adopted to promote the Diploma and to give learners information, advice and guidance about their choice to study for a Diploma. It also examines the learners' experiences of the IAG received, and whether particular groups of learners were targeted and why. The impact of the IAG on learners' knowledge and understanding of Diplomas is also discussed.

Chapter 6 examines the extent of learner take-up of Diplomas, and the factors which influenced young people's decision to take a Diploma or not.

The range and type of training and support offered and received by staff across consortia is discussed in **Chapter 7**, as well as views on further training and support needs.

An overview of the key findings to date, and the key implications emerging for policy-makers, for Gateway 1 consortia and for future consortia delivering Diplomas, is presented in **Chapter 8**.

2. Consortium Management and Structure

Key findings and messages for policy and practice

- Pre-existing partnerships provided a sound basis for building effective consortia, as they had both helped to establish relationships between different institutions and to advance practical arrangements, such as aligned timetabling. If there is no history of partnership working, consortium leads need to provide strong direction, examples of good collaborative practice and encouragement to institutions to consider the benefits to their learners of collaboration. (Section 2.2)
- Consortium effectiveness was dependent on effective management structures and staff with strong leadership skills. The consortium lead required sensitivity to handle the delicate nature of building collaborative partnerships, and there was a need to overcome competition between some institutions. (Sections 2.2 and 2.3)
- Those engaged in planning and implementing Diploma delivery, at all levels, emphasised the need for sufficient time to plan effectively and attend meetings and training courses. The financial resources therefore need to be available to support this. (Section 2.3)
- There will be plenty of scope for new consortia to learn from the experiences of those established for Gateway 1. Visits to consortia with examples of good practice are particularly helpful, or published case studies where this is not possible. Also good examples of progress in such areas as quality assurance systems, travel-to-learn arrangements, resource sharing and employer and HEI engagement will need to be disseminated. (Section 2.3)
- All consortium leads and many other interviewees considered their consortia to be effective and making good progress towards delivery in September 2008. However, views on consortium cohesion varied between and within consortia. Cohesion was thought to require shared vision and a curtailment of institutional self-interest and this could not be hurried, or imposed. (Section 2.3)
- Although the case-study consortia were confident that they had the capacity to offer the first lines of learning from September 2008, concerns were expressed about the increasing complexity of offering further lines of learning. Consortia may need strong support and guidance to help them expand their Diploma offer, and prepare for delivery of all 17 lines of learning. (Section 2.4.3)

This chapter examines the structure and management of Gateway 1 consortia and perceptions of consortium effectiveness and cohesion. It is based on visits to the 15 case-study consortia, as well as the telephone survey of 136 consortium leads carried out in February 2008. Specifically, this chapter presents findings related to:

- consortium membership, management structures and information sharing strategies;
- how consortia were established, the extent of existing provision and the impact of pre-existing partnerships;
- the effectiveness and cohesion of the case-study consortia, the factors that facilitate and inhibit this and the extent to which challenges in establishing effective consortia have been overcome; and
- the reasons why consortia applied for Gateway 1, for particular lines of learning and their capacity to deliver Diplomas from September 2008.

2.1 Consortium management structures

Consortia involved a wide range of stakeholders; including different types of educational and training institutions, employers and employer organisations, Connexions Services and Local Authority (LA) representatives. As a result, structures had been established to help manage the implementation of Diplomas across these organisations. As there was considerable variation amongst the 15 case-study consortia in terms of size, type of LA and geography, there were details in their management structure that made each of them distinct, but the common structural pattern across consortia was as follows:

Main strategy group

In overall control of planning and decision-making with regard to Diploma implementation, and with a wide-ranging membership.

Examples of those represented included:

- line of learning leads
- representation from Local Authority 14-19 Partnership
- representation from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC)
- headteachers and principals of schools and colleges
- training providers and local HEIs
- the Connexions Service
- employers and /or Education Business Partnerships Organisations (EBPOs).

In general such groups met every four to six weeks. They usually set targets for implementation and received reports on the progress of implementation across the consortium.

One or more operational management groups

These usually included a group of senior managers from schools and colleges and bodies which were **specific to lines of learning**. Any representatives of organisations listed above that were not included in the overall strategic steering group were usually involved at this level. They often included staff responsible for lines of learning within their institutions. These groups focused on the essential details of Diploma implementation, such as models of delivery, timetabling, and choice of awarding bodies. They often met on a monthly basis.

Delivery groups

These usually involved the staff who would be delivering Diplomas from September 2008, mainly from schools and colleges, but sometimes also training providers and HEIs, where they were involved in delivery. They dealt with the practical issues of collaborative delivery and subject development.

Some met on a weekly basis and others three or four times a term.

Specialist groups

In some consortia these groups took responsibility for particular issues, such as employer engagement, information, advice and guidance (IAG) or functional skills. Membership was therefore dependent on their specific remit. If specialist groups did not exist, such issues were within the remit of strategic or operational management groups.

It should be noted that the term 'strategic' could be interpreted in many ways and although it has been used in the diagram above to denote the body with the ultimate responsibility for decision-making and overall control of development, members of other groups also described their role as strategic, in terms of taking decisions which affected Diploma development. Some of the large consortia in metropolitan areas were sub-divided into local partnerships based on a geographical area, or different lines of learning, and so had additional layers of strategic management.

With two exceptions, all the consortium leads interviewed were also 14-19 Partnership managers and their roles combined the implementation of Diplomas within the wider context of other 14-19 developments. Some had been seconded to their posts from senior management positions in schools or colleges and others had led 14-19 Partnerships at LA level for several years and saw the development of consortium leadership as a natural progression of their role.

Role of the consortium lead

Consortium leads, who were usually based within LAs, considered that the main functions of their role were to:

- **Act as 'conduits' of information** - from national bodies to their own consortium groups, and also from LA level to Diploma implementation groups and back again.
- **Facilitate good communication between the various levels of consortium management** - this was considered to be important from the perspective both of the consortium leads and staff involved at all stages of development. One consortium lead described the role as '*bridging gaps*', so they had to be '*comfortable talking to headteachers, but also get on with the LA people and understand the restrictions that both are under*'.
- **Provide firm leadership, but in a sensitive manner** - the complexities of managing the introduction of Diplomas at the same time as other changes in the 14-19 landscape, and the delicate nature of building collaborative partnerships, required clearly defined goals and constant vigilance, as well as the ability to deal with many competing interests. Encouraging progress and setting manageable targets, without being, as one interviewee said '*overbearing*', was a skill that consortium leads recognised as essential, and also required strong support from other key players, such as line of learning leads.

Role of line of learning leads

Line of learning leads played a significant role in all consortia, often overseeing the practical implementation of a Diploma line alongside management responsibility. Some were based in 14-19 Partnerships at LA level, but the majority were senior managers, or department/faculty heads, in schools or colleges. In some large consortia, there were different leads for each Diploma level being offered within each line of learning.

Depending on the size of the consortium and the number of lines of learning, there were some leads who were responsible for their line of learning across the whole consortium, while others had responsibility only within their own organisation. Typically, their role included:

- keeping in close contact with the staff who would be delivering Diplomas
- decision-making on subject development and implementation across the line of learning

- dealing with practical issues of implementation
- promotion of Diplomas and the provision of consortium-wide IAG, for example, through attendance at options or open evenings in schools and colleges.

Having management structures in place, with groups and individuals having clear roles and remits, was perceived to have facilitated preparedness for Diploma delivery. As one senior manager said, *'the reality of how prepared teachers are in delivering [Diplomas] really depends on how successful the planning groups have been'* (see Chapter 4 for a discussion about delivery).

2.2 Establishing consortium partnerships

Amongst the case-studies, consortia involved a wide range of partners which were either involved in delivering Diplomas or just represented on the consortia (for example, in an advisory role). Schools and FE colleges were in the majority, but training providers, HEIs and employers, or their representatives on EBPOs, were also generally involved.

All the case-study consortia were at least reasonably well-established in terms of partnership working, as was the case across all Gateway 1 consortia (as indicated by the telephone survey of consortium leads), and the majority had not encountered major difficulties in establishing their consortium. However, three of the case-study consortia reported that they had faced some difficulties, related mainly to overcoming lack of interest, or resistance among schools, colleges and employers. If this was due to a lack of information and understanding, a concerted effort to provide information and counter misunderstandings could achieve results. However, where resistance was based on more deep-seated causes, such as rivalry between schools and colleges, it was more difficult to overcome. Consortium effectiveness and cohesion are discussed in Section 2.3.

Employer involvement in consortia

The extent of employer involvement in Diploma consortia appeared to vary quite widely, with half the consortium leads reporting positively on the active involvement of employers (including major companies) in the delivery of Diplomas (as discussed in detail in Chapter 4). Other consortia reported that, while employers were represented on the consortium and had expressed an interest in Diploma development, they had not yet committed to providing work experience placements.

Furthermore, the number of employers prepared to offer assistance with work-based learning was often fewer than had been hoped for, and consortium leads raised concerns about finding suitable work experience placements for Diploma learners.

Training provider involvement in consortia

The extent of training providers' involvement in consortium partnerships varied at the time of the visits. While training providers were usually represented either at strategic steering group level, or operational management level, their participation in Diploma delivery often depended on the lines of learning offered by the consortium (see Chapter 4 for more detail on training provider involvement in delivery). However, some interviewees felt that there was scope to make greater use of training providers. This view was reflected in the comments of one of the training providers herself who explained that she was *'the only representative for work-based learning on the steering group, so I am involved in a lot of liaison with other training providers to disseminate information to them...others have dropped off along the way'*. She added that establishing her role had required determination.

HEI involvement in consortia

The involvement of HEIs in consortia also varied considerably. HEIs were usually represented on Diploma consortia either at strategic steering group level, or line of learning management level. However, there were some comments that HEI partners tended to represent particular types of HEI, usually what were described as the 'newer' universities, or those with more of a vocational orientation. A senior manager interviewed at a university confirmed this when he said, *'Universities like this are interested and supportive, but most of the traditional universities still need to be convinced'*. It appears, therefore, that there is scope to improve HEI involvement in Diploma development, and in the delivery of Diplomas (as discussed in Chapter 4). The issue of whether HEIs accept Diplomas as entry into their institutions will be explored in the future through a survey of HEIs.

Pre-existing partnerships

Most of the case-study consortia had benefited from some level of pre-existing partnership (there were three where this had been less developed), and those who had experience of pre-existing partnerships noted the advantages of building on existing foundations. Many schools and colleges had been involved in key stage 4 vocational delivery, such as the Increased Flexibility Programme and the Young Apprenticeship Programme. This meant that some areas were already advanced in practical arrangements for partnership working, such as travel arrangements for learners, quality assurance systems and some measure of aligned timetabling, as summed up by the following comment from a senior manager:

All those mechanisms that other consortia are struggling to get their heads around, like timetabling and common funding arrangements and so on, we've been doing that for the last four years here.

In addition to these practical benefits, previous partnership working was perceived by interviewees at all levels to have been an advantage, in that relationships had already been established and, as long as these had been successful, they provided a basis of collaborative effort on which to build further. A school senior manager explained that his school, a neighbouring school and the local FE college had all worked together for the IFP, and as a result, *'it's not a major change for us and we get on well together, so there's none of that sort of establishing relationships that we'd have to do if we were working with new people'*.

Two of the case-study areas had been Diploma Pathfinder consortia and this experience was perceived to have been particularly useful for establishing partnerships and policies. There was also an example of a consortium that had run its own pilot scheme for a year, with a 'diploma' that was recognised city-wide, and here too the experience of shared delivery and partnership working had provided a good platform on which to develop further.

For consortia without the benefit of pre-existing partnership experience, learning from those who do, and who therefore have already made practical developments that have proved their worth, is likely to be useful, particularly if they are from an area of a similar nature (for example, seeking solutions to overcoming the challenges of travel-to-learn in a rural environment). Establishing new relationships between partner institutions is more difficult to achieve and takes time, but encouraging both formal and informal networking and joint training and promotional events have been seen as useful aids by consortium leads.

2.3 Consortium effectiveness and cohesion

The effectiveness and cohesion of the case-study consortia were not always easy to judge, even for interviewees. However, the issues raised about attitudes towards cohesion were at the heart of the collaborative working that consortia need to establish in order for Diplomas to be successful.

None of the consortium leads thought that their consortium was ineffective and most were very positive about the good progress they had already made towards delivery in 2008 (see Chapter 4 for discussion of how prepared consortia were for delivering Diplomas). However, a minority felt that, although they had good management structures in place and were steadily overcoming challenges, a lack of cohesion meant that effectiveness could sometimes be undermined. Although there was clearly a connection between effectiveness and cohesion, the former tended to be interpreted in terms of policy development, management structures and practical progress towards delivery, while cohesion revolved around more intangible factors, such as promoting the common good, curtailing self-interest, willingness to take risks and shared vision.

There was a strongly positive view about the effectiveness of consortia, and generally this was true at both a consortium lead level and among other staff. Some interviewees considered that effectiveness was demonstrated by specific achievements, such as the joint establishment of a new vocational college; agreement on aligned timetables, quality assurance and learner tracking systems; or travel-to-learn arrangements. Many also thought that being ready to offer Diploma provision by September 2008, across a range of institutions, was a mark of effectiveness.

In addition to previous partnership working (discussed in Section 2.2), a number of factors were considered to have **facilitated effectiveness**, and these included:

- **Strong leadership** - there were many appreciative comments about consortium leadership and the ability of those in this role to oversee strategic plans, with realistic deadlines, outcomes and clarity of purpose. It was important to have someone who could *'hold the reins'*, but was also careful to *'treat people fairly'* and avoid making institutions or individuals feel *'threatened'*. In confirmation of consortium leads' own view of their role as being a *'go-between'*, it was also necessary to have a leader with the authority to deal with employers, headteachers and principals, but an appreciation of how schools and colleges operated, and sensitivity to the concerns of their staff.
- **Adequate time for meetings and planning** - this was important at all levels from strategic planning to practitioner meetings and training. Line of learning leads were often on reduced timetables, to enable them to work on Diploma development, as were some senior managers with a coordinating role. Several interviewees also pointed out that funding was essential for this type of development time, as this line of learning lead explained: *'We meet every week and these meetings are absolutely essential, but we couldn't have done that without adequate funding'*.
- **Staff with the right experience and skills undertaking key roles** - this was important at all levels and often involved either secondments to senior positions, or protected time for those with the required skills, in order to plan and implement effectively. Senior managers in schools were seen by consortium leads as playing a vital role in *'driving forward implementation'*, as they had the authority to make important decisions on such issues as timetabling, and were strongly committed to making the new systems work.

- **Good channels of communication and networking** - a well-defined communication system within consortia was considered essential. There were many references to the need for regular meetings, the opportunity to network with other consortia and the particular value of practitioners '*supporting each other*' through the implementation process. Some consortia had newsletters with regular updates and conferences to bring together stakeholders from across all lines of learning. Visits between consortia for the purpose of sharing good practice were also considered to be especially valuable.
- **A high level of commitment from partner organisations and a willingness to collaborate** - this was where there was the strongest connection between effectiveness and cohesion and it was also the ingredient that was most often perceived to be lacking. This is, therefore, discussed in more detail below.

There was only one consortium out of the 15 case-study areas where all the interviewees were entirely positive about the extent of cohesion and two where it was considered to be well-advanced. Otherwise views across the different interviewees were often mixed and in one case, almost entirely negative (this consortium had very little previous experience of collaborative working, was extensive in area and included schools that, for various reasons, were not very interested in collaborative partnerships). This caution about cohesion was perhaps not surprising, as cohesion was seen as dependent on changes to both working practices (for example, in terms of partnership working and shared teaching) and attitudes (mutual trust and shared objectives between institutions, for example).

Interviewees generally considered that cohesion would be achieved in time, but would have to grow naturally, and attempts to force it would only be counter-productive. It was significant that, although most consortia had previous experience of partnership working through the Increased Flexibility and Young Apprenticeship programmes, this had usually involved schools collaborating directly with colleges, rather than with each other, with young people attending colleges for their learning, rather than being involved in shared delivery. As a result, while good relationships had often been established between individual schools and colleges, this did not usually extend to school-to-school relationships. Senior managers sometimes stated that it was inter-school relationships that could be an issue, with concerns about quality assurance systems and parental attitudes, such as that stated by one school senior manager: '*one barrier to effective partnership has been that the parents from the other school didn't want their kids to come to this school.*'

Despite previous partnerships, even relationships between schools and colleges were not always smooth, as college staff sometimes considered that most institutions were too protective of their own interests. One college senior manager admitted that there was an appearance of cohesion in his consortia but, beneath the surface, real commitment to partnership working was limited by protection of vested interests: '*We all get on very well together and we all pretend that we are working together, but we all have our own agenda. We all do what we want for our institution and do it with a smile.*'

The challenge of replacing a competitive system between institutions with a collaborative ethos was also referred to frequently by interviewees at all levels as a major reason why cohesion was still in its early stages, and was summed up by this consortium lead: '*The concept of collaborative working will be problematic for many schools. They have moved from an environment of competition around league tables, results and exclusions to an entirely different one where they are expected to work together and share information.*'

It was in recognition of these tensions that many interviewees talked about the need for trust and the willingness to put the interests of learners before those of individual institutions. It should be noted too, that many interviewees believed that progress was being made in this

area and that cohesion would eventually improve because institutions. *'know that they cannot work in isolation anymore'*.

Other interviewees also talked about an increase in *'mutual trust and understanding'* among consortium partners which would make collaboration easier to achieve. Some interviewees felt that if a partner organisation was not prepared to *'accept compromises'* and *'look to the common good'*, it was better if they opted out, at least at this crucial early stage. So, although the refusal of some institutions to participate, or their withdrawal from active involvement could itself be seen as symptomatic of lack of cohesion, for others who were committed, it was an advantage in enabling them to make progress unhindered.

2.4 Rationale for offering Diplomas and for offering individual lines of learning

2.4.1 Rationale for choosing to be involved in Diplomas

Notwithstanding the issues associated with forming effective partnerships, discussed earlier in this chapter, it is evident that the Gateway 1 consortia considered that there was a need to continue existing partnerships, or form new ones, in order to offer the opportunity for young people in their area to undertake Diplomas. The telephone survey with consortium leads explored this and revealed that the **main motivating factors for their consortium to deliver Diplomas in Phase 1** were a desire to prepare for the 14-19 entitlement³ (96 per cent) and to improve outcomes for young people (96 per cent). Table 2.1 presents the other motivating factors reported by consortium leads. Further statistical analysis revealed that consortia offering Diplomas in Construction and the Built Environment were significantly more likely to be motivated by a demand in the labour market compared to those offering other lines of learning.

Table 2.1 Main motivation for delivering Diplomas in Phase 1

Motivating factors	%
Keen to prepare for 14-19 entitlement	96
Improve outcomes for young people	96
Demand for these skills in the local labour market	79
Demand in the subject area amongst learners	77
Consortium well established	74
Demand for learning approach amongst learners	67
Additional funding for institutions	36
Other*	36
No response	1
N = 136	

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100
**Other' factors included broadening the curriculum offer for young people, raising standards and expertise in a particular subject area.*
Source: NFER / University of Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Consortium Survey 2008

³ The 14-19 entitlement is a new national curriculum and qualifications entitlement that is at the heart of the 14-19 reforms. This will give all young people access to the education that is best suited to them in a setting appropriate to what they are learning. By 2013, every 14-19 year old will have an entitlement to 17 Diploma lines in their local area, in addition to the existing National Curriculum. Collaboration between institutions will be crucial in delivering the 14-19 entitlement as not every institution will necessarily be able to provide all elements of it.

The case-study visits to a sample of colleges and schools provided insights into these institutions' reasons for choosing to offer Diplomas in Phase 1. These were similar to reasons mentioned by the consortium leads surveyed as they included the desire to:

- **Widen learners' options:** this was the most common reason for choosing to offer Diplomas reported by senior managers, as they felt that Diplomas offer a new option for young people who want to pursue an alternative to GCSEs. In addition, some noted that Diplomas would appeal to many young people who would like to focus on a specific subject area.
- **Be part of a major development in 14-19 provision:** several senior managers were keen to take part in the delivery of Diplomas from the outset as they considered it to be *'the way forward'* and a key development in 14-19 provision so *'it seemed a good idea to be in from the start'*.
- **Provide learners with a better set of skills:** the majority of interviewees considered Diplomas to be a more rounded qualification that would provide learners with a new set of skills which, in their view, traditional qualifications such as GCSEs do not focus on developing. A school senior manager, for example, explained that *'Diplomas will allow students to gain broader skills than in the traditional curriculum, will become more independent, creative learners, better working in teams'*.
- **Address the perceived difference between vocational and academic education:** a few senior managers were motivated to offer Diplomas as they saw it as a vehicle for bridging the perceived gap between academic and vocational qualifications. This was illustrated by one assistant head of a school who noted *'we have seen them [Diplomas] as being a much needed qualification that would remove that old academic/vocational divide, and prevent any course that wasn't a GCSE having a low status'*.

2.4.2 Rationale for choosing individual lines of learning

Across the Gateway 1 consortia, the telephone survey with 136 consortium leads revealed that:

- All consortia surveyed were offering at least one line of learning at Level 2
- 87 per cent of consortia were offering Level 1
- 81 per cent of consortia were offering at least one line of learning at Level 3.

Engineering, and Creative and Media Diplomas were most widely offered (43 per cent 42 per cent of consortia respectively) while Information Technology, Construction and the Built Environment, and Society, Health and Development were less frequently offered (30 per cent, 29 per cent and 27 per cent of consortia respectively).

It was apparent that nine of the 15 case-study consortia had applied through Gateway 1 for more lines of learning than they had received approval to deliver from September 2008. Indeed, while some indicated that they had made a decision about which lines of learning to offer in Phase 1, others had taken the approach of applying for all five lines to see which would be successful. It was notable that interviewees in two consortia commented that, in retrospect, they were content that they had started with fewer lines of learning as this would be more manageable. In other cases, interviewees in three consortia had actively chosen to *'start small'* and build up.

The findings from the telephone survey of Gateway 1 consortia leads revealed that, when deciding on which lines of learning to offer in Phase 1, the three main factors taken into consideration by consortia were staff expertise within the consortium (86 per cent), the availability of specialist facilities and resources (67 per cent) and learner demand (40 per cent). The case-study interviews revealed that consortia had taken very similar factors into consideration regardless of the line of learning they offered. These factors included the following:

- **Subject specialisms and strengths** - interviewees in 11 consortia said that schools or FE colleges with particular specialisms, including but not only those recognised through specialist school or COVE status, were considered to be the appropriate lead for associated lines of learning. A related consideration was ensuring coverage of lines of learning across an area.
- **Skills and enthusiasm of teaching staff** - in nine consortia, the extent to which staff had particular expertise or, in some instances, a '*keenness*' to offer a particular line of learning, was a key consideration.
- **Availability of appropriate facilities** - a further factor associated with institutional specialisms and skills of staff, mentioned by interviewees in seven consortia, was access to appropriate facilities. While this was particularly mentioned in relation to Engineering and Construction and the Built Environment, it was also noted in relation to other lines of learning.
- **Existing partnerships** - staff in seven consortia said that their decision of which line of learning to offer was related to the existence of relationships between institutions established through, for example, the Increased Flexibility and Young Apprenticeship programmes.
- **Local labour market and employment opportunities** - in six consortia (which were in more urban areas), interviewees commented that they had considered the future employment opportunities in their local area, such as the existence of large engineering employers, or the likelihood of an increase in demand for skills in the care sector, in identifying appropriate lines of learning. Related to this was the '*the capacity to deliver work placements*' by being able to access relevant employers locally.
- **Demand from learners** - in five consortia, interviewees mentioned that they had considered learners' interests and, in some cases, had assessed this demand from take-up of qualifications in similar subject areas.

2.4.3 Capacity to deliver Diplomas

Case-study consortia were confident that they had the capacity to offer the Diplomas from September 2008 in the lines of learning for which they had approval. As illustrated in the previous section, this was due in part to the consortium members having considered the availability of the necessary staff, facilities and resources to do so. However, consortia leads were also conscious of the potential constraints on their capacity to deliver relating to facilities, staff and employer involvement.

Consortium leads in 11 consortia mentioned that they had expanded their **facilities**, or planned to do so, with new buildings or refurbishments and that this was related to the current and future requirements for Diploma delivery, including planning for Phase 2 lines of learning. Some of these developments were funded through Diploma capital funding, for example, one consortium was building an Engineering facility while a second was funding a

skills centre for Hospitality. In other areas, where funding was available through Building Schools for the Future (BSF), the needs of Diploma delivery were sometimes being taken into account in BSF developments, including creation of a Manufacturing centre. In addition, in some areas, Diploma delivery was expected to benefit from wider developments in colleges and in vocational centres which comprised new specialist facilities. There were also instances of existing facilities being remodelled to enable Diploma delivery, such as refurbishment of workshops for Construction and the Built Environment and re-assigning an area as a Business Centre.

While in general, interviewees considered that there would be sufficient numbers of appropriately skilled **staff** to deliver the Diplomas from September, interviewees in four consortia were less confident that staff with specialist skills would be available (as discussed further in Chapter 3). Indeed, some were seeking to recruit additional staff at the time of the interviews. As outlined above, consortia had sometimes actively considered the potential availability of appropriate **work placement opportunities** that would be accessible to the Diploma learners when deciding which line of learning to offer. Nevertheless, there was a general awareness across consortia that the lack of availability of appropriate placements could constrain their capacity to deliver the work placement element of the Diplomas. The issues associated with employer engagement are discussed further in Chapter 4.

2.5 Summary and conclusion

All the 15 case-study consortia had management structures in place which assigned responsibilities to those with the required experience and skills and had made good progress in working towards Gateway 1 delivery in September 2008. Most of the 136 consortia surveyed had been based on pre-existing partnerships, to which new partners had generally been added, and this seemed to have facilitated meeting the challenges of Diploma planning and delivery. In addition, strong, firm leadership from the consortium lead, providing sufficient time for meetings and planning, employing staff with relevant experience and authority to coordinate implementation, and good channels of communication appeared to be key factors in establishing effective consortia. The main challenge to consortium cohesion was considered to be the need for acceptance in all institutions that changes in attitude were required to make collaboration and shared delivery work well. It was not possible to impose this on reluctant organisations and time was needed for institutions to see the benefits that could emerge from collaboration. In most consortia, there was careful consideration of which lines of learning to offer, and this decision was based mainly on existing capacity, staff skills and pre-existing partnerships, as well as local employment opportunities.

3. Views of Staff on the Diploma

Key findings and messages for policy and practice

- The Diploma was welcomed overall, particularly because of the varied learning experience and transferable skills learners would gain. (Section 3.1)
- Learners need to be clearly informed about the Diploma course content and mode of learning in order to make an informed choice, which emphasises the importance of IAG at a national and local level. There was a misconception amongst young people and parents, for example, about the extent of practical learning involved in a Diploma. Concerns were raised that learners might expect the Diploma to prepare them for a vocation in a particular sector, which was not always thought to be the case by teaching staff. (Section 3.2)
- Functional skills were considered important and required by employers. The difficulty of functional skills at each level should be reviewed, however, as there was a perception that they were more difficult to pass than basic / key skills at the same level. Having to pass functional skills was also considered to be a potential barrier to take-up. Consortia also wanted clarity about how to deliver or assess functional skills. (Sections 3.1 and 3.3.1)
- There were some comments about gaps in staff skills to teach certain elements of the Diploma, particularly the justice elements of the Society, Health and Development Diploma and the built environment elements of the Construction and the Built Environment Diploma. This has implications for training and recruitment of staff teaching these Diplomas. (Section 3.2.)
- There were contrasting views about whether the Diploma is suitably broad (offering learners a range of skills and experiences) or too broad (not covering the topics in depth enough for learners to gain a true understanding or develop a particular specialism). (Section 3.2)
- The work experience element was welcomed overall for giving learners the opportunity to gain a good insight into their chosen sector, although there were some concerns about finding appropriate work experience placements for learners. Consortia should consider creative ways of providing work experience, but might benefit from advice on how to do so. (Section 3.3.2 and Chapter 4)

This chapter explores staff views on:

- the Diploma in general
- the specifications and curriculum content of each of the first five lines of learning
- the different components of the Diploma generic learning.

It should be noted that the broad telephone survey of Gateway 1 consortium leads did not explore views on the specifications and curriculum content, or their reactions to elements of the Diploma specifically, and thus the findings presented in this chapter relate primarily to interviews with line of learning leads and senior managers in Diploma centres across the sample of 15 case-study consortia.

3.1 Views on the Diploma in general

Interviewees gave responses in relation to their views on the Diploma in general when asked for their reactions to the specifications. The Diploma overall was generally welcomed, with positive reactions relating to:

- the level of **flexibility** afforded by the qualification, which was seen as an advantage by those who welcomed the opportunity for each institution to *'play to its strengths'*
- the capacity for learners to develop **transferable skills**, such as independent research and team work
- the different components of the Diploma, which offer a **varied learning experience** which will help to *'bring out different strengths and weaknesses in the students'*
- the configuration of the Diploma, giving the learner a **structured learning experience**.

The concerns expressed about the Diploma qualification in general related to the following:

- **Having to pass a number of component parts in order to be awarded a Diploma.** Concerns were raised about it being *'unfair'* that a learner might get a distinction in one aspect but fail another, which would mean they were not awarded a Diploma. The impact on take-up of having to pass all elements was also raised as an issue.
- **The perceived need for specialist learning for entry to higher education.** Comments were expressed that the content of the Diploma alone (specifically the principal learning) would not give learners broad enough knowledge of the subject area, which might mean that higher educational institutions would be looking carefully at the specialist learning achieved alongside the Diploma. As discussed in Chapter 4, at the time of the interviews, the specialist learning offer did not seem to be well developed by consortia delivering Diplomas from September 2008.

3.2 Views on the line of learning specifications

At the time of the visits to case-study consortia (April to July 2008) interviewees only felt able to talk in general terms about the specifications and curriculum content for each of the lines of learning, as they had yet to plan and deliver the qualifications. Therefore, the information in this section is based on initial impressions, although they are reported in order to reflect the formative nature of the evaluation. Further details will be sought at a later stage of the evaluation from those who deliver Diplomas from September 2008.

Most issues which emerged were generic across a number of lines of learning and thus the findings have been summarised below under broad headings (with the relevant lines of learning indicated):

- **The extent of practical learning:** this was raised particularly in relation to the Engineering and the Construction and the Built Environment Diplomas, with a particular concern being that some learners, and their parents, had a misconception that the Diploma would involve more practical learning than it would in reality. One school headteacher felt, for example, that the titles of the Diplomas implied there was a focus on practical tasks, particularly the title 'Construction and the Built Environment'. There was a concern that learners had applied to do the Diploma because they perceived that the practical focus they thought the Diploma would give them would prepare them for an occupation in the sector, which was not thought by staff to necessarily be the case. As one line of learning lead for the Construction and the Built Environment Diploma commented, for instance, *'It [the Diploma] will give them an understanding of an industry but not prepare them for a vocation. It is an excellent qualification...in terms of giving them a structured pathway into higher education...it will give them the skills for university but it won't prepare them to be a surveyor. It will put people off if there's not enough practicality in it...people think this will have more of a vocational content.'* One line of learning lead for the Engineering Diploma emphasised that choices for specialist learning would be important for maximising the vocational experience: *'Some of the schools are saying they are going to run History alongside [Engineering]...I can't see how that's going to help someone get a job in engineering'*. Another line of learning lead felt that learners might expect the Diploma to be like BTEC qualifications and the 'type' of young people usually applying for BTEC courses *'won't cope with the Diploma as it is not practical enough'*. This evidence of a misconception highlights the importance of providing accurate IAG so that learners understand the difference between applied, vocational and practical learning to enable them to make informed choices about whether to take the qualification or not.
- **Staff expertise:** this was raised particularly in relation to the Construction and the Built Environment and Society, Health and Development Diplomas. There was a perception that recruiting staff with the broader knowledge and skills to teach the built environment elements of the Construction and the Built Environment Diploma might be challenging as they might perceive they could earn more money outside teaching. As a line of learning lead said, *'there are not enough staff at [college] or elsewhere who know enough about the principal learning. We need to recruit, but it is very difficult to find the right people. There is the issue of pay, because college staff are paid poorly compared with what specialists can earn in their field'*. In addition, although the justice element of the Society, Health and Development Diploma was considered *'extremely relevant'* there was concern that this was not an area of knowledge for staff, who were most used to teaching Health and Social Care. Comments included, *'the justice element is something completely new to all of us so*

- The balance between breadth and depth:** this was raised particularly in relation to the Creative and Media and Engineering Diplomas. There seemed to be a debate about whether the broad nature of these Diploma lines was a strength (for offering learners a range of skills and experiences) or a weakness (for not covering the topics in depth enough for learners to gain a true understanding or develop a particular specialism). For example, comments from those who thought breadth was a strength included *'it gives an incredible opportunity to offer a really broad learning experience'* and *'I like the [Creative and Media] Diploma because the student learns skills across the board in the creative industry area'*. In contrast, comments about breadth being a weakness included: *'The Creative and Media Diploma is so general. It will not give the students the expertise to specialise at Level 3. They can do units all over the place...there'll be insufficient depth. I suppose we could offer a particular focus, but that would defeat the point of the Diploma'* and *'[the Engineering Diploma is] shallow...I can't see how it can apply to all branches of engineering...and it doesn't'*. The breadth of the Creative and Media Diploma was also felt to result in the need to involve a number of departments within a college in delivery, which had presented some implementation challenges.
- The level of difficulty:** this was raised particularly in relation to the Engineering Diploma (Levels 2 and 3, but particularly the mathematics and science at Level 3) and the Information Technology Diploma (with the Level 3 Diploma being described as *'quite hard'* and the difference between Levels 2 and 3 thought to be *'quite extreme'*).
- Teaching and learning:** comments were made about the content of the principal learning element of the Society, Health and Development and Construction and the Built Environment Diplomas being a bit *'dry'*, making it necessary to teach and apply the content in a *'creative way'*. One line of learning lead for the Society, Health and Development Diploma said, *'the curriculum is really as good as you make it...there are certain aspects of it that look a bit dry...but it's about how you bring it alive and the teaching and learning strategies'*. Others praised the scenario-based style of learning and the visits to the local community *'that make the learning experience more real for students'* (which would also be relevant to other Diploma lines of learning).
- The extent of innovation:** this was raised particularly in relation to the Information Technology Diploma and whether it offered anything new, with one line of learning lead commenting, for instance, that the principal learning was *'sound, but not revolutionary'* and others too feeling that the content was very similar to alternative qualifications, such as the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE). One lead said *'it is disappointingly lacking in innovation'*. Two line of learning leads suggested that the employer engagement element to the Diploma *'is more interesting and relevant...it brings it to life'*, although there were some concerns about how to engage employers (see Chapter 4 for more discussion on employer engagement).

3.3 Views on the generic learning components

This section explores interviewees' views on the generic learning components of the Diploma (the models of delivery of these elements are discussed in Chapter 4).

3.3.1 Functional skills

The consensus across interviewees was that functional skills were **important** and **required** by employers. As one line of learning lead said, they are '*vital qualities*'. However, there were some concerns raised:

- **That the requirement to pass functional skills** in order to achieve a Diploma would be a barrier to take-up (mentioned by five line of learning leads across different consortia). One lead said, '*why not just do a BTEC which employers will accept and they won't need to pass English and maths*'. There was a perception that learners would '*struggle*'. A minority of interviewees also felt that functional skills could possibly contribute to a low take-up of Diplomas such as Creative and Media and Society, Health and Development, which were thought to be usually chosen by '*creative*' and '*vocational*' learners who might be '*turned off*' by functional skills.
- At least two line of learning leads commented that functional skills were **more difficult to pass than key / basic skills** (for example, learners in pilot centres who had passed Level 2 key skills had failed Level 2 functional skills). This will be explored further in future stages of the evaluation. In two case-study consortia, institutions which had piloted functional skills commented that they planned to assess learners as early as possible (in Year 9 in one case) in order to '*identify the need for additional support*'.
- There was some criticism that **Level 3 learners would have to pass functional skills at Level 2**, even if they already had achieved GCSE grade C or above, which was also considered to be a barrier to take-up.
- A minority of interviewees seemed confused about whether learners could re-take functional skills if they failed.
- Consortia were not always clear about **how to deliver** functional skills, particularly institutions not involved in the pilot, although there were individual examples of how functional skills would be delivered amongst those who had taken part (see Chapter 4).
- The **assessment** of functional skills appeared to require greater clarification and planning.

3.3.2 Work experience

The work experience element of the Diploma was welcomed overall as it was considered to give learners a good insight into their chosen sector. Decisions were still being made about how to deliver it, for example in one two-week block, in two separate weeks, or during staggered days. In some cases, it seemed that this element of the Diploma would simply replace the work experience a learner would usually do in Year 10, whereas there were other examples of consortia which were trying to offer something different. For example, two line of learning leads in two consortia specifically mentioned that learners would get more than the specified ten days of work experience. One said, '*in the first year, students will spend one afternoon a week on work placements (equating to 18 days). They will also have an*

enrichment week. The expectation of work experience is higher than is required for the Diploma...it gives students important skills...a better insight into the subject area'.

However, there were general concerns about organising 'suitable' work experience. Comment expressed in relation to specific lines of learning are outlined below:

- **Society, Health and Development:** a lack of breadth of opportunities being made available, resulting from few placements being offered in hospitals or with the police, and most placements being in nurseries or care homes for the elderly.
- **Construction and the Built Environment and Engineering:** health and safety implications, particularly for 14-16 year olds, with construction sites presenting particular issues. Some consortia mentioned alternative, creative, ways of providing work experience (in one, for example, the EBPC was helping to devise a work experience programme for the Construction and Built Environment Diploma, whereby learners would spend time with professionals, such as architects, project managers and building control surveyors in a safe environment learning about the process of building from inception to completion).
- **Creative and Media:** the cost of some placements, particularly with artists who work alone and were thought, therefore, unlikely to give their time for free was a concern. However, one consortium was funding an 'artist in residence' to work with learners.

At the time of the interviews, only a very small minority of interviewees made any comments in relation to the Project / Extended Project or the Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills element. These components of the Diploma will be explored further and reported on at future stages of the evaluation.

3.4 Summary and conclusion

Reactions to the Diploma overall were generally positive, with particular reference made to the level of flexibility offered, the capacity for learners to develop transferable skills, and the variety of learning experiences which are likely to suit a range of learning styles.

Some comments were made about the requirement for a learner to pass all of the separate elements in order to achieve the Diploma award as being a potential barrier to take-up (with a particular barrier perceived to be the requirement to pass functional skills). There seemed to remain some uncertainties about whether a learner could re-take functional skills if they failed. There also seemed to be little understanding at the time of the interviews about what the Project could / would comprise.

Staff also reported that there seemed to be a misconception amongst learners about the degree of practical learning in Diplomas. As a sector-related qualification, the assumption had been that there would be an emphasis on practical learning. This suggests that there is a need for more clarification about the difference between applied, vocational and practical learning. Moreover, some staff felt the content was a bit 'dry', but were planning creative teaching methods to maximise the learning experience.

Views also suggest that there is a debate about the appropriate balance between breadth and depth of topics covered by certain lines of learning. This raised the question about whether the Diploma should offer a learner a broad range of skills and experiences relating to a number of different topic areas, or whether it should focus in more depth, allowing learners to gain a true understanding and develop a particular specialism. Some questioned the extent to which the depth of subject knowledge would adequately prepare learners for higher education. The work experience element, however, was welcomed overall for giving

learners the opportunity to gain a good insight into their chosen sector, albeit with some concerns about finding appropriate work experience placements for learners.

There were some comments about gaps in staff skills and expertise to teach certain elements of the Diploma, particularly in relation to the Society, Health and Development Diploma (concerning the justice elements specifically) and the Construction and Built Environment Diploma (particularly the built environment elements).

4. Plans and Readiness for Diploma Delivery

Key findings and messages for policy and practice:

- Overall, consortia felt that they would be prepared for delivery from September 2008. They reported factors which had both facilitated preparedness (such as effective management structures and partnership working, dedicated time for staff to implement and plan the delivery of Diplomas, and staff commitment) and hindered it (such as challenges with partnership working and uncertainty about assessment and functional skills). (Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2)
- Consortia were still making decisions about which levels of the Diploma to offer, particularly in relation to Level 1 due to concerns about progression from Level 1 at age 16. (Section 4.1.1)
- Diplomas were not being delivered post-16 in all consortia. This was either due to a deliberate focus on pre-16 delivery or because of uncertainty about the acceptance of Diplomas by HEIs as entry into their institutions, which highlights the need to promote the Diploma as an acceptable qualification for entry into higher education. (Section 4.1.1)
- In some consortia, there were plans to co-teach Level 1 and 2 classes, as staff did not wish to make a decision at an early stage about which level would suit a learner's ability. At a local level, consortia need to ensure that learners are adequately briefed and advised about this, as the outcome could have implications for their learning experience and progression. DCSF should consider providing guidance to ensure that there is clarity among institutions about whether co-teaching is acceptable. (Section 4.1.1)
- Most consortia were planning some degree of shared delivery and learner travel, and had adopted aligned timetables to facilitate this arrangement. However, logistical challenges were raised and not all consortia offered learners transport assistance. Moreover, teachers were only planning to travel to teach in a minority of consortia. Implications for future Diploma implementation should be considered, as challenges in relation to the capacity to deliver the Diplomas were anticipated to grow as cohorts increase. Consortia should reflect on examples of good practice in relation to partnership working and travel to learn. (Sections 4.1.2, 4.1.3 and 4.2.2)
- Pre-16, institutions were more likely to offer additional learning than specialist learning, due to timetable constraints and/or a lack of staff expertise. This suggests that some young people would not be getting the depth of understanding that was perceived by some staff to be beneficial to develop a sector specialism or for entry into higher education. There is also a need for staff across consortia to be fully informed about the available options for additional and specialist learning, and for information to be more accessible. (Section 4.1.4)
- Some challenges with employer engagement in Diploma delivery were mentioned, especially in relation to the provision of work experience placements for Diploma learners. Consortia should consider how to maximise employer engagement, for example by involving EBPOs to manage the demands on employers. (Section 4.1.5)
- Not all consortia had access to a shared Virtual Learning Environment, which has implications for being able to support distance learning (Section 4.1.7)

This chapter summarises findings from the telephone survey of 136 consortium leads and interview data from case-study visits to 15 consortia, in relation to:

- **Diploma delivery:** for example, the lines of learning and levels of the Diploma being delivered by consortia pre- and post-16; how Diplomas will be delivered, where and by whom; the rationale for delivery approaches; and the existence of patterns of delivery in relation to lines of learning, Diploma levels and the characteristics and context of the consortia.
- **Preparedness for delivery:** for instance, whether consortia felt prepared to deliver Diplomas from September 2008, and the factors which had facilitated or hindered preparedness.

4.1 Diploma delivery

4.1.1 Lines of learning and levels of Diploma being delivered in case-study consortia

Table 4.1 below illustrates the lines of learning and levels of Diploma that the 15 case-study consortia were planning to deliver from September 2008. In some cases, consortia had yet to finally decide which levels of the Diploma to deliver, which was primarily dependent on learner take-up, which would be finalised over the summer months. If delivery of a particular level was uncertain at the time of the interviews, it is indicated as 'possible' delivery in the table below. The table shows that it was not necessarily the case that a consortium offering a line of learning would be delivering it at all levels pre- and/or post-16.

Pre-16, for example, it seemed that all but one consortia would be delivering its line(s) of learning at Level 2. Level 1 delivery was less certain, due to concerns about progression from Level 1 at age 16. One deputy headteacher emphasised this issue: *'It would take four years to get a Level 2 qualification [if they started with Level 1]...for students that are not going to get a Level 2, Level 1 is too hard and there's a better chance of picking up some GCSEs at C+'.* It appeared that, in at least three case-study consortia, there were plans to co-teach Levels 1 and 2 learners, as staff did not wish to make a decision at this early stage about which level would suit a learner's ability. For example, this approach was being adopted by one consortium offering Information Technology and Creative and Media Diplomas. The consortium lead said:

They'll be taught as one group. We were adamant about that. We are designing assessments so that they can achieve either Level 1 or Level 2. The alternative would be to say to kids in Year 9 "for seven of your GCSE subjects you're going to get a D-G"...well, who would ever say that?

There was acknowledgement across other consortia that the guided learning hours for Levels 1 and 2 are different, making them favour shared delivery of certain activities for Level 1 and 2 learners, rather than joint delivery of the whole Diploma.

Post-16, it was most likely for Level 3 to be offered, although this was not always the case (three consortium leads felt, for instance, that HEIs may not accept learners with Level 3 Diplomas). No Level 1 delivery post-16 was certain; this was often dependent on take-up or concerns about progression which remained unresolved at the time of interviews. If offered, it was likely to be a one-year course in some cases. It should be noted that two consortia would not offer Diplomas post-16 at all from

September 2008. This was either because of a deliberate focus on pre-16 delivery (Levels 1 and 2) or because of uncertainty over the acceptance of Diplomas by HEIs.

4.1.2 Delivery models

In relation to *how* the Diploma would be delivered, *where* and by *whom*, delivery arrangements were still fluid in the 15 case-study consortia at the time of the interviews. Final decisions about Diploma delivery and assessment were due to be made over the summer months by Diploma management groups (either by the overall strategy group or, most often, the line of learning operational groups).

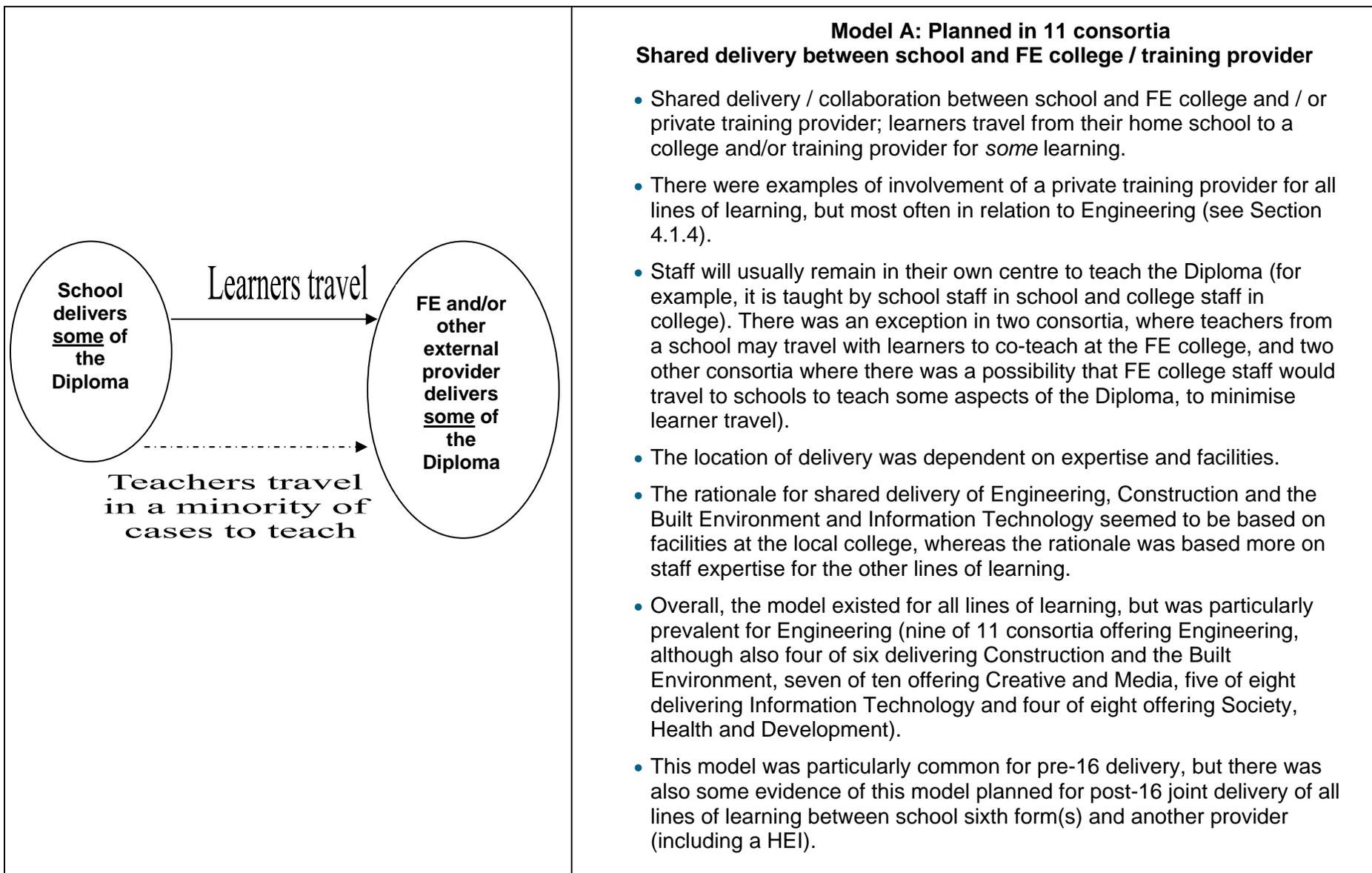
The rationale for a delivery model primarily depended on which centres had the capacity to deliver Diplomas. This was largely based on practical and logistical issues (including the existence of staff with relevant skills and expertise and the necessary facilities). However, decisions across some consortia were also dependent on learner take-up, which was not yet finalised. As one line of learning lead commented, for example, *'a challenge at the moment is actually clarifying who is actually delivering what... which at this stage of the game isn't where we wanted to be'*. In this particular area, schools were reported to feel that shared delivery with a college was an expensive model, so they were still making decisions about who would deliver the Diploma and where.

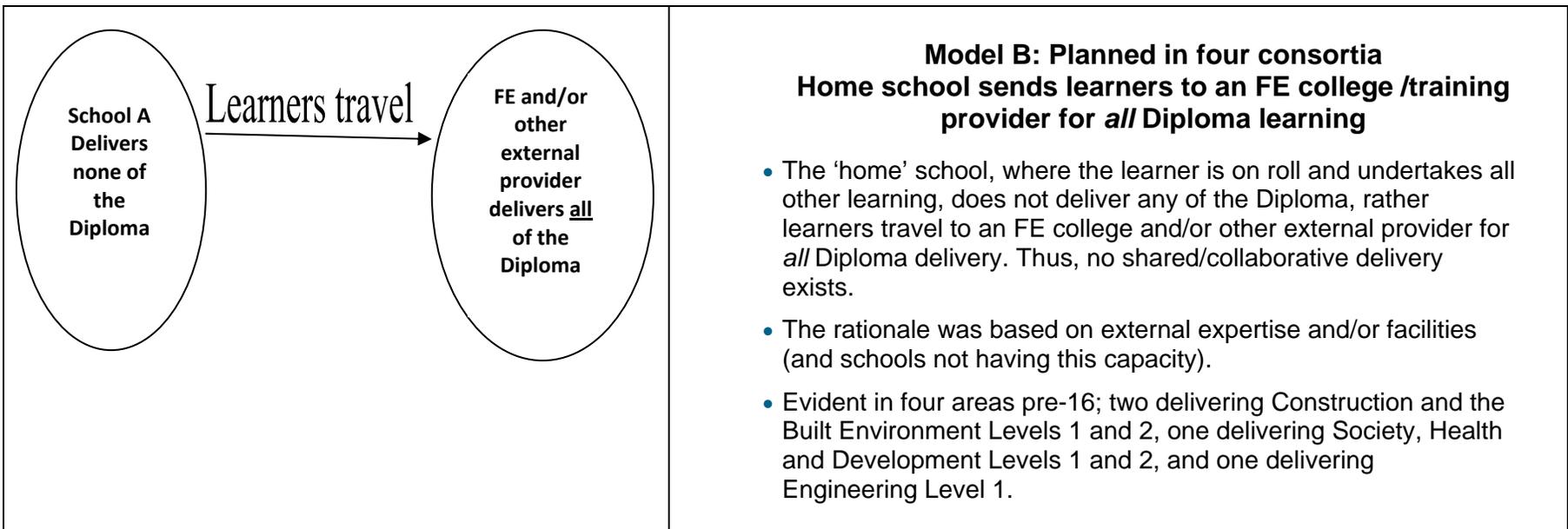
The case-study interviews across the 15 consortia gave an indication of planned delivery, and enabled an exploration of patterns and models of delivery in relation to the contexts of consortia, as well as the lines of learning and levels being offered. It was clear that planned delivery models varied, not only between consortia but also between different institutions within consortia, and within institutions for different lines of learning. The diagrams below in Figure 4.1 illustrate the main different models of delivery across consortia. The extent to which a model was common, for instance, for a particular line of learning, level and/or context is also discussed. It is important to note that the descriptions below refer to delivery of the Diploma as a whole entity, rather than to specific components of it, unless specified. The delivery of the separate components of the Diploma is discussed separately in Section 4.1.4.

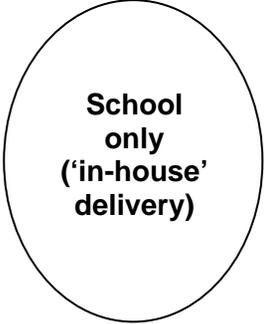
Table 4.1 Diploma lines of learning and levels offered by case-study consortia

Line of Learning	Pre-16			Post-16			
	Level 1 <i>Number of consortia</i>	Level 2 <i>Number of Consortia</i>	Total consortia offering line pre-16	Level 1 <i>Number of consortia</i>	Level 2 <i>Number of consortia</i>	Level 3 <i>Number of consortia</i>	Total consortia offering line post-16
Construction and the Built Environment	4	6	6	<i>2 possible</i>	1 <i>+2 possible</i>	5	5
Creative and Media	7	10	10	<i>2 possible</i>	1 <i>+2 possible</i>	9	9
Engineering	8 <i>+1 possible</i>	11	11	<i>4 possible</i>	1 <i>+3 possible</i>	9	10
Information Technology	4 <i>+1 possible</i>	8	8	<i>2 possible</i>	3 <i>+1 possible</i>	7	8
Society, Health and Development	6	7	8	<i>3 possible</i>	4 <i>+1 possible</i>	6	7

Figure 4.1 Models of Diploma delivery in case-study consortia



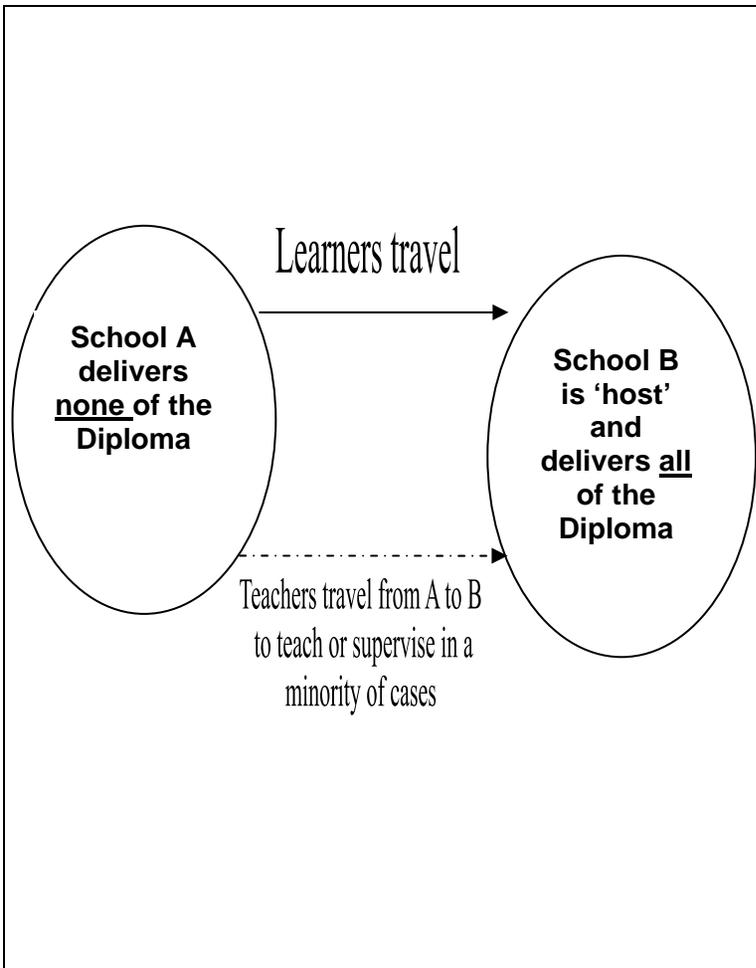




**School
only
(‘in-house’
delivery)**

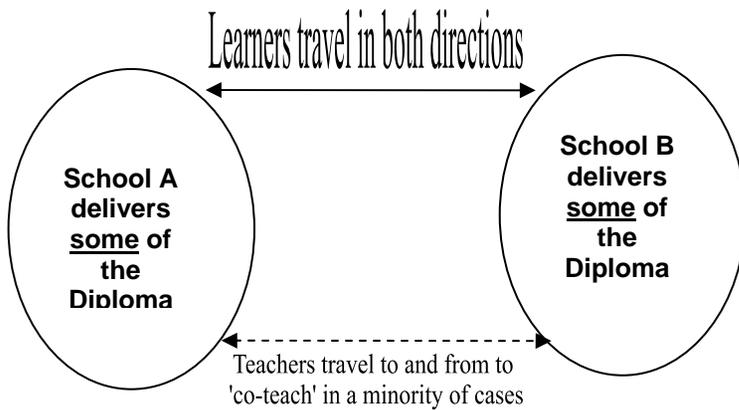
**Model C: Planned in 11 consortia
School delivers the entire Diploma ‘in-house’**

- No shared / collaborative delivery exists; all in home school
- Most centres adopting this model felt that they had the capacity to deliver in relation to staff expertise and facilities (most acknowledged that if learner take-up was low, collaboration with a partner would need to be considered, to combine learners for a large enough group). However, some concerns were expressed about reluctance to collaborate, and consequent restrictions on the learning experience.
- One rural consortium was planning this model to avoid learners travelling (although this might change in the future).
- Pre-16, this model was planned in 11 consortia. Also existed post-16 (within school sixth forms) and across the different Diploma levels.
- Most common for Society, Health and Development Diploma (in five out of eight areas offering this line); planned for Information Technology and Creative and Media but in fewer consortia.
- This model only existed in one consortium for Engineering and not at all for Construction and Built Environment (most schools recognised the need to use external facilities, although in one case reported tensions between schools and FE college prevented collaboration).



Model D: Planned in five consortia
School sends learners to another school for all Diploma learning

- School A 'home' school, (where learners are on roll) sends learners to School B ('host school') where the entire Diploma is taught by staff in School B. Thus, no shared/collaborative delivery usually exists (*with one exception, where teachers from School A also travel to teach in 'host' school for joint teaching*).
- In one consortium, a teacher from School A will travel with the learners to *supervise* delivery in School B.
- The rationale for this model varied: in one consortium, two schools were planning to 'swap' learners for delivery of Engineering and Creative and Media due to their specialisms; in three consortia, the model was based on numbers of learners (combining learners from two schools to make one class); and in another the model was driven by a lack of capacity in some schools to deliver Information Technology due to limited facilities).
- This model does not exist across case-study consortia for Engineering or Construction and the Built Environment (delivery was often shared with an FE college due to specialist facilities).
- One slight variation to this model existed, whereby some schools in one consortium were planning to send learners to another school *and* an FE college for delivery of Engineering pre-16 (combination of Models A and D).



Model E: Planned in five consortia Schools share delivery

- The Diploma is taught in two different schools, hence shared/collaborative delivery exists between two schools.
- Learners will travel in both directions in five consortia; in two of these teachers will also travel with the learners to carry out joint teaching with staff in the partner institution.
- The rationale for this model was either to share resources and expertise, or to combine numbers of learners to make one large whole class (it should be noted that in three areas, the preference would be for Model C outlined above (i.e. in-house delivery with no movement), but learner take-up in individual schools was too low to justify this model.
- No specific line of learning or level pattern, although this model was not evident for Construction and the Built Environment Diploma delivery.
- One slight variation to this model existed, whereby two schools shared delivery in this way, but also shared it with a third partner (an FE college).

**FE
College
only
(‘in-
house’
delivery’)**

**Model F: Planned in 13 consortia
FE college delivers entire Diploma ‘in-house’**

- Post-16 model.
- FE college delivers all of a Diploma line of learning ‘in-house’ on its own, solely to its own learners i.e. there is no shared/collaborative delivery with another centre.
- Model did not exist in two case-study consortia with no post-16 delivery.
- Evidence of model for all lines of learning and levels post-16, although most common for Level 3.
- Two slight variations exist: in one consortium, the FE college will get some support from the City Learning College for the delivery of Information Technology at Level 3 post-16; and in another consortium a sixth form college (not an FE college) delivers Information Technology to its own learners post-16 (otherwise, post-16 delivery by schools is usually shared with an FE college).

The models adopted by each of the 15 case-study consortia are listed in Appendix C, which highlights that most consortia adopted more than one delivery model (this was even the case where the consortium offered a single line of learning). There were two consortia offering only one line of learning (Society, Health and Development in one, and Information Technology in the other), but different models of delivery were adopted pre- and post-16 (with some collaboration between schools pre-16, and between schools and an FE college post-16).

There was one consortium that planned to adopt only one model pre-16 (Model C; schools delivering in-house only), which was a rural consortium in which centres decided not to collaborate due to the time it would take to travel the distance between the centres. There was also some reluctance for the small number of young people opting to study for a Diploma from September 2008 to '*drive the timetable*'. However, the consortium lead was hopeful that this reluctance may diminish over time and that learners would travel to learn in the future.

4.1.3 Travel to learn and teach

The findings from the consortium lead telephone survey revealed that the majority of Gateway 1 consortia (92 per cent) were planning for some or all pre-16 learners to travel from their 'home institution' (where they are registered and where the majority of their other learning takes place) for their Diploma learning. Just over three quarters (79 per cent) said this was the case for post-16 learners. Fewer consortia said *all* learners would travel than said it was the case for *some* learners. Similarly, in 14 of the 15 case-study consortia, there were plans for at least *some* Diploma learners to travel from their home institution to another centre for all or parts of their Diploma delivery.

It should be noted that, even if collaborative delivery existed in a consortium and learners were travelling for some of their Diploma learning, it did not necessarily mean that they would be able to choose to study any of the lines of learning being delivered in their consortium. For example, in the three case-study consortia delivering all five lines of learning from September 2008, these were not all open to all learners. Broadening out travel to learn to give learners a full entitlement was considered challenging. A member of staff coordinating Diploma delivery in one college said, for example, that '*the reality is that there will be very little movement...that was a rational decision. The idea that Diplomas will become the qualification of choice, and students will be moving from school to school in the future, I think collectively the strategy group can't see how it would ever work*'.

Examples were given of plans for teachers to travel to teach the Diploma outside their home institution, although this was less common than learners travelling. For example, in five consortia, teachers were travelling with learners to either a different 'host' school or an FE college where Diploma learning would take place, and were planning to co-teach at that other location. There did not appear to be any school teachers travelling without learners from their own school to deliver the Diploma elsewhere. In two consortia there was some possibility of college staff travelling to schools to teach some elements of the Diploma. However, collaboration with a college was often considered beneficial due to its specialist facilities, meaning that delivery on the college site was necessary to maximise the benefits.

4.1.4 Delivery of the different Diploma components

Views on the Diploma content and the different components of the Diploma are discussed in Chapter 3, although it is appropriate here to explore how consortia were planning to deliver the components.

Principal learning

The findings from the telephone survey of consortium leads found that, in nearly all Gateway 1 consortia (92 per cent) schools were responsible for delivering the principal learning element for at least one line of learning while, in nearly as many (88 per cent) FE colleges were involved, suggesting that in some cases delivery was shared. Findings from the case-study visits confirmed this. Where collaborative delivery of the Diploma between centres was planned (this would be the case in Models A and E described in Section 4.1.2), most consortia reported that the delivery of the principal learning would be shared between partners. The decision about which centre would deliver which units was dependent on expertise and facilities. In only one case-study consortium, where schools and a college were planning to collaborate, was the plan for all of the principal learning to be taught in the college. Schools in this consortium would take responsibility for functional skills and additional and specialist learning, although college staff disagreed with such an approach, and suggested that functional skills should be '*embedded and applied*' rather than delivered separately by schools as a '*bolt-on*'.

Employers were reported to be involved in delivery of principal learning in a quarter (26 per cent) of the consortia included in the telephone survey (carried out in February 2008). Across the smaller case-study sample, half of the consortia reported the involvement of employers in Diploma delivery, while half were still in the process of engaging employers although they hoped that they would be involved in delivery (see Section 4.1.5 for more details on employer involvement in delivery).

Training providers were reported to be involved in the delivery of principal learning in 21 per cent of consortia included in the telephone survey. Amongst case-study consortia, it seemed that there were plans for training providers to be involved in delivering some principal learning in nine areas. Although plans were unconfirmed at the time of the interviews, it seemed that training providers were more likely to be involved in Engineering (four consortia), but were also involved in delivery of all other lines of learning to some extent. There was a perception in some consortia that training providers were perhaps not being utilised fully. One consortium lead commented, for example, that training providers were not yet fully engaged in his area because '*schools haven't factored in using them*'.

In 14 per cent of the 136 consortia that responded to the telephone survey, **HEIs** were reported to be involved in delivery of the principal learning. As discussed in Chapter 2, the extent to which HEIs were engaged in delivery in case-study consortia appeared to be limited at this stage. The following examples existed:

- one HEI delivering Level 3 Engineering in partnership with schools, with school learners travelling to the university for some of their principal learning
- a consortium in which undergraduate students at a HEI were going to support pre-16 Level 2 Diploma learners with their learning (also in Engineering)
- two consortia in which HEI involvement in delivery was planned from September 2008 but was not yet decided in detail.

Delivery of functional skills⁴

The case-study findings suggest that, in most cases, the delivery of functional skills would be the responsibility of the learners' home institution. Most consortia had yet to decide how this element of the Diploma would be delivered, for example whether they would be taught discretely or be embedded in Diploma principal learning and/or other subjects.

At the time of the interviews, only a minority of line of learning leads and senior managers in schools were able to give feedback on firm plans for delivery of functional skills. Approaches were mixed (with no one approach seeming more prevalent than another at this stage) and included:

- embedding functional skills within the Diploma principal learning
- embedding functional skills within English, mathematics and ICT GCSEs (although it was acknowledged that this was more difficult with ICT as not all learners will take this course; a discrete ICT lesson was considered as an alternative)
- teaching discrete lessons on functional skills.

Combined approaches were sometimes planned, for example, embedding functional skills within the Diploma principal learning in addition to timetabling discrete lessons for additional support from specialist teachers. The actual approaches adopted will be investigated in more depth when case-study centres are re-visited in the spring term 2009 (at least three months after delivery commenced) and again a year later in 2010.

Centres which had been involved in the functional skills pilot felt more confident about delivery, but thought it likely that schools that had not been involved in the pilot '*will struggle*'. Interviewees observed that feedback from the pilot had been lacking, leaving many interviewees feeling unprepared about functional skills delivery at the time of the interviews. Views on the functional skills training were also mixed (see Chapter 7 for details). As one senior manager in a school said, '*we haven't had the information we would have hoped in terms of functional skills*'.

Additional and specialist learning

At the time of the case-study visits (April to July 2008), it seemed that the most common approach was for additional and specialist learning to be delivered to learners by their home institution. In a minority of cases there were suggestions that an FE college might deliver specialist learning pre-16, but decisions were still being made.

Decisions were also still being made across most consortia about which qualifications would be offered as additional and specialist learning and, perhaps most significantly, about whether additional and specialist learning would be available (as distinct from just additional learning). This was sometimes because consortia planned to deliver the additional and specialist learning in the second year of the Diploma, meaning that they felt able to delay the decision. However, this has implications for the learner choice, as evidently some learners had opted to study a Diploma in some schools without knowing what additional and specialist learning would be available.

⁴ A two-year pilot of functional skills qualifications started in September 2007, with over 1000 centres taking part (including approximately 700 Diploma Gateway 1 centres). The functional skills pilot is being evaluated separately by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.

Due to decisions not being finalised, most interviewees were only able to give an indication about the likely offer. In general, it seemed that most individual schools were only going to be able to offer Diploma learners additional learning, mainly in the form of GCSEs pre-16 or A Levels post-16. This was most often due to timetable constraints (with the Diploma taking up a number of option blocks, other options were considered to be limited) or a lack of staff expertise, but also because some schools felt it was more manageable to offer their 'normal' options in the first year of Diploma delivery. Comments included, *'It's just too much to do at the moment on top of everything else'* and *'[we are] playing it safe in this first year by offering additional learning subjects that are already available'*.

Specialist learning was most commonly offered as part of the Level 3 Diploma post-16, where it was delivered by an FE college that was more likely to have specialist staff and facilities. However, five consortia were hoping to be able to offer some specialist learning pre-16 with some assistance from local FE colleges. Thus, specialist learning was more likely to be available if a college was going to be involved in delivery.

As discussed in Chapter 3, there was a debate amongst some staff about whether additional learning was favourable to add breadth to learning, or whether specialist learning was more important to add depth and help learners develop a specialism (that might, arguably, be required for entry into higher education).

Overall, the perceived complexity of the acceptable combinations of qualifications had led to some confusion across consortia. Some staff mentioned that the database of qualifications had not been particularly accessible. As one line of learning lead said, *'it took me about three hours to find the database...and the list is huge'*.

4.1.5 Employer engagement in Diploma delivery

At the time of the interviews, half the consortium leads reported positively on the active involvement of employers in the delivery of Diplomas (as discussed in Chapter 2). Of those consortia, most referred to employers who were providing other work experience opportunities for learners outside of the Diploma, who they hoped would also assist with Diploma delivery, or links that they had developed through involvement in other programmes and initiatives, such as the YA programme. Examples of how these consortia were hoping to involve employers in delivery, over and above the provision of work experience placements for Diploma learners, included:

- employer visits to schools / colleges to talk to Diploma learners about their organisation / sector
- visits by Diploma learners to employers to see their specialist equipment
- employer involvement in design of the curriculum/lesson plans, delivery of principal learning units and assessment
- employers spending time in schools / colleges acting as mentors / consultants for learners (for example, Information Technology learners consulting employers about website design, or employers assisting learners with their Diploma project)
- employers mentoring / coaching teachers to familiarise them with sector-specific issues.

It seemed that details of employer involvement had not yet been fully resolved across the other half of the case-study consortia, which were still focusing on making employers aware of the Diploma, and overcoming some of the challenges associated with employer

engagement (as discussed in Section 3.3.2), before finalising how they would be involved. Examples of the challenges they had faced in engaging employers specifically in Diploma delivery included:

- **gaining commitment from employers:** employers had expressed an interest in being involved, but had not yet committed to active involvement in delivery. The local economic conditions and size of companies were seen as the significant factors impacting on the level of commitment received from employers, which were beyond the control of consortia
- **increasing demand on employers:** consortia were concerned about finding enough suitable / quality work experience placements for Diploma learners, given the demand on employers. There were also concerns that engaging employers would become increasingly difficult as the number of Diploma lines of learning increased (this was also expressed by some consortia which had developed relationships with employers)
- **health and safety restrictions:** comments were made about the long-standing issue of health and safety implications for employers of taking pre-16 learners.

There did not seem to be a pattern in employer engagement according to whether consortia were categorised as urban or rural, with some consortia from either type of area having either developed links or, in contrast, faced challenges.

At the time of the interviews, the focus was on finding solutions to these challenges, in order to engage employers in Diploma delivery. Solutions included:

- using EBPOs and Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) within the consortia, not only in providing information and encouragement to employers, but also in providing a single point of contact for the organisation of work placements and other aspects of work-related learning for a whole consortium. Consortia might also wish to consider working more closely with Sector Skills Councils to engage employers
- creating a central LA database of suitable employers
- encouraging young people to research employers in their area and set up their own work experience placements
- ensuring that there was one point of contact at consortium level for dealing with work placements
- encouraging FE colleges to provide placements within their departments
- offering incentives to employers.

4.1.6 Planned assessment approaches

As revealed by the telephone survey of consortium leads, understanding assessment and accreditation was one of the issues causing most concern at that time.

Consortium leads felt that awarding bodies had disseminated Diploma specifications and detailed information about assessment and standards later than they had hoped, leaving them feeling unprepared for assessment at the time of the interviews. Findings from the case-study interviews which took place later in the summer term confirmed that this feeling of uncertainty remained widespread. There was criticism about the timing of receipt of

information; to have specifications earlier would have helped lesson planning and earlier planning of assessment. It would have also helped practitioners to have more of an understanding of the Diploma content and assessment when they were supporting learners to make their options choices (for example, some interviewees felt the specifications should have been available during the summer before learners make their choices, so they could familiarise themselves before giving information and advice). There were also mixed views about training on assessment (see Chapter 7). However, the general view was that meetings with awarding bodies and the appointment of internal assessors would take place over the summer months, once other, perhaps more imminent, issues had been resolved, such as lesson planning, delivery models and logistical challenges. Therefore, at the time of the visits, interviewees were unable to give detailed feedback about their assessment approaches. Nevertheless, in discussing assessment, two specific issues were raised by a number of interviewees:

- **Standardisation and quality assurance:** Assessment was reported to be the responsibility of the institution delivering a unit of the principal learning. Where collaborative delivery was planned, comments were made about the importance of a '*common understanding*' amongst partners and a need for '*standardised systems of assessment if [there is] multi-centred delivery*'. As one curriculum manager in a school said, '*the biggest thing is having quality assurance, assessment procedures and documentation standardised across the partnership*'. There were examples of LA staff or assessment verifiers being given responsibility for ensuring quality and standardisation.
- **Difficulty of functional skills assessment:** There were some concerns about the difficulty of functional skills assessments, particularly in comparison with basic and key skills. A comment made by a senior manager in a school mirrored the views of others: '*they look very different from Level 1 and 2 basic skills in literacy and numeracy and I think there's some concern amongst our practitioners...some of our Level 1 basic skills students wouldn't be able to do Level 1 literacy and numeracy [functional skills]*'. Views on functional skills have been discussed further in Chapter 3.

4.1.7 Use of ICT to support delivery

Institutions in eight of the 15 case-study consortia had access to a consortium-wide virtual learning environment (VLE), while this type of resource was still being developed in the other seven areas. Most of the interviewees who commented on VLEs were positive about the potential benefits for teaching and learning and talked about ways in which they would use existing VLEs to support Diploma delivery, which included:

- Teachers / tutors uploading Diploma resources and schemes of work / lesson plans for delivery partners to share and learners to access
- learners uploading work for teachers to access
- e-tracking and e-monitoring of learner progress
- e-assessment / online examinations
- staff and learners accessing blogs, forums and Diploma networks.

Other technology, such as video conferencing, laptops, memory sticks and digital cameras had been purchased in some areas to support Diploma delivery.

4.2 Preparedness for delivery

The findings from both the broad telephone survey of consortium leads and the in-depth case-study interviews revealed that Gateway 1 consortia felt that they would be prepared for Diploma delivery by September 2008, although the detail of the delivery arrangements were still in development at the time of the interviews. Overall, the findings from the consortium lead telephone survey indicated that almost two-thirds felt well-prepared in terms of staffing levels (63 per cent) and staff expertise (60 per cent), for instance. However, at an institution level, there was perhaps a little more caution - maybe because they were the ones implementing on the ground - yet there was still optimism about being ready by September. Decisions about *how* the Diploma would be delivered, *where* and *by whom*, were still to be finalised. Practitioners were still in the process of developing schemes of work and there remained some uncertainty about particular issues (see below), although most were hopeful that these issues would be resolved over the summer months. Comments included:

The consortium will be ready in September. It doesn't mean we're there yet, but we've got nine weeks to go!

They [practitioners] have been developing it in their subject meetings, but the nitty gritty will come over the coming weeks.

Many noted that implementing the new Diplomas was no different to preparing for any new course, that they were as ready as they could be, but realised that it was unlikely for them to be 100 per cent prepared at the start. As one senior manager in a school said, '[the teachers] are as prepared as they can be... [we are] fully aware that it's a new course and they need to keep thinking, planning and delivering'. Overall, there seemed to be a sense of excitement across most consortia about delivering a new course. Comments from interviewees included:

Among the core deliverers there's quite a buzz of excitement about the opportunity of doing things differently and generating different learning styles. [Curriculum manager]
We will be ready and we're really keen for it to happen. [Curriculum manager]
We're as prepared as we can be...I feel quite excited and definitely ready to start another new course. [Line of learning lead]

There is a certain amount of apprehension..., but I think it is the exact qualification we need...I think it's fantastic. I genuinely believe it is the qualification of the future and I'm strongly behind it. [Line of learning lead]

Only a minority of interviewees felt that they would not be prepared by September.

4.2.1 Factors facilitating preparedness for delivery

The in-depth case-study interviews enabled an investigation of the factors thought to assist consortia in preparing for delivery, which, in turn, serve as lessons learned for future consortia. The prevailing factors were:

- **Transport strategies:** As mentioned above, 14 of the 15 case-study consortia were planning for at least some Diploma learners to travel from their 'home institution' to another centre for all or part of their Diploma delivery. Some form of transport assistance (minibus, taxi or bus fares) had been *arranged* for learners in four consortia, one of which was located in a rural area where learners would be transported by minibus because public transport routes were said to be lacking. Transport assistance was being *considered* in another three consortia. However, in the remaining seven consortia, learners would travel independently, without assistance (including financial assistance). This was usually because the number of

learners moving was small and/or distance travelled was not considered significant. A senior manager in one school said that, although some parents were concerned about their child travelling independently, they should see it as part of the whole Diploma experience: *'It's that functionality bit...it gives students important life skills'*. Concerns were raised about the future when more lines of learning are offered, and the potential for learner travel grows. Comments included, *'we recognise that the movement of students will increase from 2009...all arrangements will have to fit in with the local authority's sustainable transport policy'*.

- **Aligned timetables:** All of the case-study consortia except two had achieved some form of aligned or congruent timetable for Diploma delivery in order to facilitate collaborative delivery; most (eight consortia) had blocked two full days; three had aligned one day per week (one of which described it as an 'extended day'); and two had allocated two half days. It should be noted that transport was considered more problematic if learners were not based in one institution for a full day. Where full days were assigned for Diploma delivery, this was thought to avoid the need for learners to travel at lunchtimes, as well as in the mornings and at the end of the day.
- **An 'effective' consortium and partnership working:** The factors associated with effectiveness were discussed in detail in Chapter 2, but it is important to note here that a collective willingness and commitment amongst partners to work together was perceived to be crucial for successful delivery. One line of learning lead, for example, commented that preparedness had been facilitated by *'a common goal and genuine people who want to work together to make the Diploma work'*. Working together, meeting frequently and communicating were emphasised by interviewees as important ways to minimise any challenges associated with partnership working. Staff visiting partner institutions was also suggested as a way for partners to become familiar with ways of working.
- **Management structures and management time:** As discussed in Chapter 2, having management structures in place, with groups and individuals having clear roles and remits, was perceived to have facilitated preparedness for delivery.
- **Time for planning for delivery staff:** Ensuring that delivery staff had focused and dedicated non-teaching time to plan the Diploma had facilitated preparedness for delivery. Comments from senior managers included, *'you can't expect people to introduce something as massive as this while they are continuing with full time teaching...it's impossible'* and *'the more time you can give to practitioners to develop, the better'*.
- **Clear communication:** Good lines of communication had helped to facilitate preparedness, not only communication between the different management and operational groups with specific responsibilities, but also between those groups and all other staff within a consortium to *'constantly remind the workforce of the implications of the Diploma'*. It was also deemed important to keep learners and parents informed of developments. Moreover, communication between consortia in the form of networking to share practice was thought to facilitate preparedness (see Chapter 7 for more details on this type of support).
- **Staff commitment:** Where staff involved in planning and delivering Diplomas were felt to be committed, this was reported to assist preparedness. As one curriculum manager commented, *'you have to build the commitment before you start. It can't be that the Diplomas are something that a few staff feel it is something to do with them'*. Moreover, interviewees advised that those involved volunteer: *'I have asked people to contribute, so people are volunteers, therefore enthusiastic'* and *'approach*

people...don't require them to do it. This applied not only to staff within an institution, but also to the institutions involved in the consortium in the first place.

Gateway 1 consortia gave advice which they hoped would help prepare future consortia for Diploma delivery:

- **Starting small:** Two consortium leads said that they had deliberately wanted to '*start small*' in order to make implementation and delivery manageable as they embarked on the delivery of this new qualification. As one said, '*I've got utter confidence...I'm relieved that the numbers are small. As professionals, we see this as a pilot.*'
- **Have a clear rationale/vision:** A strong message across consortia was '*don't rush in*'. It was considered important to have a clear rationale for Diploma delivery prior to the Gateway process and a '*big mistake*' to bid for every line of learning without clearly thinking through the reasons for doing Diplomas, the capacity to deliver and how the Diploma fits with the overall provision within the consortium. Moreover, institutions in partnership were thought to need a shared vision and a common understanding of the rationale. Advice included, '*consider how it [the Diploma] fits with your overall curriculum provision and consider whether you really do have a market for the Diploma lines you are aiming to offer*' and '*be absolutely clear how you want to go forward, think about the implications of decisions before the application stage*'.
- **Start planning early:** The general perception was '*be realistic about the amount of planning time needed*' and advice was given for consortia to '*get hold of information as soon as possible*' and to '*drip feed information*' to make it manageable.
- **Explore good practice:** Gateway 1 consortia acknowledged that they were at a disadvantage to some extent by being the first to deliver a new qualification. However, lessons on good practice can help to inform future consortia. As one line of learning lead advised, '*I would go and look at centres where they are developing and develop a model of practice based on people's previous experience*'.
- **Embrace change:** A number of interviewees advised that future Diploma consortia should '*keep an open mind*' and '*be prepared to embrace change and appreciate that the Diploma has the opportunity to be a meaningful learning experience for the students*'.

4.2.2 Factors hindering preparedness for delivery

While most consortia felt that they would be prepared for delivery by September 2008, facilitated by the factors mentioned above, the in-depth case-study findings indicated that there were some factors hindering consortia from being as prepared at the time of the interviews as they would have liked, or which were presenting challenges. Such factors were as follows:

- **Challenges with partnership working:** Although 14 of the 15 case-study consortia were planning some degree of shared delivery, the most common factor thought to potentially hinder effective delivery of Diplomas was difficulties with partnership working. Even where models of shared delivery existed, it did not mean that all Diploma centres were involved; some were planning to deliver all of the qualification in-house. This raised the question among other consortium members about whether young people's learning experience was being restricted. In one consortium, for example, the line of learning lead for Information Technology, based in an FE college, was critical of schools wanting to deliver in-house and said, '*my overall view is that it*

will make Diplomas not as exciting as they should be for learners. I am confident that we would link well [with schools] but they will protect their sixth forms. In terms of enriching their learning experience, the experience they would get in college is a million miles [better than] what they would get in school. Specifically, issues raised about partnership working included:

- **Quality assurance:** interviewees wondered how the quality of provision in partner institutions would be monitored. Examples were given of how quality had been monitored for similar arrangements in place for the Increased Flexibility Programme, including lesson observations and learner feedback, and how this would be built on for Diploma partnerships.
- **Logistics:** practical issues, such as transport⁵ and timetabling, were raised in relation to organising delivery across partners. There was a general perception that such logistical issues would escalate as more lines of learning become available, causing concern about the capacity of centres to deliver the Diploma.
- **'Cultural' and environmental differences:** school staff felt that some learners might feel nervous going to a different school, and were worried about differences in learning styles, expectations and behavioural sanctions.. One interviewee said, *'my students will have to go to another school...how comfortable are they going to be going through the school gates'*. In a minority of cases, the issue of cultural change for FE college staff delivering the Diploma to pre-16 learners was raised.
- **Overcoming competition:** as one consortium lead said, *'the aspirations of individual schools leads to tension between autonomy and collaboration'*. A comment from a senior manager in a school reflected this view: *'we have in the past been in direct competition, but now we are bedfellows'*. Similarly, one curriculum manager said the biggest challenge was *'opening up individual institutions' own autonomy for the wider good of the learning community'*.
- **Funding:** at a consortium lead level, some who responded to the telephone survey in February said that, at that time, they had not yet been told what funding they were entitled to or had not yet finalised funding deployment. Amongst case-study interviewees, some months later, issues to do with funding were raised at an institution level, and related to uncertainties about funding for future Diploma implementation. Comments included, *'...need to ensure funding beyond 2009. Schools won't be able to afford the Diplomas. If it doesn't come with funding, it won't be offered'*. The practicalities of shared delivery, and the types of facilities required for some lines of learning (particularly Engineering and Construction and the Built Environment), were thought by some to be costly.
- **Overcoming scepticism/managing change:** interviewees in four consortia mentioned that adapting to new qualifications and a new way of working can be challenging for staff, which needs to be managed carefully. One consortium lead said, *'some entrenched views need to be overcome'* and, similarly, another lead said, *'in my experience there is caution...we need to evolve and try different models'*. Staff in leadership roles had often had to work hard to raise awareness of the Diploma amongst other staff and to combat the perceived negative press which was thought to contribute to scepticism. Similarly, as one line of learning lead said, *'the continued negative press will impact on future recruitment and on students taking the Diploma'*.

⁵ Guidance is available on good practice in relation to travel to learn. See: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RW045.pdf>
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RW046.pdf>

This highlights the need for awareness raising and the dissemination of positive findings resulting from evaluation, both at a national and local level.

- **The timing and rigour of information:** there was a general perception that specifications were not received as early as consortia would have liked in order to plan delivery and assessment. Comments included, '*delays from national bodies have prevented staff from being prepared*'. It was also considered beneficial for specifications to be available before staff are trained, which was not always the case. Some consortium leads also felt that the national-level promotion materials produced about the Diploma were not sufficiently detailed. These issues were summed up by a consortium lead who said the materials had been '*neither early nor rigorous enough*'. Subsequent changes to information, such as the Diploma equivalences, also caused confusion.
- **Uncertainty about assessment and accreditation:** as explored in detail above, the consortium lead telephone survey and the case-study interviews revealed that uncertainty about assessment was one of the issues causing most concern at the time of the interviews. As one line of learning lead said, '*in terms of assessment, that's probably where the support is needed most*'. However, most interviewees were confident that planning for assessment would take place over the summer.
- **Uncertainty about functional skills:** as reported above, there was a lack of confidence in relation to functional skills delivery, particularly amongst those who had not taken part in the pilot.
- **IT and administrative systems:** the findings from the telephone survey of consortium leads found that good progress was being made with IT systems, although some noted that systems were still under development. Similarly, consortium-wide VLEs were still being developed in seven of the 15 case-study consortia. There was some concern about the variability of IT systems across institutions.

Challenges associated with employer engagement, gaps in training and staff skills to teach certain elements of the Diploma were also mentioned, but are discussed fully elsewhere in the report.

4.3 Summary and conclusion

Models of delivery varied, with most consortia planning to adopt more than one approach, even for one line of learning. Some degree of shared delivery between schools and other institutions (such as FE colleges), involving learners travelling outside their home institution, was planned in all but one case-study area. It was less common for learners to travel to access a line of learning not available in their home institution. Teachers were planning to travel to teach in only a minority of consortia. There were some plans to co-teach Levels 1 and 2 because centres were reluctant to decide initially which level would suit a learner's ability.

Challenges associated with partnership working were mentioned, including quality assurance and logistics. Aligned timetables were in place in most consortia to facilitate shared delivery, but transport strategies varied (with assistance for learners not always offered). There was a general perception that logistical issues would escalate as more lines of learning become available and, therefore, more learners take up Diplomas, causing concern about the capacity of centres to deliver the Diploma. In some cases, competition between institutions and concerns about issues such as logistics seemed to determine the delivery model, with the learning experience of the young person sometimes being a secondary concern.

It seemed that the principal learning would be delivered mainly by schools, with some involvement from FE colleges where delivery of the Diploma was planned to be shared. There was some uncertainty about functional skills and the assessment of Diplomas, but more planning was due to take place over the summer prior to September delivery. It seemed that specialist learning was more common post-16 in colleges than pre-16 in schools, with schools feeling constrained by current curriculum offers and timetables.

Some consortia were facing challenges in engaging employers in providing work placements or delivering aspects of the Diploma. Although a variety of solutions were being considered, there were concerns that employers would not commit. Despite some challenges faced in preparing for delivery, consortia felt they would be ready by September. Factors thought to facilitate this feeling of preparedness included effective management structures and partnership working, dedicated time for staff to implement and plan the delivery of Diplomas, and staff commitment.

5. Information, Advice and Guidance about Diplomas

Key findings and messages for policy and practice

- Nationally-produced materials were generally well received and used widely to promote the Diploma, and to disseminate information. However, there was a widespread perception that these promotional materials were not received early enough. Institutions need to receive detailed promotional information in time for them to plan their marketing and IAG strategies, ideally in the summer term of the year before learners make their choices. (Section 5.1.1)
- Despite Diplomas not currently being available to all 14-19 year olds nationally, interviewees held the view that there should be a higher profile national promotion campaign, targeted particularly at 14-16 year olds, to ensure that all learners are aware of Diplomas. (Section 5.1.1)
- There were some good examples of consortium-wide promotional events that had been successful in raising the profile of Diplomas. However, IAG varied considerably between and within consortia, and there seemed to be scope for greater consistency in strategies across institutions. The dissemination of 'what works well' in promotion and IAG would be helpful for both Gateway 1 consortia and future consortia. (Section 5.1)
- Awareness and knowledge of Diplomas was felt to be limited among some IAG staff and among parents and, given the role that they can play in guiding young people's choices, there is a need to ensure that they are fully informed about Diplomas. In order to ensure greater consistency in IAG standards, more opportunities for training for staff who advise young people should be provided, with protected time to attend such training. (Section 5.1.3)
- There is scope for improving the information and guidance given to young people about Diplomas, as learners' knowledge and understanding of Diplomas was limited, and the majority did not recall receiving information about key aspects of the qualification. This was felt to be due, in part, to the perceived complexity of Diplomas. This limited understanding is likely to impact not only on take-up of Diplomas, but could also potentially lead to young people discontinuing Diplomas if they find they are not what they expected. (Sections 5.2 and 5.3)

This chapter provides an overview of the strategies adopted to promote the Diploma and to give learners IAG about their choice to study for a Diploma and explores the impact of this IAG on learners' knowledge and understanding of Diplomas. Specifically, it focuses on:

- national, consortium and institution-level promotion and recruitment strategies, and staff's and learners' views on the usefulness of such strategies
- the nature of the information given to learners about Diplomas, and any areas where further information was required
- learners' experiences of the IAG received

- learners' knowledge and understanding of Diplomas and the impact of IAG on their knowledge. It investigates any differences in the understanding of learners who have chosen to take a Diploma, compared with those who have not, and identifies any common gaps in learners' understanding.

The chapter draws on information from the Year 9 and 11 learner surveys, and on case-study interviews with consortium leads, staff in schools and colleges, and learners in Year 9 and 11 (both those who had chosen Diploma courses and those who had not chosen them).

Findings in relation to IAG were complicated by a number of factors, including reliance on learners' recollections of the IAG that they have received and the likelihood that learners' choices and decisions, and the influences on these, would remain fluid until they embarked on their chosen qualifications in September 2008.

5.1 IAG and promotion strategies

As summed up by a college senior manager, for the successful promotion of Diplomas it was necessary to have a strategy at three levels – national, consortium and institutional and therefore that any particular weaknesses at any of these levels created disadvantages. To a large extent, this view was reflected in the comments of other interviewees, when they considered the strengths and weaknesses of promotion generally, and more specifically, the nature of the IAG provided for learners. The strategies at each level are discussed in the following sections.

5.1.1 National strategies

Nationally-produced materials, including a DVD, leaflets and posters, were generally well-received and were widely used for disseminating information and for public displays. They also often formed the basis for customised information packs and leaflets that were used for consortium-wide Diploma promotion.

However, views of promotion at national level were coloured by the widespread perception that promotional material, and detailed information about lines of learning, had not been ready early enough to use in consortia to market the new qualification effectively. Although promotional materials were published by DCSF in September 2007, these did not appear to have reached appropriate staff in consortia until later. This was considered to have affected the ability of staff to provide good quality IAG to learners and their parents, and interviewees felt that materials should have been distributed to consortia earlier (for example, in the summer term of the year before learners make their choices). This line of learning lead's explanation of the significance of this timing was widely reflected in other comments:

The marketing should have been out in the summer [2007], in my mind they should have swamped the media and the schools and it just didn't happen. That should have been all ready to go in September last year when the schools started again. For colleges, we have our open evenings in September and October [to recruit for the following academic year] and that is one of our biggest events.

School and college staff referred to the difficulty of trying to provide information to young people and their parents, 'when we did not have the information ourselves' and that this was considered to have been particularly unfortunate when it was necessary to counter the negative media coverage that was beginning to circulate.

There was also a view expressed by some interviewees that national publicity for the Diplomas had not been high profile enough. Despite Diplomas not being currently available to all 14-19 year olds nationally, many interviewees felt that more national advertising and more general publicity would have raised the profile of Diplomas, because *'kids and parents don't know much about it...even teachers don't know much about it'*. Some staff thought that the national publicity campaign had been targeted more at the Level 3 Diploma and consequently *'had passed by this age group'* (pre-16). A senior manager reported that a Year 9 learner had seen posters displayed locally, but had said; *'yes, but that's for college people isn't it?'*

5.1.2 Consortium-level strategies

A consortium-wide marketing strategy was in place in most of the 15 case-study areas, although there were two where it appeared to have been the responsibility of individual institutions and another where the extensive rural area meant that the separate partnerships that made up the consortium were responsible for their own promotion strategies.

Most consortium managers felt that their local promotion campaigns had been successful, but fairly *'low key'* in the lead-up to this first year of delivery. This was partly considered to be because of limited lead-in time, but also because Gateway 1 was regarded in some institutions as a *'pilot'* year in which learner numbers should be kept at what was seen as a manageable level, while delivery models and partnership procedures were worked through.

Some consortium leads had produced written materials and PowerPoint presentations for all their partner institutions to use so that a consistent message was given to learners and their parents. One also described this approach as ensuring *'a single message'* went to Connexions personal advisers and school staff. Others preferred to leave it to partner organisations to adapt these as they chose, or to produce their own versions. Line of learning leads were closely involved in preparing promotion materials for each line of learning, which were additional to generic Diploma information.

There were some good examples of consortium-wide **promotional events** that had been successful in raising the profile of Diplomas. These included information events for young people (and, in some cases, their parents), which were either entirely focused on Diplomas, or related to all key stage 4 or post-16 options; and taster days, in which young people were able to get further information about the line(s) of learning they were interested in. In some consortia, there were plans for these events to be held in 'neutral' venues, rather than in schools or colleges, in the future.

Some mentioned other consortium-level strategies, which had either been valuable already, or which they intended to try. In many cases these were a response to issues raised by staff. They included:

- producing a consortium-wide marketing **'toolkit'**, to be used with all staff in partner organisations, *'to get across what a Diploma is and how information can be given to students'*
- commissioning a **locally-produced DVD** for Diploma promotion, that was relevant to local conditions (some consortia had already done this)
- increasing the **use of Connexions staff**, making sure that *'they were all giving the same message'*, and ensuring that all learners who had chosen to take a Diploma had a personal interview, *'to make sure that they understood'*

- aligning the timing of the key stage 4 options choice process across the consortium, with the same, or similar deadlines, and linked in to major promotional events
- using learners who will be taking the Diploma as '**ambassadors**' in future promotion and as peer advisers.

Several consortium leads also referred to the **area prospectuses** which should now be available on all LA websites, with details of all 14-19 courses, including Diplomas. One consortium already had a common online application system for all post-16 courses and would be extending this to post-14 courses in the near future and others were moving towards this process, which would help to streamline the provision of information and the application process.

It should be noted that consortium leads were already engaged in an **informal reviewing system** of how effectively marketing and IAG were operating, and were thinking ahead to future practice.

5.1.3 Institution-level strategies

When it came to the strategies employed by partner institutions, IAG played a crucial role, as it was clear from the responses of both learners and staff that it was the information, and particularly the advice, received in schools and colleges that guided young people's choices.

The provision of **IAG in schools**, has undergone frequent change over the last few years, as the complexity of the key stage 4 curriculum has increased, as systems of post-16 education and training have changed and as the Connexions Service has evolved. The introduction of the Diploma was thought to have added to that complexity, as well as widening choices for young people, and hence guidance at an individual level has become even more significant.

IAG in Year 9

There was a common pattern across the case-study consortia to the provision of information and guidance on key stage 4 options, including Diplomas. This included special year group assemblies and talks on the options process, an options evening for young people and their parents, the issuing of options booklets and then various forms of follow-up activity while choices were made. Information and advice about Diplomas was part of this process, but the extent to which Diplomas had been promoted varied considerably, depending to some extent on the curriculum offer in the school (see Chapter 6 for further details), and the knowledge and awareness of staff about Diplomas.

The role of school staff in providing IAG was of great importance, as confirmed by the Year 9 learner survey, in which respondents reported that, outside their circle of family and friends, they had discussed taking a Diploma mainly with a subject teacher (34 per cent), another teacher (22 per cent) and their form tutor (24 per cent). In terms of helpfulness, 39 per cent of Year 9 learners had found talking to subject teachers helpful, 33 per cent had found Connexions Personal Advisers helpful, 30 per cent found IAG teachers helpful, and 32 per cent found that talking to another teacher in school had been helpful.

IAG in Year 11

Choices for Year 11 learners were not just which courses and subjects to take, but also where to study post-16. IAG needed to respond to this, and the case studies showed that the manner in which it was provided varied greatly from one area to another and from one school to another.

It emerged from the Year 11 learner surveys that, apart from family and friends, this age group had most commonly discussed taking a Diploma with a Connexions adviser (46 per cent), a school IAG adviser (41 per cent) and a college tutor or training provider (30 per cent). This reflected the situation as reported in schools, where Year 11 learners, especially in 11-16 schools, were more likely than Year 9 learners to have one-to-one advice from Connexions staff and school IAG teachers. Year 11 learners were also encouraged to visit colleges and attend their open evenings and to undertake their own research into available courses. The role of staff in colleges and schools in giving advice to learners is very important and emphasises the need for all to be well-informed about Diplomas and able to offer impartial and sound guidance.

The learner surveys also showed that young people in Year 11 were less likely than those in Year 9 to have found discussions with all types of staff helpful. For example, subject teachers in school were reported to have been most helpful (34 per cent of Year 11 respondents), followed by Connexions staff (25 per cent) and school IAG staff and college tutors, mentioned by 24 per cent of Year 11 learners.

Overall, for both year groups, **one-to-one discussions** between learners and school staff were widely perceived by interviewees as more important than written and online information, as this school senior manager explained: *'The only way that learners really understand is through having it explained to them. Prospectuses and websites don't allow them to understand completely, so one-to-one is the most effective way'*. A lot, therefore, depended on the ability and willingness of staff to give accurate information and impartial guidance. This was true not only for specialist staff such as Connexions advisers and IAG coordinators, but also for subject teachers and form tutors, and it was in this context that staff interviewees had concerns, as illustrated by the following comment from one consortium lead:

It's got to be more learner-centred. It has depended on institutional presentations and commitment....a lot of that comes down to the individual culture of institutions. We've been leaving them to it this year, but next year we'll be more involved.

Limitations of institution-level promotion and guidance

Although line of learning leads were often industrious in encouraging young people to consider the Diploma as an option, some schools were taking a cautious approach to promoting the Diploma. For instance, as one interviewee said:

We took a low key approach to publicising Diplomas because this is a very academic area and the parents have got a presumption of the type of education a child will receive at this school. The danger was that if we played this too big, it would put them off, so we played it softly, softly and presented the Diploma as just another course.

Furthermore, some staff (including IAG co-ordinators and Connexions advisers) were ready to admit that there were **weaknesses in their IAG systems**. They reported reasons for these weaknesses, which generally related to:

- **Lack of detailed information:** as already referred to, the late arrival in institutions of detailed information had made it more difficult to provide guidance. One school senior manager, for example, stated: *'Some of the materials were not available before the options process, so we were wary about saying too much about it as we still didn't understand it ourselves. We haven't tried to explain the different elements of the Diploma because you don't want to overload, so we sold it as a course offering variety and leading to other opportunities'*.

- **A lack of staff awareness:** all the IAG interviewees and many of the other staff drew attention to their perception that staff who had not been directly involved in preparing for Diploma delivery usually had very little knowledge of Diplomas. Given that form tutors and subject staff played a key role in providing both formal and informal advice and guidance to learners, this was considered to be a weakness. One IAG coordinator stated. *'I think staff here have no clue about the Diplomas, because it doesn't play a part in their daily lives yet, but they're often the ones giving the advice'*.
- **Anxieties about promoting a new qualification:** some staff were apprehensive about giving young people IAG about a qualification in which they were not fully confident. This was summed up by one IAG coordinator who stated: *'How do you promote something which you don't know is going to work and which may be changed? I would be doing my students a total disservice if I advised them to do things that weren't in their best interests'*. It may well be that this apprehension impacted on the quality of IAG provided, and on the take-up of Diplomas, as the comments of a minority of the staff interviewed suggested that the IAG given to learners was not always impartial.
- **Lack of training opportunities, or inability to attend training:** most IAG coordinators had not received specific training on the Diplomas, because it had not been available (at the time of interview), or it had not been possible to attend because of other teaching commitments. As they often taught a full timetable in addition to their IAG role, finding adequate time for training courses could be a problem. Even Connexions advisers themselves had sometimes only received a briefing about the Diploma from the consortium lead and sometimes from line of learning leads.
- **Concerns about Diploma implementation:** staff said that they were cautious in the way that they presented the Diploma to learners because, for example, they had concerns about the lack of quality assurance systems, there were still uncertainties over delivery models, or they were uneasy about promoting an untried qualification which would take up a substantial amount of learner time.
- **Concerns about the impartiality of advice and guidance:** staff in FE colleges sometimes expressed reservations about the motives of the school staff who gave advice to learners choosing post-16 options. While these concerns were not limited to Diplomas, the perception of some college staff was that schools with sixth forms were more concerned with encouraging Year 11 learners to stay at school, rather than giving impartial advice. However, within the case-study consortia, there were examples of schools with sixth forms where this was not the case, and where staff were positively promoting the Diploma offer across other institutions within the consortia to young people. As there were far fewer Level 3 Diplomas than Level 2 being offered across consortia, there were usually more limited opportunities for post-16 learners anyway, and it may be easier to gain a clearer picture of post-16 Diploma advice and guidance when more Level 3 courses are provided.

5.2 Learners' experience of IAG

This section focuses on learners experiences of IAG generally and specifically on Diplomas. The findings draw on case-study interviews as well as survey data.

5.2.1 Extent to which learners had been given information about Diplomas

The surveys of Year 9 and Year 11 learners revealed that the majority of learners who were surveyed had heard of the Diploma. However, around two-thirds reported that they did not know much about them (see Table 5.1), and a notable minority stated that they had never

heard of Diplomas. This suggests that marketing of Diplomas had not reached all the learners in the schools surveyed although, as stated earlier, such an interpretation is dependent on the recollections of the young people surveyed. The higher percentage of young people in Year 11 who responded that they had not heard of Diplomas would be expected, as fewer institutions were offering the Level 3 Diploma.

Table 5.1 Extent to which learners had heard of Diplomas

Have you heard of Diplomas?	Year 9	Year 11
	%	%
Yes, and I know a lot about them	12	10
Yes, but I don't know much about them	68	64
No, I have never heard of them	13	20
Not sure	4	4
No response	2	2
N =	5481	2080

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

A total of 5348 Year 9 respondents and 2048 Year 11 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER / University of Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Year 9 and Year 11 Survey, 2008

The case-study visits also revealed that a minority of learners said that they had not been told anything about Diplomas. This might have been because schools had targeted certain learners for Diplomas (as outlined in Section 6.2), but it is also possible that some young people had forgotten what they had been told if they had not taken any interest in studying for a Diploma. A school senior manager made the point that *'if they're not interested, they blank it out.'* It was also the case that within the interview groups of Year 9 learners not taking the Diploma, there were sometimes conflicting views as to whether they had or had not received information. IAG staff need to ensure, therefore, that information about Diplomas is presented to young people in an accessible way, and to make sure that young people fully engage with, and understand, the information they are given.

A minority of the learners surveyed found the information they had received about Diplomas helpful, and this proportion was particularly low among Year 11 respondents; 33 per cent of Year 11 learners found the information very or quite helpful, compared with 45 per cent of Year 9 respondents. Around one third of learners in each year group had *not* found the information that they had received helpful, and a further 14 per cent of Year 11 respondents, and 12 per cent of those in Year 9, were unsure whether the information had been helpful. There was some reflection of this in the case-study interviews where those who had not chosen Diplomas were often very vague about details and said that they had received *'a talk, but it didn't tell us much'*, or *'I got confused because it wasn't explained well'*.

Even those who had chosen to do a Diploma sometimes said that they would have liked to know more about details such as where they would be learning, or the progression routes, or considered that: *'I don't feel like I have the whole picture'*. On the other hand, there were many positive comments from interviewees about the amount of information and advice they had been given, such as: *'The teachers were really good at explaining it to you'*; and, *'If we needed any information, the teachers help us as much as they can because most of them do that anyway'*. It was also quite common for those who felt that they lacked detailed information to say that they had not attended specific Diploma talks or open evenings, where such details were more likely to have been available.

There was no evidence of any significant differences between the characteristics of survey respondents who had received information, and those who had not. Similar proportions of young people of each gender, ethnicity and eligibility for free school meals reported that they had or had not received information about Diplomas. This was also the case with regard to attainment among the Year 9 cohort. However, young people in Year 11 who had attained below Level 5 in their key stage 3 assessments were more likely to have been given information (83 per cent) than those who had attained Level 5 or above (74 per cent). Whether a school had a sixth form did not appear to affect Year 11 learners' views of the helpfulness of the information. However, among Year 9 learners, those who attended a school with a sixth form were significantly less likely to report that the information was useful compared with those who attended schools with no sixth form.

5.2.2 Sources of information about Diplomas

Information about Diplomas was provided to young people through a range of means, as shown in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Sources of information about Diplomas: Year 9 and Year 11

Seen or heard about Diplomas through:	Year 11	Year 9
	Yes %	Yes %
Written information about Diplomas (e.g. booklets)	42	46
Events (e.g. careers events, Diploma launch events)	29	26
Whole class lessons at school about subject choices	27	37
Information about Diplomas on websites	24	20
Group discussions at school about subject choices	22	30
Articles in newspapers/magazines	8	12
Radio adverts	6	11
N =	371	1004

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A filter question: all those who had chosen, or were considering choosing, to take a Diploma in September 2008

Source: NFER / University of Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Year 11 and Year 9 Survey, 2008

The most common method of information about Diplomas being provided was through written information and specific events. Few young people had heard about Diplomas through the public media, such as radio⁶ and magazines, and this was confirmed by case-study interviews.

Further analysis revealed that the following proportions of young people found the information they had received helpful:

- **Written information**⁷: 40 per cent of Year 9 learners and 31 per cent of Year 11 learners who had received such information found it helpful
- **Events**: 39 per cent of Year 9 learners and 29 per cent of those in Year 11 who had engaged in events

⁶ Radio adverts were first broadcast in November 2007.

⁷ Note that these percentages are based on those who reported that they had received each type of information.

- **Websites:** 21 per cent of Year 9 and 19 per cent of Year 11 learners
- **Class lessons:** 31 per cent of Year 9 respondents
- **Group discussions at school:** 31 per cent of Year 9 learners⁸.

These proportions show that, in addition to being the most commonly received source of information about Diplomas, written information and events were also perceived by young people to be the most useful sources of information. Written information was also considered helpful by the learners who were interviewed, particularly those in Year 9, who frequently referred to their options booklets, which they had taken home and read through with their parents, and the various leaflets and packs that they had been given on the Diploma. Events received a similarly positive response from interviewees, especially open evenings at schools and colleges and taster days, which were regarded as very helpful in providing insight into what the learning would actually be like.

Advice that had been received from outside school

In making their decisions at 14 and 16, young people often seek the advice of people whom they know, trust and respect. As might be expected, across both year groups, the majority of young people reported that they had talked about pursuing a Diploma to their parents or family (60 per cent of Year 11 respondents and 66 per cent of those in Year 9) and their friends (40 per cent in Year 9 and 39 per cent in Year 11).

Interviewees too said that, outside school, they had most often spoken to **family members**, including older siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Some had also consulted family friends, who were knowledgeable about the subject areas, or careers, in which they had an interest. Friends were mentioned less frequently and were generally regarded as helpful in terms of discussion and reassurance, but not particularly influential. The influence of family members appeared to be stronger in Year 9 than Year 11, and young people from Year 9 who had chosen a Diploma mentioned positive support from their parents for this decision (discussed further in Chapter 6). However, other interviewees commented that their parents did not understand about the courses and subjects they could take at school, which meant that their advice was not always very helpful, and this reinforced the need for good guidance at school, as well as more information for parents.

5.2.3 Nature of information given to learners

In both Year 9 and Year 11, a notable minority of learners (between 22 and 31 per cent) indicated that they were not sure whether they had been given information about various aspects of Diplomas. As can be seen in Table 5.3, in both year groups, the most widely reported information received related to the subjects and levels of the Diplomas available, their equivalence to other qualifications, and the location of where they would be studied. However, it is worth noting that most learners who responded to the survey, and said that they had heard of Diplomas, did not indicate that they had received such information.

⁸ The number of Year 11 respondents who had accessed these strategies was too small to report those who found it helpful.

Table 5.3 Information received about Diplomas by Year 9 and Year 11 learners

Information given	Year 9 Yes %	Year 11 Yes %
The Diploma subject areas that you could take	47	33
The different levels of Diploma that you could take (Foundation, Higher, Advanced Higher)	42	38
What a Diploma is worth compared to other qualifications (e.g. A levels or GCSEs)	42	29
Where you could study for Diplomas	29	36
The other qualifications that you could take alongside the Diploma	27	20
The amount of time the Diploma will take up	*	24
What jobs you can get after completing a Diploma	26	22
What you need to do to pass a Diploma	26	21
What courses you can do after completing a Diploma	19	18
How Diploma work will be assessed	*	15
Who would teach you the Diploma	*	12
N =	4622	1624

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A filter question: all those who said they had heard of Diplomas

** Year 9 respondents were not asked these items*

Source: NFER / University of Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Year 11 and Year 9 Survey, 2008

As Table 5.3 shows, a greater proportion of Year 11 learners reported that they had been given information about where they would study their Diploma, compared with Year 9 learners. This might be expected given the likelihood that young people in Year 11 might be making a choice of post-16 institution in addition to a qualification. However, as noted in Chapter 4, delivery of many pre-16 Diplomas would involve travelling to learn, and given that studying away from school is a motivation to choose Diplomas for 27 per cent of those surveyed (see Chapter 6), it might therefore be expected that more Year 9 learners would have been given information about where they would study for their Diploma. Overall, relatively few learners who responded to the survey had been provided with information about progression after a Diploma and the process of assessment and achieving a Diploma.

In general, the survey data showed that, where learners had been provided with information relating to each aspect of Diplomas, this information appeared to have met young people's needs. The majority (between 85 per cent and 91 per cent of those in Year 9 and between 89 per cent and 94 per cent of those in Year 11) of young people who had received information said that they did not want more information. However, it was clear that there was scope to improve the provision of information about Diplomas because, among those who had not received information about Diplomas (or were unsure whether they had), around one-quarter to one-third of learners would have liked more information relating to a range of aspects of the Diplomas. More specifically the following proportions of young people would have liked more information about:

- the Diploma subject areas (33 per cent of Year 9 and 32 per cent of Year 11)
- the different Diploma levels (29 per cent of Year 9 and 28 per cent of Year 11)
- where they could study a Diploma (30 per cent of Year 9 and 28 per cent of Year 11)
- the other qualifications they could take alongside a Diploma (31 per cent of Year 9 and 27 per cent of Year 11)
- what they need to do to pass a Diploma (32 per cent of Year 9 and 26 per cent of Year 11)
- what a Diploma is 'worth' (32 per cent of Year 9 and 27 per cent of Year 11)
- the course opportunities after a Diploma (32 per cent of Year 9 and 28 per cent of Year 11)
- the job opportunities after a Diploma (37 per cent of Year 9 and 29 per cent of Year 11)
- who would teach the Diploma (23 per cent of Year 11)⁹
- the amount of time undertaking a Diploma would take (26 per cent of Year 11)
- how the Diploma will be assessed (25 per cent of Year 11).

It is notable that a greater proportion of learners in Year 9 were interested in having more information about future course and job opportunities after completing a Diploma than was the case among Year 11 learners. This demonstrates that some young people making choices at 14 take into consideration their medium-term future when making immediate decisions.

5.3 Learners' understanding of Diplomas

In order to explore the effectiveness of the IAG provided to young people, learners' knowledge and understanding of Diplomas was examined, both through the learner surveys and the case-study visits.

Through the surveys, learners' understanding of Diplomas was explored through their responses to a question that tested their knowledge of particular aspects of Diplomas. Table 5.4 presents the responses of Year 9 learners to this question, and Table 5.5 presents Year 11 learners' responses (the correct answers are marked with a *). These findings show that there was a high level of uncertainty among learners about what Diplomas involved as, for most of the items, more than half of the learners indicated that they were unsure of the correct answer. Year 11 learners were particularly uncertain, as indicated by the proportion of respondents saying that they were unsure. The areas where young people appeared to be particularly uncertain related to the amount of work experience that the Diploma involves, the GCSE/A level equivalence of Diplomas, whether a learner can do a Diploma at age 16 if they have not achieved one in Years 10 and 11, and whether a learner can pursue A levels after taking a Diploma.

⁹ These last three items were only asked of Year 11 learners

On the whole, where learners did give a true/false response to an item, the majority of them gave the correct answer. In particular, most of these learners knew that Diplomas involve a mix of written, practical and employer-based work (56 per cent of Year 9 learners and 43 per cent of Year 11 learners). However, young people appeared to be least knowledgeable about whether it is possible to take a Diploma in more than one subject area at a time, as 22 per cent of Year 9 learners and 24 per cent of Year 11 learners answered this item incorrectly and stated that it was possible to take Diplomas in more than one subject area.

Table 5.4 Learners' knowledge of Diplomas - Year 9

Are the statements below true or false?	True	False	Not sure	No response
You can take a Diploma in more than one subject at a time	22	20*	52	6
Diplomas involve a mix of written, practical and employer-based work	56*	3	35	7
You can take GCSEs at the same time as a Diploma	37*	14	42	7
You do at least 10 days of work experience if you do a Diploma	27*	7	59	7
You can't do A levels after taking a Diploma	12	30*	52	7
A Higher Diploma (Level 2) is the same as 7 GCSEs at grades A*-C	28*	8	57	7
You can't do a Diploma at age 16 unless you have done one in Years 10 and 11	11	23*	59	7
You can get into university / higher education with an Advanced Diploma	36*	6	51	7
N = 4622				

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A filter question: all those who said they had heard of Diplomas

** shows the correct answer to each item*

Source: NFER / University of Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Year 9 Survey, 2008

Table 5.5 Learners' knowledge of Diplomas - Year 11

Are the statements below true or false?	True	False	Not sure	No response
You can take a Diploma in more than one subject at a time	24	14*	56	6
Diplomas involve a mix of written, practical and employer-based work	43*	3	46	7
You can take GCSEs at the same time as a Diploma	28*	7	58	7
You do at least 10 days of work experience if you do a Diploma	17*	7	69	7
You can't do A levels after taking a Diploma	8	24*	61	7
An Advanced Diploma (Level 2) is the same as 3 ½ to 4 A levels	18*	6	69	7
You can't do a Diploma at age 16 unless you have done one in Years 10 and 11	8	26*	59	7
You can get into university / higher education with an Advanced Diploma	34*	4	54	8

N = 1624

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A filter question: all those who said they had heard of Diplomas

** shows the correct answer to each item*

Source: NFER / University of Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Year 11 Survey, 2008

Further analysis was undertaken to explore the factors associated with young people's knowledge of Diplomas (as measured through the question in Tables 5.4 and 5.5)¹⁰. This analysis revealed:

- **a positive relationship between the information provided to learners and their knowledge and understanding of various aspects of Diplomas:** for example, learners who stated that they had been given information about the equivalence of Diplomas to other qualifications were significantly more likely than young people who had not received this information to answer correctly that a Higher Diploma is the same as seven GCSEs at grades A* to C, and an Advanced Diploma is the same as three and a half A levels.
- **differences in the knowledge and understanding of learners with particular characteristics:** for example, learners with higher prior attainment were significantly more likely than those with lower attainment to give more correct answers about Diplomas. In addition, among both Year 9 and Year 11 learners who planned to take, or were considering taking, a Diploma, those who were intending to take Diplomas in Engineering gave the most correct responses about Diplomas, while those planning to take a Diploma in Information Technology gave the least correct responses.

¹⁰ A score was derived for each young person from the number of correct answers given to the questions in Tables 5.4 and 5.5 and analysis was undertaken which explored the relationship between this score and a range of other variables, including learner background characteristics.

- **an association between learners' knowledge and understanding of Diplomas** (as measured by their score on the items in Table 5.4 and 5.5), **and the extent to which they had talked to people about taking a Diploma, and received information on Diplomas** through various sources: young people who reported, for example, that they had talked to staff at school, a Connexions Personal Adviser (Year 9 only) and their parents about taking a Diploma were significantly more likely than learners who had not spoken to these people, to have a better knowledge of Diplomas. Similarly, young people who said that they had learnt about Diplomas through written information (such as booklets), or through events, were significantly more likely to have a better knowledge of Diplomas than learners who reported that they had not accessed information on Diplomas through these sources.

The case-study visits to consortia, which involved interviews with school and college staff, as well as young people, provided further insights into learners' knowledge and understanding of Diplomas. These revealed that the majority of the school and college staff interviewed felt that, while most learners have a basic understanding, they *'don't fully understand Diplomas'*, and this view appeared to be supported by the responses of learners to the surveys (Tables 5.4 and 5.5). The most common reason given for this lack of understanding among learners was that teaching staff did not have a good enough understanding of Diplomas to give appropriate IAG to learners.

This was felt to be due, in part, to the **perceived complexity of Diplomas**. In particular, staff felt that the most difficult aspects of the Diploma for teachers and learners to understand related to the different components of the Diploma, and how they fit together, the different style of teaching involved, and the equivalence of the Diplomas. Comments from staff included that *'it's a very complicated qualification'*, and *'it's a hard thing to get your head around...it's a whole new way of learning'*, and they felt that even though learners had received information about Diplomas, they did not *'fully appreciate what it's going to be like.'* Related to this, staff reported that the most common questions asked by learners about Diplomas concerned the number of GCSEs or A levels that Diplomas were equivalent to, the progression options available after taking a Diploma (for example, *'Will universities accept it?'* *'Will it help me get a job?'*), and specific questions about the content of the Diploma, and the topics that would be covered.

Staff felt that, to some extent, **some lack of knowledge was normal with a new qualification**, that teachers and learners would not fully understand the Diplomas until they started them, and that *'when they're actually doing it, it will be a lot clearer'*. A senior manager in one school, for instance, commented:

It will take time for the Diplomas to become completely clear and for everyone to understand what they involve...there are learners who don't fully understand the Diploma....but it's very difficult to get your head around it when no one has had any experience of it.

Staff also reported that **uncertainty among learners** about the qualifications they would be taking was **not unique to Diplomas**, as emphasised by one careers teacher: *'Who understands what their GCSEs or vocational courses will cover when they start?'* However, it appeared that this lack of understanding had resulted in some learners not taking a Diploma (discussed in Chapter 6). Furthermore, given the complexity of the Diploma, and the level of uncertainty among teaching staff, many interviewees felt that there was scope for improving the information available to teachers, to ensure that learners receive comprehensive and impartial IAG about Diplomas.

The **interviews with young people**, both those who were planning to take a Diploma, and those who were not, confirmed the perceptions of staff that, on the whole, learners had a limited understanding of Diplomas. The learners interviewed who had chosen not to take a Diploma, in particular, knew very little about Diplomas, which is consistent with the finding from the learner surveys that young people who were planning to take, or considering taking a Diploma had a better knowledge of Diplomas. Indeed, in a small number of cases, learners were not aware what a Diploma was. One Year 9 learner, for example, asked: *'Diplomas? Is that the piece of paper with the ribbon tied around, like in America?'* Where non-Diploma learners were able to comment on what they knew about Diplomas, the main features that they tended to comment on were the work experience component of Diplomas, and the teaching and learning style, which they perceived to be more practical.

Among those **learners who were planning to take a Diploma**, some appeared to have a good understanding of the different aspects of the Diploma they would be undertaking, such as the content of the course, the location of study, the nature of the assessment and the equivalence. One girl, for example, who had chosen to pursue a Diploma in Society, Health and Development, stated: *'It's a two year course....it will cover crime and law, what goes on in society and child development...it will be equal to seven GCSEs.'* Another learner in the same school was aware of the progression routes following a Diploma and noted: *'It's a two-year course, but you can carry on into sixth form for the Level 3 Diploma.'* However, this level of knowledge and understanding was not evident among the majority of learners interviewed, and many knew very little about the qualification they would be taking. The reasons why some young people were more knowledgeable about Diplomas were unclear from the case-study data, and no systematic pattern relating to the IAG strategies in their schools were evident. It may be that particular individuals were more helpful in informing and guiding young people in their choice to take a Diploma.

It is important to note that the findings in this chapter are based on learners' understanding of Diplomas in the spring term of 2008, prior to their introduction, and it is likely that young people would have received further information about Diplomas before they commenced their course. However, in general, it appears that learners had based their decision on whether to take a Diploma on varying levels of understanding about what it would actually involve and, in some cases, this understanding appeared to be very limited. The interviews explored young people's understanding of the different aspects of the Diploma they were planning to take, in relation to the following key areas:

- **Content of the Diploma and assessment:** most of the learners who planned to undertake a Diploma had a broad understanding of its content, and the different topics that they would be covering within their principal learning, although this was not true of all the young people interviewed. Furthermore, few understood how the Diploma would be assessed, as the following comment from one Year 9 learner illustrates: *'I really don't know that much about it...I'm hoping that there isn't much coursework or exams.'* As was discussed in Chapter 4, many staff felt that they needed additional information and support with assessment, so this may explain learners' lack of knowledge.
- **Location of study:** many learners were also not aware where they would be taught their Diploma, or who they would be taught by, and while some knew that there would be a work experience element, others did not. It is worth noting (as discussed in Chapter 4) that, at the time of the case-study visits, some consortia had not finalised their plans for delivery of Diplomas, accounting for some of this lack of awareness among learners. However, this meant that some young people were making decisions about taking a Diploma without knowing about their location of study, and were not fully aware of the implications that this would have for their learning experience

- **Equivalence of Diplomas:** while many of the learners interviewed knew the equivalence of Diplomas compared with other qualifications, such as GCSEs and A levels, this was clearly an area of confusion for a notable minority. While some learners had no knowledge of equivalence, others misunderstood what this concept meant. For example, a small number of young people thought that they would achieve GCSE qualifications at the end of their Diploma. Other young people, particularly Year 9 learners, held incorrect views on the equivalence of Diplomas, and their responses relating to the number of GCSEs that the Diploma is equivalent to, ranged from two GCSEs to 16 GCSEs.
- **Diploma levels:** there was also confusion among some of the Year 9 learners interviewed about the different levels of Diplomas, as many did not know which level Diploma they would be pursuing, and a minority thought that Level 1 Diplomas were at a higher level than Level 2 Diplomas.

5.4 Summary and conclusion

Consortia had clearly learnt a great deal about promotion, recruitment and IAG from the preparations for Phase 1 of Diploma delivery, and methods of dealing with the main challenges were being developed and disseminated. There was therefore optimism generally that some difficulties would be addressed before Phase 2 began. However, consortia emphasised the need for promotional materials about Diplomas to be available by the start of the academic year in which learners made their choices, to ensure that FE colleges, in particular, have them in time for their open days in the autumn.

Standards of IAG across and between consortia were variable and this was an area where almost all interviewees thought there was need for further development. This was thought to require new approaches and more emphasis on training, to ensure that all staff had sufficient knowledge and understanding of Diplomas to be able to offer impartial and accurate IAG to learners.

The findings illustrate that provision of information about Diplomas can be effective in ensuring that young people understand these new qualifications, as those who had received information, or talked to people about taking a Diploma had a better knowledge of Diplomas. However, at present, the IAG strategies adopted by consortia do not appear to be effective in informing learners fully about Diplomas because not all young people recall receiving information about Diplomas and, in general, learners' knowledge and understanding of Diplomas was limited. This was even the case among young people who had chosen to take a Diploma, many of whom had little knowledge of what their Diploma qualification would involve, including their location of study, how the Diploma would be assessed, and the possible progression routes after completing a Diploma.

Given that these findings are based on learners' understanding and perceptions in the spring term 2008, prior to the launch of the Diplomas, it is likely that learners planning to take a Diploma would have been given further information about Diplomas before they commenced their course. This may well have addressed some of the gaps in their knowledge that were apparent at the time of the interviews. However, it does seem that, in Phase 1, many learners were basing their decisions on whether to take a Diploma or not on a limited, and sometimes inaccurate, understanding of the qualification, and the teaching and learning experience that it will entail. This suggests that there is scope to improve the IAG given to young people, to ensure that learners fully engage with, and understand the information they are given, to allow them to make informed decisions about their choices at key stage 4 and post-16. Take-up of Diplomas, and the influences on learners' choice are discussed in the following chapter.

6. Take-up of Diplomas

Key findings and messages for policy and practice

- While take-up of Diplomas was lower than originally hoped for, particularly at Levels 1 and 3, consortia felt that this made implementation of the first phase of Diplomas more manageable. There were indications that take-up would improve in the future as more lines of learning are introduced, and the Diplomas becomes more established (Sections 6.3 and 6.4)
- Year 9 learners had a greater probability of taking a Diploma where they had achieved Level 4 or below, on average, at key stage 2, were male, had a positive attitude to school and intended to pursue a work-based route post-16. Year 11 learners had a greater probability of choosing a Diploma where they had achieved Level 5 or below, on average, at key stage 3 and had a positive attitude to school. (Section 6.3)
- Given the differences in the characteristics of learners choosing each of the lines of learning, there may be scope for promoting different aspects of the Diploma to young people interested in the different lines of learning, to improve future take-up. (Sections 6.3 and 6.4)
- Given the gender patterns that have emerged in take-up of the different lines of learning, consortia may wish to raise awareness among IAG staff of the need to challenge gender stereotyping in young people's choices. (Section 6.3)
- The main reasons why young people considered taking a Diploma were because the subject was related to a career interest and because they felt that it would help them to get a job in future. (Section 6.4.1)
- The main reason why young people chose not to take a Diploma was because they did not know enough about it. In addition, learners in Year 9 did not choose a Diploma because the subject area was not interesting and, in Year 11, because they preferred other qualifications (Section 6.4.2).

This chapter examines the extent of learner take-up of Diplomas, and the factors which influenced young people's decision to take a Diploma or not. It draws on findings from the telephone survey of 136 consortium leads, surveys of Year 9 and Year 11 learners in a sample of 30 consortia (which were conducted around the time when young people were making their option choices), and interviews with staff and learners through the case-study visits to 15 consortia. More specifically, this chapter presents findings related to the following:

- The curriculum offer or option choices made available to learners, and the extent to which the provision of Diplomas has impacted on the wider curriculum offer in schools.
- Entry requirements for the Diploma and whether particular groups of learners were targeted, and why.
- Take-up of Diplomas and whether this matched expectations. The characteristics of learners planning to take a Diploma, compared with those who are not planning to take one, will also be examined.
- Learners' reasons for choosing, or not choosing to take a Diploma, and the factors which influenced their choice.

6.1 The Diploma 'offer'

On the whole, the introduction of Phase 1 Diplomas had not had a considerable impact on the wider curriculum offer of the case-study centres, both at key stage 4 and post-16. Most of the schools visited reported that they had not dropped any of their existing courses in favour of Diplomas, but that Diplomas had just been added to the range of courses available to young people. One school senior manager, for example, explained that introducing Diplomas '*has just given them [learners] more choice than they had before.*' However, in a minority of schools, the Diplomas had replaced existing courses, including GCSE, A level and BTEC courses, primarily because the Diplomas were felt to be too similar in content to these other courses. One school, for example, had replaced their BTEC in Art for the Creative and Media Diploma, while another had replaced their A level in Health and Society with the Diploma in Society, Health and Development. There was a general consensus, however, that as more lines of learning were introduced, there would need to be a reduction in the number and range of other courses offered, with Diplomas replacing existing courses, to ensure that courses had sufficient learners to be viable.

The Diploma 'offer' available to young people was determined by the lines of learning and levels offered by their consortium, and by their individual school or college. However, at key stage 4, the wider curriculum offer, and the overall approach to key stage 4 options adopted by their school also influenced whether Diplomas were available to all learners, and whether Year 9 learners had a free choice in electing to pursue a Diploma.

Case-study visits to the sample of 15 consortia revealed that the schools in these consortia were operating different models for their key stage 4 options systems, which were impacting on learners' opportunity to take Diplomas. In all the schools visited, there was a compulsory core of subjects, which included GCSEs in English, mathematics and science. The number of core subjects varied between schools, as many of the schools had specialist status, and learners were required to take a course that linked with this specialism. Consequently, the number of option choices that young people were able to make at key stage 4 varied across schools.

Outside the core subjects, key stage 4 options (which included Diplomas) were offered to young people in three broad ways: through open choice, option blocks, or through pathway systems.

The **open choice approach**, which was in operation in ten of the schools visited, presented young people with a free choice of subjects. This enabled them to choose their options regardless of the nature of the subject. Schools with this approach wanted to give learners as much choice as possible, and not constrain their options, as explained by a senior manager in one school: '*We don't believe that students should be divided into one cohort or another, based on a decision about whether they would suit a more academic or vocational route.*' In some cases, however, certain combinations of subjects were restricted, due, for example, to timetabling or staffing constraints. Furthermore, in a small number of schools, while they adopted an open choice approach, staff reported that they '*steer [learners] towards what seems best for them.*' Generally in schools with an open choice approach, Diplomas were listed alongside all the other options choices, and were available to all Year 9 learners. In some schools, the Diploma offer was restricted to those lines of learning being delivered in the school, while, in others, learners were able to choose from any Diplomas offered by the consortium as a whole.

Six of the case-study schools were operating a key stage 4 options system in which courses were grouped into **option blocks**. These blocks tended to include courses from within specific subject categories (such as technology or languages, for instance), or divided courses into academic and work-related blocks. Young people were able to make a relatively free choice from within each of these blocks, and again, with this approach, Diplomas were available to all learners.

The third approach to key stage 4 options, which was in operation in ten of the case-study schools, was the **pathways system**. In schools with this system, learner choice was more restricted, as learners were put into various pathways according to their ability or preferred learning style. Learners were then guided to choose only from those courses within that particular pathway, meaning that in these schools, Diplomas were only offered to young people within a particular pathway. One school, for example, operated three pathways: 'academic / vocational', 'vocational / work-related', and 'specialist vocational', and Diplomas were available in the latter of these pathways. Section 6.2 discusses in further detail the extent to which particular groups of learners were targeted for Diplomas.

The extent to which these different approaches to key stage 4 options may have impacted on take-up of Diplomas will be explored later in this chapter.

6.2 Entry requirements for the Diploma

The majority of schools did not formally target learners for the Diploma, although some staff talked about **informal targeting**, by which they meant the Diploma was offered to all Year 9 learners, but some were given particular encouragement to consider it. This was generally because these young people were considered to have a particular interest in, or aptitude for, a line of learning. One senior manager, for example, talked about '*gentle targeting, because we know which ones it will suit best*', while another described the learners he thought would gain most advantage from a Level 2 Diploma as: '*the more academically able students that are disengaged with the school curriculum and want to focus on an area that will stimulate them*'.

Where specific targeting of learners for the Diploma was taking place, it was a practice mainly in schools where only the Level 2 Diploma was being offered at key stage 4. In these schools, staff had targeted learners who were judged capable of achieving at least five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. This was the standard of attainment considered necessary to successfully complete the Level 2 Diploma, as this senior manager explained: '*because of concerns about numeracy and literacy, we have looked very carefully at their level and targeted initially about 50 children and hopefully we'll end up with a group of about 15 to 20*'.

Learners who had been targeted either informally or specifically were generally very positive about their 'selection' for consideration to take a Diploma, regarding themselves as '*special*' and it appeared that the individual or group discussions they had received from staff had enthused them.

Almost all schools had set an entry requirement for **Level 2** Diplomas related to young people's achievement in key stage 3 assessments¹¹ (with learners achieving Level 5 in at least two of their assessments, and a Level 4 in the other). This standard entry requirement was due to the need for Level 2 functional skills achievement and concerns that without sound ability in mathematics and English, young people would be '*set up to fail*'. Some

¹¹ Key stage 3 assessments are undertaken by Year 9 learners in English, mathematics and science, and progress is assessed against a number of levels. The median level achieved at key stage 3 in English and science is Level 5. The median level achieved in key stage 3 maths is Level 6.

schools added a requirement for good attendance rates; in one school specifically set at 90 per cent or above. In addition to attainment levels, staff also wanted to see evidence of commitment and interest and usually Diploma applicants were interviewed, either at their own school, or where applicable, in college, and sometimes in both. There appeared to be only three schools, in three different consortia, where no predicted key stage 3 levels were required for the Level 2 Diploma.

Only one school had set a requirement for **Level 1**, of predicted key stage 3 assessments at Level 4, otherwise there were no bars set for this level other than interest and commitment and this was usually judged through interviews with applicants.

For the **Level 3 Diploma**, the standard entry requirement was five GCSEs at grades A* to C (or the BTEC equivalent), usually including English and mathematics, although this sometimes depended on the line of learning. Interest in, and aptitude for, the line of learning were also considered crucial, but generally targeting did not apply to the same extent for Year 11 learners, as staff described learners applying for Level 3 as mainly self-selecting.

6.3 Expected take-up and reactions to take-up

As part of their Gateway 1 application, consortia were asked to provide estimates of the numbers of learners they expected to take a Diploma from September 2008. Although many consortia felt that these figures were '*overly optimistic*', there was a general view across the 15 case-study consortia that take-up of the Diplomas was lower than they had anticipated (a finding that was mirrored in the consortium lead telephone survey). While some consortia reported that they would meet or exceed their anticipated numbers for Level 2 Diplomas, recruitment appeared to be particularly challenging at Levels 1 and 3, and take-up was reported to be lower than expected at these levels. There also appeared to be some variations in take-up across the different lines of learning (for example, the consortium lead telephone survey indicated that take-up may be greater in Society, Health and Development, Creative and Media, and Information Technology), although there did not appear to be a clear pattern to this variation across the individual centres within consortia.

On the whole, consortia were not overly concerned about the lower than anticipated take-up of Diplomas, because, as outlined in Section 2.4, they felt that this made implementation of Diplomas more manageable, and meant that they could ensure '*quality, rather than quantity*'. However, in some cases, this lower take-up meant that some Diploma courses would be too expensive or would cause timetabling difficulties due to the small class sizes. As a result, it was possible that some Diploma provision, most commonly at Level 3, would not be viable in Phase 1.

The surveys of Year 9 and Year 11 learners provided further indications of the likely take-up of Diplomas from September 2008¹². These surveys, which were undertaken in schools in a sample of 30 consortia from May to July 2008, indicated that 14 per cent of Year 9 respondents, and 13 per cent of Year 11 respondents had chosen to take a Diploma from September 2008 (see Table 6.1). A further eight per cent of Year 9 learners and ten per cent of Year 11 learners were considering taking a Diploma, but had not yet made their final decision. Around two-thirds of the young people surveyed were not planning to take a Diploma, and the majority of these (45 per cent of Year 9 learners and 56 per cent of Year 11 learners) had not considered taking a Diploma at all.

¹² Details of the representativeness of the responding samples of Year 9 and Year 11 learners are provided in Appendix A.

Table 6.1 Extent to which learners have chosen to take a Diploma

Young people's choice	Year 9	Year 11
	%	%
I have chosen to take a Diploma from September 2008	14	13
I am thinking about taking a Diploma, but haven't made up my mind yet	8	10
I thought about taking a Diploma, but decided not to	23	11
I did not think about taking a Diploma	45	56
No response	10	10
N =	4622	1624

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

A filter question: all those who said they had heard of Diplomas

A total of 4163 Year 9 respondents and 1462 Year 11 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER / University of Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Year 9 and Year 11 Surveys, 2008

Year 9 learners who stated, through the survey, that they were not planning to take a Diploma in September 2008 were asked whether they thought they might **pursue a Diploma in the future**. This revealed that more than half (55 per cent) of these young people said that they did *not* intend to undertake a Diploma in the future. Around a third (32 per cent), however, thought that they might pursue one at some time in the future, and two per cent intended to take a Diploma immediately after finishing Year 11.

The interviews with learners also confirmed that, while some learners said that they would not consider taking a Diploma in the future, others said that they would, albeit with caveats that they would only take one if there were more subject areas available, and if they could do more options alongside the Diploma. Young people also said that they would not take a Diploma until it was more established and that they were convinced that it would be accepted and valued by colleges, HEIs and employers.

What factors were associated with take-up of Diplomas?

Further analysis of the survey data (including multi-level regression analysis) was undertaken which examined the relative impact of a range of variables on learners' choice to pursue a Diploma, to provide some insight into the factors associated with take-up of Diplomas. In doing this analysis, young people who reported that they had chosen a Diploma, and those who said that they were thinking about taking one, but had not yet made up their mind, were grouped and compared with young people who had decided not to take a Diploma. The variables explored through this analysis included learner-level variables (such as prior attainment, background characteristics, attitude to school¹³, and the extent of information received about Diplomas) and school-level variables (such as school type).¹⁴ This revealed that, among **Year 9 learners**, the following variables were found to be associated with planned take-up of Diplomas:

¹³ Analysis was undertaken to consolidate the data from the surveys on learners' attitudes to school and learning. Four attitude variables were derived that were used for subsequent analysis. A description of these variables is provided in Appendix D.

¹⁴ See Appendix E for a full list of the variables included in the multi-level model analysis.

- **Key stage 2 attainment:** Year 9 learners with lower key stage 2 attainment (Level 4 or below, on average) had an increased probability that they would plan to, or consider, taking a Diploma compared with similar learners with higher prior attainment. However, this appeared to only be the case among learners who were planning to take a Level 1 Diploma. Year 9 learners intending to take a Level 2 Diploma had similar prior attainment to their non-Diploma peers.
- **Gender:** male learners had a higher probability of planning to take a Diploma than female learners who were similar in all other respects measured. This is perhaps because two of the first five lines of learning (Engineering, and Construction and the Built Environment) are traditionally subject areas that are studied by more males than females.
- **Attitude to school and learning:** Year 9 learners with a positive attitude to school and learning were more likely to report that they were planning to take a Diploma, compared with similar young people with a negative attitude to school and learning.
- **Post-16 intentions:** young people who were planning to progress to a work-based route post-16 (employment, with or without training, or an Apprenticeship) had an increased probability that they would plan to take, or consider taking, a Diploma in Years 10 and 11, compared with similar Year 9 learners who intended to take a course-based route post-16.

To illustrate these findings, Table 6.2 and Figure 6.1 provide examples of the degree of impact that some of the above factors might have on the likelihood that a young person would plan to take a Diploma. These indicate the effect that a feature, such as having a positive attitude to school and learning, has on a young persons' choice to take a Diploma, over and above other influential factors which are controlled for, such as the background characteristics of the individual and their school.

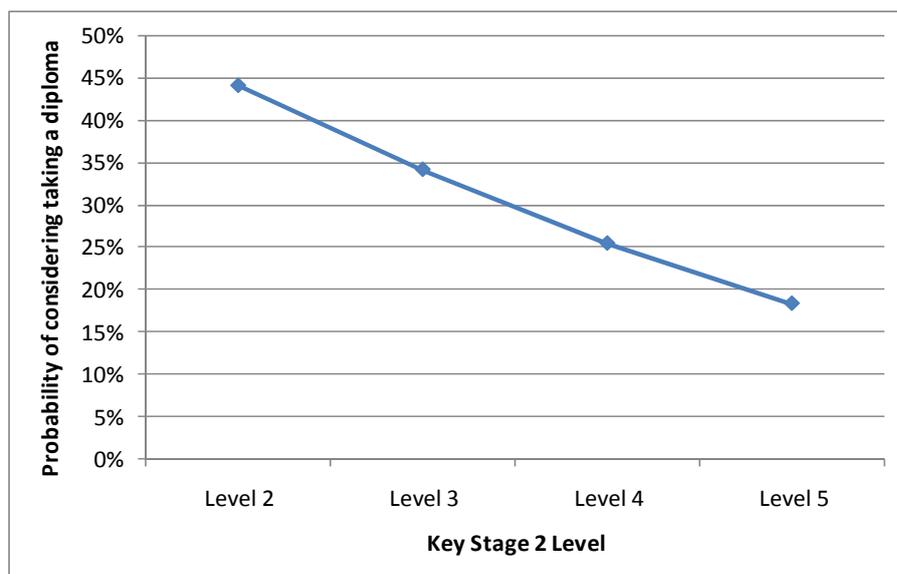
Table 6.2 Probabilities of learners with particular characteristics planning to take a Diploma - Year 9

Learner characteristics	Year 9 %
Typical Year 9 learner*	24
Female Year 9 learner	16
Year 9 learner planning a work-based route post-16	38
Year 9 learner with most positive attitude to school and learning	34

**A typical learner reflects the majority characteristics of the sample. In this case, a typical learner is male, with no special educational needs, achieved Level 4 at key stage 2, who intends to take a course-based route post-16, and has average attitudes towards school and learning.*

Source: NFER / University of Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Year 9 Survey 2008 and National Pupil Database

Figure 6.1 Probability of learners with different levels of prior attainment planning to take a Diploma - Year 9



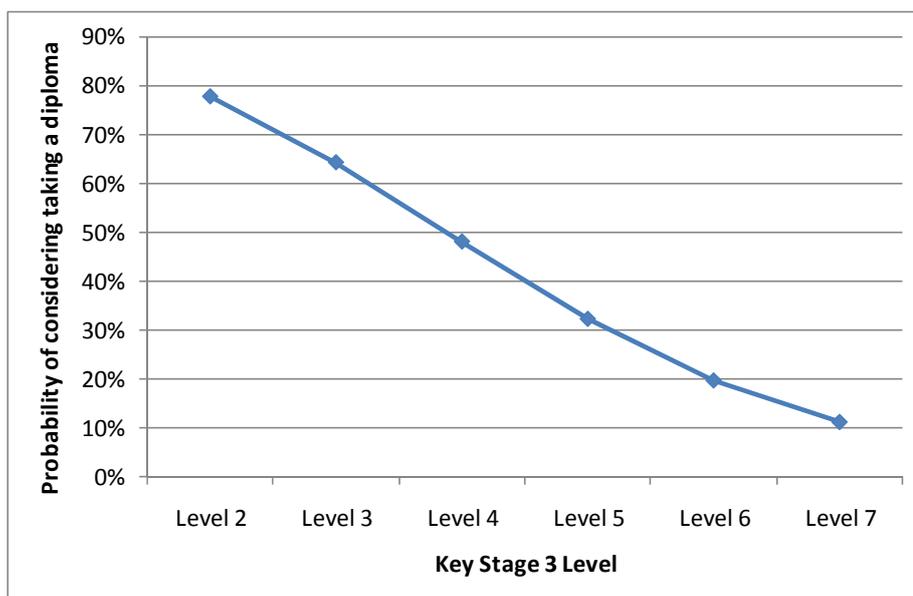
Among the **Year 11 learners** surveyed, the following variables were found to be associated with take-up of Diplomas:

- **Key stage 3 attainment:** Year 11 learners with lower key stage 3 attainment (Level 5 or below) had a higher probability of planning to take a Diploma than similar learners with higher attainment planning to take any non-Diploma route post-16. However, this was only the case among Year 11 learners who were intending to pursue a Diploma at Levels 1 or 2. Young people who were planning to take a Level 3 Diploma had similar prior attainment to their peers who were not intending to take a Diploma.
- **Attitude to school and learning:** Year 11 learners with a positive attitude to school and learning had a higher probability that they would plan to take a Diploma than similar young people with a negative attitude to school and learning.

To illustrate these findings, further analysis revealed that a typical Year 11 learner¹⁵ had a 25 per cent likelihood of planning to take a Diploma post-16. A young person who was the same in all respects measured, but had a positive attitude to school and learning had a 34 per cent chance of indicating that they had chosen, or were considering taking, a Diploma. Figure 6.2 illustrates the impact of prior attainment on the likelihood of a Year 11 learner taking a Diploma, and shows that higher attainment at key stage 3 was associated with a decreased probability that young people would plan to take a Diploma.

¹⁵ A typical learner reflects the majority characteristics of the sample. In this case, a typical Year 11 learner is a young person with no special educational needs, and average levels of key stage 3 attainment (Level 5) and attitudes towards school and learning.

Figure 6.2 Probabilities of learners with particular characteristics planning to take a Diploma - Year 11¹⁶



Young people who were planning to take a Diploma from September 2008 were also significantly more likely than those who were not intending to do so to report that they had been given information on Diplomas. For example, 56 per cent of Year 9 learners planning to take, or considering taking, a Diploma indicated that they had been given information about the equivalence of Diplomas to other qualifications, compared with 46 per cent of those who were not intending to take a Diploma.

Learners considering taking a Diploma were also significantly more likely than those who were not intending to take a Diploma to report that the information they had received had been very helpful. In contrast, young people in Years 9 and 11 who were not planning to take a Diploma were more likely than other learners to indicate either that they had found the information unhelpful, or that they had not received any information at all.

What lines of learning will young people be taking?

As Table 6.3 shows, among **Year 9 learners**, similar proportions of respondents (around one fifth) were planning to take (or considering) each of the five lines of learning, although a slightly greater proportion were planning to embark on the Creative and Media Diploma. Among **Year 11 learners**, the distribution across the lines of learning was less evenly spread, with a greater proportion of learners planning to study Society, Health and Development, and Creative and Media.

Across all consortia involved in the telephone survey, Engineering was the most common line of learning offered pre-16 and post-16 (64 per cent of consortia), followed by Creative and Media (54 per cent) and Information Technology (46 per cent). Similar proportions of consortia were offering Society, Health and Development, and Construction and the Built Environment (39 per cent in each case). While this distribution does not reflect the pattern of take-up reported by the learners surveyed, learners were not necessarily able to access every line of learning on offer in their consortium.

¹⁶ It is important to note that only small numbers of young people achieved Level 3 or below at key stage 3.

Table 6.3 Diploma line of learning chosen - Year 9 and Year 11

Line of learning	Year 9 %	Year 11 %
Construction and the Built Environment	17	10
Creative and Media	23	21
Engineering	19	8
IT	18	13
Society, Health and Development	17	30
No response	7	18
N =	1004	371

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

A filter question: all those who had chosen, or were considering choosing, to take a Diploma in September 2008

A total of 935 Year 9 respondents and 306 Year 11 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER / University of Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Year 9 and Year 11 Survey, 2008

Further analysis of this survey data revealed some differences in the characteristics of learners taking the different lines of learning, in relation to the following characteristics:

- **Attitude to school:** among Year 9 learners, those planning to take an Information Technology Diploma appeared to have a significantly more positive attitude to school and learning than young people planning to take the other lines of learning. In contrast, those planning to undertake Diplomas in Construction and the Built Environment, and Society, Health and Development were less positive about school and learning.
- **Preferred style of learning:** Year 9 learners who were planning to take a Diploma in Engineering were significantly more likely than other learners to prefer practical work and team working. Those who had chosen, or were considering taking, a Diploma in Information Technology were least likely to prefer practical work.
- **Behaviour and attendance:** Year 11 learners who were planning or considering taking a Diploma in Construction and the Built Environment were significantly more likely than young people taking other lines of learning to report poor behaviour or attendance at school.
- **Gender:** there were some clear gender differences across the lines of learning, with some lines of learning being dominated by a particular gender. For instance, among Year 9 and Year 11 learners, Construction and the Built Environment, and Engineering were both dominated by male learners. Society, Health and Development, on the other hand, was dominated by female learners. In Creative and Media, and Information Technology, there was a more even distribution of male and female learners, but with a greater proportion of females taking Creative and Media, and a greater proportion of males taking Information Technology.
- **English as an additional language:** although only small numbers of learners considering or planning to take a Diploma had English as an additional language (EAL), among Year 9 learners, these proportions were lowest in Construction and the Built Environment, and Society, Health and Development.
- **Post-16 plans:** young people planning to take Diplomas in Creative and Media, Information Technology and Society, Health and Development, most commonly reported that they intended to leave full-time education after taking a course at

university. In contrast, those planning to pursue a Diploma in Construction and the Built Environment most commonly reported that they would leave education at the end of Year 11.

What Diploma levels will young people be taking?

At the time of the learner survey, just under half of Year 9 learners, and a quarter of Year 11 learners were unsure of the level of Diploma they would be taking (as shown in Table 6.4). However, their responses indicated that in Year 9, learners were most likely to be taking a Level 2 Diploma¹⁷, with only 11 per cent planning to embark on a Level 1 Diploma. Among Year 11 learners, the same proportions of learners were planning to take Level 2 and 3 Diplomas. As was the case among the Year 9 respondents, 11 per cent of Year 11 learners were planning to take a Diploma at Level 1. These findings reflect the comments from staff that take-up was mostly at Level 2 (and also reflect the fact that Level 2 Diplomas were most commonly offered by consortia, as indicated in Section 2.4).

Table 6.4 Diploma level chosen - Year 9 and Year 11

Level	Year 9	Year 11
	%	%
Foundation (Level 1)	11	11
Higher (Level 2)	38	27
Advanced (Level 3)	N/A	27
Not sure	46	25
No response	5	10
N =	1004	371

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

A filter question: all those who had chosen, or were considering choosing, to take a Diploma in September 2008

A total of 951 Year 9 respondents and 333 Year 11 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER / University of Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Year 9 and Year 11 Survey, 2008

Further analysis of the survey data revealed some differences in the characteristics of learners planning to embark on the different levels of Diploma¹⁸:

- **Prior attainment:** as might be expected, learners with higher attainment were planning to do the higher level Diplomas. Among Year 9 learners, for example, 79 per cent of learners planning to take a Higher Diploma achieved Level 4 or above on average at key stage 2 (a similar proportion to those who planned not to take a Diploma), while only 45 per cent of those planning to take a Foundation Diploma achieved such key stage 2 results. Similarly, among Year 11 learners, a significantly greater proportion of those planning to take an Advanced Diploma achieved Level 5 on average or above at key stage 3 (84 per cent), compared with those planning to take a Diploma at Level 2 (62 per cent).
- **Special educational needs status:** among Year 9 respondents, a significantly greater proportion of those planning to take a Level 1 Diploma were recognised for School Action / School Action Plus (31 per cent), compared with young people intending to undertake a Level 2 Diploma (12 per cent).

¹⁷ Details of the Diploma levels being taken are self-reported by young people.

¹⁸ Details of the Diploma levels being taken are self-reported by young people. A full analysis of the relationship between Diploma levels and the characteristics of young people taking each level will be undertaken in the future through an analysis of data from the Diploma Aggregation Service.

- **Eligibility for free school meals:** among Year 11 learners, a significantly greater proportion of those planning to take a Level 1 Diploma were eligible for free school meals (32 per cent), compared with those planning to embark on a Diploma at Level 2 (ten per cent) or Level 3 (12 per cent).
- **Future plans:** there were notable differences in the future plans of young people planning to take the different levels of Diploma. Overall, a course-based route was the most common post-16 route planned among Year 9 learners taking Diplomas. However a significantly greater proportion of those planning to embark on a Level 1 Diploma intended to follow a work-based route post-16 (32 per cent), compared with those planning to take a Level 2 Diploma, 19 per cent of whom intended to follow a work-based route. Similarly, among Year 11 learners, a significantly greater proportion of respondents planning to take a Level 3 Diploma expected to progress to university (47 per cent), compared with those planning to take a Diploma at Level 2 (33 per cent) or Level 1 (six per cent).

Of those **Year 9 learners** who had chosen, or were considering taking, a Diploma at key stage 4, one fifth thought they would also take one immediately after finishing Year 11, and a further 54 per cent indicated that it was likely they would undertake another Diploma at some point in the future. This suggests that most Year 9 learners were planning to progress to the next Diploma level in the future.

6.4 Influences on learners' choice

Young people's decision whether to take a Diploma or not appeared to have been influenced by a range of factors, including their career plans, the information they received about Diplomas, the views of their parents and teachers, and their own perceptions of Diplomas. The evidence from the interviews with learners suggests that young people who had chosen, or were considering, a Diploma appeared to have different views of Diplomas than learners who had chosen not to take a Diploma, and it seems that these perceptions contributed to their decision.

6.4.1 Reasons for choosing to study a Diploma

Tables 6.5 and 6.6 present the reasons given by the young people surveyed for choosing to take, or considering taking, a Diploma from September 2008. These show that, for both Year 9 and Year 11 learners, the most common reasons given were that the subject area of the Diploma they were planning to take was related to their chosen career, and that they thought the Diploma would help them get a job in the future. Notable proportions of young people also felt that the Diploma would **help them get into university** in the future. The opportunity to study a **different subject area**, and to experience a **different way of learning**, were also factors that attracted young people to the Diploma, particularly Year 9 learners. Only a minority of young people reported that they had chosen the Diploma because they were told to by their school, or because they did not know what else to do. While most of these young people gave other reasons for choosing to take a Diploma, for a small number, being told by their school, or not knowing what else to do appeared to be their main motivation for pursuing a Diploma.

Table 6.5 Reasons for choosing to study a Diploma - Year 9

Reasons	%
I thought it might help me get a job in the future	60
The subject area is in a career I am interested in	59
I wanted to gain work experience	41
I thought it might help me get into university / higher education in the future	41
I thought it might help me get into college in the future	35
I wanted to try a different way of learning	29
I wanted to study a different subject area	28
I wanted to study out of school	27
My parents encouraged me	21
I like the teacher(s) who will be teaching it	6
I was told to by my school	5
I didn't know what else to do	4
My friends chose to study for a Diploma	4
Other	9
No response to this question	5

N = 1004

More than one answer could be put forward so percentages do not sum to 100

A filter question: all those who had chosen, or were considering choosing, to take a Diploma in September 2008

A total of 951 respondents gave at least one response to this question.

Source: NFER / University of Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Year 9 Survey, 2008

Table 6.6 Reasons for choosing to study a Diploma - Year 11

Reasons	%
The subject area is in a career I am interested in	67
I thought it might help me get a job in the future	49
I thought it might help me get into university / higher education in the future	35
I wanted to study a different subject area	23
My parents encouraged me	21
I wanted to gain work experience	19
I wanted to try a different way of learning	13
Teachers at my school encouraged me	12
I thought it might help me get an apprenticeship in the future	11
I like the teacher(s) who will be teaching it	5
I didn't know what else to do	4
My friends chose to study for a Diploma	4
Other	6
No response to this question	8

N = 371

More than one answer could be put forward so percentages do not sum to 100

A filter question: all those who had chosen, or were considering choosing, to take a Diploma in September 2008

A total of 342 respondents gave at least one response to this question.

Source: NFER / University of Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Year 11 Survey, 2008

The case-study visits to 15 consortia, and particularly the interviews with young people, provided further insight into the reasons why young people chose to take a Diploma. The following discussion focuses primarily on the comments from learners, with supporting evidence from the surveys. However, it is worth noting that the views of school and college staff with on the reasons why young people chose to take a Diploma mirrored those of the young people.

Interest in subject area

As was the case in the surveys, the most common reason given by young people interviewed for choosing a Diploma was that they were interested in the subject area and, in most cases, this linked with their intended career. However, it is worth noting that less than half of the young people who responded to the survey indicated that Diplomas would be more interesting than their other qualifications (49 per cent of Year 9 learners and 46 per cent of Year 11 learners), perhaps reflecting their uncertainty at the time of the survey about the exact content of their Diploma course.

Learners **valued the breadth** of Diplomas, and indicated that they had chosen to take a Diploma because it covered a range of different subjects that interested them. One Year 9 learner, for example, explained that she had been unable, within the constraints of her key stage 4 options system, to choose two arts subjects, but that the Diploma enabled her to do this: *'I'm really interested in art, drama, photography, media....with the Diploma I can do all these things...it gives you a lot of choices, rather than just one thing.'*

Employment opportunities

Around three-quarters of the young people surveyed (77 per cent of Year 9 respondents and 75 per cent of Year 11 respondents) felt that a Diploma would help them gain employment in the future, and this view was also widespread among the young people interviewed. Some interviewees felt that taking a Diploma would be beneficial for their specific chosen career (which was often in the same sector as the Diploma they were planning to take). Other young people, who did not have a particular career in mind, felt that the breadth of the Diploma would help *'keep my options open'*, due to the **work-related knowledge, work experience, and 'employability skills'** (such as communication skills, presentation skills and IT skills) that they would gain.

These views corresponded with the findings from the surveys, which revealed that the majority of learners felt that Diplomas would give them useful skills for the future (82 per cent of Year 9 learners and 79 per cent of Year 11 learners), and a well-recognised qualification that they could use in the future (77 per cent of Year 9 learners and 74 per cent of Year 11 learners).

Different style of teaching and learning

The teaching and learning style of Diplomas was also a factor that attracted young people to Diplomas, according to both learners and the staff who were interviewed. The young people perceived the Diploma to be *'different from other options'*, *'interesting'*, and *'really exciting'*, and they valued the opportunity to study out of school, to meet new people, and to experience a variety of teaching approaches. This was summed up by one Year 9 learner who had chosen a Creative and Media Diploma:

It was the thought of doing something new, and I thought it would be a really good chance to see what it would be like and not do normal lessons....the creativity bit sounded really exciting...he [his teacher] talked about doing this magazine thing, and you take pictures, and you can go out on locations and visit [town] as a group...it sounded really exciting.

There was also a general perception among learners that the Diploma would be more practical and *'hands-on'* than their other courses, which appealed to them. The following comment from a Year 9 learner illustrates this:

I wanted a hands-on kind of experience...in school it's all about pen and paper, but over where I'm going to do the construction stuff, it will be like a different experience...you get a feel of what you'll do in the future.

However, it is worth noting that some staff were concerned that Diplomas were less practical than learners were anticipating.

The nature of assessment of Diplomas was also mentioned as an influential factor by some young people. These learners were attracted by the fact that the Diploma would involve more ongoing assessment, and course-work, rather than one final exam. This was summed up by one Year 9 learner, who planned to take a Diploma *'because they say that you take exams throughout your course, and I was interested in that because I think doing it like that would be much easier than doing the one exam at the end of two years'*.

New and different qualification

Although some learners were nervous about taking a newly introduced qualification, others reported that this was one of the factors that encouraged them to take a Diploma, as the following comment from a Year 9 learner indicates: *'I'd like to be able to say that I was one of the first students to ever take a Diploma...I thought that would be cool.'* In addition some felt that this might set them apart from other learners, such as a Year 11 learner who said: *'because it's different, people will be interested in what it is, take notice more...people like employers.'*

Number of points assigned to Diplomas

A small number of young people, particularly Year 9 learners, were attracted by the number of points assigned to Diplomas, and specifically, the number of GCSEs that the Diploma was equivalent to, as they felt that this would help them progress to employment and university in the future. Young people commented that, *'because it's worth more qualifications'*, the Diploma would give them the *'upper hand'* over other learners when applying for jobs or to university. One Year 9 learner, for example, explained that *'everyone else will probably get two or three GCSEs, but I'll have the same as seven, so I will get a good job.'*

Parents' views

The views of their parents were also taken into consideration by young people. As indicated in Chapter 5, the majority of young people indicated that they had talked to their parents about taking a Diploma and, on the whole, those learners who had chosen to take a Diploma reported that their **parents had been supportive** of their decision. However, a minority said that their parents had initially been unsure about the Diploma because *'it's not so academic'*, because they felt that *'it's better to stay in the sixth form and do A levels'* or because they thought *'it would be better to have a bigger mix of subjects at GCSE'*.

While the majority of the young people who planned to take a Diploma from September 2008 were positive about Diplomas, a minority of those interviewed raised concerns about taking a Diploma, or highlighted some potential disadvantages (which, to some extent, reflected the factors that contributed to young people choosing not to take a Diploma, outlined in the following section). These included:

- **Disappointment that taking a Diploma had limited the number of other options they could make:** given the amount of guided learning hours required of a Diploma, learners were limited in the number of additional options they were able to choose.

- **Concerns about the workload involved in taking a Diploma:** one Year 9 learner, for example, commented that *'it will be a big course because it takes up a lot of options...it will be hard work for the next two years.'* Other interviewees expressed concern about the impact that this might have on their other courses: *'Because we have to do a lot of things in the Diploma, it might be hard to keep up with the other GCSEs.'* However, nearly all of these young people stated that they welcomed the challenge of taking the Diploma, and were willing to work hard to achieve their Diploma qualification. This view was summed up by the comment of one Year 9 learner, who explained that, *'it might be a bit hard...you'll have to put a lot more effort in, but it will be worth it.'*
- **Uncertainty about taking a qualification that is new within the education system and to employers:** learners planning to take a Diploma had two main concerns about taking this new qualification. The first was that the course might not be what they expected, or that teachers *'will be testing out lots of new things'*, while the second, held by a small number of learners, was that the qualification *'won't be recognised in the working world or by universities'*.

6.4.2 Reasons for choosing not to take a Diploma

Young people's reasons for choosing not to take a Diploma were explored through the learner surveys and case-study visits. The reasons given by young people reflect the views of school and college staff, and also overlap with their views on the reasons that take-up of Diplomas was lower than anticipated.

Tables 6.7 and 6.8 present the responses from Year 9 and Year 11 learners who responded to the survey, and show that many of the factors that attracted some young people to take a Diploma contributed to other young people choosing *not* to take a Diploma. For example, while one of the main reasons that young people chose to take a Diploma was because they were interested in the subject area, a **lack of interest in the available Diploma subject areas** was one of the key reasons why learners chose *not* to take a Diploma. A **preference for taking other qualifications** also influenced just under half of both Year 9 and Year 11 learners not to take a Diploma. Young people with higher prior attainment were significantly more likely than learners overall to give this as a reason for choosing not to take a Diploma. Lack of information about Diplomas appears to have been a key contributing factor in young people choosing not to take a Diploma, as just under half of learners indicated that they **did not know enough about Diplomas**.

While the views of teachers, parents and friends influenced young people who chose a Diploma, they were also influential for some learners who had elected *not* to take a Diploma, as notable minorities of survey respondents indicated that they had chosen not to take a Diploma because their **parents, teachers or friends had advised them not to**. While most young people gave other reasons for choosing not to take a Diploma, for a small number, the advice of parents, teachers or friends seemed to be the main factor which influenced their decision.

Table 6.7 Reasons for choosing not to take a Diploma - Year 9

Reasons	%
I was not interested in the subject area(s) offered	51
I preferred to take only GCSEs / other qualifications	48
I did not know enough about Diplomas	45
I did not think a Diploma would help me with my future	32
My parents/carers did not think I should	15
Diplomas were not available to me	11
I did not want to study out of school	11
I did not want to travel somewhere else	10
I do not know the teacher(s) teaching the Diploma	7
Teachers at my school did not think I should	6
It is a new qualification	6
My friends are not taking a Diploma	5
My friends did not think I should	2
I did not like the teacher(s) teaching the Diploma	2
Other ¹⁹	17
No response to this question	4
N = 3159	

*More than one answer could be put forward so percentages do not sum to 100
A filter question: all those who had decided not to take a Diploma in September 2008
A total of 3035 respondents gave at least one response to this question.
Source: NFER / University of Exeter Evaluation of Diplomas: Year 9 Survey, 2008*

Table 6.8 Reasons for choosing not to take a Diploma - Year 11

Reasons	%
I preferred to take only A levels / other qualifications	48
I did not know enough about Diplomas	42
I was not interested in the subject area(s) offered	28
I did not think a Diploma would help me with my future	23
Diplomas were not available to me	14
I don't think I will achieve the grades needed to do a Diploma	13
I did not want to travel somewhere else	11
My parents/carers did not think I should	9
I wanted to start an apprenticeship	8
I wanted to get a job	7
Teachers at my school did not think I should	6
I do not know the teacher(s) teaching the Diploma	6
I cannot afford it	4
It is a new qualification	4
My friends are not taking a Diploma	4
My friends did not think I should	3
I did not like the teacher(s) teaching the Diploma	2
Other	13
No response to this question	3
N = 1091	

*More than one answer could be put forward so percentages do not sum to 100
A filter question: all those who had decided not to take a Diploma in September 2008
A total of 1053 respondents gave at least one response to this question.*

¹⁹ Survey respondents were not asked to provide details of other reasons.

Further analysis explored whether there were any differences in the responses of young people who reported that they had thought about taking a Diploma, but decided not to, compared with those who did not consider taking a Diploma at all. Among Year 9 respondents, this revealed that those who did not consider taking a Diploma were significantly more likely than those who had thought about it to say that they had not taken a Diploma because they were not available to them²⁰, they were not interested in the subject area, and because they did not know enough about them.

Similarly, among Year 11 learners, those who had not considered taking a Diploma at all were significantly more likely than learners who had thought about it to report that they did not know enough about them. Young people who had thought about taking a Diploma were significantly more likely than other learners to indicate that they had not taken a Diploma because teachers advised them not to, because they did not want to travel somewhere else, or because they did not know the teacher teaching the Diploma, and because the Diploma is a new qualification.

The findings from the case-study visits provided further insight into some of the issues raised by the surveys about why learners chose not to take a Diploma.

Lack of interest in subject area

Among those young people who commented that they were not interested in the Diploma subject areas available to them, many indicated that they would have considered a Diploma (and would consider taking one in the future) if a wider range of subject areas was available. This suggests that take-up of the Diploma could increase in future years as the number of lines of learning available increases, and consortia extend their Diploma offer to young people.

Narrowing of choices

As a consequence of the Diploma taking ‘*too much space on my option blocks*’ and the consequent view that it ‘*restricted other choices*’ at key stage 4 or post-16, young people felt that taking a Diploma ‘*would be limiting my options*’ or ‘*cut out career options*’. Interviewees indicated that they preferred to take other qualifications, such as GCSEs or A levels, as they felt that these gave them a broader education, and enabled them to keep their future options open. This was a particular concern among young people who had not yet decided on their career path, as they did not want to become too specialised on one subject area. This was summed up by one Year 9 girl, who explained:

The Diploma is so big, it pushes you onto one subject. If you couldn't do that job, [but] you had other subjects, you've got the GCSE to do another job. I was going to do a Diploma, but then I wanted to do other lessons, so I took the GCSE.

Some young people commented that they would have considered taking a Diploma if it did not take up so many options, and it may be that if they were more aware of the additional and specialist learning element of Diplomas, they might be encouraged to take one in the future.

²⁰ It is worth noting that all of the learners surveyed attended schools that were members of Gateway 1 consortia.

Reluctance to take a newly introduced qualification

Another factor which appeared to have influenced young people's decision not to choose a Diploma was the fact that it was a new qualification (although only six per cent of Year 9 learners, and four per cent of Year 11 learners indicated this in the survey). Young people felt that they did not fully understand how the Diplomas would be delivered because they could not talk to teachers or young people with prior experience of Diplomas and consequently *'I don't know how it works...you can't talk to anyone who's done it'*. Young people also had some concerns that *'since it's a new subject, the teachers wouldn't know what they were doing,'* or that the Diplomas would be discontinued if there was a change of government, meaning that the Diploma *'would be a useless qualification then'*. However, learners noted that they might consider a Diploma in the future, once it becomes more established.

Concern that Diplomas will not be accepted by universities

Concerns about progression to university among learners and their parents, and the perceived late announcement by UCAS of the tariff points for the Advanced Diploma were felt by staff to be one of the main causes of low take-up at Level 3. This view corresponds with the comments from many learners, particularly those in Year 11, who were concerned that Diplomas *'aren't very useful because universities aren't going to take them'*. Young people preferred to take other, more traditional courses that they knew would be accepted by HEIs as illustrated by a Year 11 learner who said: *'I did consider the Diploma, but I was advised that HEIs value A levels rather than a Diploma. I think that A levels count for more.'*

Lack of knowledge of Diplomas

Reflecting the survey findings, many interviewees reported that they had chosen not to take a Diploma because they did not know enough about them, and their comments revealed that many had a very limited (and sometimes inaccurate) understanding of what Diplomas would involve. Furthermore, a minority reported that they had *'never been told'* anything about Diplomas. This may be due, in part, to the Diploma offer available to learners, particularly at key stage 4, and the fact that, in some schools, Diplomas were not available to all young people.

Concerns about the new style of teaching

Some young people were apprehensive about the different style of teaching and learning involved with Diplomas. In particular, they were concerned about studying out of school, spending a large proportion of time (often whole days) on one subject area, and what they perceived to be the more practical nature of the Diploma. In addition they were concerned about the structure of the Diploma, which meant that *'failing one exam means you fail the whole Diploma'*.

Although it was not cited by many learners as a reason for not choosing a Diploma, there was a general perception among those who had chosen not to take a Diploma that the qualification would involve more work and would be more challenging than their other courses. One Year 9 learner, for example, said *'I believe it's harder to get qualifications from a Diploma'*. A small number of learners had preconceptions of the term 'Diploma', and felt that it was associated with higher level work, as the following comments from two Year 9 learners illustrate: *'The word 'Diploma' makes it sound like it's going to be too hard'; 'The name, it seems academic and posh...it seems really difficult'*.

Around half of the non-Diploma learners interviewed expressed views on the types of learners that they felt were best suited to undertaking Diplomas. Some young people, for example, perceived Diplomas to be '*more for people who are less academic*', or '*for the less able*'. Learners who had not opted to take a Diploma also felt that, because Diplomas are focused on a particular sector, they are more appropriate for those young people who '*know what career they want to do*'. One Year 11 learner, for example, stated that Diplomas are '*ideal for people who want to be a builder or something*'. Although these views were not reported by young people as a reason for them choosing not to take a Diploma, it is likely that they influenced their decision.

6.5 Summary and conclusion

In Phase 1, take-up of the Diploma was lower than was originally anticipated, particularly at Levels 1 and 3. Take-up of the Diplomas was more common among learners with lower prior attainment, but with a positive attitude to school and learning, and among young people who were planning to progress to a work-based route post-16. There was also evidence of a positive relationship between whether learners were planning to take Diplomas and the information they received about Diplomas. While it may be that those who had chosen a Diploma subsequently received further information about the qualification, lack of knowledge about Diplomas clearly played a role in some young people's decision not to take a Diploma.

Learners seemed to be particularly attracted to Diplomas because they were interested in the subject area, they thought it would help them get a job, or into university in the future, and because they wanted to experience a different style of teaching and learning. On the other hand, the main reasons given by young people who had chosen *not* to take a Diploma were that they were not interested in the subject areas available, they preferred to take other qualifications, they were concerned about narrowing their choices, and they felt that they did not have sufficient information about Diplomas. These findings suggest that take-up of Diplomas may improve in the future. For example, it may be that, as the number of lines of learning increase, more young people will be motivated to take a Diploma. Take-up may also improve as the Diploma becomes more established, and Diploma learners progress to employment and higher education

However, it was also evident that learners who did not take Diplomas said that this was because they did not know enough about them. While it may be the case that learners who are less interested in taking these qualifications are less likely to retain information provided to them about Diplomas, consortia may wish to review their approaches to promoting the Diplomas to a wide range of learners to ensure that those who choose not to undertake one are making an informed choice. When designing their IAG strategies and their curriculum offer, there may be value in consortia considering the reasons given by young people for choosing to take a Diploma or not, the concerns among young people about Diplomas, and the areas where they said they required further information. Promotional materials could include, for example, more information about ASL elements of Diplomas, the skills and experience that learners could develop, and the future opportunities offered by Diplomas.

7. Training and Support

Key findings and messages for policy and practice

- Consortia staff had access to a range of formal and informal training and support, at national, regional and local levels. This was reported to have varied in terms of quality and usefulness (Section 7.2).
- Networking and the sharing of best practice between institutions and consortia was particularly valued, and while national events and training offered an arena for this, consortia staff were keen that there are more specific opportunities available in the future. (Section 7.2)
- Training may benefit from more consultation with practitioners in order to ensure that the content meets their needs, depending on the stage of development they are at in planning for delivery of the Diplomas. The communication of this content to potential participants should clearly outline the focus of the training and the nature of the most appropriate attendees. (Sections 7.2 and 7.3)
- Consortia very much valued the opportunity to meet regularly at both strategic and practitioner level. Resources including time, funding and personnel are required in order for this to happen. (Section 7.2.2)
- Some staff across consortia would welcome more information and support in relation to partnership working and leadership, functional skills delivery, assessment, additional and specialist learning qualification combinations, and practical delivery approaches. Examples of teaching approaches, lesson plans and resources should be disseminated in the future. (Section 7.4)
- To some extent, interviewees have revealed that the changing context of 14-19 provision means that they are not and cannot be entirely sure what their support needs will be in the future. National bodies, therefore, should continue to monitor provision and support needs throughout Diploma delivery. (Section 7.4)

The chapter draws on the findings from interviews across 15 case-study consortia. This section seeks to demonstrate the general experience of consortia in relation to the types and focus of training and support received, and to outline some of the key themes and issues reported by interviewees, in order to inform future provision.

Specifically, this chapter explores:

- the **range** of training and support offered and received across consortia and who it was provided by
- views on the **type** of training and support received (for example, the approach taken or method of training or support) and what was considered most useful
- views on the **focus** of the training and support received
- **further needs** in relation to training and support.

It is important to note that at the time of the interviews (April to July 2008), consortia were still taking part in training and were continuing to receive support.

7.1 The range of training and support offered

Consortia staff reported that they had access to a range of both formal and informal training and support at national, regional and local levels. Formal training programmes available included (but were not limited to): support for effective leadership of the Diplomas; a three day course for practitioners; functional skills training; and assessment training. Consortia also had access to a range of other support mechanisms, which included (but were not limited to): hard copy literature, online content and communities / networks, regional advisors and consultants, and structured learning visits.

Organisations involved in providing this training and support to case-study consortia included:

- Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT)
- Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)
- National Assessment Agency (NAA)
- Quality Improvement Agency (QIA)
- The National Strategies²¹
- Awarding bodies, such as Edexcel
- National College for Schools Leadership (NCSL)
- Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL)
- Local-level consortia and networks.

Interviewees were asked about the training and support that they had received in reality. Their views are reported throughout this chapter in relation to the *type* of training and support received and its *focus*.

7.2 Views on the type of training and support received

Interviewees identified **common principles of beneficial training and support**. In summary, these principles included that nationally available training and support should be:

- locally relevant, with a focus on the specific needs of a consortium
- led by well-informed experts who are able to answer questions
- aimed at the most appropriate audience in terms of role, existing knowledge and skills
- of a consistently high quality, for example adhering to the principles above and perhaps endorsed or filtered by a DCSF 'kite mark'
- streamlined to avoid repetition and overlap, and ideally 'marketed' to consortia through a single source.

²¹ The National Strategies are professional development programmes for teachers, practitioners and managers across the phases of learning. They are a vehicle for improving the quality of learning and teaching in schools and early years settings and raising standards of attainment and are delivered by Capita Strategic Children's Services on behalf of the DCSF.

It appeared that for most Gateway 1 consortia, certain *types* of training and support were considered better able to fulfil these principles. The different types of training and support received are discussed in detail in this section, and have been categorised as follows:

- formal and nationally available training courses
- networking within a consortium
- networking outside of the consortium
- support from consultants, experts and professional guest speakers.

It is worth noting that approaches to continuing professional development (CPD) differed across consortia, and often comprised one or more of the types of training discussed below.

7.2.1 Formal and nationally available training courses

Interviewees across all consortia widely reported that they had access to some formal Diploma training, most often the national three-day practitioner training. Views on formal training courses were mixed but, overall, interviewees perceived that training had varied in quality and usefulness and the main issues were as follows:

- **Ineffective communication about the content and focus** of individual CPD events had occurred in some instances. A consequence of this was that interviewees attended courses expecting to find out more about the detail of delivery but found the content focused on the principles of 14-19 policy which was said by one interviewee to be '*preaching to the converted*'. This illustrates the need for the content and target audience of any CPD session to be clearly communicated.
- The **content** of the course had not always met the needs of staff. It was said in some cases to have been '*not...pitched at the right level*' and '*too generic*'. Many interviewees would have preferred CPD to be more '*bespoke*' and tailored to their individual consortium's context. Overall, it appears that future training would benefit from further consultation to identify the appropriate content that would be of most value to staff delivering Diplomas.
- The **timing of the course** had been an issue for some interviewees. As consortia and staff were at different stages of planning, for some, the courses were too early in their preparations for Diploma delivery while, for others, training came too late. Moreover, staff had been unable to attend relevant courses either because the relevant people had yet to be identified when the course was run or because of lack of flexibility in the timing of the course so that staff could accommodate it.
- Consortia staff **did not have an overall plan for formal CPD** from which they could strategically identify what they would require. Rather they had to be reactive to CPD opportunities as they became available. Consequently some interviewees felt that they did not have an overview of CPD that would be provided in order to identify any gaps that they needed to respond to locally. Publication of an overall CPD strategy would ameliorate this issue in future.

The three-day practitioner training course was the most widely accessed course and therefore the most commented upon. The employer-led element was well received and considered to have been of most use; it was said to be '*inspiring*' and was praised for being '*targeted to the context of the consortia*'. Other interviewees felt that the course had provided

some useful context about Diplomas and had helped to raise issues. As one line of learning lead said, *'at least we now knew what questions we now needed to address'*.

However, of around 40 interviewees who commented specifically on the three-day practitioner training, the majority were very negative, with descriptions ranging from *'diabolical'*, to *'woeful'*. The general consensus was that the course could have explored general issues in more detail and focus more on the details related to their own consortium. Some interviewees commented that they were aware that the training and support offered to Gateway 1 consortia was being reviewed and was beginning to improve.

7.2.2 Networking within a consortium

A substantial number of interviewees across all 15 case-study consortia spoke positively about support provided by colleagues via networking meetings at the consortium level. Networking at Diploma strategy group meetings was considered useful, as was networking between curriculum managers and practitioners at institution level via SMT and staff meetings (see Chapter 2 for more details on consortia management structures). The regularity of meetings had been an important aspect for many interviewees, the benefits of which included the opportunity to discuss issues and seek support, to cascade information to consortia/institution staff, to contribute to planning through the discussion of detail and to share resources and ideas. Meetings were also felt by many to have been an important element of CPD.

Interviewees emphasised that the benefit of support hosted at a local level, as distinct from that provided externally and aimed at a large number of delegates, was the *'ability to control the agenda'* and the locality and timing of meetings.

7.2.3 Networking outside of the consortium

Opportunities to share best practice and discuss common issues with other consortia were mentioned specifically by 14 interviewees across eight consortia. Visits to other consortia were said to have been extremely useful. As most of these visits were said to have been organised by a government or non-governmental organisation, it may be that such organisations could have a useful role in identifying consortia who share common characteristics and facilitating contact between them. Many of the visits were made to pathfinder consortia, although one consortium lead had been abroad to visit a specialist school. Interviewees identified learning visits as particularly useful in terms of developing an overall understanding of what collaboration looks like, and in order to observe how some of the finer detail of implementation such as timetabling, curriculum structure, recruitment and IAG had been planned across partners. A comment made by one senior manager in a school illustrates the value of sharing knowledge and experience and highlights the need for a broker to help identify other, similar, consortia:

I have been trying desperately to find other post-16 Level 2 providers...the way forward is to link up with other colleagues delivering the same things because you're going to get the same problems occurring and two or three heads together you'll come up with a solution.

In addition to visits and, as noted previously, training and events were reported as a useful networking opportunity, particularly in terms of sharing information and making links with consortia members in similar roles or contexts. Another example of networking outside of the consortium was noted by a senior manager in a school, who had been a part of the DCSF 'Twinning project', whereby a 'twin' or partner consortium had acted as a hotline support service, commented that, *'It's been fantastic! ...it's great you can just pick up the phone and get the correct information'*.

7.2.4 Support from consultants, experts and guest speakers

Interviewees across 14 consortia said that they had received one-to-one support from experts and consultants. Nationally-provided experts and consultants were said to include SSAT, NCSL / CEL, the QCA and AQA and other awarding bodies. Support was available through presentations or coaches; with the former method being accessible to all members of the consortium, whereas the latter was most likely to have been accessed by consortium leads. Interviewees used this source of support to gain better understanding of Diploma content, assessment and delivery methods. They worked one-to-one with the experts/consultants to improve leadership and partnership working within the consortium (for example, developing QA procedures, set up and lead committees and development groups, and forward plan) and to plan content and delivery (for example, developing resources, write schemes of work and timetable the Diplomas).

Interviewees also mentioned that they had accessed the support of consultants and experts which were not centrally provided such as ICT consultants and voluntary sector speakers, and employment engagement experts such as EBPOs and Trident. Overall, interviewees were positive about this form of support and were more likely to say that it had been useful, well-informed, relevant, and focused in comparison to national training. It may be that, with this type of support, consortia felt better able to control the agenda and discuss the issues with most relevance to their context.

7.3 Views on the focus of training and support

The training and support mentioned by Gateway 1 consortia covered a range of different topic areas, which can be categorised under the following headings:

- Partnership working and leadership
- Functional skills
- Assessment.

The following sections summarise the comments received in relation to these different foci of training and support.

7.3.1 Partnership working and leadership training

Training and support that focused on partnership and leadership was mentioned by interviewees across five consortia and was received through both:

- **informal approaches** such as consortium level networking and meetings
- **formal approaches** including the Leadership and Management Programme (mentioned by two interviewees), literature, and coaching (both in person and online).

The experience of formal training related to partnership and leadership was varied. While the two interviewees who specifically mentioned the leadership and management programme had been '*impressed*' with the way it had been tailored to consortia needs, other courses had been less successful and, for example, '*didn't provide all the answers*'. Coaching from various organisations had been more popular, as it targeted specific needs.

Interviewees across four consortia said that they had not received any formal training in relation to their leadership role or partnership working. Of these, two interviewees inferred that they would not expect to receive any training of this kind stating, for example, that *'It was assumed that I would have the necessary skills already to take on a management role'* or *'I've had no specific support to lead Society, Health and Development, but it's a management skill, it is a new initiative like any other'*.

7.3.2 Functional skills training

Training focusing on functional skills was mentioned by interviewees across 11 consortia. Formal training was mostly accessed at the national level and opinion was divided about the extent to which this training had been of use. As discussed previously, a general lack of confidence relating to functional skills delivery was voiced at the time of the interviews, suggesting that training and support received to date had not met the needs of teaching staff. Some interviewees commented that trainers could not give answers to their questions, while others were concerned that the course *'never got down to basics'*. Of more use for many was involvement in the functional skills pilot (institutions across ten consortia had been involved). One Diploma coordinator in a school commented, *'I don't know how schools can offer the Diploma without being a Functional Skills pilot. It's been invaluable preparation'*. Feedback from the pilot was considered crucial, but did not appear to have been disseminated to all consortia (or consortia members) at the time of the interviews.

7.3.3 Assessment training

Interviewees across 13 of the case-study consortia had accessed training on assessment; either specific examiner training or more generic training around assessment. Views on this training were mixed, although awarding body training courses that were delivered within individual institutions were seen to be particularly useful, as they were more tailored to the needs of that institution. In contrast, other training on assessment was reported to be *'basic'* and *'left delegates confused'*, highlighting the need for greater consistency in the training and support provided in relation to assessment.

7.4 Further support needs

This section explores further training and support needs as reported at the time of case-study visits. Some of the findings may be of particular use when considering provision of future training for future consortia.

It examines generic comments received about training and support on the whole, but first discusses existing needs in relation to the *focus* of training and support on the following topics:

- Partnership working and leadership
- Diploma content
- Assessment
- Delivery methods
- Raising awareness of Diplomas
- Employer engagement.

7.4.1 Partnership working and leadership

As discussed above, it seemed that there was often an assumption at a consortium level that individuals in leadership roles, such as line of learning leads, did not need specific training to support them in their leadership role. It seemed that some, although not all, felt that such training would be useful.

The main support need in relation to partnership working was largely focused around the development of common ICT solutions which work across institution boundaries. As discussed in Chapter 4, seven case-study consortia did not yet have access to a common VLE. The existence of such a resource was considered likely to facilitate shared delivery of Diplomas.

7.4.2 Diploma content

The two main areas of the Diploma content where the interviews with staff indicated that they would like more support were:

- **Functional skills:** as some interviewees were *'not really clear on what the functional skills look like'*.
- **Additional and specialist learning:** in particular what subjects could be taught for this aspect of the Diploma and improvements in the accessibility of information relating to this.

7.4.3 Assessment

Assessment was one of the main areas of concern for interviewees at the time of the case-study visits, with staff across 14 of the 15 consortia expressing that they were still unclear about assessment. While some acknowledged that things were *'still evolving'*, some interviewees said that they would like more support from the awarding bodies. In particular, they observed that key information, such as GCSE equivalencies and specifications for the subjects, should have been clarified earlier.

It should be noted that many interviewees were due to attend assessment training in the near future. Most were confident that planning for assessment would take place over the summer; their current priority was developing curriculum plans and finalising delivery models. However, interviewees gave feedback about their additional support needs relating to assessment that they hoped would be addressed over the summer:

- **Understanding how to standardise assessment across the partnership:** staff at an institution-level reported that they were still unclear of how to standardise assessment across partners, and felt they lacked support to assist them with this process. One curriculum manager said, for example, *'the concern seems to be that teachers are not that familiar with "the strategic oversight" of assessment that is part of the Diploma'*. As if to illustrate this, a senior manager in another consortium said, *'I hadn't considered the requirement to standardise... I only just found this out. This complicates matters'*. However, the majority of interviewees commenting on this concern were aware of the need for standardisation, they were just concerned that it was not being addressed at a consortium level or that the support was not in place to understand how it will be done.

- **Assessing the new and different elements of the Diploma:** some deliverers were concerned about a lack of clarity around how the different aspects of the Diploma, such as work experience, musical performances or films would be assessed. There was some concern that assessment methods would lack creativity and implied that they would like more dialogue with the awarding bodies around this issue.
- **The need for exemplar material:** interviewees expressed a need to view, for example, marking systems for modules and examples of what moderation would look like externally. It was felt that this would and should be more possible as the course is delivered in different consortia.

The lack of clarity about assessment was not found to differ across the lines of learning, across institutions, or across consortia offering different numbers of lines of learning.

7.4.4 Delivery methods

Interviewees across case-study consortia raised the need for further support in relation to the following:

- **Teaching methods:** college staff were particularly concerned about their own ability and that of their colleagues to deliver to 14-16 year olds, with the main concern being their ability to cope with behaviour issues. Other comments, which were not unique to college staff, centred around the need for support to focus on innovative approaches to teaching a qualification that is '*supposed to be exciting and different*'.
- **Materials, lesson plans and resources:** interviewees suggested that they might feel more supported if provided with more examples of lesson plans or teaching resources, which they felt might make them '*more confident*'. These could be provided centrally or through sharing of information within a consortium or across consortia.
- **Developing skills and knowledge in relation to Diploma content:** as the Diploma is a new qualification, some interviewees felt they would need support to fully understand and deliver the content.

It should be noted that the Training and Development Agency (TDA) have developed their Initial Teacher Training (ITT) programmes to ensure that all trainee teachers starting a secondary ITT course from September 2008 will receive training to enable them to deliver at least a Level 1 Diploma and to embed functional skills. However, it seems that existing teachers would benefit from further support in relation to Diploma delivery.

7.5 Summary and conclusion

Interviewees have had access to a wide range of training and support, but it was reported to have varied in terms of quality and usefulness, with some issues remaining about how adequate and fit for purpose the methods and approaches used had been. Formal training courses had been criticised for being insufficiently targeted, lacking practical detail and being too generic. However, the opportunity to network with colleagues at such events, or at other times, had been perceived as useful to explore existing good practice. Regular meetings within a consortium were also valued. One-to-one coaching and advice was welcomed, in order that consortia staff, as professionals, could determine solutions to their own planning and implementation issues. It would seem, overall, that bespoke means and methods of training and support were favoured.

8. Conclusions and Implications

This chapter summarises the key findings to date from the national evaluation of Diplomas, and discusses the key implications emerging for policy-makers, for Gateway 1 consortia and for future consortia delivering Diplomas.

While planning and preparation for Diploma delivery were still in progress at the time of the case-study visits (April to July 2008), Gateway 1 consortia generally felt that they would be ready for implementation in September 2008, and there was evidence of a good level of commitment and enthusiasm among consortia to ensuring the successful delivery of Diplomas. As would be expected with the introduction of any new qualification, there were some early implementation issues, such as promotional materials not reaching institutions as early as they would have liked, challenges with partnership working, and gaps in training. However, it is likely that if there is successful dissemination of the lessons learned by Gateway 1 consortia to policy-makers, and to future consortia, such challenges will be resolved over time. Nonetheless, there may be new challenges and issues for consortia to overcome as the implementation of Diplomas develops, and the number of learners taking the qualification increases.

The chapter presents the key issues and implications emerging from the report relating to:

- Expected take-up of the Diploma
- IAG
- Diploma delivery
- Teaching and learning
- Employer engagement.

8.1 Expected take-up of the Diploma

In September 2008, approximately 12,000 learners across England commenced these new qualifications. Overall, this number was lower than originally anticipated by consortia, and take-up was particularly lower than expected at Levels 1 and 3. However, in general, consortia were not overly concerned about the lower than anticipated take-up, as some felt that this made implementation of the Diplomas more manageable and meant they could ensure *'quality, rather than quantity'*. Indeed, some Gateway 1 consortia advised future consortia to *'start small'*.

Year 9 and Year 11 learners who had chosen, or were considering taking, a Diploma tended to have lower prior attainment than average but a positive attitude to school and learning, and tended to be more likely to be planning to progress to a work-based route post-16. In Year 9, they were also more likely to be boys. Moreover, they were significantly more likely to report that they had been given certain information about Diplomas (for example, information on the equivalence of Diplomas compared with other qualifications, or information on how Diplomas are assessed).

The main reasons why learners had decided to study for a Diploma related to: an interest in the subject area; a perception that it would help them to gain a job or university place; or an interest in experiencing a different style of teaching and learning. Their reasons for not wanting to study for a Diploma related to: a lack of interest in the subject areas covered by the first five lines of learning; a preference to take other qualifications due, in part, to the fact that the Diploma was a new 'untried' qualification; concerns that it would narrow their future curriculum and career choices; and a lack of sufficient information and understanding about Diplomas.

The following **implications** emerge from these findings:

- as the number of lines of learning increases, more young people are likely to be interested in the subject areas and be motivated to take a Diploma
- over time, as Diplomas become more established, concerns about taking a new unproven qualification are also likely diminish, which may have a positive impact on take-up
- consortia should seek to address the concerns expressed by young people about Diplomas, for example about whether taking a Diploma would limit their future curriculum and career options. This concern about narrowed choices raises a question about the qualification itself and whether it focuses young people too much at an early age on a particular subject area, and which might therefore remain a barrier to take-up (the debate about breadth and depth is discussed further below)
- the lack of information and understanding about Diplomas among a notable minority of learners emphasises the importance of IAG.

8.2 Information, advice and guidance

Good quality IAG is an important factor in ensuring future take-up and reducing the likelihood of drop-out from Diplomas. There were examples of good practice in relation to IAG, including local promotional events to raise awareness of Diplomas and the use of locally-produced materials such as DVDs and toolkits. While there was little evidence at this stage as to which method(s) is/are most effective in ensuring that young people understand Diplomas, learners reported that written information and promotional events were most helpful. Young people reported that they would have welcomed information from other young people, which consortia may wish to consider in the future when current Diploma learners have enough experience to share.

Levels of IAG across and within consortia varied and did not always appear to be effective in informing learners fully about Diplomas. This was evident because:

- the majority of learners did not recall receiving information about key aspects of the qualification and, in general, learners' knowledge and understanding of Diplomas was limited
- only a minority of learners surveyed found the information they had received about Diplomas helpful
- a lack of information and understanding was one of the main reasons why learners had decided not to choose to study for a Diploma
- many young people who had chosen to take a Diploma were not fully informed about what their Diploma qualification would involve, including the mode of learning (including misconceptions about the extent of practical learning), their location of study, how the Diploma would be assessed, and the possible progression routes after completing a Diploma.

The following issues are likely to have contributed a lack of understanding about Diplomas, which have implications for future take-up and potential drop-out:

- **The timing of dissemination of promotional materials:** although nationally-produced materials were well received, there was a general consensus that they should have been disseminated earlier than September 2007; they would have been welcomed in the previous summer term, in order to enable consortia staff to have time before the new term to familiarise themselves fully with the materials, and gain an understanding of the Diplomas themselves, prior to promoting the new qualification to learners from September. It was also the case that some institutions experienced a delay in receiving information, despite it being disseminated to consortia in September.
- **A lack of publicity:** despite Diplomas not being currently available to all 14-19 year olds nationally, many interviewees felt that more advertising and more general publicity would have raised the profile of Diplomas. Consortia staff highlighted the need for such a campaign to reach not only young people, but also their parents, employers and HEIs. A broader positive national campaign might also have helped to combat some of the negative press, which appeared to have an impact on perceptions amongst learners, parents and staff.
- **Lack of staff awareness and/or impartiality:** reportedly, many staff did not have a good awareness and understanding of Diplomas, and some were apprehensive about guiding young people to embark on this new qualification that they did not understand themselves fully. Moreover, staff in FE colleges sometimes expressed reservations about the motives of the school staff who gave advice to learners choosing post-16 options, suggesting that schools with sixth forms were encouraging learners to stay in school rather than giving them impartial advice about all options (including Diplomas available at a local college). Given the role that school and IAG staff play in informing learners' choices, consortia should ensure that they provide sufficient information about Diplomas to enable staff to give accurate and impartial IAG to young people. More opportunities for training for staff giving information and advice to learners should be provided, with protected time to attend such training. This applies to all relevant staff with a role in advising young people, such as form tutors, not just IAG teachers.
- **Lack of understanding amongst parents:** there was some concern that parents, who play a key role in advising young people, did not fully understand the Diploma. Parents should be fully informed by consortia, in order to address misconceptions they may have about the qualification and to maximise potential take-up. There may also be a role for local authorities in disseminating information directly to parents.
- **Low key campaigns at a local level:** most consortium managers felt their local promotion campaigns had been fairly low key in the lead up to this first year of delivery, which was regarded by some as a pilot.

Overall, there is considerable scope for consortia to improve the extent and nature of the IAG given to learners. Consortia should consider adopting a range of IAG methods, including providing written information about Diplomas, holding promotional events, and giving young people the opportunity for one-to-one discussions about their choices. They may benefit from their IAG strategies addressing the factors which influence learners' choice to take a Diploma or not (as discussed above). They need to ensure that learners are clear about the course content and mode of learning in order to make an informed choice.

8.3 Diploma delivery

Delivery arrangements were not yet finalised at the time of the interviews, although the findings gave an indication of how consortia were planning to deliver Diplomas from September 2008. Delivery models varied considerably, both across and within consortia and even for individual lines of learning.

8.3.1 Partnership delivery

Most consortia were planning models of delivery which involved some form of **partnership working between centres** and, therefore, at least some young people travelling from their home institution for aspects of their Diploma learning. This was regardless of the reported challenges associated with partnership working, which included competition between centres, quality assurance and logistics. There was a general perception that logistical issues would become more challenging as more lines of learning become available and, therefore, more learners take up Diplomas. The following key messages and implications emerged from challenges associated with partnership working:

- Messages about 'what works well' in terms of partnership working, delivery approaches and promotion should be disseminated. Specifically, examples of good practice in relation to shared quality assurance systems across partners, travel-to-learn arrangements, resource sharing, and employer and HEI engagement are likely to be welcomed by consortia.
- Consideration should be given to whether the most effective management structures are in place, roles are clearly defined, and whether the staff involved are fully committed (which were all factors considered to facilitate effective partnership working).
- The use of ICT, such as shared VLEs across consortia, should be maximised to support distance learning; seven of the 15 case-study consortia did not have access to a shared VLE at the time of the interviews.
- Consideration should be given to the advantages of teachers/tutors travelling to teach (which was only planned in a minority of cases), rather than large numbers of learners travelling to learn. However, there might be factors which restrict the possibility of staff travelling to teach, including disparity of pay between college and school staff, and the perceived expense of staff being out of their home institution for substantial amounts of time.
- Adequate funding must be in place to support partnerships with the complex delivery of this new qualification, particularly as new lines of learning become available, which could lead to further logistical and delivery challenges for partnerships.
- 'Cultural' differences between centres working in partnership are likely to be addressed by communication between potential partners, for example, through regular meetings and visits by staff to partner institutions to become familiar with their ways of working, and by allowing time for trust and shared understanding to develop.
- Consortia should consider the benefits of involving training providers and HEIs to a greater extent in partnership delivery, as their involvement was relatively limited, but they might need support and advice in developing such partnerships. Examples of good practice from Gateway 1 consortia should be disseminated to assist with this.

8.3.2 Access to Diploma lines of learning and levels

Learners did not necessarily have access to all lines of learning available in a consortium, or to all levels of the Diploma lines of learning. Although delivery partnerships existed in most consortia, this did not necessarily mean that learners would be able to choose to study any of the Diploma lines of learning delivered in their consortium. It was most common for learners to be able to study only the line(s) of learning being delivered at least in part by their home institution. There were very few examples of learners having the option to study an alternative Diploma that was not being delivered at all in their own institution. This was either because consortia had deliberately wanted to start implementing Diplomas in a manageable way or because logistical issues associated with learners travelling were seen as potentially problematic. Therefore, some consortia would benefit from examples of 'what works well' in terms of partnership working and may need particular support and guidance to help them expand their Diploma offer in the future, and prepare for delivery of all 17 lines of learning.

Moreover, some consortia were not planning to deliver all levels of the Diploma lines of learning (particularly Level 1 pre-16 and Levels 1 and 2 post-16) due to concerns about learner progression. There was evidence that centres in some consortia were planning to co-teach Level 1 and 2 classes, as staff did not wish to make a decision at this early stage about which level would suit a learner's ability. At a local level, if co-teaching is planned, consortia need to ensure that learners are being adequately briefed and advised about this, as the outcome could have implications for their learning experience and progression. Some consortia were unsure whether co-teaching was acceptable, therefore, DCSF and supporting agencies might wish to ensure that there is clarity among institutions delivering Diplomas at Levels 1 and 2. Consortia may also wish to consider the implications of not offering Level 1 Diplomas, which could mean many learners being excluded from Diplomas.

8.4 Teaching and learning

Some issues concerning teaching and learning have emerged from the findings to date, particularly in relation to teaching and assessment approaches and whether studying for a Diploma gives the learner enough breadth.

8.4.1 Teaching and assessment

Consortia were in the process of developing schemes of work and lesson plans at the time of the interviews. However, a number of issues were raised in relation to teaching and assessment, from which emerge implications for future implementation:

- Approaches to **curriculum/lesson planning tended to be localised** and were not necessarily consistent across consortia. Many interviewees felt they could have been supported more in this area. Some consortia were sharing lesson plans for lines of learning, via local VLEs for example, but there are also likely to be benefits of this type of dissemination at a national level.
- There was some concern about **a lack of staff expertise** to teach some aspects of the Diploma, particularly the built environment elements of the Construction and the Built Environment Diploma, and the justice element of the Society, Health and Development Diploma. Consortia should consider whether staff have the necessary skills to teach all elements of the Diploma, and the implications for training and recruitment of staff.

- Some interviewees also commented on the **lack of information about practical delivery approaches**, suggesting the value of Gateway 1 consortia sharing examples of practice to help support each other and future consortia. Comments were made about creative approaches being needed to make some 'dry' aspects of the content exciting for the learner; some practical, creative examples of delivery approaches are likely to be welcomed (including those making use of ICT). It is acknowledged that the TDA have developed their ITT programmes to ensure that all trainee teachers starting a secondary ITT course from September 2008 will receive training in relation to delivering Diplomas, but existing teachers would also benefit from further support and advice in relation to practical teaching approaches.
- There were particular uncertainties in relation to the delivery of **functional skills**, and some staff across consortia felt unprepared for this aspect of delivery despite having attended training. Many practitioners observed that they would value more feedback from the functional skills pilot on the different ways of teaching functional skills.
- Uncertainties about **assessment** were also raised, and some interviewees considered that the training had not prepared consortia staff adequately in this area. Although consortia were planning meetings with awarding bodies over the summer, and therefore were confident that they would be more prepared prior to delivery in September 2008, it seemed that they would have benefitted from further support relating to assessment, including functional skills assessment and how to standardise assessment procedures across partners. These issues should be addressed in future training.

8.4.2 Breadth and depth of learning

The findings from the evaluation to date suggest that there were mixed views about whether the Diploma was **either appropriately broad**, offering learners a useful range of skills and experiences relating to a number of topic areas, **or too broad**, not focusing on topics in enough depth to allow learners to gain a true understanding and develop a particular specialism, which was thought to be a potential barrier to entry into employment or higher education. A learner's view of this is likely to depend on how decided they are about their future pathway. This emphasises the importance of providing young people with sufficient information about the Diploma so that they are making an informed choice. It also highlights the importance of the qualifications offered as **additional and specialist learning** in offering learners the opportunity to add breadth and / or depth to their learning where considered appropriate.

Consortia should consider the following questions about the additional and specialist learning offer available to learners:

- Do young people understand the aim of the additional and specialist learning to add breadth and / or depth to the Diploma?
- Is sufficient additional learning available to enable these young people to broaden their learning?
- If the answers to the two questions above are 'yes', then another question might be 'is this enough to reassure learners that the Diploma gives their learning enough breadth or depth?'

It should be noted that at the time of interviews, the additional learning offer seemed to be mainly in the form of GCSEs pre-16 or A levels post-16, and few opportunities for specialist learning seemed to be available as yet among the case-study consortia, particularly pre-16.

8.5 Employer engagement

In general, engaging employers to support Diploma delivery was seen as challenging. Although employers showed an interest, securing their commitment was more difficult. Constraints such as local and national economic conditions, and the number of small and medium sized employers in some areas were mentioned. Concern was also expressed about the increasing demands on local employers, which they felt would increase further as more lines of learning are introduced.

The **work experience element** of the Diploma was welcomed overall for giving learners an important insight into a chosen sector or career. Although some concerns were expressed in relation to:

- engaging enough employers to provide the *minimum* of ten days' work experience for all Diploma learners, and the additional challenge of asking employers to contribute more than the minimum (some interviewees felt that ten days' work experience was insufficient)
- ensuring that 'quality' placements would be available at a time when securing employer involvement was challenging
- health and safety issues presenting some difficulties for learners studying the Construction and the Built Environment and Engineering Diplomas.

Other valuable roles were identified for employers over and above the provision of work placements. For example, some consortia had made plans to involve employers as mentors to learners. There were also examples of plans for groups of learners to visit employers, to gain information through tours and presentations by staff. In some cases employers were involved in the development of lesson plans and in supporting the delivery of the principal learning. Although the added value of employer involvement was acknowledged by interviewees across consortia, they noted challenges associated with engaging employers in such ways.

Solutions to such challenges need to be considered in order to ensure that consortia have the capacity to deliver at least the minimum requirements in terms of work experience, but also to enable them to involve employers in maximising the learning experience for young people in other ways, as described above. Possible solutions include:

- involving EBPOs and/or CoVEs in taking responsibility for employer engagement, by raising awareness of Diplomas amongst employers and by acting as a central point of contact to deal with practicalities
- consortia working more closely with Sector Skills Councils to engage employers
- financial incentives for employers, which may particularly help to secure the involvement of small employers facing economic difficulties, or public sector employers who have experienced funding cuts
- finding creative ways of providing work experience (for example, in the construction and engineering sectors) which do not have health and safety implications for learners.

Consortia and employers should also consider the recommendations made in 2008 by the National Council for Educational Excellence (NCEE)²² concerning business engagement with schools and colleges. They include a recommendation for employers to support the delivery of a new National Framework for business education partnership so that, by 2010, every school and college should have effective relationships with business. The National Framework priorities for business include a contribution to the development of young people's employability skills, which could be achieved through involvement in Diploma delivery.

8.6 Future research

To date, the national evaluation of Diplomas has focused on the planning and preparation for Diplomas amongst Gateway 1 consortia, prior to the launch of this new qualification. This report has presented findings related to this preparation stage, and offers advice and recommendations for future consortia regarding the planning and implementation of Diplomas. Given that delivery of the first five lines of learning has now commenced (in September 2008), future stages of the evaluation involving Gateway 1 consortia will explore actual delivery, and will examine what models, approaches and strategies work in practice, and why. The research will explore, for example, teachers' experience of delivering Diplomas, and the learning experience from the perspective of young people, and will highlight any approaches or models that appear to be particularly effective. Furthermore, the research will examine patterns of recruitment to Diplomas, and provide further insights into the involvement of employers and training providers in Diploma delivery, as well as the perceptions of Diplomas among HEIs. The evaluation will also examine these issues in relation to the future phases of Diploma implementation as new lines of learning become available.

²² <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/ncee/docs/7898-DCSF-NatCouncilEd.pdf>

Appendix A Representativeness of Gateway 1 sample

Using data from the consortium lead telephone survey, and information provided by DCSF about the schools involved in Gateway 1 consortia, a sample of 30 consortia was drawn for involvement in the survey strand. As outlined in Chapter 1, the sample was selected according to the following criteria:

- **lines of learning and level offered** (to ensure that all lines and levels were represented)
- **number of lines of learning offered** (the sample was selected to over-represent consortia offering between two and five lines of learning, and to under-represent those offering one line of learning).
- **school characteristics**, such as learner achievement and free school meals eligibility (to ensure that the schools included were representative of all schools offering Diplomas in Gateway 1).

Tables A1 and A2 present the key characteristics of the sample, at a consortium level, and institution level. In summary, the sample was representative in terms of:

- **achievement** bands of schools at school level
- schools that are comprehensive to 16 and comprehensive to 18
- **Government Office** Region at consortium level – this is not necessarily the case at school level but this will have been influenced by the numbers of schools in consortia in certain regions
- **FSM** eligibility at consortium level and with a slight over-representation of schools with the highest and lowest percentages of young people known to be eligible for free school meals at school level.

Table A1 Representativeness of consortia in the sample

Characteristic	Sample of consortia		All Gateway 1 consortia	
	Number	%	Number	%
Government Office Region				
North East	3	10	7	5
North West/Merseyside	4	13	23	16
Yorkshire & The Humber	3	10	13	9
East Midlands	5	17	18	12
West Midlands	3	10	17	12
Eastern	1	3	10	7
London	4	13	20	14
South East	5	17	26	18
South West	2	7	12	8
N =	30		146	
Learners eligible for Free School Meals in schools associated with consortium				
Less than 10	10	34	47	33
10-20	10	34	51	36
More than 20	9	31	45	31
N =	29		143	
Lines of learning				
Engineering only	1	3	21	16
Society, Health and Development only	1	3	9	7
Information Technology only	1	3	12	9
Creative and Media only	2	7	25	19
Construction and the Built Environment only	1	3	18	13
2 to 4 lines of learning	20	67	40	30
All 5 lines of learning	4	13	9	7
N =	30		134	
Type of organisation employing Consortium lead				
FE college	2	7	25	19
School	4	14	35	27
6th form college	1	3	5	4
Training provider	0	0	1	1
Local Authority	17	59	54	41
Other	4	14	11	8
More than one organisation indicated	1	3	0	1
N =	29		132	

Pre/Post 16 Engineering				
Not planning to deliver	11	37	76	57
Planning to deliver	19	63	58	43
N =	30		134	
Pre/Post 16 Society, Health and Development				
Not planning to deliver	17	57	97	72
Planning to deliver	13	43	37	28
N =	30		134	
Pre/Post 16 Information Technology				
Not planning to deliver	16	53	94	70
Planning to deliver	14	47	40	30
N =	30		134	
Pre/Post 16 Creative and Media				
Not planning to deliver	13	43	79	59
Planning to deliver	17	57	55	41
N =	30		134	
Pre/Post 16 Construction and the Built Environment				
Not planning to deliver	18	60	94	70
Planning to deliver	12	40	40	30
N =	30		134	
Schools				
Mostly Comprehensive to 18	11	38	61	43
Other	18	62	82	57
N =	29		143	

Table A2 Representativeness of institutions in the sample consortia

Characteristic	Sample of institutions		All institutions involved in Diplomas	
	Number	%	Number	%
LEA type				
London Borough	36	14	145	15
Metropolitan Authorities	87	33	299	30
English Unitary Authorities	74	28	157	16
Counties	69	26	394	40
N =	266		995	
Government Office Region				
North East	10	4	46	5
North West/Merseyside	33	12	170	17
Yorkshire & The Humber	57	21	132	13
East Midlands	40	15	105	11
West Midlands	27	10	99	10
Eastern	6	2	73	7
London	36	14	145	15
South East	31	12	153	15
South West	26	10	72	7
N =	266		995	
Governance				
Academy	6	2	22	2
City Technology College	1	<1	1	<1
Further Education College	22	8	99	10
Community School	152	57	509	51
Community Special School	10	4	31	3
Foundation School	21	8	124	13
Foundation Special School	0	0	1	<1
Pupil Referral Unit	0	0	9	1
Voluntary Aided School	34	13	112	11
Voluntary Controlled School	5	2	20	2
Sixth Form Centre	9	3	30	3
Tertiary College	4	2	22	2
Other institutions	2	1	15	2
N =	266		995	

School type				
Secondary Modern	4	2	33	3
Comprehensive to 16	107	41	337	34
Comprehensive to 18	95	36	362	37
Grammar	4	2	14	1
Other Secondary schools	6	2	27	3
CTC schools	1	<1	1	<1
Special schools	10	4	32	3
Pupil referral units	0	0	9	1
6th Form colleges	8	3	31	3
Tertiary colleges	4	2	22	2
FE colleges	22	8	101	10
Other institutions	2	1	11	1
N =	264		980	
Eligible for FSM 2005				
Lowest 20	14	6	69	9
2nd lowest 20	49	22	155	20
Middle 20	47	21	194	25
2nd highest 20	46	21	205	26
Highest 20	65	29	166	21
N =	221		789	
Achievement Band (total GCSE point score 2005)				
Lowest band	66	31	204	27
2nd lowest band	44	21	175	23
Middle band	37	17	152	20
2nd highest band	36	17	138	18
Highest band	30	14	93	12
N =	213		762	

Representativeness of learners responding to survey

A total of 5,424 Year 9 learners and 2,078 Year 11 learners responded to the questionnaire survey, from across 72 schools (which were representative of all schools identified as offering Diplomas from September 2008), within 28 of the 30 consortia in the sample. These consortia covered all nine Government Office Regions.

Tables A3 and A4 present the characteristics of the Year 9 and Year 11 learners who responded to the survey, compared with the whole cohort in their schools (which includes those learners in their year group who did not respond to the survey), and their peers nationally. These tables show that the responding samples were broadly representative of all learners in their year group in the responding schools, and of all learners nationally in the two year groups. However, the Year 9 respondents were slightly less likely to be recognised as having special educational needs, and were slightly more likely to report themselves as White British than their peers in their schools, and nationally. In addition, the Year 11 respondents were slightly more likely than their peers to:

- not be eligible for free school meals
- not be recognised as having special educational needs
- have achieved Level 6 or above, on average, at key stage 3.

Table A3 Background characteristics of Year 9 learners - responding learners, all Year 9 pupils in responding schools and all Year 9 learners nationally

Characteristic	Respondents to the survey	All Year 9 learners in responding schools	All Year 9 learners in England
	%	%	%
Gender			
Male	50	51	51
Female	50	49	49
N =	5,434	9,471	587,367
Eligibility for free school meals			
Not eligible	85	81	85
Eligible	15	19	15
N =	4,975	9,471	587,367
Special Educational Needs			
No SEN	83	77	77
School Action/Plus	16	20	19
Statement	1	2	4
N =	4,975	9,471	587,363
English as an additional language			
No EAL	92	90	89
EAL	8	10	11
N =	4,966	9,448	585,234
Ethnicity			
White - British	85	82	80
White - Other	3	3	4
Gypsy/Roma	<1	<1	<1
Mixed	2	3	3
Asian - Indian	1	1	2
Asian - Pakistani	1	1	3
Asian - Bangladeshi	1	1	1
Asian - Other	<1	1	1
Black - Caribbean	1	1	1
Black - African	2	3	2
Black - Other	1	1	<1
Chinese	<1	<1	<1
Other	1	1	1
Preferred not to say	1	1	1
N =	4,962	9,441	583,147
Key Stage 2 Average			
Level 2 and below	4	6	6
Level 3	11	13	12
Level 4	52	51	49
Level 5	33	31	33
N =	4,744	8,942	561,901

Table A4 Background characteristics of Year 11 learners - responding learners, all Year 11 pupils in responding schools and all Year 11 learners nationally

Characteristic	Respondents to the survey		All Year 11 learners in responding schools		All Year 11 learners in England	
		%		%		%
Gender						
Male		50		52		51
Female		50		48		49
N =		2,067		4,853		598,597
Eligibility for free school meals						
Not eligible		89		84		87
Eligible		11		16		13
N =		1,945		4,853		598,597
Special Educational Needs						
No SEN		85		76		78
School Action/Plus		13		22		18
Statement		2		2		4
N =		1,945		4,853		598,595
English as an additional language						
No EAL		90		88		90
EAL		10		12		10
N =		1,936		4,772		597,653
Ethnicity						
White - British		81		76		81
White - Other		2		2		3
Gypsy/Roma		0		0		<1
Mixed		2		3		3
Asian - Indian		3		3		2
Asian - Pakistani		5		5		3
Asian - Bangladeshi		<1		<1		1
Asian - Other		1		1		1
Black - Caribbean		1		2		1
Black - African		1		2		2
Black - Other		1		1		<1
Chinese		1		1		<1
Other		1		1		1
Preferred not to say		2		3		1
N =		1,944		4,746		594,965
Key Stage 3 Average						
Level 3 and below		5		9		8
Level 4		13		17		14
Level 5		29		31		31
Level 6		35		29		31
Level 7 and above		18		13		16
N =		1,895		4,674		579,344

Appendix B Sample of case-study consortia

A sub-sample of 15 consortia was selected from the sample of 30 for more in-depth case-study work. As outlined in Chapter 1, the sample was selected to ensure that the following were included:

- all **lines of learning** at all three levels
- consortia offering different **numbers of lines of learning** from September 2008
- a **geographical spread** across eight of the nine Government Office Regions, including rural and urban areas
- different **types of institutions** involved in delivery Diplomas
- different partnership structures and models of delivery.

Further details of the characteristics of the case-study consortia are provided in Table B1.

Table B1 **Number of consortia represented in case study sample by criteria**

Criteria	Number of consortia in sample
Government Office Region	
East	0
East Midlands	2
London	2
North East	1
North West	2
South East	2
South West	2
West Midlands	2
Yorkshire and the Humber	2
Urban/rural²³	
Urban	10
Rural	3
Mixed	2
Lines of Learning [note that all levels offered by consortia are represented]:	
Engineering	11
Creative and Media	10
Society, Health and Development	8
Information Technology	8
Construction and the Built Environment	6
Number of lines of learning:	
Five	3
Four	1
Three	4
Two	5
One	2
Type of Authority:	
Unitary	5
Metropolitan	4
County	4
London Borough	2

²³ Urban / rural / mixed categories were based on an analysis of census data relating to the number of homes in hamlets in an LA.

Appendix C Models of delivery across case-study consortia

Table C1 below indicates the planned models of delivery across all of the 15 case-study consortia. It should be noted that this summary represents the information available at the time of interviews. Delivery models were still fluid and final decisions were being made over the summer.

Model A: Shared delivery between school and FE college / other external provider

Model B: School delivers none of the Diploma, but sends learners to an FE college for all Diploma learning

Model C: School delivers the entire Diploma ‘in-house’ to own learners only

Model D: School A delivers none of the Diploma, but sends learners to School B for all Diploma learning

Model E: School A and B share delivery (learners travel to and from each)

Model F: FE college delivers the entire Diploma ‘in-house’ to own learners only

Table C1 Models of delivery

Consortium	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model D	Model E	Model F
1	*		*			*
2			*	*		*
3	*		*			
4	*	*				
5	*			*		*
6	*	*				*
7			*	*		*
8	*	*	*	*	*	*
9	*		*			*
10			*			*
11	*		*		*	*
12	*	*	*	*	*	*
13	*		*		*	*
14	*					*
15			*		*	*

Appendix D Factor analysis of learner attitudes

Exploratory factor analyses were carried out to consolidate the data on the Year 9 and Year 11 learner questionnaires relating to young people's attitudes to school and learning. These aggregate variables produced more robust measures of learners' attitudes than a consideration of the individual items on the questionnaire alone. The factor analyses also allowed simpler analyses to be undertaken, comparing learners' attitudes with other variables (such as whether they chose a Diploma, and the line of learning they had opted for), than would have been possible if using each of the individual variables.

Factor analysis looks for variables that correlate highly with each other. The existence of such correlations between variables suggests that those variables could be measuring aspects of the same underlying issues. These underlying issues are known as factors. Thus, the aim of the factor analyses was to derive a smaller number of 'attitude' composite variables from selected questions on the questionnaire which could be used to explore the attitudes of learners in further detail.

Factor analyses were conducted on three questions within the Year 9 and Year 11 questionnaires, which explored learners' feelings about their school lessons and their attitude to school; their punctuality and attendance at school; learners' views of their preferred learning style; and the support provided to learners by their parents. Items that appeared to relate closely to one another were grouped together as a scale and, after subsequent analysis, four separate factors were identified, relating to different aspects of learners' attitudes. These four factors were related to:

- learners' attitude to school and learning
- learners' views on their school lessons
- learners' preference for practical learning and team work
- learners' tendency to have poor attendance and behaviour.

A description of the individual items on the questionnaire that made up each factor is presented below:

Factor 1: Positive attitude to school and learning

- I work as hard as I can in lessons
- The work I do in lessons is interesting
- I am good at working on my own
- I like to look up information in books or on the internet
- I like to know how I am doing in my learning
- I like to be given responsibility
- Most of the time I like coming to school
- My parents / carers always make sure I do my homework
- School work is worth doing
- I am well behaved in school
- I always meet homework/ coursework deadlines
- I enjoy learning
- My parents praise me for doing good work at school.

Factor 2: Negative views of school lessons

- I often count the minutes until a lesson ends
- I am bored in lessons
- The work I do in lessons is a waste of time.

Factor 3: Preference for practical learning and team work

- I prefer practical work to lots of writing
- I don't like lessons where we work in groups (negative)
- I learn best by doing something
- I like working in a team.

Factor 4: Tendency to have poor attendance and behaviour

- I am late for lessons
- I play truant / skip lessons

Appendix E Variables included in the multi-level model analyses

Table E1 Variables included in the Year 9 analysis of the choice to take a Diploma (from September 2008, and in the future)

Variable	Label
1work	Post-16 intentions - Work based
q21unc	Post-16 intentions - Unclear
factor1	Enjoy school and learning
factor2	Lessons boring / waste of time
factor3	Enjoy practical & team work
factor4	Poor behaviour/attendance
female	Female pupil
nonwhitu	Non white-UK pupil
sensa	SEN - school action / plus
senstat	SEN - statement
k2av	Key Stage 2 Average attainment
k2miss	Missing Key Stage 2 attainment information
schage	School with sixth form

Table E2 Variables included in the Year 11 analysis of the choice to take a Diploma (from September 2008)

Variable	Label
factor1	Enjoy school and learning
factor2	Lessons boring / waste of time
factor3	Enjoy practical & team work
factor4	Poor behaviour / attendance
female	Female pupil
nonwhitu	Non white-UK pupil
sensa	SEN - school action / plus
senstat	SEN - statement
k3av	Key stage 3 average attainment
k3miss	Missing Key Stage 3 attainment information
schage	School with sixth form

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