

“DIPLOMAS COULD BECOME QUALIFICATION OF CHOICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE” – ED BALLS

23 October 2007

- Additional Diplomas in Science, Languages and the Humanities launched
- The CBI, Russell Group universities and Mike Tomlinson to sit on an Expert Advisory Group to shape new qualifications
- 2008 Review of A-Levels postponed. First review of 14-19 qualifications to be held in 2013

Ed Balls today announced plans for additional Diplomas in Science, Languages and the Humanities in order to increase the options for 14 to 19 year olds. He welcomed the strong and growing support for the first Diplomas and set out the next steps in building a consensus among schools, universities, colleges and employers on improving the UK's skills base.

Flanked by Richard Lambert of the CBI, Mike Tomlinson and representatives of Cambridge, Exeter and Leeds Universities, Mr Balls told a group of business leaders and education professionals at the CBI Conference Centre that the expanded Diploma range could become the qualification of choice over the next decade.

He said: “If Diplomas are successfully introduced and are delivering the mix that employers and universities value, they could become the qualification of choice for young people. But, because GCSEs and A-Levels are long-established and valued qualifications, that should not be decided by any pre-emptive Government decision, but by the demands of young people, schools and colleges.”

Mr Balls confirmed that an A-Level review scheduled for 2008 will now be postponed and that a first review of 14-19 qualifications will instead take place in 2013.

He said: “It has been argued in the past that Diplomas could only be a success if A-Levels and GCSEs were no longer offered as stand-alone qualifications, and that we should use the planned 2008 review of A-Levels to signal the end of these qualifications.

“But this is not the Government's view and not a matter for us to pre-judge. We need to have time to consider the success of our Diplomas, and assess how far the changes we have already made to A-Levels and GCSEs have strengthened these qualifications.”

Setting out the next steps in the Government's Diploma programme, Mr Balls said:

“Diplomas will open up real opportunities for combining academic and practical options to allow every young person to make the most of their talents, whether they are progressing to further study, work or an apprenticeship.

“We are confident that these new subject-based Diplomas will secure the benefits of Diplomas for all young people. They will provide a wider

curriculum offer for those young people who want to secure both the theory and practical skills they need to excel in study, work and life.

“We need the business and academic worlds to continue to back these qualifications and help make them a success. With their support, I believe that Diplomas could emerge as the jewel of our education system.”

Developed to meet the needs of universities and businesses, Diplomas will secure a fully-rounded education for all young people at all levels of ability. They will combine in-depth theoretical and practical study of specific subject areas, a strong focus on English, Maths and ICT skills and opportunities to apply their learning in work-related contexts.

All Diploma students will be able to communicate and analyse data at the highest levels, while at the same time developing a broader set of personal skills and attitudes that businesses and universities require: the ability to learn independently, think creatively, solve complex problems, manage time effectively, show determination and resilience and work with others.

There are already plans for 14 Diploma qualifications introduced over the next three years. The first five Diplomas – in Construction and the Built Environment, Creative and Media, Engineering, Information Technology and Society, Health and Development – will be offered for the first time next September to nearly 40,000 young people in almost 900 schools and colleges around the country. Diplomas will follow in: Business, Administration and Finance, Hair and Beauty, Hospitality, Environmental and Land Based Studies, Manufacturing and Product Design, Public Services, Retail, Sport and Leisure, Travel and Tourism

The three additional Diplomas announced today will not be based around a specific sector. Instead, they will focus on Science, Languages and Humanities as broad subjects. They will guarantee a core of functional skills in English, Maths and ICT, in-depth knowledge of their subject area and practical skills.

These additional Diplomas will incorporate the best of existing GCSE and A-Levels qualifications along with new specially-designed content developed by a group of leading academics and employers. They will be available to young people for the first time from 2011. The standards of the new qualifications will be assured and secured by the new independent regulator.

The Department for Children Schools and Families will establish a Diploma Development Partnership (DDP) to specify the content for each of the new Diplomas, consulting with a wide range of partners and stakeholders, which will start work in the New Year.

In order to specify the design structure and principles within which this DDP will work, the Department will now create an Expert Advisory Group to work with it over the next few months to develop the terms of reference for the DDP and also advise us on the implications for the strategic direction of our 14-19 qualifications offer. The group will include Mike Tomlinson, Susan Anderson at the CBI, teachers and senior figures at several of the UK's leading universities, including Cambridge, Exeter and Leeds.

Ed Balls said:

“The UK is at the starting line of a skills race that will define our future prosperity. As well as experts in engineering, IT and health, we also need to develop a stronger supply of talented scientists and linguists to compete globally.

"The balance of academic rigour, practical knowledge and generic skills that Diplomas provide will address this urgent need. That's why we want to expand the Diploma programme to offer these new options for young people – they will suit those who may not have a sector-specific interest at 14 or 16, but who still want to benefit from the Diploma experience.

"It's encouraging that so many leading companies and universities have pledged their support to Diplomas. I am particularly pleased that the CBI is working closely with us to make all these Diplomas, including the three we are launching today, work for business and young people."

Richard Lambert, Director General of the CBI, said:

"The Diplomas are designed to ensure young people develop the skills they need – literacy, numeracy and employability – and make them realise how these skills are relevant to their working lives. The Diplomas will also provide valuable insights into the way particular sectors operate and help young people make better informed career decisions.

"The Government has embarked on a very ambitious plan to roll out this programme in a short space of time. If it is to be successful, the Diploma system must be properly promoted to students, parents, universities and employers. Business must play its part by providing high quality work experience which enables students to develop and apply the skills they've learnt in the classroom."

Mike Tomlinson said:

"Today's statement is most welcome as it will see the creation of Diplomas covering A-Level and GCSE subjects, providing students with the core skills and knowledge needed to maximise their potential, whether in HE or employment. While there is much to do before the proposals can be fully implemented, I look forward to being part of those next steps."

Geoff Parks, Director of Undergraduate Admissions at Cambridge University said:

"We have had extensive input into the Engineering Diploma, with the goal of ensuring that it will be a suitably rigorous qualification for entry into higher education.

"I welcome the fact that these new Diplomas will be HE-led and anticipate that many of our academics would welcome a role in their development. As with all broad-based educational developments the ability to transfer to study at leading research universities will depend on students taking the correct combination of subjects and options.

"The University strongly welcomes any moves that will encourage young people to study the sciences, maths and modern languages in particular at a higher level."

Sir Anthony Greener, Chairman of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), said:

"QCA warmly welcomes this announcement, which builds on the experience gained in developing the initial suite of Diplomas for teaching in 2008. It marks an important further step away from the vocational-academic divide, allows young people to develop their talents, and prepares them for the world of work. We look forward to working with the Expert Advisory Group in the development of these important new qualifications."

Duncan Mitchell, Vice President and Managing Director of Cisco Systems UK and Ireland, said:

“In Cisco we recruit highly talented graduates. We need people with a real aptitude for technology, who are business focused, and who perform well in a professional work setting. We believe these Diplomas will ensure young people have the IT and other skills required to succeed in business.”

The membership of the Expert Advisory Group is:

- Susan Anderson – Director of HR Policy, CBI
- Mike Tomlinson – Diploma champion for schools and colleges
- Dr Geoff Parks – Director of Admissions for the Cambridge Colleges
- Prof Steve Smith – Vice-Chancellor, Exeter University
- Prof Michael Arthur – Vice-Chancellor, Leeds University
- Prof Deian Hopkin – Vice-Chancellor, London South Bank University
- Jackie Fisher – Principal, Newcastle College
- David Kershaw – Principal, New College Leicester
- Malcolm Trobe – Head, Malmesbury School
- Kathleen Tattersall – Chair, Institute of Educational Assessors
- Duncan Mitchell – Vice President and Managing Director, Cisco Systems UK and Ireland

Editor's Notes

This press notice relates to 'England'

A policy statement setting out the detail is attached.

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Press Notice 2007/0195