

Diplomas

The introduction of diplomas in England in September 2008 heralded a period of significant change for all those involved in the delivery of the 14-19 curriculum. This factsheet answers some common questions.

What is a diploma?

Purpose: the diplomas offer a blend of general and applied learning, and are designed to appeal to pupils/students who seek a richer educational experience than a purely classroom-based curriculum. They are also designed to appeal to students who wish to go on to university or those who will go on to seek employment opportunities.

Focus: the aim of each diploma is to provide pupils and students with knowledge and experience of an occupational area, as well as skills that would be relevant to university or employment.

Levels: there are three levels of diploma – foundation, higher and advanced. However, there is also a progression diploma that sits between higher and advanced, and an extended diploma that will show a higher level of attainment at any of the diploma levels.

Progression: students can progress from one diploma to another or from GCSE to diploma, or diploma to university, apprenticeship or employment.

Entry: to access a diploma a student must have the requisite skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT.

How are diplomas structured?

All diplomas are made up of the same structure.

The principal learning is made up of 50% general knowledge and 50% applied knowledge in the relevant occupational domain.

The generic learning is made up of four components:

- functional skills (externally assessed)
- personal learning and thinking skills (integrated into student work)
- 10 days' work experience (identified in the student's portfolio of work)
- a project (free-standing qualification available at level 3 to other courses of study).

Personal learning and thinking skills are broken down into six aspects: independent enquiry, creative thinking, reflective learning, team-working, self-management and effective participation.

The additional and specialist learning options are chosen from the diploma catalogues (the National Database of Accredited Qualifications). These options allow pupils or students to deepen or expand their learning in a variety of ways.

The scale of a diploma

Diplomas consist of the following:

- foundation diploma – 600 guided learning hours; one-year programme or two-year programme in key stage 4 timetable alongside the national curriculum

- higher diploma – 800 guided learning hours; one-year programme or two-year programme in key stage 4 timetable alongside the national curriculum
- advanced diploma – 1080 guided learning hours; taught at level 3 as an alternative to A-levels, BTECS or NVQs.

Equivalence of diploma to general education qualifications

Each diploma is equal to the following:

- foundation: 5 GCSEs
- higher: 7 GCSEs
- progression: 2.5 A-levels
- advanced: 3.5 A-levels (A-E)
- advanced/extended: 4.5 A-levels.

Assessment

Diplomas are made up of units of assessments from the smallest (30 guided learning hours) to the largest (180 guided learning hours).

Diplomas compare very favourably on UCAS tariff points with other qualifications because of their size and complexity in developing multiple skills.

Collaboration

Local authorities have a duty to offer diploma places and, by 2011, all 17 diplomas must be offered. Collaboration is required between schools, sixth forms, FE colleges and others to provide a high quality diploma, and therefore consortias are a necessary part of implementation.

Staffing issues

Diplomas have a number of elements that require the expertise of staff in schools, sixth forms and FE colleges. The importance of functional skills in relation to GCSE results, for example, may mean that school staff will teach these. On the other hand, applied learning and occupational-related topics in the principal learning and projects will, most probably, be taught by FE staff either in college or at the school.

Consequently, it is important to have locally agreed procedures that match national agreements in terms of workforce conditions when consortia arrange the teaching of diplomas.

ATL is pursuing parity in pay and conditions in general and, specifically, in regard to 14-19 collaborations.

Actions for ATL reps

- Request updates from your college on 14-19 developments and the impact assessment on the workforce.
- Ask your college to specify the contractual agreement with staff involved in delivering the diploma. What responsibilities have they taken on? How are they being rewarded?
- Request a CPD plan for 14-19 delivery.

Further information

If you have any questions related to these issues, please contact ATL's national official, Norman Crowther, email: ncrowther@atl.org.uk.



Need advice?

Your local ATL branch is available to help with queries, or you can contact ATL's member advisers on **020 7930 6441**, email: info@atl.org.uk or write to 7 Northumberland Street London WC2N 5RD

Don't forget you can also get lots of help and advice, as well as download copies of other ATL advice sheets, on our website at www.atl.org.uk

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