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## NATIONAL EVALUATION OF DIPLOMAS GATEWAY 2 LEAD CONSORTIUM SURVEY

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### Background

The new Diploma qualification for young people aged 14-19 was first announced by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (previously the Department for Education and Skills) in the *Education and Skills White Paper* in 2005. The Diplomas are being offered at three levels and across 17 lines of learning, and are being implemented in annual phases (from September 2008). The first five lines of learning (Phase 1), which were introduced in September 2008, are being delivered by consortia of schools, colleges and other partners which were successful after applying through Gateway 1. A further five lines of learning (Phase 2) will be delivered from September 2009 by consortia approved through Gateway 2.

In January 2008, the DCSF commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and the University of Exeter to conduct the national evaluation of the implementation and impact of Diplomas over the period 2008-2013. This Research Brief presents the findings from a telephone survey carried out in January-February 2009 of Gateway 2 consortium leads. Interviews were achieved with 254 of the 310 consortium leads (82 per cent). Of those, 106 had been delivering Diplomas since September 2008. It is important to note that the survey focused primarily on planning and preparation for the lines of learning that consortia would start delivering for the first time in 2009.

### Key findings

- Overall, consortia felt prepared for the delivery of Diplomas from September 2009, with most reporting that they were either 'well' or 'fairly well' prepared in relation to the factors listed.
- At the time of the interviews (February 2009), consortia were most concerned about: future funding in order to sustain provision; providing transport (especially in rural areas); and assessment and accreditation (although training and support was scheduled for the coming months).
- Most consortia were planning some degree of partnership delivery between schools and other organisations, maximising the benefits of staff expertise and facilities across partners.
- Having strong leadership, establishing and maintaining effective communication between partners, and developing a shared vision for Diploma implementation, were considered important for overcoming any challenges of collaborative working.
- Just over two-thirds of consortia were planning to deliver three or fewer lines of learning from September 2009; the Higher level Diploma (Level 2) was most likely to be offered. A majority of consortium leads anticipated that there would be 100 or fewer learners starting a Diploma in September 2009 in their consortium.

## Are consortia prepared for Diploma delivery from September 2009?

Overall, consortia felt prepared for the delivery of Diplomas from September, with most reporting that they were either 'well' or 'fairly well' prepared in relation to the factors listed (see Figure 1). As was the case in 2008, consortia felt most prepared in terms of staffing levels and staff expertise.

**Figure 1 - Consortium leads' views on their preparedness for delivering Diplomas from September 2009**

	Well prepared	Fairly well prepared	Causing minor concern	Causing major concern	No response
	%	%	%	%	%
Staffing levels	43	47	8	1	1
Staff expertise	42	48	8	1	1
Availability of specialised facilities / Equipment / resources	41	46	10	2	1
Marketing and promotional activities	36	47	14	2	1
Quality of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) for learners	27	48	21	3	1
Level of HEI support / involvement	26	52	14	2	6
Level of employer involvement	25	53	21	1	1
Quality Assurance policies across partners	22	52	22	2	1
Transport plans	21	32	34	10	2
IT and administration systems	19	43	33	2	2
Development of Additional and Specialist Learning (ASL)	18	57	22	2	2
Staff confidence	18	61	19	1	1
Funding arrangements	13	33	38	15	2
Understanding of assessment and accreditation	10	45	39	5	2

**N= 254**

*A series of single response items*

*Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100*

*Source: NFER / Exeter evaluation of Diplomas: Consortium Lead Survey 2009*

However, consortium leads across the whole sample seemed to apply more caution generally this year than they did in 2008, as they were more likely to say they were *fairly well* prepared rather than *well* prepared in relation to a number of factors. For example, 43 per cent of consortium leads reported being *well* prepared in terms of staffing levels in 2009, compared with 63 per cent in 2008, and in relation to staffing expertise the proportions were 42 per cent in 2009 compared with 60 per cent in 2008. This could be due to consortia introducing new lines of learning in Gateway 2 which staff felt less confident and able to deliver compared with those introduced during the first phase.

When explored further, it should be noted that three-quarters of the consortium leads involved in Diploma delivery since 2008 reported that their consortium was *more* prepared overall in the lead up to September 2009 delivery than they had been in 2008. This suggests that, when responding to the most recent survey, it was the consortium leads approved through Gateway 2 only (who would deliver Diplomas for the first time in 2009) who felt less prepared than those who had been involved since September 2008. This was indeed the case, as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2 - Consortium leads' views on their preparedness for delivering Diplomas from September 2009**

	Gateway 1 and 2		Gateway 2 only	
	Well prepared	Fairly well prepared	Well prepared	Fairly well prepared
	%	%	%	%
Staffing levels	49	42	39	51
Staff expertise	48	46	38	50
Marketing and promotional activities	45	45	29	47
Availability of specialised facilities / equipment / resources	38	49	44	43
Quality of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) for learners	33	48	23	49
Transport plans	33	25	13	37
Level of employer involvement	27	53	23	53
Level of HEI support / involvement	25	52	26	51
Quality Assurance policies across partners	25	53	20	52
Staff confidence	23	65	14	58
IT and administration systems	22	52	18	37
Funding arrangements	21	37	7	30
Development of Additional and Specialist Learning (ASL)	19	58	18	55
Understanding of assessment and accreditation	10	51	9	41
<b>N=</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>148</b>

*A series of single response items*

*Source: NFER / Exeter evaluation of Diplomas: Consortium Lead Survey 2009*

The following factors were most likely to be causing concern at the time of the interviews (see Figure 1):

- funding arrangements (comments suggested that this related to future funding in order to sustain provision)
- providing transport (especially in rural areas)
- assessment and accreditation (although many reported that training was planned).

Consortia were also less likely to report being well prepared in relation to the development of Additional and Specialist Learning (a number of consortium leads reported that the offer was limited to Additional rather than Specialist Learning, and that Additional Learning options were often limited to existing qualifications already offered).

### **What are the lessons learned from Diploma delivery in Phase 1?**

Three-quarters (76 per cent) of consortia involved since 2008 felt more prepared overall for delivery from 2009 than they had for 2008 delivery. Consortium leads involved in Gateway 1 emphasised the benefits of planning and developing the following as early as possible:

- consortium structures (including developing management and operational groups for each line of learning, and clarifying responsibilities and channels of communication)
- funding arrangements and how funding will be distributed
- continuing professional development (CPD) and support for practitioners

- IAG and marketing strategies across the consortia to assist recruitment
- quality assurance protocols/standardised practice across partners
- delivery models, including functional skills delivery
- schemes of work.

### How established are partnerships across consortia?

The majority (89 per cent) of consortia approved for the first time through Gateway 2 had a history of working in partnership together; only a minority (ten per cent) of these consortia had been established solely for the purpose of applying to deliver Diplomas. Pre-existing structures and processes seemed to support Diploma planning and implementation. There was evidence of growth across a third of consortia which had been delivering Diplomas since 2008, in terms of new partners becoming involved to help to implement new lines of learning. Some consortia were facing ongoing challenges associated with partnership working, including: building effective collaborative partnerships across which there is a shared commitment to Diplomas; creating common systems across partners; and the logistics of establishing a consortium involving many partners.

A range of ways of overcoming such challenges were mentioned, such as:

- having strong **leadership**, for example from the consortium lead and line of learning leads
- establishing and maintaining effective **communication** between partners, for example, through regular meetings of all consortium partners and through the consortium lead conducting one-to-one visits to institutions to discuss Diploma delivery
- developing a **shared vision** for Diploma implementation across partners, and negotiating agreements on the roles and responsibilities of each partner.

### What lines of learning and levels of the Diploma were consortia planning to deliver?

As shown in Figure 3, just over two-thirds of consortia were planning to deliver three or fewer lines of learning from September 2009. Only one consortium was planning to deliver all ten lines of learning.

**Figure 3 - Number of lines of learning that consortia will begin delivering from September 2009\***

Number of lines of learning	%
One	23
Two	23
Three	21
Four	14
Five	11
Six	3
Seven	3
Eight	1
Nine	0
Ten	<1
No response	1
<b>N= 254</b>	

*\*Table includes both Phase 1 and Phase 2 lines of learning*

*Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100*

*Source: NFER / Exeter evaluation of Diplomas: Consortium Lead Survey 2009*

Figure 4 indicates that Creative and Media, Hair and Beauty Studies, Information Technology, and Business Administration and Finance were the most widely offered Diplomas (a mixture of Phase 1 and 2 lines of learning), while Environmental and Land-based Studies and Manufacturing and Product Design were least frequently offered by consortia delivering from 2009.

**Figure 4 - Lines of learning and levels offered**

Line of learning	Total number of consortia	% of all consortia
<b>PHASE 1</b>		
Creative and Media	123	48
IT	99	39
Construction and the Built Environment	70	28
Society, Health and Development	69	27
Engineering	66	26
<b>PHASE 2</b>		
Hair and Beauty Studies	104	41
Business, Administration and Finance	82	32
Hospitality	68	27
Environmental and Land-based	47	19
Manufacturing and Product Design	18	7
<b>N=254</b>		

*Consortia could be offering more than one line of learning*  
 Source: NFER / Exeter evaluation of Diplomas: Consortium Lead Survey 2009

As shown in Figure 5, consortia were most likely to be offering Diplomas at the Higher level (Level 2) overall; the Higher level was most prevalent pre-16 but the Advanced/Progression level (Level 3) was most often offered post-16.

**Figure 5 - Levels offered by consortia, pre-16 and post-16**

Levels offered	Pre-16	Post-16	Offered at all by consortia	
	%	%	Number of consortia	%
Foundation (Level 1)	69	29	179	71
Higher (Level 2)	96	54	250	98
Advanced/Progression (Level 3)	-	61	155	61
<b>N= 254</b>				

*Consortia could be offering more than one level.*  
 Source: NFER / Exeter evaluation of Diplomas: Consortium Lead Survey 2009

**What was the estimated number of learners expected to start a Diploma in 2009?**

As shown in Figure 6, the majority of consortium leads anticipated that there would be 100 or fewer learners starting a Diploma in September 2009 in their consortium. Some had deliberately set a low limit (in order to manage implementation carefully in the first phase of Diploma delivery).

**Figure 6 - Estimated learner numbers across consortia for Diploma delivery starting in September 2009**

Estimated number of learners	%
0-50	27
51-100	32
101-200	24
201-300	6
301-400	4
401-500	1
More than 500	2
No response	4
<b>N= 254</b>	

*A single response item*  
 Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100  
 Source: NFER / Exeter evaluation of Diplomas: Consortium Lead Survey 2009

## How will Diplomas be delivered from September 2009?

Most consortia (91 per cent) were planning some degree of partnership delivery between schools and a Further Education (FE) college and/or training provider, maximising the benefits of staff expertise and facilities across the consortium. Just under a third (31 per cent) planned shared delivery between schools. There were examples of FE colleges / training providers or schools delivering the entire Diploma in-house with no shared delivery with another institution (in 24 per cent and 17 per cent of consortia respectively).

Nearly all consortia (99 per cent) reported that employers would be involved in supporting Diploma delivery, most often by providing placements for learners (99 per cent of consortia involving employers), hosting visits (97 per cent), assisting with the development of curriculum materials (94 per cent) or giving talks to learners (94 per cent). Securing long-term commitment from employers was a concern for some, particularly in the current economic climate. Most consortia also *planned* to involve HEIs (82 per cent) and training providers (68 per cent) in Diploma development and/or delivery. Where their involvement was planned, HEIs were likely to host visits (85 per cent) or give talks/advice to learners or teachers (87 per cent), and training providers were most likely to be involved in teaching elements of the Diploma (84 per cent) or developing materials (84 per cent).

## Implications for policy and practice

The following implications for policy and practice have emerged from the findings:

- **Partnership working / collaboration:** Challenges in establishing consortia most commonly related to difficulties in building trust between partners and developing a shared vision for Diploma implementation within the consortium. Consortium leads advised 'new' consortia to start as early as possible in each phase of implementation to develop clear management structures and to clarify roles and responsibilities. The importance of open dialogue and clear and frequent communication between partners was also highlighted. 'Newer' consortia are likely to benefit from lessons learned by more established and growing consortia. Continued provision of opportunities to visit consortia involved in Gateway 1, together with web-based information, are likely to be helpful.
- **Marketing and promotion:** Some consortia were aware that a limited *interest* in Diplomas among young people may affect take-up. While this survey was undertaken before young people had made their final choices, this suggests that continued and improved marketing and IAG is required at both a local and national level in order to increase take-up.
- **Employer engagement:** Consortia should make use of the Diploma Support Programme<sup>1</sup> for advice on employer engagement and consider other forms of support, such as that provided by Education Business Partnership Organisations (EBPOs) or by a person given designated responsibility for employer engagement. If challenges are still faced, other means of providing learners with opportunities to develop work-related skills may need to be considered, such as making use of realistic working environments (RWEs) in colleges.
- **Gaps in preparedness:** Consortia considered that they needed more clarification about future funding in order to feel secure about the sustainability of Diplomas. Some also felt less prepared in terms of transport plans; possible solutions were considered to be funding assistance for transport and/or support from a designated person with responsibility for such arrangements. Some consortia also expressed concerns about ASL, reporting that the offer was limited to a narrow range of additional learning options, which could have implications for the learner experience and progression. Therefore, consortia should consider how they can extend the offer across partners, and may value advice on how to do so. Moreover, consortia felt less prepared this year in terms of staff expertise and staffing levels, which suggests a need for on-going support and CPD and that there may be a need to recruit staff to fill gaps in expertise.

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.diploma-support.org/resourcesandtools/insidework/ee>

## **About the evaluation**

The research design provides a complementary mixed-method approach to address the complex range of issues and aims associated with the implementation and impact of Diplomas. This involves surveys of a range of stakeholders, longitudinal programmes of qualitative case-studies of consortia, and statistical analysis of external datasets. This Research Brief summarises the findings from a telephone survey of 254 consortium leads whose consortia will be delivering Diplomas from 2009 (including 106 who started in 2008). The survey was conducted in January-February 2009 and largely replicated a similar survey conducted a year earlier, of consortium leads whose consortia started delivery in 2008. The survey aimed to gather information on the overall strategy and structure of consortia, prior to Diploma delivery in September 2009.

## **Additional Information**

Further information about this research can be obtained from Rebecca Rylatt, Young People Analysis Division, DCSF, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT

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*The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.*