The Diploma
Bringing learning to life
A guide
The world is changing fast. Employers need people with higher levels of skills and qualifications more than ever before. There have been substantial improvements in results at GCSE and A level over the last few years and increasing numbers staying on in education to 18 and beyond. But up to 10% of our 16–18-year-olds are not in education, training or employment, and we need more young people to be achieving at higher levels.

By 2015 every young person will be entitled to education and training until they are 18. The government has invested in creating new options for young people to ensure that all develop the skills they need to succeed. Young people will be able to choose from a greater range of qualifications to suit their interests and learning styles.

The Diploma is one major strand of the 14–19 reforms. It is a qualification for 14 to 19-year-olds combining theoretical study with practical experience based around a work-related curriculum. Other reforms include:

- updated GCSEs and A levels
- Foundation Learning
- the Extended Project
- functional skills
- personal, learning and thinking skills.

With all this change, the right support is important for our young people. Information, advice and guidance services will be improved, and all school and college staff will have a role to play in advising learners and their parents or carers. This will ensure that young people get the most out of the reforms and make the right choices that help them to realise their aspirations.

This booklet is your quick and easy guide to the Diploma, a qualification launched in 2008 that is set to become one of the four main education options, alongside GCSEs / A levels, Apprenticeships and Foundation Learning for those working mainly at Entry Level and Level 1.

The booklet aims to provide all school and college staff and other providers with the key information that they will need about the Diploma as take up grows and it becomes an entitlement for students from 2013.

The Diploma in context
The 14–19 reforms

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When the reforms have been fully implemented, the Diploma will become one of the pathways available to all young people from 2013.
The Diploma is a flexible qualification that has been designed to appeal to students of all abilities. The Diploma combines subject learning with other valuable disciplines including functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT, project work, work experience and personal skills such as communication and teamwork. Learning is applied, giving young people practical, hands-on experience in addition to classroom learning.

Based around subject areas, the Diploma includes project-based learning and gives students the chance to choose additional and specialist learning (ASL) options which are tailored to young people’s interests and that also reflect their career ambitions.

The Diploma has been designed and developed in consultation with over 5,000 employers, with some 8,000 employers now involved with Diploma delivery. Many schools, colleges, and representatives from some of the country’s best universities have also been involved in developing the Diploma.

Diploma students develop a broad set of valuable, transferable skills that prepare them for further study and employment. That is why Diploma learners can access 80% of undergraduate courses for entry in 2010, and big employers such as Toyota, Vodafone and Microsoft are actively involved in championing the Diploma.
By 2011, a total of 17 Diplomas will be available.

Available since September 2008
- Construction and the Built Environment
- Creative and Media
- Engineering
- Information Technology
- Society, Health and Development

Available since September 2009
- Business, Administration and Finance
- Environmental and Land-based Studies
- Hair and Beauty Studies
- Hospitality
- Manufacturing and Product Design

Available from September 2010
- Public Services
- Retail Business
- Sport and Active Leisure
- Travel and Tourism

Available from September 2011
- Humanities and Social Sciences
- Languages and International Communication
- Science – Foundation and Higher levels

Available from September 2012
- Science – Advanced level

The Diploma can be studied at three different levels:

- **Level 1:** Foundation – equivalent to 5 GCSEs at grades D–G
- **Level 2:** Higher – equivalent to 7 GCSEs at grades A*–C
- **Level 3:** Advanced – equivalent to 3.5 A levels

There is also the Progression Diploma – equivalent to 2.5 A levels. The Progression Diploma comprises the same elements as the Advanced Diploma, but without the ASL component.

The Diploma has three components:

- **Principal learning:** This develops the skills, knowledge and understanding necessary for the Diploma subject. The emphasis is on practical tasks and applying knowledge in a range of situations. Much of the curriculum will be project-based and internally assessed.
- **Generic learning:** This is the same for all Diplomas – functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT, personal, learning and thinking skills, and project work. All students must complete a minimum of 10 days’ work experience.
- **Additional and specialist learning (ASL):** This adds breadth or depth to the qualification. It is made up of other qualifications which are accredited to be part of the Diploma qualification, e.g. GCSEs, A levels and a range of vocationally-related qualifications, as well as other types of qualification. You can find out more about ASL in a separate booklet, The Diploma: A guide to additional and specialist learning.
How the Diploma is structured

The guided learning hours (GLH) shown for the ASL component is the specific minimum requirement that must be met for Diploma aggregation. The GLH shown for all other components are provided as an indication of the average amount of time which would be spent on each part of the Diploma. Some parts may in practice be integrated with others. For example, the personal, learning and thinking skills are embedded in and assessed through the principal learning; there is no separate assessment unit for them.

The new, stand-alone Functional Skills qualifications are a mandatory part of every Diploma but are also qualifications in their own right. Students might complete the teaching and learning as part of normal English, mathematics and ICT lessons alongside GCSE studies with other students not doing the Diploma. But Diploma students will benefit from teaching approaches which allow learners to apply their English, mathematics and ICT in practical contexts as part of the principal learning in the Diploma.

GLH = Guided learning hours over the whole course
* ICT, mathematics, English
** For example GCSEs, A levels, BTECs and NVQs, as well as other types of qualification
*** No ASL in the Progression Diploma

How the Diploma fits with the wider curriculum

FOUNDATION AND HIGHER DIPLOMAS
At Key Stage 4, Foundation and Higher Diplomas are taught over two years alongside the statutory curriculum – so learners continue to study the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and foundation subjects like ICT, PE and citizenship.

Many students will study GCSEs in English and mathematics, as well as other subjects, alongside their Diploma, but they will still be required to complete functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT at the relevant level to achieve the Diploma.

As well as studying GCSEs alongside the Diploma, learners may opt to study for a GCSE as part of their Diploma programme through the additional and specialist learning (ASL) component, although the options available should not be restricted to GCSEs.

ADVANCED DIPLOMA
Students may choose to take an established qualification, such as an A level or one of a range of vocationally-related and other qualifications, as their ASL component at Advanced level.

QCDA has published curriculum guidance and advice on timetabling and options for co-teaching the Diploma.

www.qcda.gov.uk/diploma
Case studies

BARNSLEY COLLEGE, YORKSHIRE

Kelly Parker, 17, is studying for a Foundation Diploma in Society, Health and Development:

“The Diploma sounded like a better option for me than A levels or a BTEC because although I wasn’t sure what to expect, I knew I’d get some practical experience from the course. We’ve had lots of experience already. I have worked in a residential home and a nursery, visited Doncaster Prison, and the local magistrates’ court. People come into college to talk to us too. We’ve met midwives, drug workers and people from the social services. It’s a different way of learning. A lot of the work is assignment-based rather than learning in class and then having a big test at the end. I think things are easier to remember this way.

Before I started my Diploma, I wanted to be a nurse. I thought it was the only job I wanted to do and could do. But now I’ve changed my mind. I really want to become a child psychologist. The Diploma is great because you find out about all of the different jobs in health and social care – I didn’t know there were so many.”

ST PETER’S COLLEGIATE SCHOOL, WOLVERHAMPTON

Charlotte Guest, 15 is studying for a Higher Diploma in Creative and Media

“I’m pretty sure that I want to study something creative at university and I don’t want to study for GCSEs that don’t really interest me. I’m still going to sit GCSEs in English, maths, ICT and the sciences, but I’m also getting more practical, hands-on experience on the Diploma course in subjects that I particularly enjoy.

I’ve chosen to use bridges as the subject for my project, which involves looking at things like planning, architecture and sculpture. I’m finding it really interesting so far. We’re going to start work on an acting project soon, where we’ll get the chance to make up our own play from scratch and perform it to an audience. We’re also learning about animation and film, and putting our knowledge into practice.

We get a chance to visit different kinds of businesses and interview the staff involved. I think this is fantastic as it lets us see what certain jobs are really like.

I like the variety of work and the fact that you’re given greater freedom and practical opportunities. You’re also treated more like an adult and trusted to work independently.”
Katherine Appleby, 15, is studying for a Higher Diploma in Engineering.

"I’m quite a practical person. I like knowing how things work and how things are put together. I really like problem-solving and there’s plenty of that on this course. I think it’s relevant for all kinds of careers and it’s great to have an opportunity to learn this sort of skill, and put it into action. Doing GCSE qualifications and the Diploma at the same time means that I’m giving myself as many career opportunities as possible. I’m not sure at the moment whether I want to be a vet or an engineer and this way I can keep all my options open as well as getting a chance to experience what an engineering career might be like first hand.

It’s pretty much all boys on this Diploma course. I’ve learnt to accept this though and I think more girls will become interested when the courses have been around for a while and they can see what’s involved.”

Nigel Akers teaches the Diploma in Information Technology

“What is so exciting about it is that we are all still learning. The Diploma is quite unlike anything I’ve taught before and the students are enthused. They are seeing people carrying out their jobs, working towards deadlines and seeing what real life is like. The projects require them to work under some pressure with a deadline and the knowledge that someone is relying on them to get the work done, correctly and on time. The way the Diploma is structured means students will learn a whole range of practical, social and communication skills, skills which will stand them in good stead in the workplace.

The students’ first project was to undertake publicity work for a former pupil who is now running her own curry delivery company. Students helped her to come up with promotional material, including designing a website which could take orders online and creating a radio advertising jingle. Their next project will include working with a local rock band on promotional material, and will involve spending time in a recording studio.

The beauty of the Diploma and functional skills is that young people are learning things that will be of real value to them in the future. We place the emphasis on giving learners as many opportunities as possible to develop their functional skills through tasks. For example, we deliver the principal learning in the Diploma in IT through challenges based on the needs of real businesses – a recent project saw learners contacting printers, radio companies, domain name providers and poster advertising companies to develop marketing solutions for a sole trader. This type of practical experience gives them the freedom to develop their English, mathematics and ICT skills in a genuine context and to learn from their mistakes and successes. We’ve already learnt that there needs to be a shift from spoon feeding to giving young people the freedom to get on with things themselves and learn through experience.

Djanogly is working with three schools and three city colleges as well as a number of employers to deliver the Diploma across Nottingham. The level of cooperation has astounded me. In the past institutions worked on their own and didn’t really share ideas but we have been able to work closely with local colleges comparing and sharing lesson models.”
Diplomas require a collaborative approach – how will we achieve this?

Your school will be part of a consortium, collaborating with other schools, colleges and providers in your area to develop the Diploma curriculum, to decide which ASL options to offer, and to deliver the Diplomas. Consortia will sort out practicalities such as where the teaching takes place and transport arrangements. Many local authorities have been developing these partnerships for some time and have come up with innovative solutions for dealing with many of the practical issues involved. Information about good practice is available on the DCSF 14–19 website and through the tailored workforce support packages available to support the implementation of the Diploma and functional skills.

Which students should take the Diploma?

The Diploma appeals to students of all abilities and aspirations, who prefer a practical style of learning and wish to undertake a course that will help them to develop a broad range of valuable skills.

Will universities accept the Diploma?

For entry to higher education in 2010, all UK universities have stated that an Advanced Diploma holder can access undergraduate courses at their institution. Diploma learners can access over 80% of undergraduate courses. Choosing appropriate ASL is important for supporting progression into higher education. Higher education institutions have different entry requirements, and some may expect applicants to have specific qualifications as their ASL component. Young people should check the entry requirements of their preferred universities. Details of HE entry requirements can be accessed from the UCAS website: www.ucas.ac.uk

How long does studying for a Diploma take?

The Diploma is a two-year full-time course, but some students will be able to complete a Higher or Foundation Diploma in a shorter time if they are over 16. As the Diploma is made up of different parts, it’s also possible for students to complete it at different stages in the academic year, allowing for different educational requirements and other commitments.

How are the Phase 4 Diplomas in Science, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Languages and International Communication different to GCSEs and A levels?

Phase 4 Diplomas will have the same structure as the other lines of learning and will offer young people the opportunity to combine theoretical learning with practical, hands-on experiences. Learners will also gain broader, valuable transferable skills, and can expand their learning through the ASL component of the Diploma to deepen their knowledge.

How is the Diploma assessed?

Diplomas are assessed through a mix of exams and moderated internal assessment to reflect the practical nature of the learning. The different parts of the Diploma, which are qualifications in their own right, are assessed separately. These include Functional Skills qualifications and qualifications which form part of the ASL component. Diploma learners must complete all components to be awarded a Diploma. The final Diploma grade is a combination of the learner’s achievements in the principal learning and project components.

Learners will receive certificates for the individual components of the Diploma as well as for the whole Diploma. For example, someone who is taking longer to achieve a Functional Mathematics qualification, but has achieved everything else, will have the awards for the principal learning, the project, the other Functional Skills qualifications and their ASL qualifications. When they do achieve the Functional Mathematics qualification, they can claim the Diploma and receive a grade and a certificate recording their achievements.

As with other qualifications, Diploma standards will be overseen by the independent qualifications regulator, Ofqual.
Grades A*-B will be awarded at Level 1, grades A*-C at Level 2, and grades A*-E at Level 3. A ‘U’ (ungraded) grade may be given to those who have not completed all of the components, or failed to pass one or more of them.

Do qualifications taken within ASL attract Achievement and Attainment Tables (AAT) points? What about post-16 success measures?

Yes, in exactly the same way as they would if taken outside a Diploma. This means that if learners do not complete their Diplomas within a given period, the ASL that they have achieved will still attract AAT points. For more information, visit: www.qcda.gov.uk/diploma

Similarly, LSC success measures for the Diploma are based at present on the achievement of the individual components of the Diploma.

How do Diplomas differ from vocational qualifications such as BTECs and NVQs?

One factor behind the 14–19 reforms is to meet employers’ concerns about the employability skills of young people. All young people need to develop functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT, to be able to solve problems, to manage themselves and to work together.

Learners who study a Diploma will learn functional skills and personal, learning and thinking skills, and complete a project in addition to principal learning.

What will happen to existing vocational qualifications?

We set out in the 14–19 Qualifications Strategy our aim that by 2013 the majority of young people will access qualifications through one of the four national learning routes: Apprenticeships; 14–19 Diplomas; GCSEs and A Levels; and Foundation Learning.

Many vocational and vocationally-related qualifications are currently delivered as ‘stand-alone’ i.e. outside the national routes. We have said that we do not expect to continue funding the majority of stand-alone qualifications beyond 2013, but this does not mean that vocational and vocationally-related qualifications will disappear; we expect that many will continue to be delivered through the national routes, for example as part of an Apprenticeship, as additional and specialist learning on a Diploma or as part of Foundation Learning.

What will happen to existing vocational qualifications?

We also recognise the need for a managed transition to the 2013 offer and have therefore, guaranteed not to withdraw funding from any high take-up stand-alone qualification before 2012.

Ongoing support

Plenty of support is being provided to help schools and colleges to deliver the new Diplomas, both from national organisations and awarding bodies. The government has allocated substantial funding for staff training.

This will cover the generic skills required to teach the Diploma, as well as each individual Diploma, so that they can focus on detailed subject matter.

There will also be specific training for teaching functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT.

A range of supporting materials is available online too, as well as local and regional networks to share effective practice.

Further information

• For further information, see: www.teachernet.gov.uk/diplomas
• Full details of all the support available on the Diploma can be found at: www.diploma-support.org
• Information about the structure of Diplomas and resources to support their delivery by schools and colleges are available from the QCDA at: www.qcda.gov.uk/diploma
• Component and Diploma Awarding Bodies hold detailed information relating to their specific Diploma qualifications.
• You can also visit the Diploma website which has been developed for students at: www.direct.gov.uk/diplomas, where you can download a leaflet on each of the Diplomas and two leaflets on choosing your options for Year 10 and Year 12.
• You can find out more about ASL in a separate booklet, The Diploma: A guide to additional and specialist learning.
• You can find out about the Functional Skills Support Programme at: www.fssupport.org
• For more information about the 14–19 reforms, visit: www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19
• The 14–19 Reforms and You booklet provides a useful overview of the reforms: www.14-19reforms.co.uk, with two further booklets, Foundation Learning: A guide and Functional skills: A guide, providing more detail on these strands of the reforms which will be useful for all teachers and practitioners.