

Research Report DFE-RR122

Evaluation of the implementation and impact of diplomas: information advice and guidance

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This research report was commissioned before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

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

1. Introduction

The 14-19 landscape of qualifications has changed fundamentally in recent years primarily in response to the predicted skills needed by the workforce in the 21st century and the need to ensure that the curriculum is engaging for all. Consequently, young people have the opportunity to study new types of qualifications such as the Diploma. This, and other factors, such as the Raising Participation Age policy, has resulted in a renewed focus on Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) for young people.

IAG is particularly pertinent to the Diploma, firstly because it is a new qualification which is quite different in many respects to other qualifications such as GCSEs, A Levels and NVQs with which young people may be more familiar. The Diploma is offered at three levels and has been phased in since September 2008 (in 2008 five subjects were introduced, in 2009 a further five subjects commenced and four more are planned for introduction in September 2010). The Diploma consists of three main components:

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

Secondly, the Diploma represents a different, more applied, learning style which incorporates both the theory of a subject and its application. Diplomas include learning in the workplace (a minimum of ten days' work experience), and learning through realistic work environments, to enable the development of practical skills and work-related application of learning. Thirdly, in many cases, the Diploma is delivered inter-institutionally within a consortium of providers in a local area and, as a result, young people may be travelling to learn this aspect of their curriculum at key stage 4 or 5. The implications of these aspects of the Diploma for IAG are explored further in section 2.

Over the first three years of the evaluation of the implementation and impact of Diplomas, the evidence from surveys and case studies has highlighted the central role of IAG for the take-up of Diplomas, levels of learner understanding of, and satisfaction with the qualification and, potentially, the future success of the Diploma. The evidence presented in this paper is drawn from six of the evaluation reports¹²³⁴⁵⁶ which presented evidence from

¹ See O'Donnell, L., Lynch, S., Wade, P., Featherstone, G., Shuayb, M., Golden, S. and Haynes, G. (2009). National Evaluation of Diplomas: Preparation for 2008 Delivery. London: DCSF. [online]

² See Lynch, S., McCrone, T., Wade, P., Featherstone, G., Evans, K., Golden, S. and Haynes, G. (2010). *National evaluation of Diplomas: Experiences of Diploma delivery across Gateway 1 consortia*. London: DCSF

³ See McCrone, T., Lynch, S., Wade, P., Featherstone, G., Evans, K., Golden, S. NFER and Haynes, G, University of Exeter (2010) *National evaluation of Diplomas: preparation for 2009 delivery*. London:DCSF

⁴ Golden, S., McCrone, T., Wade, P., Featherstone, G., Southcott, C. and Haynes, G. (forthcoming). National Evaluation of Diplomas: Cohort 1- the second year of delivery. DfE

⁵ McCrone, T., Wade, P., Featherstone, G., Southcott, C, Golden, S. and Haynes, G. (forthcoming).

surveys of learners in 2008, 2009 and 2010 and case-study visits to 15 consortia delivering or planning to deliver the first five subjects and 15 that were delivering or planning to deliver the second five subjects.

This paper explores the part Diploma-related IAG has played in supporting young people, in locations where Diplomas have been introduced, to make informed decisions about whether to study for the new qualification since its launch in 2008. It is aimed at policy makers and local authorities, which now have overall responsibility for commissioning and funding IAG.

⁶ National Evaluation of Diplomas: Cohort 2- the first year of delivery. DfE
Lynch, S., McCrone, T. and Sims, D. (forthcoming). Cohort 3 – potential take-up of Diplomas. DfE
Please note that relatively small numbers of learners responded to the surveys referred to in this report and thus the findings are not necessarily representative.

2. What are the key issues for Diploma-related IAG?

Although the focus of this paper is on Diploma-related IAG it is briefly worth considering the wider IAG context and how this impacts on how young people may be making decisions about whether to study for a Diploma.

Firstly, given that Diplomas represent a different way of learning, it is clear that young people need further support to be able to make an informed decision about whether or not to study this new qualification. Previous research⁷ has shown that the provision of information for young people making decisions on option choices in Year 9 and Year 11 is not enough on its own. Guidance and education on how to approach the decision-making process, and being aware of the implications of their choices, are needed too. Secondly, the provision of impartial information and advice and guidance at institutional level is essential if young people are to make informed decisions. Thirdly, there is evidence⁸ that there is a need for further training for careers coordinators within schools so that teachers delivering careers education are more knowledgeable about careers education, and have dedicated time for it, and can provide the type of guidance and advice that adequately prepares students for choices.

The Quality, Choice and Aspiration strategy⁹ aims to improve and modernise the delivery of IAG to all young people and so should contribute towards addressing the above points. Additionally schools have increased responsibility to deliver impartial careers education.

In addition to the wider context for IAG provision, and the national developments in policy outlined above, there are some issues specific to the Diploma that require consideration. These relate to:

- **The Diploma as a new qualification**

IAG for learners considering a Diploma needs to take account of its position as a new qualification with which learners will be unfamiliar and which may take time to gain recognition and credibility. Furthermore the lack of familiarity with the new qualification, including the different components (see section 1), levels and style of learning, also affects the nature of the information and advice and guidance that not only careers advisers but also teaching staff need to provide.

- **The Diploma as a different way of learning**

The essence of the Diploma is that it offers an applied way of learning for young people. This may be a new approach for many learners so Diploma-related IAG needs to ensure that young people understand that applied learning means they will relate theory to real work, or industry experiences or

⁷ Blenkinsop, S., McCrone, T., Wade, P. and Morris, M (2006). *How do young people make choices at 14 and 16?* London: DCSF

⁸ McCrone, T., Marshall, H., White, K., Reed, F., Morris, M., Andrews, D. and Barnes, A (2009). *Careers coordinators in schools* London DCSF

⁹ Quality, Choice and Aspiration – a strategy for young people’s information, advice and guidance. DCSF 2009.

examples. This way of learning enables the student to understand the underpinning theory and to develop the related practical skills. Additionally studying for the Diploma also includes a more independent style of learning where young people take more control of gaining the requisite knowledge and skills.

- **Collaborative ways of working**

Diplomas can be offered through consortia comprising a number of different institutions, such as schools, further education colleges and training providers, who work together in the planning, preparation and delivery of Diplomas. From the young person's perspective this may present a new dimension to learning, as they may need to travel between institutions. Young people and their parents need to be aware of this factor when making their choices. Inter-institutional delivery also presents a new way of working for most institutions which needs to be reflected in both the content and delivery mechanisms of any consortium-wide Diploma-related IAG.

3. What was the experience of Diploma-related IAG to date?

3.1 What evidence is there that young people are aware of Diplomas?

Overall the majority of young people, six months prior to the commencement of the first five Diploma subjects (in September 2008), said that they were aware of Diplomas, although two-thirds (68 per cent of Year 9, and 64 per cent of Year 11 learners¹⁰) said that they did not know much about them and a minority (13 per cent Year 9 and 20 per cent Year 11 learners) had never heard of Diplomas.

Two years later, in 2010 six months before the launch of the final 4 subjects, the majority of young people in Years 9 and 11 were aware of Diplomas, but, in line with the 2008 survey findings, most said that they did not know much about them (61 per cent of year 9 and 61 per cent of Year 11 respondents). Moreover, seven per cent of Year 9 learners surveyed in 2010 said that they had never heard of Diplomas while this was the case for 17 per cent of Year 11 respondents.

Young people had accessed a range of sources of information about Diplomas. The following proportions of learners had found the sources helpful¹¹, (these are discussed more fully in section 4) were:

- Written information (for example options booklets) (40 per cent Year 9 and 31 per cent Year 11 learners in 2008 and 38 per cent of Year 9 learners and 44 per cent of year 11 learners in 2010)
- Events (such as open evenings and taster days) (39 per cent Year 9 and 29 per cent Year 11 learners and 42 per cent of Year 9 learners and 37 per cent of year 11 learners in 2010)
- Class lessons (31 per cent of Year 9 learners in 2008 and 21 per cent in 2010)¹²
- Group discussions at school (31 per cent of Year 9 learners in 2008 and 22 per cent in 2010)¹³

Supporting these findings, in terms of IAG for post-16 studies, in 2009 and 2010, Year 12 learners interviewed who had been studying a Diploma for a year reflected that, in the main, they had been informed about the Diploma through FE prospectuses, open days/evening, a teacher suggesting that the Diploma might suit their learning style or through their own research rather than through IAG provided through the institution at which they had studied in

¹⁰ See O'Donnell, L., Lynch, S., Wade, P., Featherstone, G., Shuayb, M., Golden, S. and Haynes, G. (2009). National Evaluation of Diplomas: Preparation for 2008 Delivery. London: DCSF. [online]. Data based on 5348 Year 9 respondents and 2048 Year 11 respondents.

¹¹ Based on the proportion of learners who accessed each source of information.

¹² The number of Year 11 respondents who had accessed these strategies was too small to report those who found it helpful

¹³ The number of Year 11 respondents who had accessed these strategies was too small to report those who found it helpful

Year 11. This evidence suggests the need for the provision of more information to raise awareness of Diplomas and emphasises the importance of impartiality in terms of advice on qualifications and location of study.

In 2009, leading up to the introduction of the second five Diploma subjects, case-study evidence from 15 consortia revealed similar levels of awareness of Diplomas amongst learners. In the majority of institutions learners reported having received information about the Diplomas but levels of information had varied:

For example some learners had received Diploma-specific leaflets, or attended taster sessions, whilst others had heard them mentioned in a general presentation given on options (page 35)¹⁴.

This finding highlights the fact that awareness of Diplomas appears to vary according to the institution at which a young person is located, the IAG methods employed and the emphasis placed on different qualifications. Consortium leads and senior leaders in institutions concurred with this finding as they felt that: *'in some consortia, there was inconsistency [in IAG] across institutions'* (page 36)¹⁵. (This finding was endorsed by observations made after one year of Diploma delivery in 2009 from consortium leads that commenced delivery in 2008 and in 2009. They reflected that the quality and consistency of IAG was dependent on the individual institutions).

There was some evidence that consortia were developing their strategies for raising awareness and providing information about Diplomas and were reflecting on the experience of consortia that had commenced delivery previously. Consortium staff commencing delivery of Diplomas in 2009 reported that they had learnt from the experiences of their counterparts who had commenced delivery in 2008. In particular they had:

- sought to raise awareness more widely among Connexions PAs and school staff to ensure the correct information about Diplomas was relayed to learners
- developed clearer information for learners and parents to assist their understanding of what the qualification included / entailed
- ensured that there was clarity in information provided to learners regarding the composition of the Diploma as Gateway 1 learners had anticipated more practical elements than was the case in practice.

Additionally some consortium leads from those starting delivery in 2008 had formulated plans to improve the provision of information about Diplomas by 2009. They were considering bringing forward the provision of information about Diplomas to September so Year 9 students could start to consider their options earlier in the academic year. They also suggested scheduling school events earlier so there would be more scope for school advice and guidance prior to the point at which options had to be selected.

¹⁴ See McCrone, T., Lynch, S., Wade, P., Featherstone, G., Evans, K., Golden, S. NFER and Haynes, G, University of Exeter (2010) *National evaluation of Diplomas: preparation for 2009 delivery*. London:DCSF

¹⁵ Ibid.

3.2 What evidence is there that learners fully understand the Diploma?

In 2008, six months prior to the introduction of the first five Diploma subjects, it was recognised by staff that some lack of knowledge and understanding of any new qualification was normal, as was uncertainty about a new qualification among learners. The perceived complexity of Diplomas, in terms of the components, the style of learning, the levels and the equivalences, further contributed to a lack of widespread full understanding. 2008 survey responses revealed:

high level of uncertainty among learners about what Diplomas involved.....the areas where young people appeared to be particularly uncertain related to the amount of work experience that the Diploma involves, the GCSE/A level equivalence of Diplomas, whether a learner can do a Diploma at age 16 if they have not achieved one in Years 10 and 11, and whether a learner can pursue A levels after taking a Diploma (page 85)¹⁶.

In 2010, analysis of survey findings showed that although learners in Year 9 and Year 11 were more likely than respondents in 2008 to have answered questions about Diplomas correctly, there was still a relatively high level of uncertainty about the issues mentioned above.¹⁷

Analysis¹⁸ of survey findings in 2008 showed that understanding was enhanced when detailed information was provided and when students talked to people about the Diploma. This was also the case in 2010. For example, Year 9 learners' understanding was enhanced when they had talked to subject teachers, careers teachers or parents, and for Year 11 when they had talked to their friends or other students doing a Diploma. Furthermore it was revealed that knowledge and understanding was higher amongst those young people with certain characteristics, such as those with higher prior attainment in 2008. This indicates the importance of ensuring that learners at *all* levels of ability are helped to understand fully what the Diploma entails, where an appropriate level of Diploma was available for learners of different abilities.

In 2009 and 2010 among those consortia introducing the second five subjects, those learners interviewed in the case studies intending to study a Diploma were reported to generally understand the principal learning element, the number of allocated days, and the location at which they would be studying the Diploma. It was also noted that learners had acquired *less* knowledge about assessment, functional skills, additional and specialist learning (ASL) and the equivalence of Diplomas. Amongst those learners who had not opted to take a Diploma, full understanding of the qualification was limited.

Reflecting awareness levels outlined above, it was also reported that in 2009 leading up to the introduction of the second five Diploma subjects, full

¹⁶ See O'Donnell, L., Lynch, S., Wade, P., Featherstone, G., Shuayb, M., Golden, S. and Haynes, G. (2009). National Evaluation of Diplomas: Preparation for 2008 Delivery. London: DCSF. [online]

¹⁷ Lynch, S., McCrone, T. and Sims, D. (forthcoming). Cohort 3 – potential take-up of Diplomas. DfE.

¹⁸ Based on factor analysis of questions used to elicit knowledge of Diplomas amongst learners who said that they had heard of Diplomas (4622 Year 9 learners and 1624 Year 11 learners).

understanding of Diplomas varied according to the level of information provided and the level of advice and guidance received at *institutional* level.

Learners who chose to study a Diploma in 2008 and in 2009 reflected a year later, in 2009 and 2010, that the opportunity to receive Diploma-related specific IAG only arose upon expressing an initial interest in the qualification. Furthermore, across the majority of consortia, there were Year 10 learners who felt that they could or should have been given more information about the Diploma. Some remarked that they had not known important information, such as the need to travel to learn or that they would need to pass functional skills to gain a Diploma.

3.3 What evidence is there that they are satisfied with Diploma-related IAG?

In general, the 2008 survey data showed that, where learners had been provided with information relating to each aspect of Diplomas, this information appeared to have met young people's needs. In 2008, the majority (between 85 per cent and 91 per cent of those in Year 9 and between 89 per cent and 94 per cent of those in Year 11) of young people who had received information said that they did not want more information.¹⁹

However, it was clear that there was scope to improve the provision of information about Diplomas because, among those who had not received information (or were unsure whether they had), around one-quarter to one-third of learners would have liked more information relating to a range of aspects of the Diplomas in 2008 and 2010. More specifically the following proportions of young people would have liked more information about:

- the Diploma subject areas (33 per cent of Year 9 and 32 per cent of Year 11 in 2008 and 24 per cent of Year 9 and 27 per cent of Year 11 in 2010)
- the different Diploma levels (29 per cent of Year 9 and 28 per cent of Year 11 and 24 per cent of Year 9 and 20 per cent of Year 11 in 2010)
- where they could study a Diploma (30 per cent of Year 9 and 28 per cent of Year 11 and 25 per cent of Year 9 and 23 per cent of Year 11 in 2010)
- the other qualifications they could take alongside a Diploma (31 per cent of Year 9 and 27 per cent of Year 11 and 28 per cent of Year 9 and 28 per cent of Year 11 in 2010)
- what they need to do to pass a Diploma (32 per cent of Year 9 and 26 per cent of Year 11 and 33 per cent of Year 9 and 24 per cent of Year 11 in 2010)
- what a Diploma is 'worth' (32 per cent of Year 9 and 27 per cent of Year 11 and 23 per cent of Year 9 and 25 per cent of Year 11 in 2010)
- the course opportunities after a Diploma (32 per cent of Year 9 and 28 per cent of Year 11 and 30 per cent of Year 9 and 25 per cent of Year 11 in 2010)

¹⁹ Based on 4622 Year 9 learners and 1624 Year 11 learners who said that they had heard of a Diploma in 2008.

- the job opportunities after a Diploma (37 per cent of Year 9 and 29 per cent of Year 11 and 33 per cent of Year 9 and 25 per cent of Year 11 in 2010)
- who would teach the Diploma (23 per cent of Year 11²⁰ and 26 per cent of Year 9 and 20 per cent of Year 11 in 2010)
- the amount of time undertaking a Diploma would take (26 per cent of Year 11 and 23 per cent of Year 9 and 23 per cent of Year 11 in 2010)
- how the Diploma will be assessed (25 per cent of Year 11 and 27 per cent of Year 9 and 26 per cent of Year 11 in 2010)

The figures above show that slightly smaller proportions of learners in 2010 compared with 2008 felt they would have liked more information relating to *some* aspects of the Diplomas.

In 2009 the majority of Diploma learners (70 per cent of Year 10 and 62 per cent on Year 12²¹), enrolled on one of the first five Diploma subjects (introduced in 2008), were either 'very' or 'quite' satisfied with the information and advice received about their Diploma a year previously before they had started their course. The figures among those in the second cohort, who had the opportunity to take one of the Phase 2 five Diploma subjects, were similar as 73 per cent of Year 10 learners surveyed and 62 per cent of those in Year 12 were either 'very' or 'quite' satisfied with the IAG they had received prior to starting their Diploma.

Further statistical analysis of the first cohort revealed that Year 10 learners who had chosen the Construction and Built Environment Diploma were most satisfied with IAG received about the Diploma. In 2010, after the introduction of the Phase 2 subjects in 2009, analysis of survey respondents in the second cohort showed that young people in Year 10 taking Environmental and Land-based Studies and Hospitality were significantly more satisfied with the IAG they received.

3.4 What are the implications of this?

Lack of awareness leading to not making an informed choice

The evidence suggests that IAG staff need to make sure that all young people fully understand the components of the Diploma, the style of learning involved, the locations at which learning will take place and the potential progression routes. This information would be most effective if relayed in an accessible way preferred by young people (see section 4) so that learners could fully engage with, and understand the content and its implications to them.

Furthermore, as many learners who started studying for the Diploma in 2008 reflected a year later in 2009 that they had only received Diploma-related specific IAG *after* expressing an initial interest in the qualification, it is

²⁰ These last three items were only asked of Year 11 learners in 2008

²¹ See Lynch, S., McCrone, T., Wade, P., Featherstone, G., Evans, K., Golden, S. and Haynes, G (2010). *National evaluation of Diplomas: Experiences of Diploma delivery across Gateway 1 consortia*. London: DCSF. Data based on 820 Year 10 and 176 Year 12 learners in 2009.

important to emphasise that all learners need this information early enough in order to make a fully informed decision. This would avoid those learners who may have been initially disinterested in Diplomas rejecting the qualification due to insufficient information and/or inadequate advice and guidance.

Lack of understanding leading to dissatisfaction among learners

In 2009 statistical analysis revealed that those Year 10 learners (who had been studying one of the first five Diploma subjects for a year) who were most satisfied with IAG scored higher in terms of their attitude towards the Diploma course. This was also the case among cohort 2 learners. This evidence suggests that when learners felt they had received effective IAG prior to starting a Diploma they were more likely to be positive about their Diploma studies one year later.

Learners who had started one of the first five subjects in 2008 were asked in the spring of 2009 whether the course had met their expectations. The majority of case-study learners reported that they had expected the Diploma to be more practical, involve less written work and be less onerous. Among the second cohort of Diploma learners, it was also evident that the course had not met the expectations of some learners. This was mainly due to it requiring more work than they had expected and that it was less practical than expected. To a certain extent young people will always find the next level of study, on any qualification, to be onerous and involve considerable written work, however it appears that these learners might not have understood the applied nature of learning integral to Diplomas and how that differs from purely practical learning.

There was some evidence that understanding of course content was more developed in some subjects than in others. For example, on the whole, Creative and Media learners indicated that the course was as expected, whereas a common theme among IT Diploma learners who were interviewed was disappointment at the extent of the business content. Among young people in the second cohort, it was those taking Society, Health and Development and IT who particularly noted that the course was less practical, involved fewer trips than they expected and a higher workload. There might be some scope for staff involved in a Diploma subject where learners were less satisfied to benefit from examining the way in which information has been made available on other subjects where learners have felt fully informed, to ensure full understanding of Diploma components.

4. What works?

Evidence from the first two years of Diploma delivery, and preparation for the third year, has shown that there are personalised and structural IAG elements that contribute to successfully providing learners with the means to make informed decisions about selecting a Diploma. By drawing on the evidence of what young people and professionals indicated worked well in Diploma-related IAG, in addition to what, on reflection, they would have found beneficial, this section summarises what appears to work in Diploma-related IAG in relation to:

- the **content** of the information about Diplomas that young people need to receive
- the **people** who are best placed to provide this information and the advice and guidance required to make good use of information
- the various **mechanisms** through which information can be provided.

In considering this, it is worth noting that these elements of provision of IAG form a matrix of provision through which various combinations of each element may be required in order to ensure that young people are well-informed in making their choices about studying Diplomas and that personalised IAG is available in response to an individual's needs. For example, IAG relating to the content of the Principal Learning element of Diplomas may be best conveyed by a specialist teacher or tutor through a taster day mechanism whereas IAG relating to equivalence and progression routes might be best provided by a careers specialist through a one-to-one discussion.

4.1 What information is needed?

All young people making decisions about their options in Year 9 and Year 11 need to have sufficient information about Diplomas (alongside information on alternative qualifications) to make an informed decision so they can select a qualification best suited to their ambitions, interests and individual learning characteristics. The evidence from learners who were satisfied with the information received, and from those who reported that the Diploma had not met their expectations shows that, in the case of Diplomas, this means they need information about the following.

The content of each component of the Diploma

Diploma learners, reflecting on the Diploma-related IAG they had received, indicated that it should cover:

- the content of the elements of Principal Learning
- the nature and role of Additional and Specialist Learning
- functional skills and the requirement to pass Level 2 in functional skills in order to achieve a Level 2 or Level 3 Diploma

The applied learning style for a Diploma

As noted above, the Diploma entails a different style of learning compared to other qualifications. Consequently, in making their choices, young people should understand how a Diploma will be taught, and how they will learn, with an explanation of the combination of theoretical and applied learning. It is also important that they understand that studying for a Diploma will include learning in the workplace and learning through realistic work environments and the application of what they have learnt. As the Diploma includes considerable independent learning young people should appreciate the need to be an organised and self-motivated learner.

The equivalence and progression routes

In order for young people to fully consider their options, they need to be able to understand the equivalence of the Diplomas to other qualifications and the potential progression routes (including progression to higher education).

The location(s) of learning

As some subjects may necessitate young people travelling to learn at different institutions it is important that young people know when this will be necessary, the locations to which they may travel and how travel will be organised and funded.

4.2 Who best provides Information and Advice and Guidance?

The value of young people discussing taking a Diploma with staff at school, a Connexions personal adviser and their parents is evident from the finding that young people in 2008 reported that they had done so were significantly more likely than those who had not spoken with these people, to have a better knowledge of Diplomas. Similarly, in 2010, Year 9 learners' understanding was enhanced when they had talked to subject teachers, careers teachers or parents. The role of each is discussed below.

Well-informed teachers

Teachers were one of the main sources of IAG for Year 9 learners considering a Diploma in 2008 and in 2010. About one third in 2008 (34 per cent) and 43 per cent in 2010 had discussed taking a Diploma with a subject teacher, 22 per cent and 32 per cent with another teacher in 2008 and 2010 respectively, and 24 per cent and 28 per cent with their form tutor in 2008 and 2010 respectively²² Of those that had talked to a subject teacher, 39 per cent had found this helpful in 2008 and 42 per cent in 2010. Around a third of Year 9 learners had found talking to another teacher helpful (32 per cent in 2008 and 33 per cent in 2010).

²² Based on 1004 and 234 Year 9 learners who chose to take a Diploma in 2008 and 2010 respectively

Among Year 11 learners, who were choosing whether to study a Diploma post-16 in 2008, 30 per cent²³ had discussed this with a college or training provider tutor and 24 per cent had found this helpful. In 2010, 35 per cent²⁴ had talked to a tutor in a college or training provider, and 32 per cent of them had found it helpful. In 2008, while fewer (24 per cent) had discussed with a subject teacher, 34 per cent had found this helpful. In 2010, Year 11 learners were equally as likely to have discussed Diplomas with a subject teacher as a tutor in college or a training provider (35 per cent). Moreover, 43 per cent of them had found talking to a subject teacher helpful. Among Year 9 learners in 2008 and 2010, the type of person whom they most often reported as being helpful in choosing to take a Diploma was a subject teacher. Amongst Year 11 learners, subject teachers were one of the most helpful types of people (along with careers/Connexions advisers; see below)

Young people were commonly talking to teaching staff about their choices, therefore, and access to well-informed teachers (who have an understanding of Diplomas) who can provide detailed information and guidance was often regarded by staff and young people interviewed as an effective source of guidance.

Reflecting the survey findings, one of the most commonly reported channels for receiving IAG, recalled by Year 10 interviewees who had chosen a Diploma, was speaking with a range of teachers. Year 11 students had a preference for talking to teachers in addition to looking at written or on-line materials, further emphasising the importance of well-informed school staff. Students explained the value of information from well-informed teaching staff as the following comments illustrate:

[it] gave a good idea about what [the Diploma] would be like

we got everything you could want...they went through whether or not it was a good idea for you...they didn't put words in your mouth

The teachers were really good at explaining it to you.

It is clear that students value receiving individual advice from people whom they trust and consider to be knowledgeable. In schools this meant teachers with whom they had frequent contact, and so was likely to be a form tutor or subject teacher, as much as a careers coordinator or Connexions Personal Adviser.

However, in the first two years of Diploma delivery there was a common perception among IAG interviewees and other staff that those who were not directly involved in Diploma delivery usually had limited knowledge of the qualification. This view was repeated in the visits to cohort 2 case-study consortia in 2009 and 2010 and during 2009 visits to cohort 1 schools that had started Diploma delivery and clearly indicates scope for development.

This is not to say that all teachers have to become experts in the detail of Diplomas but rather that learners need to be able to access a person who has such knowledge to whom they could be directed by their teachers.

²³ Based on 371 Year 11 learners who chose to take a Diploma in 2008

²⁴ Based on 109 Year 11 learners who chose to take a Diploma in 2010

Well-informed IAG professionals

Young people surveyed in 2008, particularly those in Year 11, had discussed the option of taking a Diploma with Connexions Personal Advisors and with IAG specialist teachers. Seventeen per cent of Year 9²⁵ learners and 46 per cent of Year 11²⁶ learners had spoken with a Connexions Personal Advisor in 2008, compared with 14 per cent²⁷ and 36 per cent²⁸ in 2010.

Nineteen per cent of those in Year 9 in 2008 and 20 per cent in 2010 had spoken to an IAG teacher. In 2008, 41 per cent in Year 11 had spoken with an IAG teacher, although this decreased to 22 per cent in 2010.

In 2008, Year 9 learners were more likely to report that they found Connexions staff and IAG teachers helpful (33 per cent and 30 per cent respectively) than those in Year 11 (25 per cent of whom found a Connexions Personal Adviser helpful and 24 per cent of whom found an IAG teacher helpful). This was also the case in 2010 in relation to IAG teachers; 28 per cent of learners in Year 9 compared with 25 per cent in Year 11 found them helpful. However, in 2010 33 per cent in Year 9 compared with 44 per cent in Year 11 found Connexions advisers helpful.

Access to well-informed Connexions Personal Advisers (who have an understanding of Diplomas) was also seen by consortium staff who were interviewed to be a future source of guidance that works for young people. The extent of Connexions involvement varied widely among case-study schools, which may be reflected in the views of the helpfulness of Connexions among young people surveyed noted above. Among the Connexions staff who were interviewed, there was a range of understanding of Diplomas, which clearly indicates capacity for further enhanced understanding. As was the case with school staff giving advice, this situation is likely to improve as the Diploma becomes a more widely available qualification and IAG professionals' knowledge of the qualification is enhanced.

Well-informed parents

Parents are an important source of guidance for young people and as such need to be well-informed about Diplomas. Two-thirds (66 per cent) of Year 9 learners and 60 per cent of those in Year 11 who were surveyed in 2008 said that they had talked with their parents about pursuing a Diploma. These figures had increased to 79 per cent (Year 9) and 68 per cent (Year 11) in 2010.

In 2008, parents were more helpful for young people in Year 9, 46 per cent of whom said that they had been helpful in making the decision about taking a Diploma, than among those in Year 11, 29 per cent of whom found discussing the Diploma with their parents helpful. This was also the case in 2010; 41 per cent in Year 9 compared with 38 per cent in Year 11.

²⁵ Based on 1004 Year 9 learners who chose to take a Diploma

²⁶ Based on 371 Year 11 learners who chose to take a Diploma

²⁷ Based on 234 Year 9 learners who chose to take a Diploma in 2010

²⁸ Based on 109 Year 11 learners who chose to take a Diploma in 2010

As parents are a key source of advice and guidance to young people, ensuring that they are equipped with the information to provide advice to their child, emerged as a key part of successful Diploma-related IAG. The cohort 2 consortia gained some advice from the IAG experiences from the first year of delivery, such as the importance of developing **a clear way of describing the Diploma so that the information was accessible for learners and parents**. Parents wanted to fully understand the Diploma and the implications of choosing it, in order to advise their children with confidence. As was the case with many students, parents had often only received basic details about the Diploma at an options evening, and then had to find out more for themselves, for example from the internet, if they were interested.

There was evidence that parents were invited to events such as open evenings and option evenings and in some consortia to Diploma 'roadshows' and special presentations about particular Diploma subjects. Parents said they wanted details of *'what the course actually covered'*, how the Diploma compared with other qualifications and how it would be regarded by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Parents can also guide their children in terms of the suitability of the **learning style needed to study Diplomas**. The majority of the parents of Diploma learners interviewed had a positive attitude to their children's choice - in particular what they perceived to be the different learning style involved in the Diploma, which they felt would *'serve the interests'* of their child and the experience of work-related learning, which would assist career choice.

Parental attendance at Diploma activities can assist parents in guiding their children. In a cohort 1 consortium, an annual 14-19 event is held, at a university, for Year 11 students who may be interested in pursuing a career in Engineering, and their parents. This includes an explanation of how the Level 3 Diploma differs from other post-16 courses as well as tours of the facilities. The event is successful in attracting a large number of young people and their parents. Using HEI or employer premises can be an attractive alternative location and also highlight for parents the difference of the Diploma qualification and its involvement of employers and higher education to provide a varied and different learning experience and could also be used for Year 9 events.

Additionally, in some consortia, where learners were interviewed prior to being accepted onto a Diploma, subject leads required that parents should attend the interview too, to ensure that both student and parents were fully informed of what taking a Diploma would entail. The timing of the interviews had some flexibility to facilitate parental attendance.

4.3 What is the best mechanism for providing Information and Advice and Guidance?

A range of mechanisms were used to provide Diploma-related IAG to young people and the interviews with staff and learners on their experience of providing and receiving IAG indicated that the following approaches were viewed as most effective.

- **Written information.** Learners had most commonly received written information about Diplomas – in 2008 this was the most frequently cited source of information and was mentioned by 42 per cent of Year 11s and 46 per cent of Year 9s. In 2010 these figures increased to 74 per cent (Year 9) and 62 per cent (Year 11), suggesting that over time more written information has become available to young people making choices. Moreover, it was also the most common source of information that was cited as useful in 2008 for Year 9 and Year 11 learners. In 2008, 40 per cent of those in Year 9 and 31 per cent of those in Year 11 who had received written information found it helpful. In 2010, the equivalent figures were 38 per cent in Year 9 and 44 per cent in Year 11 (events, such as taster days, were thought to be slightly more useful in 2010 by learners in Year 9). Learners valued written information because they could take it home and consider it together with their parents. It was also evident that Year 12 learners were more likely to have found out about Diplomas independently through written information such as FE prospectuses which highlights the need for such information to be of high quality.
- **Taster days.** Where learners surveyed in 2008 had engaged in events such as taster days, 39 per cent of those in Year 9 and 29 per cent of those in Year 11 had found these helpful in 2008 (and these were the second most helpful sources of IAG cited in 2008 (after written information). In 2010, events such as taster days were the most common source of information cited as useful by learners in Year 9 (42 per cent of learners who had accessed events. Events were also thought to have been helpful by 37 per cent who had accessed them Year 11 in 2010). Interviews revealed that learners valued the opportunity to gain an insight into what learning a Diploma would actually be like. Learners in four consortia who attended a taster day, having decided that they were interested in a Diploma, were well-informed about the Diploma and were able to provide details of the content and structure of the qualification. They had been able to refine their decision based on this greater insight. For example, one learner who had chosen an NVQ hairdressing course, instead of the Hair and Beauty Studies Diploma, explained *'the Diploma's got science in it, and there's a lot more writing. It's less hands-on. The NVQ is more hands-on, no science.*
- **Diploma experience.** Gaining some first-hand experience of what it would be like to study a Diploma had been particularly welcomed by learners. The effectiveness of this approach is apparent as those who had attended taster days or sessions said it had helped them decide whether or not to take a Diploma. One challenge in offering taster sessions is to ensure that they are not superficial, but do impart some of the real experience of taking a Diploma. For example, in a cohort 1 case-study consortium, the Year 9 learners from several schools who had chosen the Diploma, were brought together for joint introductory lessons over several weeks before the end of the summer term. This type of extended experience was seen by the students as very helpful in making a final decision on whether to take the course. While such an approach would only be appropriate for learners who had already shown definite interest in a Diploma, rather than to those who were simply thinking initially about their options, it has the potential for ensuring that learners have a detailed understanding of what taking a Diploma would be like.

- **Guided direction.** Allied to the options choice process, through which all learners could potentially be aware of, and informed about the Diploma, was the extent to which schools used targeting positively. Although in some schools, students could be directed towards particular post-14 routes, based on their academic ability which might preclude learners ever finding out about Diplomas, it was also possible for schools to use a form of positive targeting for Diplomas, so that students who were considered to have a particular aptitude for, and interest in, a Diploma subject, were encouraged to take it up. In case-study schools where this type of targeting had occurred, the learners usually had a very positive attitude towards the Diploma, and were well-informed about it. A further key aspect of providing effective guidance is to ensure that the learners are aware of, and have, the necessary ability to undertake the Diploma at their chosen level.

In summary, the potential effectiveness of adopting a matrix of the strategies outlined above is illustrated by the evidence from three consortia that commenced delivery in 2008 in which learners were positive about the IAG received and where recruitment levels to Diplomas had matched or exceeded anticipated take-up. In these consortia, learners were more likely to report that:

- they had received information via a broad range of methods
- the IAG they had received fully covered the content and structure of the Diploma
- they had impartial advice around choosing and decision-making
- they had the opportunity formally and informally to seek further information from well-informed teaching staff.

4.4 Timing the provision of Diploma-related IAG

The short time frame during which young people have to make their choices in Year 9 presents a constraint on the level of detail it is possible to provide to all learners about their choices. It is evident that there needs to be further consideration of the timing of the provision of Diploma-related IAG (as discussed in Section 3.1). For example, one learner explained *'you don't know that much unless you have properly looked into it and you were seriously considering it'*. There needs to be a balance between providing sufficiently detailed information on Diplomas, so that young people can decide in principle whether they wish to consider the qualification, followed up by more detailed information and, for example tasters, so that people can refine their choices and ensure they choose the correct course for them.

4.5 Strategies for challenging gender-stereotyping in young people's choices

Interviewees at consortium and institution level were very aware of the need to challenge gender stereotyping. Strategies that had been developed included holding special events, for example, to encourage girls to consider Engineering and Construction and the Built Environment, and boys to

consider Creative and Media, and Society, Health and Development. Using current atypical students who were taking Diplomas to give presentations, and using pictures of atypical students in brochures were also advocated. Talks by employers who were keen to challenge gender stereotyping in young people's choices were seen as particularly useful.

5. Summary and key messages for policy

In considering the implications of the evidence for policy makers, it is worth noting that the implementation of Diplomas entailed a phased introduction both in terms of the subjects (five in 2008, five more in 2009 and the final four in 2010) and in terms of consortia being established to deliver Diplomas with new consortia commencing each year since the first cohort 1 consortia started delivery in 2008. The effect of this phased implementation is that not every learner in Year 9 or Year 11 nationally has the same choice of taking a Diploma at all or of taking one of all 14 subjects. Consequently, raising awareness of Diplomas, and ensuring that they are understood, has to be implemented within this context.

5.1 Summary

The evaluation to date has highlighted the need to take into consideration the context in which consortia are seeking to provide Diploma-related IAG to learners. In particular it is evident that they are doing so in a context where the qualification is new and entails some different ways of learning for teachers and young people. In addition, the increasing range of choices for young people requires development of enhanced decision-making skills and, importantly, impartial IAG. In achieving this, Diploma consortia are working in a context of institutional independence which can lead to challenges in implementing a consortium-wide approach to IAG.

Notwithstanding this context, there is evidence that consortia have been able to provide young people with helpful information about Diplomas and, where this is done well, young people are more likely to be satisfied with their Diploma. There is, nevertheless, scope for further improving the content and mode of providing IAG about Diplomas to young people, which could entail a combined strategy that makes effective use of informed professionals and provides the appropriate level of detail needed at the right time.

5.2 Key messages for policy and practice

In considering the key messages for policy about Diploma-related IAG it is worth noting the wider context and developments in IAG many of which relate to similar issues.

- **Raising awareness of Diplomas where they are available** – there is evidence that some young people did not choose to take a Diploma because they did not know enough about them and that there is some uncertainty among some young people and parents of the value and currency of Diplomas. Consortia and institutions wishing to offer Diplomas may wish to consider further and enhance communication about Diplomas to parents and young people. This could usefully include the evidence of HEI's acceptance of Diplomas for entry into higher education would assist in enhancing understanding and help young people to make an informed choice.

- **Enhancing consistency of information** – it is evident that the information that young people receive about Diplomas varied across institutions so that a learner in one institution may not receive the same information about Diplomas as a learner in another institution although they would be studying the qualification together. At a local level, where co-located delivery continues, there may be value in generating common written information that all learners in an area receive and exploring the use of consortium-wide events which any learners within a consortium could access.
- **Supporting professionals and parents** – it is evident that young people prefer to have some element of discussion and mediation when navigating their way through their choices at 14 and 16. As the Diploma is a new qualification, with some different elements compared to other qualifications, it seems that there would be value in enhancing further the knowledge of professionals and parents to whom young people turn for advice and guidance. This could entail a two-tiered approach through which parents and some staff are provided with some generic and basic information about Diplomas to enhance their knowledge and understanding and details of those to whom they should direct young people who require further details. The second tier would entail enhanced information for such professionals (for example Connexions personal advisers and careers coordinators) to use to guide young people who are considering taking a Diploma.
- **Supporting strategies to enhance Diploma-related IAG** – further sharing of practice of strategies that appear to enable young people to make a more informed choice of whether to take a Diploma or not, in particular taster sessions and opportunities for learners with experience of Diplomas to outline their experience to those who are considering it, would be of value.

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