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Evaluation of the implementation and impact of diplomas: findings from the 2009/10 survey of higher education institutions

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The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

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Executive Summary

The survey

This is the second in a series of surveys investigating higher education institutions' (HEIs) views and experiences of the Diplomas, first introduced in schools in September 2008. Fourteen sector-related Diplomas were introduced in three phases: in 2008 (5), in 2009 (5) and in 2010 (4). In the first survey (Richardson and Haynes 2009), a stratified, purposive sample of 19 English HEIs, educating 17 per cent of the country's undergraduates, was undertaken. Respondents were primarily key senior managers in each institution: Pro Vice-Chancellors (PVCs) and Heads of Admissions (HoAs). Data from these responses were supplemented with that from a sample of 62 admissions tutors spread across 17 of the 19 institutions.

In this second survey, a further 19 institutions were sampled, educating 16 per cent of the UK-based undergraduates attending English HEIs in 2008/09. Telephone interviews were again undertaken with PVCs and HoAs. In addition, using the UCAS website, the entry requirements specified by the 19 institutions were investigated for a range of 271 separate undergraduate courses which appeared to provide potential pathways from the first five Diploma subject areas.

Key findings

- In common with senior managers in the 2008 survey, PVCs in 2009/10 welcomed the breadth of learning inherent in Diplomas and their potential to widen participation. Also as in 2008, the range of learning styles fostered by Diplomas was considered well aligned to current developments in teaching and learning on undergraduate (UG) programmes.
- Involvement in Diploma **development** was at a higher level amongst the institutions sampled in this 2009/10 survey than in the 2008 sample. Although none of the institutions in this sample was currently involved with **delivery**, there was a willingness amongst some, mostly teaching-led, HEIs to collaborate with schools and colleges in delivery, if additional resources were made available to HEIs for this.
- All institutions in this sample had departments accepting one or more of the first five subject areas for entry onto undergraduate degree courses. Most senior managers were of the view that Diploma applicants could either stay within the pathway related to their chosen subject or branch across to another area of study at UG level, so long as specific entry requirements (including components of Additional and/or Specialist Learning (ASL)) had been met.
- There was some evidence that undergraduate courses in the broad areas covered by Creative and Media and Society, Health and Development were most likely to accept Diploma applicants from other subject areas. Courses in the broad areas of IT, Engineering and Construction and the Built Environment were more likely to accept only Diploma applicants studying this line. In practice, almost all applicants for 2010

entry had applied to undergraduate courses closely related to the Diploma they had followed, suggesting that young people embarking on level 3 Diplomas have carefully chosen a specialist pathway.

- Across the 271 courses for which entry requirements for Diploma applicants on the UCAS website were reviewed, in only four cases (in three institutions) was it explicitly stated that the Diploma would not be an acceptable qualification for entry. These were: Psychology (2 courses); Adult Nursing (1); and Human Biology (1). However, Diplomas were accepted by other institutions offering these courses.
- Where courses specified the ASL component of the Advanced Diploma, this was most commonly an A level. Only two HoAs knew of any courses within their institution specifying the nature of the Extended Project.
- As expected, the number of Diploma applicants to HEIs for 2010 entry was small, matching the small number of learners starting a Diploma at level 3 in 2008. Approximately 240 applications from Diploma candidates had been received, by February 2010, across the 18 institutions able to provide data (and whose intakes account for approximately one sixth of the volume of undergraduate higher education in England). It should be noted that the figure of 240 applications was unlikely to equate to 240 applicants, as UCAS allows students to choose to apply to up to five courses and there may therefore have been some multiple-counting of applicants in our sample.
- In line with the HEIs' expectations, Diploma applicants were from their established catchment areas, be these regional, national or both.
- The quality of applications from Diploma students was reported to be in line with the quality HEIs receive from A level candidates. All institutions which had already processed applications from Diploma applicants had made some offers.

Higher Education Context

All the HEIs in the sample had considered the impact of the impending demographic downturn of 18 year olds (from 2010) and the current recession on the sustainability of their current pattern of recruitment. Senior managers across all types of institutions reported the overriding impact of the recession to be an increase in undergraduate applications and this had lessened the concerns of normally 'recruiting institutions' that the demographic change would make undergraduate recruitment more difficult. In response to the current funding situation in higher education, five institutions, of all types, were striving to increase the volume of overseas students. Over the next five years, a majority of institutions in the survey were also aiming to increase entry standards by setting higher thresholds for undergraduate entry and to maintain their efforts to widen participation.

In terms of developments in undergraduate teaching and learning, many institutions reported initiatives to enhance students' employability, including the provision of more opportunities

for work-related learning and work placements, themes strikingly resonant with the formal aims of Diploma learning.

Knowledge and understanding of Diplomas

Levels of awareness and understanding of Diplomas amongst PVCs and HoAs was higher in the 2009/10 survey than in the previous year. Although it was reported that knowledge of Diplomas within academic departments was uneven, this was not considered to be problematic as departmental staff would use the HoA as the in-house expert to advise and support on Diploma-related matters. Departmental staff who had been involved with Diploma development either at the national or local level were understandably more likely to be better informed.

In general, senior managers felt that information about Diplomas had been effectively disseminated by the relevant government departments. Some mentioned DFE publications and website links as helpful. UCAS was identified by many HoAs as the most useful source of information. Institutions were currently waiting for confirmation from UCAS on how and when the Diploma results would be collated and presented to HEIs.

Engagement with Diploma development and delivery

Of the 15 institutions in the 2009/10 survey for which data was available, 11 reported some involvement in the development of one or more Diploma subject areas. Two institutions had been involved at the national level through Diploma Development Partnerships: both in relation to the Engineering Diploma. In the remaining cases, involvement was at the local level, working through the local Lifelong Learning Network and/or as a partner in a local Diploma consortium. Activities included involvement in the Gateway submission process; hosting meetings; contributing to discussions with local schools and colleges about Diploma curricula.

None of the PVCs interviewed was aware of any current involvement in delivery (compared to involvement by 4 out of 19 in 2008), but some would consider encouraging involvement with Diploma delivery by departmental staff if there were dedicated resources available. There was greatest enthusiasm for this amongst the teaching-led HEIs. Involvement in delivery could encompass a range of activities: teaching elements of the Diploma at local schools/colleges; teaching elements of the Diploma at the HEI to visiting learners; providing projects/challenges for young people to complete; providing content for teachers to use when delivering, e.g. information packs.

Progression pathways

Senior managers in most of the institutions sampled considered the Diploma to offer both a generic and a specialist pathway onto undergraduate study. Twelve of the 19 HoAs described the Diploma as a generic qualification, though almost all mentioned that some of their courses were specifying relevant ASL (such as Music A level to study Music). Three PVCs believed that young people choosing to do a Diploma had taken a decision to follow a

particular pathway and would therefore be likely to wish to continue in the same curriculum/sectoral area in higher education.

Amongst the sampled institutions, the first five Diploma subject areas were mentioned more frequently than the second group of five (with the exception of Manufacturing and Product Design) when PVCs were asked which lines were likely to become the most significant for their institution in terms of curriculum match and/or levels of recruitment. Creative and Media and Engineering were each mentioned by five institutions, though only one mentioned Construction and the Built Environment. Neither Hospitality nor Hair and Beauty Studies was mentioned as 'significant' by any institution.

PVCs identified those subject areas that seemed well aligned to current areas of undergraduate study offered at their institution, so constituting a potential progression pathway. The most commonly cited subject areas were (in descending order): IT; Creative and Media; Business, Finance & Administration; Society, Health and Development; Engineering. The least cited lines were (in descending order): Construction and the Built Environment; Hospitality; and Hair and Beauty Studies.

As with the 2008 sample, although many of the institutions in the 2009/10 survey had foundation degree provision, a large majority of institutions expected recruitment to be to their honours degree programmes, indicating that they were according the Diploma qualification the same status as A levels and expected Diploma applicants to be of a comparable quality to A level candidates. Institutions expected recruitment to be from their established catchments, be these regional, national or both.

Admissions practices

A large majority of institutions in the survey were willing, in principle, to recognise all of the first Diplomas as suitable preparation for undergraduate study. Understandably, this did not always mean that every Diploma would be accepted for every course of study. Across the 271 courses investigated on the UCAS website as part of this study, only four (in three institutions) explicitly stated that the Diploma would not be an acceptable qualification for entry.

In a large majority of cases, A level and Diploma students were being treated similarly in terms of entry requirements. In a very small number of cases, Diploma students were required to achieve higher *grades* than A level candidates or, conversely, were required to achieve a lower *tariff* score than A level applicants. There were some examples of Diploma students being requested to contact a relevant department or central admissions prior to applying. This may reflect unfamiliarity with the new qualification and its component elements on the part of departmental admissions staff.

In terms of the Additional and/or Specialist Learning element of the Diplomas, five of the six research-intensive HEIs reported applying specific A level requirements to most or all of their undergraduate courses in terms of subject area, though HoAs stressed that this level of

prescription was generally in line with that imposed on A level candidates. There was greater flexibility in relation to ASL amongst the teaching-led HEIs.

Again, in common with their policy for A level students, research-intensive HEIs were much more likely to specify the grade (rather than tariff points) to be attained – both in relation to the Progression Diploma element and the Additional and/or Specialist Learning subject. Only two of the 19 institutions provided guidance as to the type of Extended Project they would prefer.

Not all departments in the institutions sampled had, by November 2009, specified publicly on the UCAS website their undergraduate entry requirements in respect of Diploma applicants, though 18 of the 19 institutions did make some reference to Diplomas in their current prospectus.

Applications from Diploma students

At the time the Head of Admissions interviews were undertaken (February 2010), approximately 240 applications had been received across the 18 institutions with data. Three institutions had received no applications at that time from young people taking a Diploma. Most institutions had received fewer than 10 applications, though three had received over 40. The small number of applications reflects the small number of learners commencing a level 3 Diploma amongst the first cohort in September 2008.

Across the subject areas, the approximate proportions among applications were: Society, Health and Development (29%); Engineering (27%); Creative and Media (24%); IT (15%) and Construction and the Built Environment (4%). Almost all the young people had applied to undergraduate courses closely aligned to the Diploma subject they had followed. The small percentage of applicants studying the Construction and the Built Environment Diploma mirrors the small number commencing this subject at level 3 in September 2008. Data published by UCAS in November 2010 indicated that the level of applications and the pattern across subject areas identified in our survey were representative of what was occurring at the national level.

The HoAs in our study reported positively on the quality of applications from Diploma students, indicating that these were in line with those received from A level candidates. Every institution which had already processed some Diploma applications had made one or more offers. It was not possible to gather precise data at this stage in the UCAS application process on the rate of conversion of applications to offers, nor on the number of offers likely to be accepted by Diploma students. Given the low level of applications, however, it was evident that there would be only a small entry of Diploma candidates to undergraduate courses in September 2010. This finding was confirmed subsequently by UCAS: 743 Diploma applications were identified by UCAS over the 2009/10 application cycle. Of these, 68% (503 students) had been accepted to a course at a higher education institution by 27 October 2010. This was very similar to the acceptance rate of all UCAS applicants: 70%. This suggests that HEIs of all kinds had accepted Diplomas as an appropriate pathway to undergraduate study.

The UCAS data also indicated that, although Diploma applicants were accepted across all Mission Groups, University Alliance and Million + institutions accepted the highest proportions. This was partly because they had received the greatest number of applications from Diploma students; they were also more likely to make offers to candidates.

HoAs had not, at the time of the interviews in February/March 2010, received confirmation from UCAS on how and when the results for Diploma students would be made available to HEIs.

Overall attitude of HEIs towards Diplomas at this stage

Thirteen of the 15 Pro Vice-Chancellors interviewed considered that Diploma learning was relevant to developments in undergraduate teaching and learning. The terms 'good fit' and good match' summed up the views of most PVCs. Of the ten PVCs who felt sufficiently knowledgeable to comment, six believed Diploma students would adapt 'very well' to undergraduate learning and four 'quite well'.

For the higher education institutions in this sample, Diplomas offered two main attractions: they may open up new routes into higher education for young people; there is a flexibility in the design and forms of learning they encompass which offers curriculum breadth, employer engagement, the application of knowledge and project-based learning. Two kinds of feature were mentioned as being least attractive. These were: uncertainty as to the strength of support across all political parties for Diplomas; and their denigration in the media.

Despite the uncertainties discussed above, a majority of PVCs reported clear support 'in principle' within their institution for Diplomas, ranging from the '*cautious*' to the '*generally very strong*'. As in the 2008 survey, the point was strongly made by some PVCs that the developing image of Diplomas within higher education would be closely related to Diploma students thriving and succeeding as undergraduates.

Policy implications

- The 2009/10 survey suggests that the readiness of HEIs to become involved in Diploma development had grown since the previous year. There was a willingness amongst some, mainly teaching-led institutions, to become involved in delivery, if additional resources were made available to HEIs for this.
- When asked about involvement in delivery, it was clear that most HEIs had a narrow view of what 'delivery' might involve. In their responses, they focused almost exclusively on consideration of class-based teaching by their staff of elements of the Diploma. It could be helpful to disseminate information to HEIs on the range of different ways in which they could support delivery.
- UCAS had received a number of queries from HEIs, schools and colleges in relation to the structure of Diplomas and how the final grade/tariff score was to be reached. The Diploma is a complex qualification and it is vital that information on how its tariff

score is calculated is presented clearly and unambiguously to schools/colleges, students and parents so that young people can understand exactly what they need to achieve to satisfy the entry requirements of HEIs.

- The majority of institutions specifying what the Additional and/or Specialist Learning component of the Diploma should comprise required an A level in a subject related to the applicant's Diploma. As this suggests that Specialist Learning is preferred to Additional Learning at Level 3 by some HEIs, it is important to alert staff who deliver information, advice and guidance in schools and colleges of this finding, in order to make sure that they discuss with learners how choosing Additional Learning, instead of Specialist Learning, might constrain their choice of HEI and/or undergraduate course later.
- HEIs were keen to know how and when the results for Diploma students would be made available to them by UCAS. In a particularly competitive year for HE entry, it was considered important that these became available at the same time as results for A level students.
- Several findings relating to admissions policies and practices are relevant for specific dissemination to organisations with a role in supporting Diplomas:
 - By November 2009, not all departments in the sample institutions had specified publicly on the UCAS website their undergraduate entry requirements in respect of Diploma applicants (relevant to UCAS e-updates to HEIs);
 - Most HEIs expected Diploma subject areas to create clear-cut progression pathways into higher education. Across the first ten subjects, this expectation was strongest in the cases of: IT, Creative and Media, Business, Finance & Administration; Society, Health and Development; and Engineering (relevant to marketing by Diploma Development Partnerships and local consortia);
 - It was expected that such pathways are likely to be established through traditional patterns of application and recruitment (regional and/or national), rather than through the specific stimulus of local 'widening participation' activity or foundation degree provision (relevant to marketing by Diploma Development Partnerships and local consortia).
- Although the number of applications to higher education in 2010 was small, matching the small number of learners commencing a Level 3 Diploma amongst the first cohort in 2008, what was clear was that the quality of the candidates had been comparable to that of A level applicants, and all HEIs (research-intensive and teaching-led institutions) receiving applications had made or were expecting to make offers to Diploma applicants. It will be important to publicise this finding widely, to allay worries amongst some schools/colleges, learners and parents that some types of HEIs will not accept Diplomas.

- Support for Diplomas among senior staff in higher education was widespread, regardless of institution type. This is a key finding of 2009/10 survey, of relevance to a range of audiences concerned with Diploma development.

1. Introduction and higher education context

1.1 Background to the survey within the overall evaluation

This report presents the findings from the second in a series of three surveys investigating higher education institutions' (HEIs) views and experiences of the Diplomas for 14-19 year olds, first introduced in schools in September 2008, by the previous, Labour government. At the time of this second survey (November 2009 – February 2010), the Diplomas were being delivered by consortia of schools, colleges, training providers, employers and higher education institutions. They were offered at three levels and across 14 subject areas which were introduced in three phases (from September 2008, 2009 and 2010).

The first five subject areas, starting in 2008 were: Construction and the Built Environment; Engineering; Information Technology; Creative and Media; and Society, Health and Development. A total of 146 consortia of schools, colleges and other partners (sometimes including higher education institutions) were approved through the 'Gateway 1' application process to begin delivering Diploma courses from September 2008. The second five subject areas delivered from September 2009 (Gateway 2) were: Business, Administration and Finance; Hair and Beauty Studies; Hospitality; Environmental & Land-based Studies; and Manufacturing and Product Design. From September 2009, the number of consortia involved in the delivery of Diplomas increased to just over 300.

In January 2008, the Department for Education (then Department for Children, Schools and Families) 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. In the first HEI survey, undertaken in 2008, interviews were undertaken with senior managers: the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Teaching & Learning (PVC) and the Head of Admissions (HoA), in 19 HEIs (Richardson and Haynes 2009). These senior managers then identified within their institutions a sample of relevant admissions tutors to whom an online questionnaire was sent. This resulted in 62 completed questionnaires being returned from across 17 of the 19 HEIs in the sample. These 62 tutors between them were responsible for admissions to 147 separate, named courses. A third survey will be undertaken in 2012/13.

1.2 The representativeness of the HEI sample

Using the same purposive sampling strategy employed for the 2008 survey, a new set of 19 HEIs currently offering degree programmes in subjects where there is alignment to one or more of the first ten Diploma subject areas was identified.

As in 2008, the 19 HEIs in the sample were spread evenly through the published institution-level rankings of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise and *The Times*

Good University Guide 2010. Within these rankings, the institutions surveyed included those positioned in each of the deciles of overall performance in rankings published by *The Times*.

Within the sample, six of the 19 HEIs could be characterised as high-performing and 'research-intensive'. The remainder have teaching as their primary focus and are described in this report as 'teaching-led'. Within this group were three long-established 'pre-1992' universities (mainly mid-ranked in league tables and of varying size in terms of undergraduate numbers); ten were institutions ranked in the bottom half of league tables of varying origins and size (see also section 1.4 below).

In order to ensure that specialist institutions were appropriately represented, in this second survey the number from the Guild HE group (typically, the smaller and more specialist institutions) was increased slightly as follows:

- Three of the 20 Russell Group member institutions
- Three of the 18 1994 Group member institutions
- Four of the 28 Million + member institutions
- Three (down from four in the 2008 survey) of the 23 University Alliance member institutions
- Four (up from three in the 2008 survey) of the 21 Guild HE member institutions
- Two unaligned institutions.

Two of the 19 institutions initially approached declined to participate. Potential substitutes were then identified from the relevant 'mission groups' (for a fuller description of the various 'mission groups' and related terminology used in this section, see the Glossary of Terms on p. 53-55). The Vice-Chancellors of these two substitute institutions agreed to their institution's participation so the sample size of 19 HEIs was achieved. Within this sample of 19, every Vice-Chancellor gave permission for their HoA to be interviewed; four declined the request for their PVC to participate. In three cases, the Vice-Chancellor reported that the HoA would be best placed to provide the information sought; in the fourth case, the PVC had only recently been appointed and was considered insufficiently informed to participate in our survey.

This sample of institutions combined had a 16 per cent share of the 1,404,000 UK-based undergraduates attending English HEIs in 2008/09 (HESA 08/09: table 0). As already indicated, the sample included a wide range of HEIs, including those:

- with highly selective courses recruiting nationally/internationally, through to institutions with a strong local, regional or curriculum-specialist mission;
- exhibiting a broad range of performance in various 'quality' indicators, e.g. research performance, formal undergraduate entry requirements and record of graduate employability (each of these being indicators that are broadly correlated).

In total, across the 2008 and 2009/10 surveys, 38 of the 113 HEIs (34%) in England now have been sampled. Between them, in 2008/09, these 38 institutions had a 33% share of all UK-domiciled undergraduates attending English universities and colleges of higher education (HESA 08/09: table 0).

1.3 Research Methods

Telephone interviews with PVCs and HoAs

The interviews with PVCs were undertaken in November/December 2009 (with 15 out of the 19 institutions supplying interviewees). In common with the 2008 interviews, they addressed the following areas:

- (a) contextual issues: the institution's current admissions goals; its priorities for undergraduate teaching and learning; the level of knowledge/understanding of Diplomas amongst the institution's staff;
- (b) possible progression pathways for Diploma applicants;
- (c) the institution's admissions policy in relation to Diploma applicants;
- (d) the institution's involvement, if any, in the development and/or delivery of Diplomas.

The interviews with the HoAs were undertaken in February 2010 (with all 19 institutions providing interviewees). This group provided detailed institution-wide information on: the current profile of undergraduates in relation to prior qualifications/attainment and characteristics such as age and gender; levels of knowledge about Diplomas amongst admissions staff/tutors; admissions policies in relation to Diplomas; and local progression agreements. These interviews were timetabled to allow the deadline for UCAS applications for 2010 entry to have passed (15 January 2010). This enabled information to be sought on the number of applications received by an institution from Diploma students, the quality of the applications, and the proportion of applications for which offers were being made. It was not, however, possible to gather data on the number of offers accepted, as the deadline for students to communicate their choices to UCAS was not until 8 June 2010, or 27 July 2010 if they had applied through UCAS Extra.

Desk Research

The time constraints of telephone interviews prohibited discussion with HoAs of entry requirements on a course by course basis. It was therefore decided to elicit this information via desk research using the UCAS website. The entry requirements specified by the 19 institutions in the 2009/10 survey sample were investigated for a range of undergraduate courses which appeared to provide potential pathways from

the first five Diploma subject areas.¹ The aims of this website analysis were to identify:

- (a) whether the Diploma qualification was being accepted by all the sampled institutions;
- (b) if Diplomas were accepted, whether departments had specified acceptance only of subject areas which appear to be directly related to an undergraduate course, or whether the Diploma was being viewed as a generic qualification;
- (c) whether the entry requirements for Diploma students were the same as those set for traditional A level students – in terms of tariff points and/or grades.

For each institution in the survey sample, a complete list of honours undergraduate (UG) degree courses was extracted from the UCAS website. Across the 19 HEIs sampled, the number of courses on offer to applicants ranged from c.40 in a small, specialist institution to c.1700 in a large HEI, though this institution offered many combined honours courses.

The next stage was to identify a sample of UG courses which might be appropriate pathways for progression from the first five subject areas. This was more straightforward for Construction and the Built Environment, Engineering and IT than for Creative and Media and Society, Health and Development which are interdisciplinary in terms of the Principal Learning component and therefore potentially offer a wider array of pathways to undergraduate study. In total, 126 differently named degree courses were identified for investigation. A list of these courses is set out in Appendix A, Annexe I.

Table 1.1 The number of institutions offering courses directly aligned to the first five subject areas

Diploma subject	Number of institutions with directly related UG courses
Construction and the Built Environment	10
Creative and Media	18
Engineering	14
IT	19
Society, Health and Development	18
N =	19

Source: NFER/Exeter evaluation of Diplomas: desk research - UCAS website, November 2009.

¹ It was not possible to investigate pathways for the second five subject areas as 2011 entry requirements were not available on the UCAS website at the time of this survey but institutions' positions on these were investigated during the interviews with the PVCs and HoAs.

The number of courses investigated across the 19 institutions totalled 271 due to the prevalence of courses with the same title across institutions. Not all institutions in the sample had UG courses which would align directly to each of the first five subject areas, as Table 1.1 above indicates. A fuller discussion of the methodology for the desk research strand of the study is set out in Appendix A.

1.4 The HEI context

In our interviews with PVCs and HoAs we asked a range of contextual questions, under three broad headings, which we considered relevant to the consideration by these HEIs of admitting Diploma-holding applicants from 2010.

Patterns and sustainability of undergraduate student recruitment

As with our 2008 sample, in the 2009/10 survey there was a range of undergraduate student cultures represented, illustrative of the diversity of English higher education.

- **Size.** Three of the Guild HE institutions were small providers (08/09 undergraduate population within the range 2,500-5,500), while two of the other HEIs had enrolled between them around 20 per cent of the students across the sample (08/09 undergraduate population within the broad range 20,000-25,000). The remaining 14 institutions had undergraduate populations of 6,000 – 18,000.
- **Social background, age profile and prior qualifications.** In the three Russell Group institutions the lowest proportion of entrants from independent schools was approximately 26%-28% (HESA 08/09: table T1b) and the great majority of undergraduate entrants to these universities were young (under-21), with A levels. Other institutions, typically those which are research-intensive, also had an undergraduate intake where the A level was the dominant (75%+) qualification. In contrast, institutions more recently designated as universities or remaining as colleges of higher education reported entrants with other types of qualification (notably BTEC) ranging in proportion from 20% to 50%. In these institutions the age profile was also likely to be higher, with the proportion of mature (over age 21) entrants ranging from 30% to 50%.
- **Geographical origin.** Newer universities and colleges were likely to have the largest local and regional patterns of recruitment (including where this was the dominant mode), although there were exceptions. One research-intensive university had a growing regional profile in terms of undergraduate entrants, while one new university had a large international population of undergraduates.

Interviewees were asked about the sustainability of their current pattern of recruitment, particularly in view of the impending demographic downturn of 18 year olds (from 2010) and the current recession. All institutions had reviewed the evidence and tried to anticipate the effects:

- across all types of institution, the overriding impact of the recession had been to increase undergraduate applications;
- this had served to lessen the concerns of the teaching-led institutions in the sample that demographic change would make undergraduate recruitment more difficult, although one responded by saying that demographic change remained a '*definite worry*'.

Two teaching-led universities reported a clear shift to part-time entrants, while five institutions, of all types, mentioned a deliberate fostering of international undergraduate applications. In one research-intensive university, concern was expressed that recessionary pressures might impact on the proportion of applications received from students in working class households.

Recruitment goals 2010-2014

In the different contexts in which this sample of HEIs work (including very varied formal undergraduate entry requirements), there were many similarities in recruitment goals being pursued by senior managers at the time of the survey.

In the immediate future, almost all of the HEIs reported expecting and desiring only slight adjustments to their current undergraduate profile in terms of volume and social/geographical composition, although one new university sought a 'step change' toward a greater proportion of younger entrants. Over the next five years, two headline goals were shared by a majority of institutions in the survey: to increase entry standards by setting higher thresholds for undergraduate entry (10 of 19 HEIs); and to maintain or increase their efforts to widen participation (11 out of 19). As with responses to the 2008 survey, these developments suggest that, in common with other applicants, Diploma-holders from 2010 will find entry to leading universities to be strongly competitive.

Undergraduate teaching and learning: current priorities and relevance of Diplomas

Overall, significant management activity in this area was reported. As was the case in 2008, at the time of the survey senior teams across the sample institutions were actively reviewing key aims relating to the teaching and learning of their undergraduates.

Among the 15 Pro Vice-Chancellors interviewed and regardless of the kind of institutions they represented, two headline themes emerged related to refinements currently in hand for undergraduate teaching and learning:

- initiatives to increase student employability through increased work-based and work-related learning (9 out of 15 institutions); and
- enhancement overall of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (6 out of 15). One respondent's comment was typical of many:

'There has been a shake-up in schools in terms of curriculum enrichment and the kind of learning that students will expect in higher education, for example social learning spaces and structured placements. All of our courses should involve placements.'

As in the 2008 survey, these generic themes are strikingly resonant with the formal aims of Diploma learning.

1.5 Summary

This survey, conducted during the winter of 2009/10, replicated and extended the previous survey conducted in 2008. In both cases purposive, stratified samples of HEIs participated: telephone interviews were undertaken with senior managers. Thirty-eight of the 133 HEIs (34%) in England have now taken part in this evaluation. Additionally in this survey, admissions requirements for entry to 271 named undergraduate courses were reviewed. These were courses available at the 19 institutions sampled in the 2009/10 survey and where content was related to that in one or more of the first five Diploma subjects. As in the 2008 survey, the current priorities of senior managers for enhancing undergraduate learning are in line with and form a good match with the design of Diploma courses.

2. Levels of Diploma knowledge

Key findings and implications for policy

- Pro Vice-Chancellors believed they needed to be – and were – sufficiently well informed about Diplomas so as to accommodate them in their institutions' undergraduate recruitment plans. They were broadly satisfied with the utility of official information about the qualifications and, overall, were better informed than their peers in the 2008 survey.
- Heads of Admissions (or, occasionally, their deputies) saw their role as being the in-house expert on Diplomas in HEIs. Where there was a lack of knowledge about them, this related to details of the unit specifications of Diplomas and the specific arrangements and timetable for the release of candidates' results. Heads of Admissions were also broadly satisfied with the utility of official information about the awards but it was to UCAS that they mainly looked for detailed answers to questions.
- In most institutions it was considered that knowledge of Diplomas among other staff in the central administration and those in the academic departments was uneven. This was not considered to be a problem as, where there was uncertainty, the central admissions teams expected to be sought out for advice by departments about admission decisions concerning applicants holding Diplomas.

Implications for policy

HEIs were keen to know when they would be told how and when UCAS would make available to them the results for Diploma applicants. In what was to be a particularly competitive year for HE entry – and the first year of entry by Diploma students – it was important that Diploma results were to be made available at the same time as the results for A levels.

2.1 Pro Vice-Chancellors' knowledge of Diplomas

Nine PVCs reported feeling 'quite knowledgeable' about Diplomas when interviewed at the end of 2009. Three felt 'very knowledgeable'; only two rated themselves as 'not very knowledgeable'. In general, the interview data provided evidence that these self-ratings were accurate and there seemed to be slightly greater levels of awareness and understanding of the Diploma qualification amongst HEIs in 2009/10, compared to 2008.

Most PVCs believed it was not necessary for them to be in possession of *detailed* information about individual Diplomas; there were others in their institution who had

this role: central admissions staff and colleagues in the academic departments. Only two PVCs said further information would be helpful. One, who had rated himself as 'quite knowledgeable', said: *'a concise briefing sheet about what they are, what subjects they're in, who is developing/delivering them/who they are targeted at and what the progression routes are would be useful'*. The other said that it would be helpful to have a schedule showing when all the subject areas were to be implemented and the numbers expected to take them. This PVC had rated himself as 'not very knowledgeable' and was clearly unaware that the implementation dates had been widely available for some years.

2.2 Knowledge of Diplomas among Heads of Admissions and Departmental Staff

Whilst all HoAs at the six research-intensive universities felt 'very knowledgeable', only three of those among the other 13 institutions considered themselves 'very knowledgeable', (with nine 'quite knowledgeable', and one 'not very knowledgeable'). However, most HoAs who rated themselves as 'quite knowledgeable' rather than 'very knowledgeable' did so because they were unfamiliar with the details of the unit specifications of the Diplomas. The only HoA who responded 'not very knowledgeable' relied upon a well-informed deputy.

Most HoAs felt they had the knowledge they required to oversee applications from Diploma applicants. Further information specifically suggested as useful would be to know when, and in what form, Diploma results will be made available by UCAS: *'We can't afford for these students to be kept waiting, particularly this summer as competition will be very tight. We need to have confidence that their outcomes will be reported at the same time as A levels.'*

When asked about the extent of knowledge and understanding of Diplomas among HEIs' admissions staff and departmental admissions tutors generally, HoAs typically reported this to be variable, with knowledge ranging widely among staff in the central administration and subject departments: *'patchy'* was a frequent response to this question. Some HoAs drew a distinction between the more knowledgeable centralised admissions staff, (six felt these to be 'very' well informed), and other staff whose level of knowledge varied widely depending upon their interest and involvement in Diplomas to date.

Department staff who had been involved with a local Diploma consortium, and some of those whose academic departments were closely aligned to a particular Diploma subject, were understandably more likely to be regarded as 'quite well' informed. Whilst HoAs recognised that all departmental admissions tutors needed to be aware of Diplomas in case they were presented with applicants, they expected less well informed tutors to approach central admissions staff for advice: *'They will lean heavily on us for guidance and information but that's fine and what we are here for. Things will get easier once we are more used to the qualification.'*

Only two HoAs felt sufficiently confident to say that all their admissions staff and tutors were very well informed.

All 19 institutions updated admissions tutors on new pre-entry courses of study, curriculum content and methods of assessment, though the ways in which this is undertaken varied from timetabled meetings during the academic year to more ad hoc and informal arrangements. Eight HEIs arranged annual meetings, forums or training events for admissions staff (in summer or autumn), four held similar meetings for admissions staff each term, and three mentioned holding one-off training events. Ten referred to providing 'regular updates', seven specifically using email for this purpose. Two HoAs reported using an intranet to make information available for admissions staff to access, and one distributed a monthly e-newsletter to admissions staff. Some institutions also mentioned induction processes for new admissions tutors which, in one HEI, comprised individual face-to-face briefing and information sessions.

2.3 Effectiveness of Diploma information dissemination

Both PVCs and HoAs were asked how effectively information about Diplomas had been disseminated to HEIs, and in what ways it might be improved.

Most PVCs believed that information about Diplomas had been disseminated 'quite' or 'very effectively' by the Department for Education, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency and some commented that there had been an improvement during the last couple of years since the first publicity materials received in 2007/08. Two, however, reported that the local 14-19 partnership had been a better source of information and one PVC wondered whether Universities UK might usefully play a greater role in keeping members up to date with developments.

Amongst HoAs, there was a widespread view that there was no shortage of information. Whilst the information flow had begun slowly and in a piecemeal way, (one HoA suggesting it might have been better coming from a single source), there was now almost too much detailed information for admissions staff to absorb. Three HoAs commented that the simultaneous changes to AQA Baccalaureate, Welsh Baccalaureate, reformed A levels and other qualifications was adding to the complexity of the work of admissions staff.

UCAS was regularly referred to as the most useful source of information. As one HoA explained: *'Things were transformed by an excellent workshop put on here by a UCAS staff member who was extremely effective in raising our awareness of all the details.'*

Several HoAs mentioned using helpful DFE publications, pamphlets and website links. The timeliness and relevance of presentations was important to their success.

Most HoAs said they now had all the information they required, though one HoA said that more information on courses which could be taken as Additional and/or Specialist Learning would be useful, and another was keen to learn how the complex Diploma results would be collated and presented to HEIs by UCAS.

2.4 Summary

Levels of knowledge about Diplomas were higher amongst PVCs and HoAs in the 2009/10 than had been found in the 2008 sample, though awareness and understanding of Diplomas at departmental level continued to be 'patchy'. This situation was expected to change as more subject areas were introduced and students with Diplomas begin to arrive in HEIs. Overall, HEIs reported satisfaction with the way in which information about Diplomas had been disseminated to them.

3. Involvement in Diploma development and delivery

Key findings and implications for policy

- In this year's survey a much greater proportion of institutions than in the 2008 survey reported involvement in Diploma **development** by their staff. This was mostly at the strategic level, as a member of a local Lifelong Learning Network (LLN) and/or Diploma consortium, though two HEIs had staff who had been involved at the national level in Diploma Development Partnerships.
- However, there was no reported involvement in the **delivery** of Diplomas by HEI staff this year, compared to the 2008 sample where four of the 19 HEIs had been making a contribution of this sort.
- Most Pro Vice-Chancellors considered that it was important to maintain teaching demarcations between higher education institutions, on the one hand, and schools and colleges, on the other. Nevertheless, there was a willingness, particularly amongst the teaching-led institutions, to consider involvement in delivery, if additional resources were made available.

Implications for policy

The 2009/10 survey suggests that the readiness of HEIs to become involved in Diploma **development** had grown since the previous year. Although none of the 19 sampled HEIs was currently involved in **delivery**, a small number, amongst the teaching-led institutions, would consider encouraging Diploma delivery among their staff if there were dedicated resources available.

When asked about involvement in **delivery**, HEI responses focused on classroom teaching by their staff of elements of the Diploma and why this would not be appropriate. It could be helpful for Diploma consortia to disseminate information to HEIs on the range of different ways in which they could support delivery.

3.1 Development

Amongst the 19 institutions sampled in the 2008 survey, four institutions had been involved in the development of Diploma specifications. Of the 15 institutions in the 2009/10 survey for which we have data from the PVC interviews, 11 reported some involvement in the development of one or more subject areas. Two of the 11 institutions said they had been involved with development of the Engineering Diploma at the national level through Diploma Development Partnerships. In the remaining cases, involvement was at the local level, working through the local Lifelong Learning Network and/or as a partner in a local Diploma consortium. Activities included contributing to the Gateway submission process; hosting meetings; taking part in

discussions with local schools and colleges about Diploma curricula. One PVC, whose institution had been working closely with four local authorities on the development of the Engineering and Society, Health and Development Diplomas identified some of the benefits:

'We've always said that [being involved] would benefit us – because our colleagues will understand much better what is going on [with Diplomas] and we may adapt our own curriculum accordingly.'

Another HEI had recently appointed a Diploma Development Officer *'with a key role to engage in Diploma development across the District and to liaise between the university and the other partners on the new Diplomas.'*

3.2 Delivery

There are potentially a number of ways in which HEIs might contribute to the delivery of Diplomas: teaching elements of the Diploma at local schools/colleges; teaching elements of the Diploma at the HEI to visiting learners; supporting the Extended Project; providing projects/challenges for young people to complete; providing content for teachers to use when delivering, e.g. information packs. However, none of the PVCs in the 2009/10 sample reported involvement by their institution with delivery of the Diplomas (compared to four institutions in the 2008 survey).

Opinions amongst the 2009/10 interviewees differed as to whether such involvement was desirable. Five of the 15 PVCs expressed strongly the view that it is not the role of HEIs to contribute to delivery. Some disagreed with the notion in principle; others questioned the rationale, as the selection of quotes below illustrates:

'It is not our mission to be involved in delivery of this kind.'

'I can't see why we'd want to be directly involved in delivery.'

'Colleagues in teaching and learning should stick to what they know best – so level 3 teachers should stick to that and level 4 teachers to their area of expertise.'

'We work very closely with two of the sixth form colleges – my feeling is that they would be much better at delivery than [our] staff!'

Some PVCs indicated a willingness to consider involvement with delivery, if funding and other resource issues could be overcome. The quotes below are representative of this group's views:

'I think there is a danger that one asks universities to do everything. There need to be some boundaries. [We] already support schools in Maths in the local area ... but to extend this support to Diplomas would have implications for staff

workload and the way in which the university is organised. Nothing is impossible, though. It's a question of resources.'

'There's a limit to what any HEI can do ... we don't have the people or the resources. It would be nice to be involved in delivery if our resources were infinite, but it's not the day job.'

A small number of institutions, although rejecting direct involvement by HEI staff with delivery, indicated a readiness to make facilities available to schools and colleges.

Only two PVCs (both in teaching-led institutions) were strongly enthusiastic about HEI involvement with Diploma delivery and reported this as a possibility for their institution in the future. One believed that specialist contributions by HEI staff could help to prepare students for study at UG level and could smooth transition both academically and socially from school/college to university. The other reported the success of previous collaborations with local schools and a desire to extend this work to Diplomas. This PVC identified benefits for students, school staff and his own staff:

'We do a lot of it, but we don't do enough of it yet. The benefits are for the students in the school – it's a myth-busting process – it shows them that the university's staff aren't eggheads, and that we do exciting stuff. For the school staff – they can be refreshed by working with university academics in their subject areas, and that therefore again benefits the students. And our staff benefit, too.'

3.3 Summary

Levels of engagement with Diploma **development** were greater amongst the 2009/10 survey institutions than the 2008 survey sample, though in contrast, none reported involvement in **delivery**. Some HEIs felt very strongly that it is not their role to become involved in the delivery of level 3 courses. There was, however, particularly from some of the teaching-led HEIs, a willingness to consider contributing to Diploma delivery, if additional funding could be made available.

4. Admissions policies

Key findings and implications for policy

- The current prospectuses of 18 of the 19 institutions provided some information on the acceptability of the Diploma for entry onto courses. The majority contained a general statement about accepting Diplomas, with further information about the entry requirements elsewhere in the prospectus/website; a small number referred applicants to the relevant UCAS web pages.
- Three institutions had not, by November 2009, posted any information on Diplomas on the relevant UCAS course entry requirements web page and on these institutions' own websites only general statements about Diplomas could be found.
- A majority of senior managers in the 19 HEIs saw Diplomas as, in principle, both general and specialist qualifications. While some interviewees argued that only one of these functions was appropriate, most were of the view that Diploma applicants could be expected either to stay within the pathway implied by their chosen subject area or to 'branch across' to another area of study at undergraduate level, so long as any specific entry requirements (including components of Additional and/or Specialist Learning) had been met.
- Pro Vice-Chancellors identified those subject areas that seemed well aligned to current areas of undergraduate study offered at their institution, so constituting a potential progression pathway. The most commonly cited subjects were (in descending order): IT; Creative & Media; Business, Finance & Administration; Society, Health & Development; Engineering. The least cited were (in descending order): Construction & Built Environment; Hospitality; and Hair and Beauty Studies.
- Although foundation degree provision was widespread amongst the sample, a large majority of respondents predicted that recruitment would be to their Honours degree courses. This had been borne out by the applications received so far for 2010 entry and was later confirmed to be the case nationally by UCAS.

As in the 2008 survey, most HEIs reported various partnership activities with local schools and colleges including 'progression accords'. However, as last year, these were not thought to be significant in terms of influencing patterns of Diploma applications. Most considered that such applications would come from institutions' established catchments, be these regional, national or both.

Implications for policy

Several findings relating to admissions policies and practices are relevant for specific dissemination to organisations with a role in supporting Diplomas:

- By November 2009, not all departments in the sample institutions had specified publicly on the UCAS website their undergraduate entry requirements in respect of Diploma applicants (relevant to UCAS e-updates to HEIs);

Implications for policy (continued)

- Most HEIs expected Diploma subject areas to create clear-cut progression pathways into higher education. Across the first ten subjects, this expectation was strongest in the cases of: IT, Creative & Media, Business, Finance & Administration; Society, Health & Development; and Engineering (relevant to marketing by Diploma Development Partnerships and local consortia);
- It was expected that such pathways are likely to be established through traditional patterns of application and recruitment (regional and/or national), rather than through the specific stimulus of local 'widening participation' activity or foundation degree provision. This indicates that HEIs were according the Diploma qualification the same status as A levels and expected Diploma applicants to be of a comparable quality to A level candidates (relevant to marketing by Diploma Development Partnerships and local consortia).

4.1 Information about Diplomas

HEIs publish prospectuses both in print and on their websites, the latter often containing the more up-to-date information. All but one of the Heads of Admissions interviewed reported that their current undergraduate prospectus provided information for potential Diploma applicants. In the remaining case, the institution's 2011 prospectus would carry this information.

There were some differences across the sample in the amount and type of information provided. Three HoAs said their prospectus made no 'generic statement' about Diplomas, presenting the necessary information by department or course. The remainder reported a combination of general statements about accepting Diplomas, with further information to candidates about the requirements of individual courses elsewhere in the prospectus or by referring them to the UCAS website.

UCAS website

Of the 19 institutions sampled, the UCAS course entry requirements web pages for three institutions (two research-intensive) did not include any information on Diplomas, though requirements for qualifications such as BTEC National Diplomas were included. On these institutions' own websites, only general statements about Diplomas could be found. The following is typical:

'The University accepts the Level 3 Advanced Diploma qualification as suitable for admission to year one of an undergraduate degree course. Admission and entry requirements ... are dependent on the Diploma taken and the degree course applied for. Applicants undertaking the Advanced Diploma are asked to contact the Undergraduate Admissions Office or visit [website link] for details of the entry requirements and further information on which Diplomas are accepted for specific degree courses.'

When this link was clicked, it led merely to another general statement:

'We would like to advise students that the University expects to be able to accept the Advanced Diplomas for entry to our degree schemes. Entry to specific degree schemes may be dependent on the Diploma taken and the degree scheme applied for.'

Of the remaining 16 institutions, there were inconsistencies across courses in five institutions. Some departments had clearly engaged with Diplomas and the entry requirements for applicants undertaking them; other departments in the same institution had not posted any information on Diplomas.

4.2 A specialised or generic qualification?

PVCs and HoAs were asked whether their institution viewed the Diploma as a generic qualification appropriate for entry onto a wide range of its undergraduate programmes or as a specialised qualification leading only to directly-related undergraduate courses.

Nine of the 15 PVCs interviewed believed the Diploma should be viewed as both a specialist and a generic qualification; to some extent it would depend on the Diploma and on the course being applied for. Only four HoAs took this position.

Twelve of the 19 HoAs interviewed described the Diploma as a generic qualification, though almost all mentioned that some courses specify relevant Additional and/or Specialist Learning (ASL) (such as Music A level to study Music). Only two PVCs reported that a decision had been taken to acknowledge the Diploma as an entirely generic qualification, though neither of these institutions accepted the Hair and Beauty Studies Diploma as an appropriate pathway onto their UG honours degrees, and one indicated that some relevant specialism might be sought by some departmental admissions tutors in terms of the ASL components that applicants have studied.

Three PVCs highlighted what they saw as the qualification's specialist nature, arguing that the young people choosing to do a Diploma had themselves taken a decision to follow a particular pathway and would therefore be likely to wish to continue with study at a higher level in the same curriculum/sectoral area. One HoA based in a small specialist teaching-led institution expected to receive applications from Creative and Media Diploma students only. Two HoAs said it was too early to say definitely whether they saw Diplomas as generic or specialised, and another, though treating them initially as generic, was expecting to review this after experience of the first intake of students.

Two HoAs, whose institutions treat the Diploma as a generic qualification, said: *'Applicants themselves are clearly seeing the Diploma as a specialised pathway – the*

applicant is driving that. Applications received by the 19 sampled institutions for entry to UG courses in 2010 are discussed in detail in section 6.

In the two cases where differences of opinion existed between the PVC and HoA as to the nature of the Diploma qualification, the HoA reported that their institution viewed it as a generic qualification, while their PVC had talked of its specialist nature. Our two annual surveys suggest that, overall, responses from HoAs are a more reliable source of information on this matter because they are responsible for managing the implementation of the entry requirements agreed centrally and with departments, and have a detailed knowledge of how policy is being translated into practice.

4.3 Diploma subject areas identified as pathways onto UG courses

In November 2009, the PVCs were asked whether all the first ten subject areas appeared to be suitable as a pathway onto undergraduate study in their institution. As the institutions in the survey formed a purposive, stratified sample, it was inevitable that not all would have undergraduate courses which would map clearly from each of the first ten subject areas and Tables 4.1 and 4.2 below should be read with this in mind.

Table 4.1 Diplomas identified by PVCs as suitable pathways to undergraduate study: research-intensive universities in the sample (4 out of 15 HEIs)

Diplomas	Definitely	Possibly
Phase 1		
IT	4	0
Engineering	3	0
Creative and Media	3	1
Construction and the Built Environment	2	0
Society, Health and Development	2	1
Phase 2		
Environmental and Land-based Studies	4	0
Business, Administration and Finance	3	0
Manufacturing and Product Design	2	0
Hospitality	1	0
Hair and Beauty Studies	0	1

Source: NFER/University of Exeter evaluation of Diplomas: interviews with PVCs in HEIs, November/December 2009

When the PVC data across the sample of HEIs are aggregated from these two tables, it can be seen that the most common progression routes cited among Phase 1 and Phase 2 subject areas were: IT (13 out of 15); Creative and Media (12); Business, Administration and Finance (11); Society, Health and Development (10); and Engineering (10). Meanwhile, relatively few progression routes were identified across the sampled institutions for students taking the Construction and the Built Environment (6 out of 15) and Hospitality (3) Diplomas and none for those taking Hair

and Beauty Studies. The explanation for this pattern may lie in the perceived curriculum of the different subject areas. With the exception of Engineering, the Diplomas most frequently mentioned by PVCs are multi-disciplinary in nature and/or develop skills which may be applied in a variety of contexts, providing a potentially greater diversity of progression pathways than Construction and the Built Environment, Hospitality and Hair and Beauty Studies.

Table 4.2 Diplomas identified by PVCs as suitable pathways to undergraduate study: teaching-led institutions (11 out of 15 HEIs)

Diploma	Definitely	Possibly
Phase 1		
Creative and Media	9	0
IT	9	1
Society, Health and Development	8	1
Engineering	7	0
Construction and the Built Environment	4	0
Phase 2		
Business, Administration and Finance	8	2
Manufacturing and Product Design	6	1
Environmental and Land-based Studies	4	1
Hospitality	2	2
Hair and Beauty Studies	0	0

Source: NFER/University of Exeter evaluation of Diplomas: interviews with PVCs in HEIs, November/December 2009

When PVCs were asked which subject areas were likely to become the ‘most significant’, in terms of curriculum match and/or levels of recruitment, the Phase 1 subject areas were mentioned more frequently than those in Phase 2 (except Manufacturing and Product Design).

Table 4.3 Diplomas identified as significant in terms of curriculum match and undergraduate recruitment potential: research-intensive and teaching-led institutions (15 out of 19 institutions)

Diploma	Number of institutions
Creative and Media	5
Engineering	5
IT	3
Society, Health and Development	3
Manufacturing and Product Design	3
Construction and the Built Environment	2
Business, Administration and Finance	1
Environmental and Land-based Studies	1

nb The total is greater than 15 because some PVCs named more than one subject.

Source: NFER/University of Exeter evaluation of Diplomas: interviews with PVCs in HEIs, November/December 2009

Table 4.3 ranks in order the number of institutions identifying specific Diplomas likely to prove significant in these terms. Neither Hospitality nor Hair and Beauty Studies was mentioned as 'significant' for any institution.

In common with the findings from our 2008 survey, the majority of PVCs (including all those interviewed in the research-intensive universities) indicated that, in general terms, Diplomas are an appropriate route from which to enter the undergraduate honours degree courses in their institution. With the exception of two research-intensive universities (which operate a 'foundation year'), every Head of Admissions reported some involvement in foundation degree provision. However, the foundation degree was widely held to have 'little importance' (four responses) or 'no importance' (11 responses) to establishing progression routes from Diplomas. Only two HoAs could see any potential links to their foundation degree provision and this would be on a small scale. The picture emerging from our sample of 19 institutions was later seen to have been reproduced nationally: UCAS reported that the vast majority of Diploma applicants (83%) were accepted to study for honours degrees. This finding confirms not only that HEIs perceived the Diploma to be an appropriate qualification for progression onto their honours degree courses, but also that they anticipated the calibre of Diploma applicants to be comparable to that of A level students.

4.4 Progression partnerships

Our interviews with HoAs explored the extent to which their institution was engaged in an arrangement/accord with local schools and/or colleges, and the significance of such partnership working for policies concerning the entry of Diploma-holding applicants to undergraduate courses. HoAs at 11 of the 19 institutions reported progression arrangements were in place; of the remaining eight, two had plans to develop these.

Two of the six research-intensive HEIs had formal progression arrangements. One reported that it was extending its existing progression accords with 40 schools and colleges to include Diplomas and it guaranteed an offer at standard grades on a range of courses. The other had set up a progression agreement for Construction and the Built Environment students applying to its Engineering and Construction-related courses, offering advice on the UCAS application process and a guaranteed interview, though not a guaranteed offer. Amongst the teaching-led institutions, most HoAs reported only a small number of agreements. One currently had five in place though the local Diploma Development Officer was developing nine more. Two teaching-led HEIs guaranteed interviews to Diploma applicants, and three guaranteed standard offers, but only on selected courses. One offered marginally discounted grades. Five teaching-led HEIs reported undertaking outreach work (e.g. visiting schools and advising students), but outside formal progression arrangements.

In common with the findings of our 2008 survey, the majority of HoAs felt that progression agreements such as those reported would have little or no significance

for patterns of undergraduate entry. At the teaching-led institution where many more agreements were being developed for 2011, the interviewee thought this route could become quite significant, but at only one other institution was any significance of this kind thought likely. Most HEIs in our sample expected Diploma applicants to be drawn from their traditional catchment areas, at either regional or national level or both.

4.5 Requirements concerning level 2 Diplomas and HE entry from 2012

In 2012, it is likely that some applicants to HEIs will have undertaken a Level 2 (Higher) Diploma at Key Stage 4 before progressing to a Diploma at Level 3 or onto A levels. Heads of Admissions were therefore asked whether Higher Diplomas will be accorded the same status as seven separate GCSEs when applications are considered. Ten HoAs said they had not yet considered this issue, but many added that specific GCSE requirements (normally in English and Mathematics) would still have to be satisfied. Among interviewees at the research-intensive institutions, four said that their university would specifically require English and Mathematics as GCSEs (one describing Functional Skills as not being an acceptable substitute) and the remaining two said their university would consider applications on a case-by-case basis. Among the teaching-led HEIs there was a more widespread view that a Level 2 Diploma would be accorded the same status as seven GCSEs.

4.6 Summary

All the first five subject areas were identified by the PVCs and HoAs interviewed as suitable pathways onto undergraduate study, though there were relatively fewer progression routes to the sampled institutions for students taking the Construction and the Built Environment Diploma. Most Diploma learners were expected to stay within the pathway implied by their chosen subject when progressing onto higher education, though there were many courses across the institutions sampled which were treating the Diploma as a generic rather than specialised qualification.

Diploma learners are expected to be recruited to honours degree courses and to be drawn from the HEIs' established catchment areas, suggesting that the quality of the Diploma qualification and its learners is acknowledged to be comparable to that of the A level and A level learners.

5. Admissions practices

Key findings and implications for policy

- A large majority of institutions in the survey were willing, in principle, to recognise all of the first five Diploma subject areas as suitable preparation for undergraduate study.
- Undergraduate courses aligned to the Creative and Media and Society, Health and Development Diplomas were most likely to accept Diploma applicants from other subject areas. In contrast, courses aligned to IT, Engineering and Construction and the Built Environment were more likely to accept only Diploma applicants studying this subject area.
- The entry requirements for 271 separate courses were reviewed on the UCAS website and among those for which entry requirements for Diploma applicants were available, only four (in three different institutions) explicitly stated the Diploma would not be an acceptable qualification for entry.
- In November 2009, there were still courses listed on the UCAS website which did not provide specific entry requirement information for Diploma applicants.
- Where specified, the Additional and/or Specialist Learning requirement most commonly took the form of an A level, with research-intensive universities most likely to prescribe the subject and/or grade. Only two of the 19 institutions provided guidance as to the type of Extended Project they would prefer.
- For the majority of courses, entry requirements, in terms of grades required or the number of tariff points, were very similar for Diploma and A level applicants.
- There was a minority of cases where the specific entry requirements to particular courses, when specified as grades (rather than tariff points) made higher demands on Diploma than A level candidates. Conversely, there was also a small number of courses (where entry requirements were specified as tariff points) which appeared to set higher requirements for A level applicants than for Diploma students.

Implications for policy

- UCAS had received a number of queries from HEIs, schools and colleges in relation to the structure of Diplomas and how the final grade/tariff score was to be calculated. At the time of our second survey, the Diploma was a complex qualification and it was vital that information on how its tariff score was calculated was presented clearly and unambiguously to schools/colleges, students and parents so that young people could understand exactly what they needed to achieve to satisfy the entry requirements of HEIs.

Implications for policy (continued)

- Most of the institutions in the sample prescribing the nature of the Additional/Specialist Learning required it to be an A level in an area related to the Diploma subject. Staff in schools/colleges providing information, advice and guidance to Year 11 learners need to ensure they discuss with learners how choosing Additional Learning, instead of Specialist Learning, might constrain their choice of HEI and/or undergraduate course later.

The data presented in this section are drawn from the interviews with the 19 Heads of Admissions and from the desk research.

5.1 Admissions practice at institution level

Seventeen of the 19 HoAs reported that their institution was accepting all of the first five subject areas (available from 2008) for 2010 entry onto UG honours courses. One research-intensive HEI had decided not to accept the Society, Health and Development Diploma as '*it does not match academic-based courses*' in the relevant departments. The other institution, a small specialist, teaching-led HEI anticipated receiving applications only from students studying the Creative and Media Diploma, but stressed that all A level applicants are also expected to have undertaken courses of study directly related to their proposed undergraduate programme.

HoAs reported that all the first five subject areas were considered to have equal status though this did not mean that every Diploma would be accepted for every course of study. The desk research provided some further information on this matter. Requirements for 271 separate courses related to the first five subject areas were reviewed. Where available, for each course, the entry requirements for Diploma applicants were investigated to discern whether most or all of the first five subject areas were acceptable (generic), or whether only subject areas closely related to the UG course were being accepted for entry (specialised). Very few differences were found in the formal requirements of courses within an institution. The differences in attitude towards the Diploma qualification were between institutions. As Table 5.1 below indicates, institutions offering courses aligned to the Construction and the Built Environment and Engineering Diplomas were less likely to accept any other subject for entry onto their UG programmes. This might be seen as limiting the opportunities for progression for Diploma students taking this subject. In the event, as we discuss in section 6, a large majority of applicants to undergraduate courses in 2010 had been studying for a Diploma in a relevant subject area.

Table 5.1 A generic or specialised qualification? Overall stance of sampled HEIs

Diploma Subject	Diploma deemed specialised	Diploma deemed generic
Construction and the Built Environment (10 HEIs)	5	5
Creative and Media (15 HEIs)	1	14
Engineering (12 HEIs)	4	8
IT (13 HEIs)	3	10 ₁
Society, Health and Development (14 HEIs)	0	14 ₂

Source: NFER/Exeter evaluation of Diplomas: desk research of entry requirements of 271 named courses, November 2009.

- ¹ One institution did not accept the Society, Health and Development Diploma for its IT courses.
- ² Across the institutions sampled, a large majority of UG courses aligned to the curriculum content of the Society, Health and Development Diploma accepted any subject area. Exceptions were: (a) Sociology and Psychology courses where one institution was prescriptive, accepting only the Society, Health and Development, IT and Creative and Media Diplomas; (b) Adult Nursing, where two institutions accepted only the Society, Health and Development Diploma; (c) Social Work, where one accepted only the Society, Health and Development Diploma; and (d) Medicine, where two institutions accepted only the Society, Health and Development Diploma.

Phase 2 Diplomas

Diploma students who have studied one of the five Phase 2 Diplomas introduced in September 2009 will be applying for entry into higher education in 2011. One research-intensive university indicated that it will not accept Diploma candidates in Hair and Beauty Studies or Hospitality, because of a lack of aligned UG courses. Among the 13 teaching-led institutions, 11 will generally accept all the Phase 2 Diplomas, though three had not yet made a decision about Hair and Beauty Studies and were still considering its academic content. One teaching-led HEI was planning only to accept Environmental & Land-based Studies and Manufacturing and Product Design, as the other subject areas were not relevant to their specialist range of courses.

5.2 Acceptance of Diplomas by individual academic departments

The interviews with HoAs revealed that, in five of the six research-intensive **HEIs**, there was at least one department in each not accepting Diploma-holding applicants for entry in 2010 onto certain courses. In four cases these related to sciences (e.g. physics, psychology, medical and life sciences) which require two science A levels². At one HEI the Economics department was reported as currently reluctant to accept Diplomas *‘because of a perceived lack of academic content’*.

HoAs at nine of the 13 teaching-led HEIs said that all departments would accept one or more of the first five subject areas, several pointing out that the acceptance of Diplomas was a corporate decision made by the institution. One teaching-led HEI would not accept Diplomas for science courses requiring two science A levels. Another had departments insisting on only directly related Diplomas. One institution’s Business School considered the content of the Creative and Media Diploma to be *‘insufficiently academic’*.

The desk research provided further information about the acceptability of Diplomas. Of the 271 separate courses reviewed, for which entry requirements for Diploma applicants were available on the UCAS website, only four courses (in three institutions) explicitly stated the Diploma would not be an acceptable qualification for entry. These were: Psychology (2 courses); Adult Nursing (1) and Human Biology (1). The Diploma was acceptable for other courses investigated in these institutions, so the decision to reject the Diploma for these courses appears to have been taken at a departmental level.

5.3 Course requirements in relation to Diplomas

Diploma applicants, in common with applicants with A levels and other qualifications, will find that there is a wide variety in the entry requirements for similar courses across different institutions. This largely reflects the extent to which a course is selecting or recruiting, which itself reflects the status of the institution and of the relevant department within that institution.

In the majority of cases, A level and Diploma students were apparently being treated similarly in terms of entry requirements though, as described in section 5.4, below, the investigation of the UCAS website identified some courses where Diploma students were required to achieve higher grades than A level candidates and, conversely, some courses where Diploma students could potentially fulfil the tariff points required with slightly lower grades overall than their A level peers.

² It is possible for a Diploma candidate to have undertaken two science A levels, one as the Additional and Specialist Learning within a Diploma one outside it, but this pattern of study is unlikely to be common.

Across the 271 undergraduate courses reviewed, research-intensive universities were much more likely to specify the grade to be attained in an Advanced Diploma – in respect both of the Progression Diploma element and the Additional and/or Specialist Learning subject.³ This was in line with the practice of these universities in making offers based on grades rather than on tariff points.

Confirming the findings of the desk research, only two HoAs knew of courses within their institution requiring a particular type of Extended Project. One, a research-intensive HEI, required the project to have a written basis ‘... a dissertation, not a performance, or artefact ... a dissertation is a more appropriate preparation for our degrees’. The other, a teaching-led institution, preferred candidates for its journalism degree to have a journalism-related project. In general, the response of the HEIs surveyed in 2009/10 echoed the views of the 19 sampled in 2008/09 in welcoming this element of the Diploma: ‘*The Extended Project is popular with admissions tutors. They think it is a component that will allow applicants to demonstrate their academic potential.*’

Although A level candidates were almost never asked to contact a relevant department or central admissions prior to applying, there were some examples of Diploma applicants being requested to do so. This probably reflects a ‘quality assurance’ procedure on the part of HEIs in the early years of Diploma implementation, at a time when not all admissions tutors are familiar with the new qualification.

Additional and Specialist Learning

All HoAs indicated that one or more of the undergraduate course teams in their institution had specified what the Additional and/or Specialist Learning (ASL) of the Advanced Diploma taken by applicants should comprise and this was most commonly an A level.

Specific A level requirements in terms of subject and/or grade were reported by HoAs as applying to most or all of the courses at five of the six research-intensive HEIs. In contrast, there was much greater variety reported among the teaching-led HEIs:

- one institution of this kind specified the ASL only for its Physiotherapy course
- one specified related subjects/grades for all Science courses, but not for any Business and Social Science courses
- for its Engineering courses, one accepted the Engineering Diploma without ASL, but other subject areas only with A level Maths as ASL
- one required ASL for admission to its Public Relations course, but this could comprise any qualification at a grade equivalent to 20 UCAS points

The desk research into 271 separate courses provided a great deal of information in relation to ASL. For those interested in the detail, we have presented the data for each Diploma in Appendix B. Set out below are the general findings:

³ For how these two elements inter-relate, see Appendix C.

- Supporting the evidence gathered from HoAs, in almost every case where an institution specified what the ASL should comprise, this was an A level. Across the courses scrutinised, only one other type of qualification was mentioned, by one institution: a BTEC National Diploma for entry onto its Construction and the Built Environment-related courses.
- A level Maths was required by a majority (6/10) of institutions for Construction and the Built Environment-related courses and by half (7/14) of those for their Engineering-related courses.
- Where a specific A level subject was required as ASL, in most cases the same A level subject was also required of A level candidates.
- In every case where the A level subject was tightly prescribed, it was related closely to the UG programme to be studied. For example, both the institutions offering Medical degrees accepted the Society, Health and Development Diploma, but only with A level Chemistry at grade A as the ASL. Staff providing information, advice and guidance to Year 11 learners should be alerted to this finding, in order to make sure that they discuss with learners how choosing Additional Learning, instead of Specialist Learning, might constrain their choice of HEI later.
- Selecting courses, especially those in selecting institutions, were more likely to specify the grade to be achieved by Diploma applicants in their ASL subject; this mirrored the practice in relation to A level applicants to those courses.
- Some institutions which had not posted specific pre-requisites for ASL requested Diploma applicants to contact the relevant department prior to application.
- Although some courses did not specify the Level 3 ASL, it was common for courses to indicate that applicants should have GCSE in English at grade C or above, also a requirement of applicants presenting with A levels. Some courses also specified GCSE Maths at grade C or above – these tended to be courses in vocational areas such as nursing or social work, where criteria set down by professional bodies have to be met.

5.4 Equivalence and status

When interviewed, all Heads of Admissions responded positively to the question *'Is your institution according the Advanced Diploma the same value as A levels when you are considering applications?'* Ten specifically referred to the role of the UCAS points tariff in achieving this.

However, the desk research identified some courses (typically in research-intensive universities) where entry requirements, particularly where these were **specified as grades**, had led Diploma applicants to be asked to perform at a higher level than A level candidates in terms of grades. In the following examples, we have added, in square brackets, the equivalence in UCAS tariff points to the stated requirements.

Table 5.2 Examples of entry requirements where grades are specified

Degree	Level 3 Qualification	Entry Requirement
Sociology	A levels	ABB [320 tariff points]
	Advanced Diploma	'A' in Diploma + 'A' in ASL (A level) [420 tariff points]
Theatre Performance	A levels	BBB [300 tariff points]
	Advanced Diploma	'A' in Diploma + 'A' in ASL (A level) [420 tariff points]
English with Creative Writing	A levels	280
	Advanced Diploma	320

Source: UCAS course entry requirements web pages (November 2009)

Conversely, the desk research also revealed a small number of courses, which appeared to set higher requirements for A level applicants than for Diploma students. Examples from two HEIs are given below:

Table 5.3 Examples of entry requirements where points are specified

Degree	Level 3 Qualification	Entry Requirement (tariff points)
Engineering	A levels	300
	Advanced Diploma	260
Creative Writing	A levels	240
	Advanced Diploma	220

Source: UCAS course entry requirements web pages (November 2009)

An explanation for the small number of cases where these variations in equivalence have been identified is not obvious. In the case of the examples of courses where higher tariff points were specified, perhaps HEIs were mindful of the fact that the Diploma is equivalent to 3.5 rather than 3 A levels. In the case of the examples of courses where higher grades are specified, perhaps admissions authorities were expressing scepticism about the 'equivalence' that the tariff is designed to represent. It may be that they are not yet fully conversant with the way in which the elements of the Diplomas build points across the candidate's programme of study. In Appendix C we present, in some detail, the guidance available on the UCAS website at the time of writing (April 2010) relating to how the tariff is calculated. The information was complex and perhaps not mastered, at that time, by all admissions tutors.

5.5 Summary

All first five Diplomas were being accepted for entry onto honours degree courses in 17 of the 19 institutions sampled in this survey, though this did not mean that every Diploma would be accepted for every course of study in an institution. Some courses, particularly those in the fields of Construction or Engineering, specified subject areas closely related to the UG course, but the driver here was the need for specialist

subject knowledge. It was rare for any HoA to report that a department had declined to accept a Diploma because of concerns about the academic content.

Where Additional and/or Specialist Learning was specified as part of the course entry requirements, it was almost always in the form of an A level, and almost always in a subject related to the UG course content. For example, just over half of the institutions offering Construction and half of HEIs offering Engineering-related courses, required a Maths A level. Other examples included Medical degrees which required A level Chemistry as the ASL element of the Society, Health and Development Diploma.

The entry requirements for most courses were very similar for A level and Diploma candidates in terms of grades or tariff points, though there were some courses which appeared to require more from Diploma students, mainly where the entry requirements were specified as grades and, conversely, some which appeared to require less, mainly where tariff points were specified.

6. Applications from Diploma students

Key findings and implications for policy

- Approximately 240 applications from Diploma candidates had been received, by February 2010, across the 18 institutions able to provide data. The proportions of these among the first five subject areas were approximately: Society, Health & Development (29%); Engineering (27%); Creative & Media (24%); IT (15%), and Construction and the Built Environment (4%).
- Three of the 18 institutions in the sample with data (including one research-intensive HEI) had received between 40 and 70 applications from Diploma holders. Two had received between ten and 25 applications. Three had received no applications; the remainder (10) had received fewer than ten applications. In November 2010, UCAS reported that there had been, in total, applications from 743 Diploma students nationally.
- A large majority of applicants had applied to undergraduate courses closely related to the Diploma subject they had followed.
- Institutions in the survey reported that the quality of Diploma applications in 2010 had been good. All institutions were committed to processing applications (including holding interviews where this was the norm) in the same way as for A level students.
- When estimating the proportion of applications that would lead to offers, HEIs in the sample ranged from around one in ten to all applications, to some extent depending on whether the institution was a 'selecting' or 'recruiting' HEI.

Implications for policy

- Although the number of applications to higher education in 2010 is small, matching the low uptake of Diplomas at level 3 amongst the first cohort in 2008, it was evident that the quality of the candidates was regarded by HEIs as comparable to that of A level applicants. All the HEIs in our sample which received applications (research-intensive and teaching-led institutions alike) had made or were expecting to make offers to Diploma applicants for entry to honours programmes. Indeed, UCAS have since reported that 68% of Diploma applicants secured a place at an HEI; this figure is very close to the 70% of all UCAS applicants accepted.
- These findings will help allay worries amongst some schools/colleges, learners and parents that some types of HEIs will not accept Diplomas.

At the time of the PVC interviews in late 2009, the expectation across the institutions sampled was that the number of Diploma applicants recruited in 2010 would be very small, due to the low level of uptake of the first five Level 3 Diploma subject areas in September 2008. The HoA interviews undertaken in February 2010, after the UCAS applications deadline had passed for most courses, provided information on the level and quality of applications from Diploma students.

6.1 Applications and offers

Three teaching-led HEIs did not monitor or track applicants by qualification type and could not provide detailed data regarding the number of Diploma applicants to date, though HoAs at two of these institutions felt able to confirm that they had received such applications (approximately 45 at one and at least 4 at the other). Approximately 240 applications from Diploma candidates had been received, by February 2010, across the 18 institutions able to provide data⁴. Of these 18, three HoAs confirmed that, at the time of interview, their institution had received **no** Diploma applications. Three HEIs (one research-intensive and two teaching-led) had received between 40-70 Diploma applications, two had received between 10-25; all others had received applications in single figures. The proportions of these 240 applications among the first five subject areas were approximately: Society, Health and Development (29%); Engineering (27%); Creative and Media (24%); IT (15%), and Construction and the Built Environment (4%). The small percentage of applicants studying for the Construction and the Built Environment Diploma mirrors the small number commencing this subject at level 3 in September 2008⁵. Every HoA with information available about Diploma applicants confirmed a very high, or absolute, correlation between Diploma subject areas and destination courses applied for. For example, at one teaching-led HEI only two out of 21 applications from Diploma students did not map onto UG courses directly related to the Diploma subject.

At 16 of the 18 institutions whose HoAs had felt able to provide approximate numbers of Diploma applicants, it was reported that these applicants were being handled in exactly the same way as A level students, in terms both of interviewing (i.e. only where it was course practice to do so), and of offers (standard points tariff/grades). In the two remaining institutions, both research-intensives, HoAs said that the approach to offers lay with departmental staff where tutors might sometimes decide to interview candidates if they felt this to be helpful.

The interviews with the Heads of Admissions took place in February 2010, too early in the HEIs' selection process, and involving too few applicants, to determine with any certainty the proportion of Diploma-holding applicants who would receive offers. Provisional estimates for this proportion ranged from five out of 42 to three out of four at research-intensive HEIs, and from three out of five to all applicants at the few teaching-led HEIs which felt able to make an estimate.

⁴ The figure of 240 applications is unlikely to represent 240 separate applicants, as UCAS allows students to apply to five courses. There may therefore be some multiple-counting of applicants across the sampled institutions.

⁵ Figures published by DFE in 2009 indicated that take-up of the Advanced/Progression Diplomas by subject in September 2008 was: Construction and the Built Environment 8%; Creative and Media 34%; Engineering 20%; IT 17%; Society, Health and Development 21%. The total number of learners at level 3 was 1409.

Whilst acknowledging variations among applicants to different courses at their institutions, the Heads of Admissions we interviewed uniformly regarded Diploma applicants generally to be of good quality. One research-led HEI had rejected only one third of its 42 Diploma applicants outright as being of insufficient quality, and a teaching-led HEI with over 60 Diploma applicants described them as *'no different from A level applicants'*.

At this stage it was difficult for interviewees to anticipate how many Diploma applicants with offers would convert into firm acceptances. Two had no idea, and were not estimating a figure. Three who had received no applications expected a nil intake. Twelve expected the number to be between 'a few' and 10 students; two expected between 10 and 20 students.

Since undertaking our survey, UCAS has published its data relating to 2010 entry. UCAS reported that 743 Diploma students had made applications to HEIs and 503 students (68%) were accepted onto a course. For all UCAS applicants, the figure was 70%.

Table 6.1 Number of applicants and number accepted onto courses at HEIs in 2010 (Source: UCAS 2010)

Diploma	Number of identified Diploma applicants making an application to UCAS	Number of accepted Diploma applicants at 27 October 2010	% of applicants accepted, by Diploma
Construction and the Built Environment	75	49	65%
Creative and Media	229	151	66%
Engineering	144	108	75%
IT	130	88	65%
Society, Health and Development	165	107	65%
Grand total	743	503	68%

In Table 6.1 above we have reproduced, with UCAS' permission, the number of applications from Diploma students by subject area. It can be seen that 75% of Engineering Diploma applicants secured places, a higher percentage than students with other Diplomas. Engineering at undergraduate level has traditionally tended to be a 'recruiting' subject area and this may explain the higher percentage of students in this Diploma subject area achieving places on courses.

Confirming our survey findings, UCAS reported (see Table 6.2 below) that applicants were accepted across all Mission Groups (although it should be noted that they did not categorise Guild HEIs as a separate group but included these in 'other'). However, UCAS found that Alliance Universities and Million + institutions had accepted the highest proportions of Diploma applicants nationally. It is worth noting that these institutions had also received the majority of Diploma students' applications.

Table 6.2 Number of Diploma students accepted onto courses, by 'Mission Group' (Source: UCAS 2010)

Russell Group	16	33
1994 Group	17	
University Alliance	176	343
Million +	167	
Other	127	127
Total	503	

The majority of the offers from University Alliance and Million + institutions were based on the achievement of UCAS tariff points rather than grades. UCAS has suggested that tariff offers may be more flexible to accommodate the achievements of Diploma learners because tariff points could be achieved from the standalone component qualifications such as Principal Learning or the Additional and/or Specialist Learning and Functional Skills.

6.2 Summary

Only three of the 19 institutions sampled had not received any applications from Diploma students for entry in 2010. Reflecting the small number of learners recruited to level 3 Diplomas in September 2008, the number of applicants was low overall with most HEIs reporting figures less than 10. However, there were encouraging signs that the quality of the applicants was generally good and seen as comparable in level to those of A level applicants, and all the HEIs who had received applications expected to be making some offers. Almost all applicants had applied for UG courses closely related to the subject area of their Diploma.

7. Overall attitudes towards Diplomas at this stage

Key findings and implications for policy

- A large majority of Pro Vice-Chancellors consider that the teaching and learning principles enshrined in Diplomas are a good match to the evolving culture of undergraduate education in their institution.
- A majority believe that Diploma students will be able to adapt to undergraduate study once admitted to higher education.
- The most attractive features of Diplomas to these respondents are: their potential to open up new progression routes from school and college to higher education; and the overall flexibility of their design and the forms of learning they encompass.
- The least attractive features are considered to be: uncertainty as to the political support they enjoy; and their denigration in the media.
- Support for Diplomas within the institutions in the survey is widespread in principle, ranging from the cautious to the very strong. The first cohort of Diploma students was due to enter higher education in the autumn of 2010 so, at the time of the survey, there was no evidence on their performance at undergraduate level. The largest impediment to the success of Diplomas was considered by PVCs to be any evidence that Diploma students were having difficulties on their undergraduate course and were dropping out.

Implications for policy

- Support for Diplomas among senior staff in higher education is widespread, regardless of institution type. This is a key finding of the 2009/10 survey which could be actively promoted to a range of audiences concerned with Diploma development.

7.1 The relevance and attractiveness of Diplomas to HEIs

The PVCs interviewed were asked about the relevance of Diplomas to developments in undergraduate teaching and learning in their institutions and the kind of influence they may have. The representatives of all but two institutions (one research-intensive and one teaching-led) considered that Diploma learning was clearly relevant to the direction in which the undergraduate teaching and learning culture was evolving. Typical responses were as follows:

Research-intensive universities:

'[Diplomas are a] good match for the trajectory that we are on and moving towards.'

'A mix of hands-on and high level analytical skills is very welcome.'

'If the Extended Project could be closely articulated with the undergraduate curriculum, this would be a strength.'

Teaching-led institutions:

'Diplomas put on us a requirement to shift and change some of the ways in which we teach.'

'The ethos of Diplomas suits us.'

'There's an incredibly good fit between what Diplomas are trying to achieve and all our teaching and learning goals for undergraduates.'

When asked if Diplomas would be likely to influence the culture of teaching and learning in their institution, 11 out of 15 interviewees thought they would or that their institution was already practising Diploma principles of teaching and learning at the undergraduate level. Four respondents saw the impact of Diplomas as essentially neutral, while one PVC (at a research-intensive institution) considered that the main effect would be the other way around: there would be *'a need for the Diploma applicant to adapt to the learning culture'* at his university.

Respondents were next asked how well they expected Diploma applicants to adapt to the undergraduate learning culture. Six believed that they would do so 'very well' and four 'quite well'. Five PVCs felt unable to comment – either because they considered themselves either only 'quite knowledgeable' (3 out of 5) or 'not very knowledgeable' (2 out of 5), suggesting that it was not concerns about Diplomas that made them reluctant to comment, but their own level of understanding of the qualification.

PVCs gave a range of responses when asked what was most attractive to them about Diplomas. These fell into two categories: the extent to which Diplomas may open up new routes into higher education (important especially to respondents at 'recruiting' institutions); and the overall flexibility of their design and the forms of learning they encompass. In this latter connection examples given across all types of HEIs were: curriculum breadth; employer engagement; integration of knowledge; and project-based learning. All but two PVCs had positive things to say along these lines.

Two kinds of feature were mentioned by these same respondents as being least attractive. These were: uncertainty as to the strength of support across the political parties for Diplomas; and their denigration in the media.

Other areas of concern, but mentioned by only very small numbers of PVCs (typically between two and four), included:

- the ability of Diplomas to gain traction while A levels remained in place alongside them (four respondents);
- the expense of arrangements for local provision, particularly in rural areas (four);
- some uncertainty as to whether their academic underpinning would prove secure for applicants to the most conventional and rigorous undergraduate courses (three);
- the impact that low numbers in the first year might have on momentum for Diploma recruitment at level 3 and subsequent entry to higher education (two);
- a perception that staff training in schools and colleges had been rushed at rather a late stage of the implementation process (two); and
- the perceived complexity of the Diploma qualification (two).

7.2 Views on Diplomas within higher education and their likely success

A majority of PVCs reported clear ‘in principle’ support within their institution for Diplomas, ranging from the ‘*cautious*’ to the ‘*generally very strong*’. For half of the PVCs there was no particular factor associated with the design of Diplomas which would make recruitment of Diploma students to undergraduate courses more likely; they had already made the commitment to recruit such applicants and would wait to see how they managed as undergraduates. Within two institutions (one research-intensive, one not) the ability of Diplomas to assist in ‘widening participation’ initiatives would, it was thought, be an additional helpful feature, while five respondents made the particular point – strongly expressed in the 2008 survey, also – that the developing image of Diplomas within higher education would be closely related to such students thriving and succeeding as undergraduates, and not dropping out of their courses.

7.3 Summary

As in the 2008/09 survey, a large majority of PVCs saw Diplomas as well aligned to the direction in which teaching and learning cultures are evolving in their institution at the undergraduate stage. None of the PVCs expressed concerns about whether, in principle, Diploma entrants would be able to adapt to the undergraduate learning culture. Similarly, a large majority saw positive attributes in Diplomas, such as their potential to broaden participation in higher education. Where PVCs had reservations these clustered around concerns about political commitment to the qualification’s future and negative media portrayal.

8. Conclusions and implications

This was the second in a series of surveys to be undertaken investigating HEIs' attitudes and outlooks relating to Diplomas. As with the first survey (2008), the sample of 19 institutions was designed to be representative of the English higher education sector. In the report of the first survey (Richardson and Haynes 2009), we identified where views were commonly shared across the HEIs surveyed, regardless of type of institution, and also pointed to differences where these existed. In this second survey, there were fewer differences between the research-intensive and the teaching-led HEIs. In this concluding section, we address three key questions:

- What is the current level of HEI engagement with Diplomas?
- What is the overall disposition of HEIs in this survey towards Diplomas?
- What has been the sampled HEIs' experience of Diploma applicants?

At the end of this section, we identify four key areas with implications for policy which have emerged from the main findings.

8.1 What is the current level of HEI engagement with Diplomas?

Levels of awareness and understanding of the Diploma qualification were higher than in 2008 at the PVC level and HoAs felt more confident in their role as the in-house expert on Diplomas and their ability to advise and support academic staff in departments.

Involvement in Diploma **development** was greater amongst the institutions sampled in this 2009/10 survey than in the 2008 sample. Eleven institutions reported some type of involvement, mostly at the local level through a local Lifelong Learning Network and/or with Diploma consortium partners to develop curricula. Although no HEI in the 2009/10 sample reported any current involvement with Diploma **delivery** (compared to 4 out of 19 in 2008), some institutions, particularly amongst the teaching-led HEIs, indicated a willingness to become involved if there were dedicated resources available.

A majority of institutions had carefully considered how the first five Diploma subject areas could align to their undergraduate degrees and had posted detailed course entry requirement information on the UCAS website.

8.2 What is the overall attitude of HEIs in this survey towards Diplomas?

In 2008 most senior managers interviewed in the research-intensive institutions had viewed the Diplomas as most relevant to undergraduate recruitment by the newer

universities; the 2009/10 survey data provided evidence of a shift in this attitude. One of the research-intensive institutions had received the third highest number of applications from Diploma students across the 19 HEIs sampled.

The entry requirements of 271 separate courses were reviewed and, among those posting entry requirements for Diploma applicants, only four courses (in three institutions: one research-intensive; two teaching-led) explicitly stated that none of the first five subject areas would be acceptable for entry.

Most senior managers were of the view that Diploma applicants could either stay within the pathway implied by their chosen subject or branch across to another area of study at UG level, so long as specific entry requirements (including components of Additional and/or Specialist Learning) had been met. A majority of PVCs believed that Diploma students would be able to adapt well to undergraduate study once admitted to higher education.

Although foundation degree provision was widespread amongst the sample, a large majority predicted that recruitment of applicants with Diplomas would be to their honours degree courses. This had been borne out by the applications received by our sample institutions. Nationally, UCAS have reported that a large majority of Diploma applicants (83%) were accepted to study for Honours Degrees. These findings provide further evidence that the Diploma qualification has been accepted as an appropriate pathway onto traditional undergraduate study.

Across the HEIs surveyed in 2009/10, as in 2008, PVCs welcomed the breadth of learning inherent in Diplomas and their potential to widen participation and the range of learning styles fostered by Diplomas was considered well aligned to current developments in teaching and learning on undergraduate programmes.

Support for Diplomas across the institutions in this survey was widespread, ranging from the cautious to the very strong. Institutions are now waiting to see how Diploma students perform at undergraduate level.

8.3 What is HEIs' experience of Diploma applicants?

As expected, the number of Diploma applicants to HEIs for 2010 entry was small, matching the small number of learners starting a Diploma at level 3 in 2008 (n=1409). Approximately 240 applications from Diploma candidates had been received, by February 2010, across the 18 institutions able to provide data. Three institutions had received no Diploma applications; three had received between 40 and 70 applications; two had received between 10 and 25 applications; the remainder had received fewer than 10.

The quality of applications from Diploma students was reported by HoAs to be in line with the quality they receive from A level candidates. All institutions (research-

intensive and teaching-led) which had already processed applications from Diploma applicants had made some offers.

UCAS reported in November 2010 that, nationally, the percentage of Diploma applicants securing a place on a course at an HEI (68%) was very similar to the percentage of all UCAS applicants (70%). This should allay the fears of some staff in schools/colleges, learners and parents that the Diploma will not be accepted as an appropriate qualification for progression into higher education.

8.4 Policy Implications

Four key areas with implications for policy have been identified from the main findings. These are:

- *Encouraging and facilitating greater engagement by HEIs with Diploma delivery*

There is a willingness amongst some, mainly teaching-led institutions, to become involved in **delivery**, if additional resources are made available to HEIs for this. However, when asked about involvement in delivery, it was clear that most HEIs had a narrow view of what 'delivery' could involve. In their responses, they focused almost exclusively on consideration of class-based teaching by their staff of elements of the Diploma. It could be helpful to disseminate information to HEIs on the range of different ways in which they could support Diploma delivery.

- *Providing information for Diploma-holding applicants and to HEIs*

UCAS had received a number of queries from HEIs, schools and colleges in relation to the structure of Diplomas and how the final grade/tariff score is reached. The Diploma is a complex qualification and it was vital that information on how its tariff score was calculated was presented clearly and unambiguously to schools/colleges, students and parents so that young people could understand exactly what they need to achieve to satisfy the entry requirements of HEIs.

The majority of institutions specifying what the Additional and/or Specialist Learning component of the Diploma should comprise required an A level in a subject related to the applicant's Diploma. As this suggests that Specialist Learning is preferred to Additional Learning at level 3 by some HEIs, it is important to alert staff who deliver information, advice and guidance in schools and colleges of this finding, so that young people are guided appropriately and do not find their progression into higher education constrained by their choice of ASL.

HoAs, when interviewed in February/March 2010, were keen to know how and when the results for Diploma students would be made available to HEIs by UCAS. In a particularly competitive year for HE entry, it was important that these were to be available at the same time as results for A level students.

- *Disseminating information relating to admissions practices to organisations with a role in supporting Diplomas.*

By November 2009, not all departments in the sampled institutions had specified publicly on the UCAS website their 2010 undergraduate entry requirements in respect of Diploma applicants (relevant to UCAS e-updates to HEIs).

Most HEIs expected Diploma subject areas to create clear-cut progression pathways into higher education. Across the first ten subject areas, this expectation was strongest in the cases of: IT, Creative and Media, Business, Finance & Administration; Society, Health and Development; and Engineering (relevant to marketing by Diploma consortia and partner institutions).

It was expected that such pathways were likely to be established through traditional patterns of application and recruitment (regional and/or national), rather than through the specific stimulus of local 'widening participation' activity or foundation degree provision. This indicated that HEIs were according the Diploma qualification the same status as A levels and expected Diploma applicants to be of a comparable quality to A level candidates (relevant to marketing by Diploma consortia and partner institutions).

- *Publicising the acceptability of Diplomas across the range of HEIs*

Although the number of applications to higher education in 2010 was small, matching the small number of learners taking Diplomas at level 3 amongst the first cohort in 2008, it was clear that the quality of the candidates has been comparable to that of A level applicants and that all HEIs (research-intensive and teaching-led institutions) receiving applications had made or were expecting to make offers to Diploma applicants, and the data published by UCAS in November 2010 has confirmed this finding. It will be important to publicise this, to allay worries amongst some schools/colleges, learners and parents that HEIs may not accept the Diplomas as an appropriate qualification for entry onto undergraduate study.

Support for Diplomas among senior staff in higher education was widespread, regardless of institution type. This is a key finding of the 2009/10 survey.

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Glossary of terms

Admissions tutors

These are academic staff (lecturers) within university departments who decide whether or not to offer an applicant a place on an undergraduate programme in their department. The department decides the entry requirements for its programmes and publishes these in its prospectus and on its website. Applications are received by the department, scrutinised by the admissions tutor(s), and, if appropriate, a letter offering the applicant a place, and detailing any conditions to be met, is sent out by the department to the applicant. If an interview or the setting of a supplementary test is considered appropriate, as is sometimes the case in selecting institutions, the admissions tutor would invite the applicant for interview. (See also: 'Central Admissions').

Central Admissions

Historically, applications to undergraduate programmes in HEIs were made to departmental-level admissions tutors. There has recently been a trend towards the centralisation of the admissions process in many institutions. Although entry requirements are still largely determined at departmental level, a Central Admissions unit, staffed by administrators, undertakes the administrative functions described under the 'Admissions Tutors' entry, above. Some institutions have retained the tradition of decisions over admissions being made at the level of tutors in departments, but this role is now mainly limited to considering atypical applications, such as candidates with qualifications other than A levels, or mature students with relevant experience rather than qualifications. In such cases, the applicant may be interviewed by the departmental admissions tutor before a decision is made as to whether to make an offer. (See also: 'Admissions Tutors').

Head of Admissions

The person leading and managing the Central Admissions team, responsible to the senior management of the university for: implementing the institution's admissions policy and targets; disseminating information on new qualifications to departments; and ensuring the smooth running of the applications process.

Higher Education Institutions

These are divided between: universities which have their own degree awarding powers and, typically, offer a wide range of teaching programmes; and smaller, more specialist colleges of higher education (where degree programmes may be validated by a partner university) or free-standing specialist institutes. Currently there are 105 HEIs in England in membership of Universities UK (UUK), complemented by a further 17 free-standing colleges.

Higher Education 'league tables'/published rankings

There is a wealth of statistical information about the sector made available by the Higher Education Statistics Agency. Over the last decade leading newspapers have used this and other data to compile 'league tables'/published rankings of performance. Among the most influential is *The Times Good University Guide*, where the eight measures of institutional performance (aggregated into an overall ranking) are: student satisfaction; research quality; student-staff ratio; services and facilities spend; undergraduate entry standards;

undergraduate completion; proportion of undergraduates gaining a First or Upper Second Class degree; graduate employment/further study.

Mission groups

Ninety seven of the 122 **English** HEIs are now also members of one of the five UK HE mission groups – the associations of institutions that share common priorities in balancing the work of teaching, research and outreach to the community. The five groups are:

- *Russell Group*. 16 English members – mainly the larger, ancient and ‘civic’ universities. Strongly committed to research.
- *1994 Group*. 17 English members – mainly the smaller, campus-based foundations, often of 1950s and 1960s origins. Strongly committed to research.
- *Million +*. 24 English members – universities of recent designation and mainly of a larger size, with a strong emphasis on teaching and ‘widening participation’.
- *University Alliance*. 19 English members, plus the Open University – mainly universities of recent designation, mixed in size and with a strong emphasis on teaching and ‘widening participation’.
- *Guild HE*. 21 English members. Smaller institutions which remain, or were until recently, free-standing colleges of higher education.

Pro Vice-Chancellor

Typically (although job titles vary), HEIs have a senior team of academic managers led by a Vice-Chancellor and assisted by several PVCs. One of these will usually be assigned responsibility for teaching and learning within the institution concerned.

Recruiting institutions

These are HEIs where all or the majority of undergraduate courses are under-subscribed and places are still available in August. These courses will attempt to fill their places at that time, usually through the UCAS Clearing process. Some students accepted onto courses at these institutions may therefore have lower grades than the advertised entry requirements. (See also: ‘Selecting institutions’).

Research Assessment Exercise

The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) occurs periodically across UK higher education and measures the research performance of groups of academic staff at subject level, via peer review. In general, there is a strong correlation between the research quality of departmental academic staff and competitive entry to the undergraduate programmes they offer.

Research-intensive HEIs

These universities (along with some specialist institutions) accord a high priority to the research activity of their staff. They also dominate the top places in HE ‘league tables’/published rankings. Their membership comprises, largely, the 20 Russell Group HEIs and 18 1994 Group HEIs. (See also Teaching-led HEIs).

Selecting institutions

These are HEIs where all or the majority of undergraduate courses are over-subscribed and there is competition for places. These tend to be the Russell Group and 1994 Group institutions. Students in these institutions will have met the advertised entry requirements. For some programmes, an interview and/or supplementary tests may be used to differentiate between applicants predicted to attain the same high grades. (See also: 'Recruiting institutions').

Teaching-led HEIs

Many of the largest and the smallest HEIs have their origins in the polytechnic and HE colleges sectors, respectively. The main focus of their mission is teaching. Those with university status are often referred to within the sector a 'post 1992' institution. Mainly, they fill the lower places in HE 'league tables'/published rankings. (See also: Research-intensive HEIs).

Unaligned institutions

These institutions (25 out of the 122 English HEIs at the time of writing this report) have chosen to remain independent of any 'mission group'. They are varied in the nature and balance of their activities.

Widening participation

In recent years, higher education has expanded rapidly but access to it amongst disadvantaged groups has failed to keep pace. There has, therefore, been much focus on initiatives to encourage undergraduate applications from those who have no experience of higher education in their family.

Appendix A: Desk Analysis

The interviews with Pro Vice-Chancellors (PVCs) and Heads of Admissions (HoAs) in the sample of 19 higher education institutions provided general information on the admissions policies in relation to Diploma-holding applicants. In order to collect more detailed data, it was decided to undertake an investigation of the entry requirements of a sample of courses related to the first five subject areas for entry in September 2010 as presented on the UCAS website. The UCAS website is a key source of information for potential applicants to HE and often the first 'port of call' when learners are seeking guidance about entry requirements. The work was undertaken during November 2009 at which time it was not possible to investigate the entry requirements for September 2011, including the second five subject areas, as these had yet to be published on the UCAS website.

Aims

The key aims of the desk analysis were to investigate whether:

- (i) the Diploma qualification is being accepted by all the institutions sampled
- (ii) the Diploma is viewed by these HEIs as only a specialised qualification onto a directly related UG course or as a generic qualification.
- (iii) the entry requirements for Diploma-holding applicants were similar to those set out for traditional A level students. The decision to compare the Diploma entry requirements with those for A level applicants and not other qualifications such as BTEC National Diploma was taken for two reasons: (a) the A level remains the 'gold standard' of 16-18 qualifications; (b) every course specification contained entry requirements for A levels; this was not the case for other qualifications.

Methodology

For each institution in the survey sample, a complete list of honours undergraduate (UG) degree courses was extracted from the UCAS website. Across the 19 HEIs sampled, the number of courses on offer to applicants ranged from c.40 in a small specialist institution to c.1700 in a large HEI, though this institution offered many combined honours courses.

The next stage was to identify UG courses which might be appropriate pathways for progression from the first five subject areas. This was more straightforward for Construction and the Built Environment, Engineering and IT than for Creative and Media and Society, Health and Development which are inter-disciplinary in terms of the Principal Learning component and therefore potentially offer a wider array of pathways. Set out below are the terms used for the course searches on the UCAS website:

Diploma line	Undergraduate course search terms
Construction & the Built Environment	Construction; Building and Civil Engineering; Architecture
Creative and Media	Creative Writing; Journalism; Photography; Graphic Design; Performing Arts; Media Studies; Marketing; Film Studies
Engineering	Engineering
IT	IT ; Computing; Computer Science
Society, Health and Development	Sociology; Social Work; Health & Social Care; Community Justice; Youth Work; Nursing; Medicine; Psychology

These search terms were drawn from promotional materials about the Diplomas on government, QCDA and other websites and documents collected as part of the case study component of our overall evaluation of Diploma implementation, as well as from case study interview data where teachers and career advisors had commented on possible progression routes into HEI. It could not be and is not intended to be an exhaustive list. Where possible, courses with the same or very similar subject codes to those used by the Higher Education Statistics Agency were identified to facilitate cross-institution comparisons of entry requirements. For each institution, a minimum of three courses per Diploma subject were sought. This was not always possible because some institutions did not, for example, offer any courses aligned to a subject. In all cases, the UCAS search option '*all [name of subject] courses*' was employed, as opposed to '*[name of subject] on its own as a single subject*'. In total, 126 differently named courses were identified for investigation. A list of these courses is set out in Annexe I. The number of courses investigated across the 19 institutions totalled 271 due to the prevalence of courses across institutions with the same title.

In terms of identifying whether a Diploma was being recognised as a generic qualification, as well as a specialised pathway onto UG study, a pilot of the methodology confirmed that this information could be gathered through scrutiny of the entry requirements for the 126 types of courses already identified. If an Engineering course indicated that all the first five subject areas would be acceptable, it could be assumed that the Diploma qualification was considered relevant to a wider range of courses than its specific subject area might suggest. The data from the PVC and HOA interviews supports this assumption.

Data Collection

The data were gathered by cutting and pasting the entry requirements information for A levels and for Diplomas from the UCAS website into a new document. Examples of how this information appeared on the UCAS website are given in Annexe II. The names of the institutions have been removed for confidentiality reasons.

Appendix A (continued)

Annexe I: Named courses scrutinised in Desk Research (n=126)

Construction and the Built Environment

Architecture	K100
Construction Management	K200
Construction Project Management	K221
Architectural Technology	K210, GK41
Construction Management	K220
Building Surveying	K230
Design and Construction Management	K252
Architectural Engineering & Design Management	K236
Construction Engineering Management (4 year)	K291
Architectural Engineering	HK21
Construction & Project Management	KN22
Civil Engineering, Civil & Structural Engineering	H200
Civil Engineering with Construction Management	H202
Civil Engineering	H205
Civil & Structural Engineering	H220
Building Services Engineering	H290

Creative and Media

Graphic Communications	W210
Graphic & Digital Design	W210
Graphic Design & Illustration	W210
Graphic Design & Multimedia	W210
Design for Digital Media	W212
Graphic Design	W211, W214, W216
Graphic & Communication Design	W290
Drama	W400
Drama and Performance	W400
Drama and Theatre Practice	W400
Theatre Performance	W440
World Performance	W495
Drama Studies and English	WQ43
Drama with Creative Writing	W4W8
Performing Arts	W491
Dance Performance	W500, W590
Cinema and Photography	W600
Film	W610
Film and Television Studies	W620
Film Studies	W620, W631
Photography	W640, W641
Photographic Practice	W640

Creative Writing	<i>W800, W801</i>
English Studies with Creative Writing	<i>Q3W8</i>
English Literature with Creative Writing	<i>Q3W8</i>
Creative Writing and Media	<i>WP83</i>

Media Studies	<i>P300, P306</i>
Digital Media	<i>P306</i>
Film Studies	<i>P300, P303</i>
Television and Film Production	<i>P331</i>
Film Studies and Media	<i>P391</i>
Media & Cultural Studies	<i>P392</i>
English Language Studies and Film Studies	<i>QP3J</i>

Journalism	<i>P500</i>
Broadcast Journalism	<i>PJ59</i>
Journalism and Media	<i>PP53</i>
Journalism and Media & Cultural Studies	<i>PP53</i>
Journalism and Public Relations	<i>PN06</i>
Journalism & Media Cultures/Digital Media Technology	<i>P5H6</i>

Marketing	<i>N500, N501</i>
Marketing and Innovation	<i>N500</i>
Marketing Management	<i>N500</i>
Marketing and Advertising	<i>N590</i>

Engineering

Engineering	<i>H100</i>
Environmental Engineering	<i>H220</i>
Electrical and Electronic Engineering	<i>H600, H606</i>
Electronic Engineering	<i>H601, H610</i>
Mechanical Engineering	<i>H300, H305</i>
Automotive Engineering	<i>H331</i>
Aeronautical Engineering	<i>H410</i>
Aeronautical and Aerospace Engineering	<i>H410</i>
Telecommunications Engineering	<i>H641</i>
Computer Systems Engineering	<i>H650</i>
Aerospace Systems Engineering	<i>H650</i>
Instrumentation and Control Engineering	<i>H660</i>
Industrial Engineering	<i>H753</i>

Information Technology

Multimedia Computing	<i>H300</i>
Computer Science	<i>G400, G402</i>
Computing	<i>G401, G404, G407</i>

Internet Computing	<i>G450</i>
Digital Media	<i>G450</i>
Web Development	<i>G452</i>
Computer Science with Management	<i>G4N2</i>
Computer Science and E-Business	<i>GNK1</i>
Computing/Business	<i>G4N1</i>
Business Computing and IT	<i>NG45</i>
Computers and Electronics	<i>GH46</i>
Computing and Sports Studies	<i>GC4P</i>
English Language and Computer Science	<i>GQ43</i>
Information Technology	<i>G500</i>
Information & Communication Technologies	<i>G500</i>
Computing and Information Systems	<i>G500</i>
Information and Communication Technology	<i>G502, G560</i>
Business Computing Systems	<i>G503</i>
Business Information Technology	<i>G510</i>
Business Systems Design	<i>G510</i>
Computer and Business Informatics	<i>G560</i>
IT and Art & Design	<i>GW51</i>
Information Technology Management for Business	<i>GN52, G5N2</i>
Information Systems/Marketing	<i>GNM5</i>
Information Technology for E-commerce	<i>GH56</i>
IT with Sports Studies	<i>GC56</i>
Business Information Management	<i>N1G5</i>
Computing (Software Engineering)	<i>G600</i>
Computer Software Development	<i>G600</i>
Computer Games	<i>G610</i>
Society, Health and Development	
Medicine	<i>A100</i>
Human Biology	<i>B150</i>
Nursing (Adult)	<i>B700, B730, B740</i>
Midwifery Studies	<i>B720</i>
Sociology	<i>L300, L301</i>
Sociology with Youth Studies	<i>L3L5</i>
Sociology, Health & Wellbeing	<i>LB39</i>
Social Policy	<i>L400, L430</i>
Social Policy and Sociology	<i>LLH4</i>
Public Policy & Management and Sociology	<i>LL24</i>
Criminology and Social Policy	<i>ML24</i>
Social Work	<i>L500, L501</i>
Social and Community Development	<i>L510</i>
Social Welfare	<i>L510</i>
Youth Work	<i>L530</i>
Youth & Community Studies	<i>L521</i>

Youth and Community Work	<i>L530, L590</i>
Working with children, young people and families	<i>L590</i>
Youth Studies and Youth Work	<i>L531</i>
Counselling Studies	<i>L540</i>
Health Studies and Social Care	<i>L4L5</i>
 Criminal Justice	 <i>L560</i>
 Psychology	 <i>C800, C801</i>

Appendix A (continued)

Annexe II: – How entry requirements appear on the UCAS website

Example 1

Course: Electrical and Electronic Engineering

Course Code: H600

Course Specific Requirements

GCSE/Standard Grade

Subjects and grades required	English Language grade C or above.
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Volume and depth of study/Tariff points and Grades

Volume and depth of study (GCE A level or equivalent)	Minimum number required: 3 Number preferred: 3
Tariff score	
GCE A/AS level grade range	AAB

GCE A level

Acceptability	Acceptable on its own & combined with other qualifications
Subjects and grades required	Mathematics.

14-19 Diploma Overall Tariff Score

Progression Diploma

Acceptability	Acceptable only when combined with other qualifications
Which Lines Of Learning/Points/Grades are accepted for entry	Engineering;

Advanced Diploma

Acceptability	Acceptable on its own
Which Lines Of Learning/Points/Grades are accepted for entry	Engineering at grade A;
Which ASL Subjects/Points/Grades are required for entry	A-level Maths at grade B;
Other Requirements for entry	Please contact the department prior to applying

Example 2

Course: Information Technology for E-commerce

Course Code: GH56

Volume and depth of study/Tariff points and Grades

Volume and depth of study (GCE A level or equivalent)	Minimum number required: 3 Number preferred: 3.5
Tariff score	

GCE A/AS level grade range	ABB-BBB
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GCE A level

Acceptability	Acceptable on its own & combined with other qualifications
Additional Information	GCSE (or equivalent) Mathematics also required, at grade C.

14-19 Diploma Overall Tariff Score

Progression Diploma

Acceptability	Acceptable only when combined with other qualifications
Which Lines Of Learning/Points/Grades are accepted for entry	Information Technology; Creative & Media; Construction & the Built Environment; Engineering; Society, Health & Development;

Advanced Diploma

Acceptability	Acceptable on its own
Which Lines Of Learning/Points/Grades are accepted for entry	Information Technology at grade B; Creative & Media at grade B; Construction & the Built Environment at grade B; Engineering at grade B; Society, Health & Development at grade B;
Which ASL Subjects/Points/Grades are required for entry	A-Level (preferably in a Computing or related area) at grade A-B;
Other Requirements for entry	The extended project should normally be a written piece of work/dissertation

Example 3

Course: Psychology
Course Code: C800

Course Specific Requirements	240 - 260 tariff points. Five GCSE subjects at grade C or above, including English and Maths.
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GCSE/Standard Grade

Subjects and grades required	Five GCSE subjects at grade C or above including English and Mathematics
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Volume and depth of study/Tariff points and Grades

Volume and depth of study (GCE A level or equivalent)	Minimum number required: 2
Tariff score	Points accepted: 240 - 260
GCE A/AS level grade range	

GCE A level

Acceptability	Acceptable on its own & combined with other qualifications
Additional Information	240-260 UCAS tariff points required

14-19 Diploma Overall Tariff Score	260
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Progression Diploma

Acceptability	Acceptable on its own
Which Lines Of Learning/Points/Grades are accepted for entry	Construction & the Built Environment. Creative & Media. Engineering. Information Technology. Society, Health & Development.

Advanced Diploma

Acceptability	Acceptable on its own
Which Lines Of Learning/Points/Grades are accepted for entry	Construction & the Built Environment. Creative & Media. Engineering. Information Technology. Society, Health & Development.
Which ASL Subjects/Points/Grades are required for entry	No specific ASL required;
Other Requirements for entry	5 GCSEs at Grade C or above (inc. English & Maths)

Appendix B

Information on Additional and/or Specialist Learning requirements – by Diploma subject area

The data presented in this Appendix emerged from the desk research into 271 courses across the 19 sampled institutions.

Construction and the Built Environment

- Twelve courses (in seven institutions) specified ASL. Six courses (in four separate institutions) required A level Maths. One of these, a research-intensive university, required not only A level Maths but also *an AS in an appropriate subject*, as well as *an appropriate extended project*. Two courses (two institutions) required an A level *in a relevant subject*: one asked for a BTEC National Diploma or equivalent, and one for an A level in a *Science or a Technical Subject*. Interviews were part of the admissions process at two institutions – both teaching-led HEIs. Five institutions did not prescribe ASL.

Creative and Media

- For **Journalism** single honours and combined honours programmes, only two of the nine institutions offering these courses specified ASL. This was in the form of an A level. One institution required the A level to be in English or Media Studies. The second institution did not specify a subject area but a grade A was required. In addition, this institution sought a *minimum grade B in a second A-Level*. One institution had no entry information on the UCAS website and asked applicants to *refer to the institution*.
- For **Drama** single honours and combined honours programmes, five of the nine institutions specified ASL. In all but one case this was an A level, but only one institution prescribed the A level. This institution also stated that the extended project should normally be a written piece of work though performance would be accepted *if accompanied by analytical notes*. Three research-intensive institutions required the A level to be at grade A. Three institutions offered **Dance** courses: in one case no entry requirements for either A level or Diploma applicants were available; the second provided information regarding A levels, but no Diploma information; the third provided information but did not specify any ASL.
- Six institutions offered **Photography** courses. Two provided no information for Diploma applicants; three asked for an A level as ASL, two of which specified the grade, the other specified the subject area: Art, Media or Photography. This was similar to the requirements for its A level applicants. The course in the sixth institution had no pre-requisites for ASL but asked applicants to contact the department prior to application.
- Eleven institutions offered **Creative Writing** as a single honours programme or as part of a combined honours degree. Of these, three provided no information for Diploma applicants; four did not specify ASL; three requested an A level in English and/or English Literature and one other gave no details of the level 3 qualification desired, other than to say it should be in a related subject.
- Nine institutions offered **Design**-related courses. Of these, three provided no information for Diploma applicants, three requested an A level or equivalent qualification in Art or Design or another relevant subject. Three institutions had no pre-requisites for ASL but one of these asked applicants to contact the Admissions department prior to application.

- Undergraduate honours degrees including **Film and/or Television Studies** were available at 11 institutions. Of these, three provided no information for Diploma applicants, three requested an A level in a related subject and four had no pre-requisites for ASL. One had no entry data on its website at all for any type of applicant. Of the four institutions offering **Media Studies**, three did not specify ASL and one asked for an A level in Media Studies, Film Studies or a Humanities subject.
- **Marketing**-related courses were on offer in 11 institutions. Two provided no entry requirements on the UCAS website; one discussed tariff points only – no reference to the types of qualifications accepted; seven did not specify ASL, one requested an A level or equivalent qualification.

Engineering

- Nine institutions set out specific requirements for Diploma learners in relation to ASL. Some concern still appeared to exist in relation to the mathematics content of this Diploma. Six institutions required A level Maths, one asked for an A level in *Maths, Physics or any Technology subject*; another required an A level *in a cognate discipline*. One university indicated its willingness to accept an A level other than Maths as ASL so long as it was *combined with Level 3 Certificate in Mathematics for Engineering at grade A-B*. In almost every case, institutions were also specifying A level Maths for A level students, sometimes combined with a science A level, usually Physics.

Information Technology

- Five institutions set out specific requirements for Diploma learners in relation to ASL. Of the three research-intensive HEIs in this group, two requested A level Maths and one asked for an A level *in Computing or a related area*. As it had for its Construction courses, one of these institutions required, in addition, an AS *in an appropriate subject*. Another specified that the extended project should *normally be a written piece of work/dissertation*. Of the two teaching-led institutions, one required a *level 3 qualification in a subject related to the course*, but did not specify that this had to be an A level. The other teaching-led institution and another of the research-intensive HEIs requested that applicants contact the department/admissions prior to applying.

Society, Health and Development

- Of the 12 institutions offering **Sociology**-related courses for which information was available, seven had no specific pre-requisites in relation to ASL, though two of these asked for GCSE English and one for GCSE English and Maths. Five institutions asked for an A level (four specified the grade), three of these stipulated a related subject area; two did not prescribe this. One asked applicants to contact admissions.
- **Psychology** courses – two institutions indicated that the Diploma would not be accepted. Of the remaining 13 institutions, five asked for an A level (three specified the grade), typically in either Psychology or a Science. Seven had no specific pre-requisites in relation to ASL, though one required GCSE English and one required GCSEs in English and Maths. One institution had no details on the UCAS website in relation to Diplomas and one asked Diploma applicants to contact admissions.
- Eleven institutions offered courses in **Adult Nursing**. One did not accept the Diploma qualification. Four asked for an A level – subjects mentioned were Psychology, Science, Biological Science. In all cases the grade was stipulated. Two required GCSE English and Maths. Two institutions also asked for the

applicants to demonstrate work experience in the field. Interviews were also sometimes required. One institution asked applicants to contact admissions.

- Thirteen **Social Work**-related courses were identified. Eight did not specify ASL, though three of these required GCSE English and Maths. Three asked for an A level (two specified the grade, one the subject area); one other institution indicated any level 3 qualification would be acceptable. Three of the four institutions offering **Youth Work** courses did not specify ASL, the other asked for a level 3 qualification in a related subject.
- Scrutiny of **Social Policy** courses indicated that of the six institutions offering these, one did not accept the Diploma; four required A levels (two of these specified the grade and subject area; one specified the grade only); one course had no pre-requisites for ASL but did require GCSE in English.
- Both the institutions where **Medicine** degrees were available accepted the Diploma qualification, but only the Society, Health & Development Diploma. These asked for A level Chemistry at grade A as ASL and one also asked applicants to contact the Department prior to application.

Appendix C

The calculation of tariff points within Diplomas and the presentation of entry requirements by higher education institutions

At the time of this HEI survey (November 2009-February 2010), the UCAS website contained the information on Diplomas set out below. We have included this information as it was the information which young people and schools/colleges were accessing at that time, but it should be noted that UCAS is continually updating its website.

Advanced Diploma = Progression Diploma plus Additional & Specialist Learning (ASL). Please see the appropriate qualification to calculate the ASL score. Please see the [Progression Diploma table](#) for Tariff scores.

The link to the Progression Diploma table then provided the following information:

Progression Diploma*

Grade	Tariff Points
A*	350
A	300
B	250
C	200
D	150
E	100

*Points for the Progression Diploma come into effect for entry to higher education from 2010 onwards.

[Read a summary of the Progression Diploma](#)

When the link to the 'summary of the Progression Diploma' was clicked, the following information was provided:

Advanced Diploma	
Summary	The Advanced Diploma includes principal learning that is sector and subject-related. It requires level 2 functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT, and provides the essential personal, learning and thinking skills needed to progress in education, training and employment. An Advanced Diploma can be completed as a two-year full-time programme.
Tariff entry	<p>The qualification was first considered for UCAS Tariff points in 2007. Points come into effect for entry to higher education from 2010 onwards.</p> <p>Expert Group report (PDF)</p> <p>Advanced Diploma = Progression Diploma plus Additional & Specialist Learning (ASL). ASL has a maximum Tariff score of 140. Please see the appropriate qualification to calculate the ASL score.</p>

Learning hours	Principal learning = 540 hrs (inc. minimum 270 applied learning hours) Generic learning =180 hrs Additional and Specialist Learning (ASL) = 360 hrs Total = 1080 hrs					
UCAS Tariff points Advanced Diploma	Principal and Generic Learning			Additional and Specialist Learning		
	Grade	Tariff	Grade	Tariff (max.)		
	A*	350	A*	140		
	A	300	A	120		
	B	250	B	100		
	C	200	C	80		
	D	150	D	60		
	E	100	E	40		
Progression Diploma	The UCAS Board agreed Tariff points for accredited components of the Advanced Diploma:					
	Principal Learning		Extended Project		Progression Diploma	
	Grade	Tariff	Grade	Tariff	Grade	Tariff
	A*	210	A*	70	A*	350
	A	180	A	60	A	300
	B	150	B	50	B	250
	C	120	C	40	C	200
	D	90	D	30	D	150
	E	60	E	20	E	100
Qualification Sector	Phase 1 (from 2008): Construction & the Built Environment; Creative & Media; Engineering; IT; Society, Health & Development Phase 2 (from 2009): Business, administration and finance; Environment and land-based studies; Hair & Beauty Studies; Hospitality; Manufacturing & Product Design Phase 3 (from 2010): Public services; Retail business; Sport and active leisure; Travel and tourism Phase 4 (from 2011): Humanities; Languages; Science					
Awarding organisations	Various - see the QCA website					
Further information	Visit the National Database of Accredited Qualifications website: www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk/QualificationSearchResults.aspx?Type=AdvancedQIn&Level3=Active&QualificationType=DIP&Page=1&PageSize=10 www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk/DiplomaCatalogueSelection.aspx					

The reason for the difference in the total number of tariff points achieved by combining the Principal Learning and the Extended Project and the tariff points of the Progression Diploma (i.e. 70 tariff points in the case of an A* grade) was not made explicit. A telephone conversation with UCAS on 25 March 2010 elicited the information that the Progression Diploma tariff 'recognises other parts of the Diploma: the Personal, Thinking and Learning Skills and the work experience element and these are included in the overall tariff score.'

UCAS had received a number of queries in relation to how the Diploma qualification is calculated. The officer at UCAS sent us a copy of the information it was making available to institutions in response to such queries and agreed it could be included in this report:

“The Diploma has extra points awarded to it to recognise achievement of the whole qualification and passing all elements of the Diploma, in addition to the points awarded to the component parts of the qualification. Therefore the score for the Diploma is greater than those awarded for the combination of PL and EP as it includes an extra allocation awarded for completion of key/functional skills, personal learning and thinking skills (PLTS) and work experience. Whilst these generic learning components do not attract Tariff points if taken as standalone activities they are included within the Tariff considerations as students cannot achieve the Diploma without successfully completing them.

Tariff points for ASL qualifications are additional to those awarded for achievement of the Diploma grade.

With regards to the assignment of these recognition points, they are awarded in line with the overall Diploma grade (which comes from achievement in Principal Learning and Extended Project). Should you wish to learn more about Diploma aggregation rules, they are available in Chapter 4 of Ofqual’s document Ofqual/08/3865, Arrangement for awarding and setting standards in the Diploma (http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/ofqual-08-3865_DASG_report.pdf) “

UCAS was, in March 2010, planning to make modifications to its website to give greater clarity to the way in which the tariff for the Diploma qualification is constructed, so it is likely that, by the time this report is published, this will have been completed.

The presentation of entry requirements by higher education institutions

HEIs normally describe their course entry requirements in terms of minimum A Level grades or minimum UCAS tariff points. The relationship between A level grades and tariff points is set out below:

A level Grade	UCAS tariff Points
A*	140
A	120
B	100
C	80
D	60
E	40

HEIs specifying **grades** for A Level entry will normally also specify a grade for the ‘Advanced Diploma’, i.e. the Diploma (named a ‘Progression Diploma’), alongside elements of Additional and/or Specialist Learning (ASL). In practice, however, the grade requirements specified by HEIs normally comprise one grade for the Progression Diploma element and another grade for entry requirements relating to ASL. For the majority of courses investigated in this study, ASL was specified as an A Level (which may or may not comprise a required subject). HEIs specifying a **points tariff** for A Level entry will normally also specify a points tariff for Advanced Diploma candidates.

The Advanced Diploma can be shown to have the equivalence of 3.5 A Levels if the points tariff for the Progression Diploma, and the ASL (assumed for the purposes of this example to be an A level), are both assigned the same grades as A Levels, as shown in the table of examples below:

Grade	A Level	3.5 A Levels	Progression Diploma	ASL (one A Level)	Advanced Diploma
A*	140	490	350	140	490
A	120	420	300	120	420
B	100	350	250	100	350
C	80	280	200	80	280
D	60	210	150	60	210
E	40	140	100	40	140

The greatest number of tariff points achievable within an Advanced Diploma, i.e. at the A* grade, is 490 (350 points for the Progression Diploma + 140 points for an A* in an A level). An A level candidate studying the typical 3 A levels could achieve a maximum of 420 tariff points (3 x 140 points). In practice, therefore, if an HEI requires the same number of tariff points, regardless of the qualification(s) an applicant is presenting with, it appears that a Diploma student could, in some situations, achieve the tariff points required by achieving overall slightly lower grades than an A level student required to have 3 A levels would need to achieve. Below is an example of this:

Figure 1: Ways in which an applicant could achieve 220 tariff points

A level student could achieve this with: BCE (100 + 80 + 40) or CCD (80 + 80 + 60)

Diploma student could achieve this with: C in Progression Diploma; E in ASL A level (200 + 40)

However, as the Advanced Diploma (Progression Diploma + ASL) is equivalent to 3.5 A levels, Diploma students would have undertaken a greater volume of work to achieve the same number of tariff points.

HEIs which specify entry requirements in terms of grades typically specify two or three A Levels and the associated minimum grades, such as BB, BC, AAB or BBB. These HEIs have the flexibility to specify a variety of combinations, but also have the ability to set a *minimum 'quality' level*, such as BBB, which requires candidates to achieve a grade B in every subject. (This differs from the equivalent points tariff of 300, which can also be satisfied by grades ABC or even AAD.)

In order to maintain a constant *minimum 'quality' level*, an HEI which requires BBB for A Level entry to a course may similarly require B for the Progression Diploma plus B for the ASL A Level element. However, in doing so it is effectively setting a higher tariff for the Diploma candidate: 300 for the A Level candidate, but 350 for the Advanced Diploma candidate.

As the example in Figure 1 indicates, in some circumstances a Diploma student would be unable to match precisely the 220 tariff points with an Advanced Diploma which includes an A level as ASL, though the tariff points available for other qualifications may make this possible.

A note on ASL tariffs

A wide range of courses can be taken as the ASL component of an Advanced Diploma and it is not possible, in this report, to give details of all tariff scores. In Annexe I of this Appendix the tariff points relating to General and Vocational AS and A level qualifications have been provided. Tariff points for all courses are available on the UCAS website.

Appendix C (continued)

Annexe I: Additional and/or Specialist Learning - GCE and VCE tariff points

Grade					Tariff points
GCE & AVCE Double Award	A level with additional AS (9 units)	GCE A level and AVCE	GCE AS Double Award	GCE AS & AS VCE	
A*A*					280
A*A					260
AA					240
AB					220
BB	A*A				200
BC	AA				180
	AB				170
CC					160
	BB				150
CD	BC	A*			140
DD	CC	A	AA		120
	CD		AB		110
DE		B	BB		100
	DD		BC		90
EE	DE	C	CC		80
			CD		70
	EE	D	DD	A	60
			DE	B	50
		E	EE	C	40
				D	30
				E	20

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