

The Diploma: an overview of the qualification



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This document replaces *The Diploma: version 2, 2007* (QCA/07/3312).

As a result of the recent introduction of three additional lines of learning for first teaching in 2011 (science, humanities and languages) and the announcement of the Extended Diploma, this document will be updated later in 2008.

Introducing the Diploma

As part of the 14–19 reform programme, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), the Skills for Business Network (SfBN) and awarding bodies are developing a new qualification – the Diploma.

The Diploma is about learning a range of widely applicable skills and knowledge, set within a ‘specialised’ context – a specified group of sectors and subjects. The Diploma offers a unique blend of general and applied learning. Applied learning – acquiring knowledge and skills through tasks or contexts that have many of the characteristics of real work – is at the heart of the Diploma. The Diploma will promote diversity, opportunity and inclusion by offering high-quality, credible, work-related learning opportunities.

The Diploma, designed principally for 14- to 19-year-olds and agreed by the Secretary of State, recognises achievement at three levels: Foundation (level 1), Higher (level 2) and Advanced (level 3). It will be available for each of the 17 employment sectors (called ‘lines of learning’ – see Glossary).

This document describes the structure and the framework of standards, requirements, assessment and grading that will underpin all Diplomas.

What are its aims?

Diplomas are qualifications that will provide an exciting, stretching and relevant programme of learning for all young people. Each Diploma will have pathways to accommodate a wide range of aspirations. They are being designed to appeal to:

- the most capable students preparing for the most demanding university courses
- students who would engage better with the innovative Diploma approach than with existing provision
- students preparing for employment or work-based learning.

Diplomas will take a young person wherever they want to go, whether that is to further and higher education or to the world of work. Above all, Diplomas will help young people of all abilities realise their potential. Learners need the education to thrive in a constantly changing global economy; the Diploma brings together employers and

educators to help prepare learners for life and work.

The Diploma aims to:

- support equality and diversity by considering the needs of all potential learners
- encourage learners to develop a broad understanding and knowledge about a sector or a subject (called lines of learning)
- encourage learners to develop skills and attributes related to the chosen sector(s) or subject(s)
- encourage learners to develop additional knowledge and skills to complement and broaden sector- or subject-relevant learning
- encourage learners to develop specialist knowledge and skills to deepen or extend sector- or subject-relevant learning
- encourage learners to develop and apply generic learning skills.

Who awards Diplomas?

The Diploma will be offered by awarding bodies that have met supplementary criteria for recognition as Diploma and/or Component awarding bodies.

Component awarding bodies (CABs) are recognised by QCA to offer and award qualifications that contribute to the Diploma.

Diploma awarding bodies (DABs):

- are recognised by QCA to award the full Diploma
- must offer and award one or more qualifications that contribute to the Diploma they are recognised to award
- will offer all levels within each line of learning they award
- award the grade for the Diploma.

Diploma catalogues

The Diploma catalogues contain information relating to the first five lines of learning. To access the Diploma catalogues, go to the National Database of Accredited Qualifications (NDAQ) website (www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk) and select 'Browse Diploma qualification'.

The Diploma catalogues are currently being populated with the principal learning and project qualifications available to learners, as well as a full listing of the functional skills and additional and specialist learning options relevant to a specific line of learning. Guidance on 'barring' (see Glossary) will also be available in each catalogue.

The shape of the Diploma

The Diploma has a common structure across all 17 lines of learning to give learners similar experiences and opportunities whatever and wherever they are studying.

Components of the Diploma

The Diploma balances practical and theoretical understanding and has three components:

- principal learning
- generic learning
- additional and specialist learning.

Experiential learning, planning and reviewing are central to all three of the Diploma components.

Principal learning

Principal learning is:

- sector- and subject-related learning
- mandatory.

Principal learning focuses in particular on developing and applying the knowledge and skills that are relevant to the line of learning. At each level a minimum of 50 per cent must be concerned with the application of knowledge and skills through tasks, problems and situations that are related to work in that sector or subject area (see ‘Applied learning’ in the Glossary).

Principal learning will be made up of units of assessment that have been newly developed and accredited for each Diploma. The size of units will vary according to the level of the Diploma. At level 1 and 2 units may be of 30 and 60 guided learning hours (GLH) (see ‘Guided learning hours’ in the Glossary), and at level 3 units may be 30, 60 or 90 GLH.

Awarding bodies will provide guidance on appropriate teaching and learning methods and resources for the Diploma. Principal learning may include:

- visits to and learning in the workplace
- school- or college-based activities led by employers
- realistic environments such as workshops
- mobile learning such as e-learning.

Principal learning will ensure that:

- skills development is related to purpose and context
- generic skills are developed and applied

- teaching and learning draw on up-to-date developments from the relevant sector and subject
- there is an emphasis on learning by doing
- rich and varied learning environments are used.

Generic learning

In this component, students develop and apply the broad skills and knowledge necessary for learning, employment and personal development. Generic learning includes:

- functional skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT)
- personal, learning and thinking skills
- work experience
- a project offering the chance to show breadth and independence of learning.

Generic skills have a wide application and can be developed in a variety of contexts, including through and across principal learning. Although the size of generic learning includes functional skills and personal, learning and thinking skills, in practice these skills will also be integrated into principal learning. This may include:

- opportunities for learners to carry out an independent enquiry and reflect on their learning, or to make creative suggestions for solving problems when working as part of a team
- a chance for learners to develop functional skills in ICT when keeping track of spending or preparing a presentation.

The different parts of generic learning are described in further detail in the next sections.

Functional skills

Diplomas require learners to gain functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT:

- at level 1 for the Foundation Diploma
- at level 2 for the Higher and Advanced Diplomas.

Functional skills are part of the generic learning component of the Diploma, but learners will have opportunities to develop and apply functional skills across the Diploma curriculum. Awarding bodies will provide guidance on the full range of opportunities for developing and applying functional skills. This will help centres to integrate functional skills into their curricula and help learners to plan and review

their achievements.

Although functional skills are free-standing qualifications that are separately assessed, they are an essential component of several learning programmes (for example, in GCSEs as well as the Diploma). The standards, assessment and delivery of functional skills are currently undergoing a three-year pilot programme and evaluation process that started in September 2007.

Personal, learning and thinking skills

Personal, learning and thinking skills are necessary for work and for general learning. A framework for personal, learning and thinking skills sets out the requirements for the following six skills:

- independent enquiry
- creative thinking
- reflective learning
- team working
- self-management
- effective participation.

Learners will have opportunities to develop and apply all six skills within principal learning. Learners may also develop and apply personal, learning and thinking skills within work experience and their project.

The qualification will be designed in such a way that it is assumed around 60 GLH will be allowed by centres to enable learners to develop, plan and review the application of their personal, learning and thinking skills across their learning programme.

Personal, learning and thinking skills will not be separately assessed as part of the Diploma. Instead all six personal, learning and thinking skills will be integrated into the assessment criteria for principal learning. Each learner's achievement of personal, learning and thinking skills will be recorded in the Diploma transcript.

Projects

The Diploma project will be available at levels 1, 2 and 3.

The project is:

- a free-standing, single-unit qualification
- a constituent qualification of the Foundation, Higher and Advanced Diplomas.

The project has a common structure and standard for learners taking the project within the Diploma and for learners taking it within a general programme.

When the project is taken as part of the Diploma it will contribute to the overall Diploma grade.

The project qualification will be locally assessed and moderated. The project must be certificated separately and include the grade achieved.

Level 1 and 2 project

At levels 1 and 2 the project will:

- encourage independent learning
- be sector- and subject-relevant
- provide the opportunity to draw on and integrate learning from all Diploma components.

Through the project, learners can:

- demonstrate their full potential, interests and creativity within set parameters
- focus in more depth on specific aspects of their specialist area
- broaden their sector- and subject-related learning by engaging in an investigative piece of work on, for example, environmental, social, economic, political and/or other issues related to their principal learning
- develop their ability to learn independently and carry out an enquiry
- apply functional skills and personal, learning and thinking skills
- adapt their applied and generic skills and learning to other contexts such as business, social or community enterprise or democratic participation.

At levels 1 and 2 the project requires 60 GLH of directed study. Further supervised study, including research, will also be required.

Level 3 extended project

At level 3 the project will:

- encourage critical, reflective and independent learning
- be sector- and subject-relevant
- provide the opportunity to draw on the complexities of all Diploma components and develop the connections between them.

Through the project, learners can:

- demonstrate their full potential, interests and creativity within set parameters
- focus in more depth and breadth on their sector- and subject-related learning by engaging in an investigative piece of work on, for example, environmental, social, economic, political and/or other issues related to their principal learning

- have significant input into the choice and design of the project and take responsibility for an individual task or for a defined task within a group project
- develop and apply decision-making and problem-solving skills
- develop and apply skills creatively, demonstrating initiative and enterprise
- extend their planning, research, critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, evaluation and presentation skills
- apply functional skills and personal, learning and thinking skills
- engage in a business or social community enterprise, and/or take part in a local, regional, national or international team project.

At level 3 the project requires 120 GLH of directed study. Further supervised study will also be required up to an additional 60 GLH.

Work experience

All learners will be expected to undertake work experience to support their programme of study. Work experience will:

- support the development and recognition of work-related learning
- build on the near-universal provision of pre-16 work experience
- develop sector or subject skills when set in relevant settings
- develop general employability skills in other settings
- enhance the overall learning experience
- allow flexibility around how evidence of attainment is achieved.

Each learner at each level of the Diploma must do at least 10 days of work experience; for older learners, in some cases, part-time work could provide some, or all, of the required experience, with appropriate structured recording of skills development. Work experience will not be assessed.

Additional and specialist learning

Additional and specialist learning:

- supports choice and progression within a coherent whole programme
- enables the learner to specialise and/or take up relevant complementary learning
- consists of qualifications chosen by the learner from the Diploma catalogues
- provides opportunities to meet particular needs
- may exceed the GLH requirement by up to 50 per cent for an individual qualification listed within the Diploma catalogues

- may include some national curriculum key stage 4 entitlement areas at levels 1 and 2
- may include qualifications from a higher level (such as level 4 qualifications) from higher education.

For specialist learning, sector and subject experts will identify qualifications that can be combined to allow learners to explore the sector or subject in ways relevant to them. Options will be grouped together to create progression pathways.

Experiential learning, planning and reviewing

Experiential learning, or learning by experience, is central to developing work-related skills. Knowledge, skills and abilities that are attained through observation, simulation and participation provide depth and meaning to learning by engaging mind and body in a process of activity, review and application.

Experiential learning in the Diploma:

- actively involves learners in planning and reviewing their Diploma programme and in recording their progress and achievements
- explores different experiences and environments
- supports the development of functional skills and personal, learning and thinking skills
- encourages learners to recognise, apply and extend their learning (which can include achievement of qualifications at a higher level as well as experience gained outside the Diploma such as part-time work or volunteering)
- supports a coherent learning experience that is more than a piecemeal collection of qualifications.

With guidance, learners will be able to review, plan and set targets for their programme.

It is critical that young people are helped through a process of planning and reviewing their learning – it is an essential element of experiential learning. This responsibility lies with teachers and other advisers of learners. Planning and reviewing includes:

- the processes of learners selecting an individualised programme of qualifications within additional and specialist learning
- identifying when and how to develop and apply functional skills and personal, learning and thinking skills
- the arrangements for regular reviews of progress
- planning for progression.

Planning and reviewing will not be discretely assessed as part of the Diploma programme, but will be critical to successful attainment.

Levels of Diplomas

The Diploma will be available at three levels: Foundation (level 1), Higher (level 2) and Advanced (level 3). At each level, there is:

- a volume, given as the number of guided learning hours (GLH)
- a size for the three components (principal learning; generic learning; additional and specialist learning), also given as GLH.

Foundation Diploma (level 1)

Volume

The Foundation Diploma requires 600 guided learning hours (GLH), and is equivalent, in terms of average length of study, to five GCSEs.

The Foundation Diploma can be completed:

- in one year if taken on its own
- in two years if taken at the same time as the key stage 4 national curriculum programme of study.

Aims and features of the Foundation Diploma (level 1)

The Foundation Diploma:

- provides a milestone for achievement at level 1 and an incentive to move on to level 2, particularly within key stage 4
- provides the foundation to progress to level 2
- helps keep learners in 14–19 education
- includes learning related to a specific sector or subject
- includes a project to allow individuals to plan and organise their own learning
- includes functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT at level 1
- provides the essential personal, learning and thinking skills to progress in education and training
- provides the opportunity to take up some national curriculum entitlement within additional and specialist learning
- coexists with and, where appropriate, supports pre-16 national curriculum study
- supports co-learning since the learning objectives of the Foundation and Higher Diploma are compatible. However, the two different qualification outcomes must

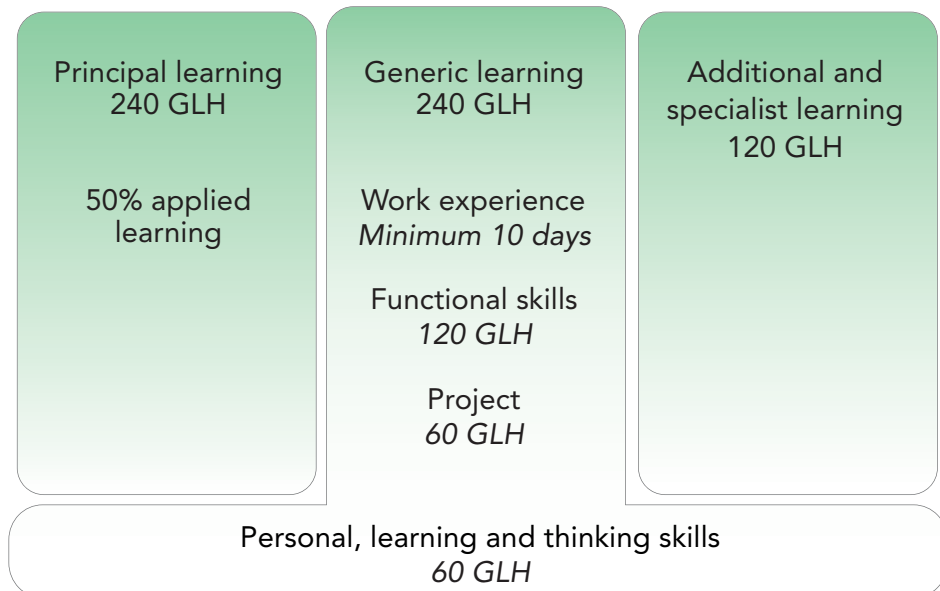
be kept distinct to maintain the integrity of the two levels.

Size of components

The Foundation Diploma components are weighted, for each line of learning, as follows:

- principal learning is set at 240 GLH, of which a minimum of 120 GLH must be applied (application in work contexts – see Glossary under ‘Applied learning’)
- generic learning is set at 240 GLH
- additional and specialist learning is set at 120 GLH.

Foundation Diploma: 600 GLH



Principal learning (240 GLH)

In the Foundation Diploma, principal learning is sector- and subject-related learning. Units may be 30 or 60 GLH and a total of 30 hours of learning will be externally assessed.

Generic learning (240 GLH)

Generic learning in the Foundation Diploma includes:

- personal, learning and thinking skills
- functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT at level 1
- a project offering the opportunity to achieve agreed objectives through particular topics relevant to principal learning
- at least 10 days’ work experience.

Within generic learning experiential learning involves an individual planning and review process. Generic learning forms a significant proportion of learning at this level because it is critical to successful progression to higher levels of learning.

Additional and specialist learning (120 GLH)

Additional and specialist learning in the Foundation Diploma provides the learner with high-quality breadth and/or depth of curriculum experience. It offers the chance to specialise in a sector or subject or across a range of sectors or subjects, and provides a solid base for progression into immediate employment with training, or full-time further education. It may be possible to meet some of the requirements of the national curriculum entitlements if this is appropriate. Qualifications at a higher level may be offered within this component.

Higher Diploma (level 2)

Volume

The Higher Diploma requires 800 guided learning hours (GLH), and is equivalent, in terms of average length of study, to seven GCSEs. The Higher Diploma can be completed:

- in one or two years if taken on its own
- in two years if taken at the same time as the key stage 4 national curriculum programme of study.

Aims and features of the Higher Diploma (level 2)

The Higher Diploma:

- provides the foundation to progress to further education, an apprenticeship or employment
- provides the foundation to progress to level 3
- includes principal learning related to a specific sector and subject
- includes a project to allow individuals to plan and organise their own learning
- includes functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT at level 2
- provides the essential personal, learning and thinking skills to progress in education, training and employment
- provides the opportunity to explore the sector or subject further and/or take up complementary learning as a part of additional and specialist learning
- coexists with and, where appropriate, supports pre-16 national curriculum study

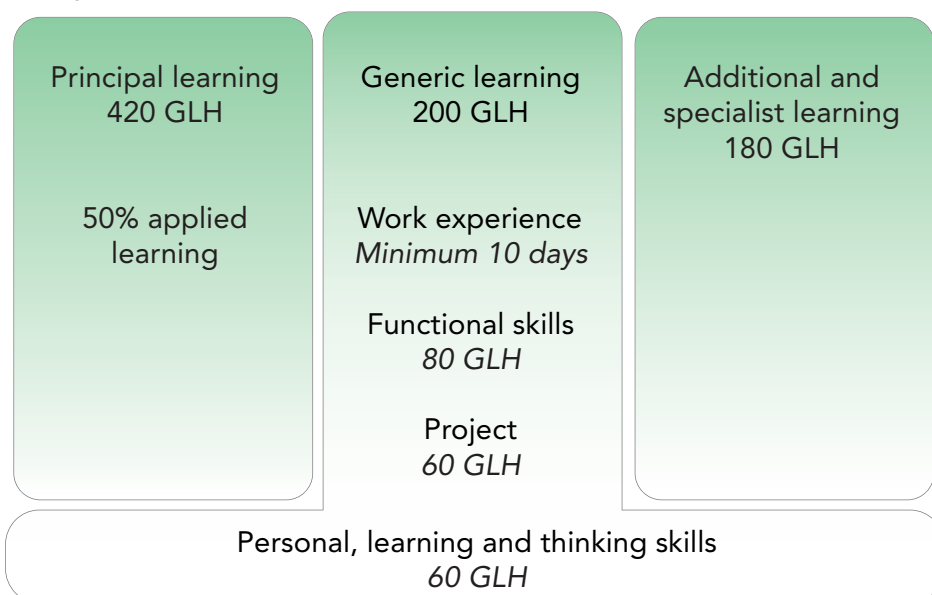
- supports co-learning since the learning objectives of the Foundation and Higher Diploma are compatible. However, the two different qualification outcomes must be kept distinct to maintain the integrity of the two levels.

Size of components

The Higher Diploma components are weighted, for each line of learning, as follows:

- principal learning is set at 420 GLH, of which a minimum of 210 GLH must be applied (application in work contexts)
- generic learning is set at 200 GLH
- additional and specialist learning is set at 180 GLH.

Higher Diploma: 800 GLH



Principal learning (420 GLH)

In the Higher Diploma, principal learning is sector- and subject-related learning. Units may be 30 or 60 GLH and 60 GLH will be externally assessed.

Generic learning (200 GLH)

Generic learning in the Higher Diploma includes:

- personal, learning and thinking skills
- functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT at level 2
- a project demonstrating independent learning and enquiry relevant to a sector or a subject
- at least 10 days' work experience.

Additional and specialist learning (180 GLH)

Additional and specialist learning in the Higher Diploma provides the learner with high-quality breadth and/or depth of curriculum experience. It offers the chance to specialise in a sector or subject or across a range of sectors or subjects and provides a solid base for progression into immediate employment with training, or full-time further education. It may be possible to meet some of the requirements of the national curriculum entitlements if this is appropriate. Qualifications at a higher level may be offered within this component.

Advanced Diploma (level 3)

Volume

The Advanced Diploma requires 1,080 guided learning hours (GLH), and is equivalent, in terms of Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) points, to three and a half A levels. There is also a Progression Diploma (level 3), a subset of the Advanced Diploma, equivalent, in terms of UCAS points, to two and a half A levels. Its content will be drawn from the full Advanced Diploma (see below).

An Advanced Diploma can be completed as a two-year full-time programme.

Aims and features of the Advanced Diploma (level 3)

The Advanced Diploma:

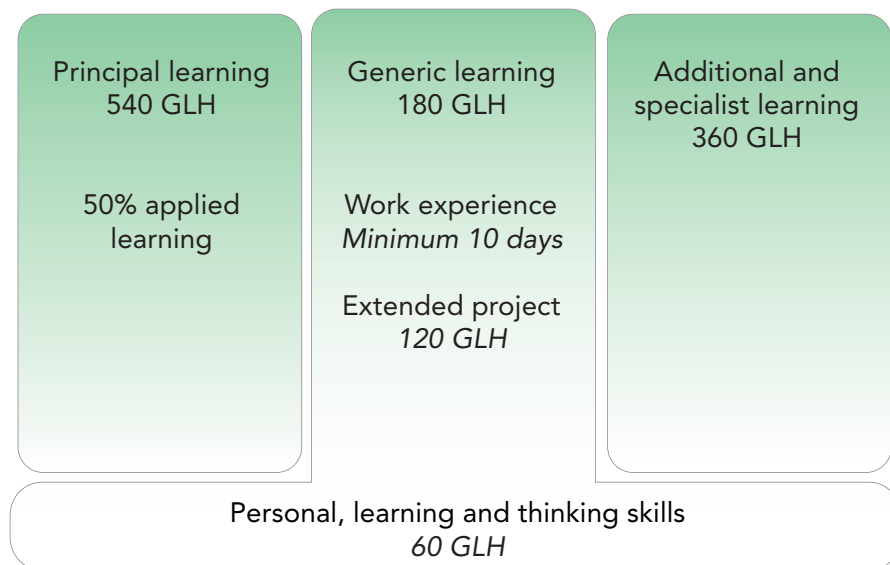
- provides the foundation to progress to higher and further education and to employment with training
- includes an extended project to allow individuals to plan and organise their own learning and to demonstrate synthesis and other higher-level skills
- provides the essential personal, learning and thinking skills to progress in education, training and employment
- allows for the highest possible level of achievement within level 3, including the scope to demonstrate higher intellectual capability
- requires level 2 functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT
- includes sector- and subject-related principal learning
- permits further specialisation through the choice of options offered in specialist learning and/or complementary learning.

Size of components

The Advanced Diploma components are, for each line of learning, as follows:

- principal learning is set at 540 GLH, of which a minimum of 270 GLH must be concerned with applied learning (application in work contexts)
- generic learning is set at 180 GLH
- additional and specialist learning is set at 360 GLH.

Advanced Diploma: 1,080 GLH



Principal learning (540 GLH)

In the Advanced Diploma, principal learning is sector- and subject-related learning. Some Diplomas may offer endorsed titles that reflect key specialist progression pathways. Units may be 30, 60 or 90 GLH and 120 or 180 hours of learning will be externally assessed (the number will be set for each line of learning).

Additional mathematics, English or ICT may be required at level 3 for some lines of learning.

Generic learning (180 GLH)

Generic learning in the Advanced Diploma includes:

- personal, learning and thinking skills
- a project demonstrating independent learning and enquiry relevant to a sector or a subject
- at least 10 days' work experience.

A minimum of level 2 functional skills (English, mathematics and ICT) will be required. Although many learners will already have reached this, others will need to achieve level 2 at the same time as they are studying for the Diploma.

Additional and specialist learning (360 GLH)

Additional and specialist learning in the Advanced Diploma provides the learner with high-quality breadth and/or depth of curriculum experience. It offers the chance to specialise in a sector or subject or across a range of sectors or subjects and provides a solid base for progression into immediate employment with training, or full-time further and/or higher education. Qualifications at a higher level may be offered within this component.

The Progression Diploma (level 3)

The Progression Diploma is smaller than the full Advanced Diploma and is equivalent, in terms of UCAS points, to two and a half A levels.

- The Progression Diploma requires 720 GLH.
- It will comprise only the principal and the generic learning components of the full Advanced Diploma.

Summary of the size of the components at each level of the Diploma programme

	Principal learning	Generic learning	Additional and specialist learning*
Foundation Diploma (level 1)	240 GLH	240 GLH	120 GLH
Higher Diploma (level 2)	420 GLH	200 GLH	180 GLH
Advanced Diploma (level 3)	540 GLH	180 GLH	360 GLH

50% Rule

* These are the minimum required guided learning hours that learners will need to complete for their additional and specialist learning. The Diploma catalogues include qualifications that are smaller than, equal to, or larger than the minimum required guided learning hours. Learners may take:

- a number of qualifications with smaller guided learning hours than the minimum required for their additional and specialist learning. However, the combined guided learning hours must meet the minimum required as shown in the table above
- a qualification with guided learning hours that are equal to the minimum required

- a single qualification with larger guided learning hours than the minimum required for their additional and specialist learning. The guided learning hours can be up to 50 per cent greater than the minimum required: Foundation Diploma up to 180 GLH, Higher Diploma up to 270 GLH and Advanced Diploma up to 540 GLH.

Assessment within the Diploma

The primary purpose of assessment within the Diploma is to determine whether learners are ready to progress. Assessment for the Diploma will meet the five regulatory requirements applied to all assessment in external qualifications and national curriculum tests:

- validity
- reliability
- comparability of standards (particularly across different Diplomas and their component parts within the same line of learning)
- minimal bias
- manageability of systems of assessment.

All Diplomas will have external assessment and a variety of approaches will be used. The proportion of external assessment may vary between Diploma lines of learning in the Advanced Diploma.

Different methods of internal assessment will also be used in the Diploma. Awarding bodies will set out requirements to support internal assessment through moderation and verification, and there will be rules and checks in place to make sure that learners' work is their own.

Individual units and their assessment

The Diploma is a unitised qualification. The following rules have been devised to govern the combination of units within a Diploma programme.

- In the Foundation and Higher Diplomas, units may be either 30 or 60 GLH.
- In the Advanced Diploma, units may be 30, 60 or 90 GLH.
- Principal learning will be a qualification in its own right, assessed both externally and internally (see Glossary under 'Internal assessment'). The size of external assessment in principal learning will be:
 - o Foundation Diploma: 30 GLH
 - o Higher Diploma: 60 GLH
 - o Advanced Diploma: 120 or 180 GLH (the size of external assessment in the Advanced Diploma will be set for each line of learning).
- The project will constitute a discrete unit with its own standards and assessment.
- Following the pilot, units will have a maximum shelf life of five years to ensure they remain up to date and are accessible to a full range of learners.

- New qualifications developed to contribute to specialist learning within the Diploma will be assessed using systems that meet the assessment principles and design requirements for the Diploma.
- Existing qualifications imported into the Diploma (such as functional skills or qualifications offered as part of additional and specialist learning) will be assessed and verified using their existing methods.
- The assessment of existing qualifications may be changed, if the changes satisfy the criteria of the existing qualification. Where such changes are agreed, that assessment change will apply to that qualification in any setting, wherever offered.

Grading

The Diploma will be graded. This will apply to all levels.

To achieve the overall Diploma qualification, learners will need to pass all components within the Diploma, including functional skills and additional and specialist learning.

The Diploma grade will be derived from the aggregate score of:

- principal learning (which will include personal, learning and thinking skills)
- the project.

The grading of the Diploma will be reported according to the following grading scales.

- Level 1 attainment will be reported as A*, A and B.
- Level 2 attainment will be reported as A*, A, B and C.
- Level 3 attainment will be reported as A*, A, B, C, D and E.

Attainment that is insufficient to lead to the award of a qualification will be reported as unclassified (U).

Passing the Diploma

The Diploma aims to highlight a broad competence or capability in the application of a range of knowledge and skills within a range of contexts.

QCA, working with awarding bodies, will carry out detailed work to address a number of technical issues of assessment, which may include the following:

- the threshold for achievement across each of the three components of the Diploma
- the rules for compensation (see Glossary under 'Compensation'), as the Diploma contains some capacity to compensate across some units in the principal learning
- the necessary adjustments for the achievement of qualifications at a higher level.

Reporting achievement

The Diploma transcript (see Glossary under ‘Transcript’) will record and report a learner’s achievements in units and qualifications within the Diploma programme. It will contain grades at unit level and record the achievement of personal, learning and thinking skills, as well as the completion of work experience.

Centre requirements

Centres have to meet rigorous quality-assurance requirements. Approval of centres will take account of the partnership environment within which the Diplomas are to be delivered.

Awarding bodies, working with Diploma Development Partnerships (DDPs), will set out for each line of learning:

- the expertise required to deliver the qualification, eg for trainers, instructors, mentors, business/industry representatives and assessors and verifiers at unit level, where appropriate
- the experience needed to support qualification delivery
- the minimum resources required for delivery of each unit, including the range and type of the tools, equipment or technology required and information and media materials
- guidance on tasks, problems and situations in applied learning contexts, which are likely to be identified and developed in partnership with key stakeholders at local, regional or national level
- guidance on real or realistic work environments.

The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and the Quality Improvement Agency, working closely with QCA, the Sector Skills Development Agency / the Commission for Employment and Skills, sector skills councils and the Skills for Business Network, are leading on the Diploma support programme. The programme will include the publication of guidance on teaching and learning methods that support Diploma delivery.

Progression

Entering a level

Achievement at one level of the Diploma will allow students to progress to the next level of study. It is not, however, a prerequisite.

Learners on Entry level programmes will have access to units from the Foundation Diploma and above.

Moving to a higher level

The Diplomas will support progression to a higher level through:

- the development of generic skills, including personal, learning and thinking skills
- the learning and evidence of achievement demonstrated in the project
- coherent applied learning, which combines practical and theoretical elements, enabling progression to appropriate foundation and other degree programmes
- completion of qualifications at a higher level (such as level 4 qualifications) as part of a Diploma within additional and specialist learning, where appropriate, demonstrating learners' capability for higher study
- recognition of Diploma achievement with UCAS tariff points
- involvement of higher education in the design and delivery of level 3 and 4 qualifications for use in the Diploma programme.

The national curriculum

A new entitlement to Diplomas is being created for 2013. Key stage 4 learners will still be required to take the national curriculum core and foundation subjects. However, this new entitlement will provide an alternative to the existing entitlement areas.

The national curriculum is based on the delivery of programmes of study, rather than GLH. However, Ofsted and QCA reports suggest an average of 350 GLH per year at key stage 4.

The Diploma model assumes that:

- an average of 800 GLH are available for each year of key stage 4 in schools
- national curriculum English, mathematics and ICT can be partly delivered in

- conjunction with generic learning and, for specific Diplomas, with principal learning
- the requirement for work-related learning at key stage 4 can be met.

The existing entitlement areas of the arts, design and technology, the humanities and modern foreign languages could be accommodated where appropriate to the Diploma. Additional science could be accommodated in the additional and specialist learning for specific Diplomas. Such overlaps make it possible for a pre-16 learner to complete the Foundation Diploma in one year alongside the national curriculum, provided a substantial portion of Diploma generic skills are delivered through national curriculum time and a portion of the national curriculum is delivered by the Diploma.

Many students will take longer than a year to complete the Foundation Diploma – progress will depend on the learner’s pace and on the extent of national curriculum delivered through the Diploma.

The Higher Diploma requires 800 GLH, approximately half the learning time available during key stage 4. Diplomas are likely to occupy much of the available curriculum time beyond the statutory national curriculum requirements.

The entitlement to Diplomas also applies to post-16 learners. In addition, they will have a statutory entitlement, up to the age of 19, to continue studying English, mathematics and ICT until they have achieved level 2. Learners going on to higher education or further professional study are encouraged to take at least one of these subjects at level 3.

Apprenticeships

Diplomas and apprenticeships are distinct. However, there will be clear routes to progress from Diplomas into apprenticeships and vice versa. Units within these two routes will be designed so that, where appropriate, they meet the needs of both apprenticeship frameworks and the Diplomas.

Stretch within the Diploma

The Diploma has the following features that make it challenging for all learners.

- The project provides for autonomy, and for higher-order synoptic skills, particularly at level 3.
- Grading of the Diploma will encourage higher achievement beyond the pass threshold.
- Qualifications at a higher level may be included as a choice within additional and specialist learning.
- The Diploma transcript will record excellence at unit level.

Case studies

QCA is producing illustrative case studies for each line of learning to show progression from Diplomas to higher education, employment and apprenticeships. These will be available from the QCA website (www.qca.org.uk/diploma) from September 2008.

Glossary

Additional and specialist learning

Qualifications that learners choose to include in their Diploma.

Additional and specialist learning must provide high-quality breadth and/or depth of curriculum experience, without duplication of principal learning, and be based on a solid evidence base of progression opportunities for learners who want to progress into immediate employment with training, or full-time further and/or higher education.

Applied learning

Acquiring and applying knowledge, skills and understanding through tasks set in sector or subject contexts that have many of the characteristics of real work, or are set within the workplace. Most importantly, the purpose of the task in which learners apply their knowledge, skills and understanding must be relevant to the workplace.

Barring

Qualifications that may not be combined because of overlapping content.

Compensation

The idea that high achievement in one element of a qualification should offset low achievement in other elements of qualification. This approach recognises that it is the student's overall performance, rather than their performance in individual related elements, that is most significant.

Component

Diplomas are made up of constituent qualifications that are organised in terms of the following three components:

- principal learning
- generic learning
- additional and specialist learning.

Component awarding body (CAB)

A Component awarding body meets the requirements for, and is recognised by, the regulators to award constituent qualifications of Diplomas.

Diploma

A defined set of qualifications combined according to a set of rules. Diplomas are a combination of existing qualifications and purpose-designed qualifications. The Diploma is designed to support progression to further study, training and employment in a particular line of learning.

Diploma awarding body (DAB)

A Diploma awarding body meets the requirements for, and is recognised by, the regulators to award the full Diploma qualification.

Diploma Development Partnership (DDP)

A partnership between employers, higher education and other subject experts (with an interest/stake in the sector or subject) and education representatives (with professional, educational or qualification-design expertise). DDPs are brought together through sector skills councils and are led by the most appropriate sector skills council. DDPs are responsible for developing the line of learning statement.

Diploma transcript

A report of the qualifications that make up a learner's Diploma programme. It lists the learner's grades for each qualification in their Diploma, and records work experience and personal, learning and thinking skills.

Entitlement areas

At key stage 4, schools are required to ensure that all students have access to at least one course in each of the following areas: the arts; design and technology; the humanities; and modern foreign languages. This entitlement will remain alongside the entitlement to Diplomas in 2013.

Experiential learning (learning by experience) cycle

A process that stresses the central role of experience in learning related to the world of work. Learners reflect on their experience, draw out and articulate lessons learnt (generalise), and then apply their learning to new situations or activities.

External assessment

Assessment tasks are set and candidates' work is assessed by the awarding body.

Functional skills

Functional skills are core elements of English, mathematics and ICT, providing the essential knowledge, skills and understanding needed to operate confidently, effectively and independently in life and at work.

Generic learning

Generic learning enables students to develop and apply the skills and knowledge necessary for learning, employment and personal development.

The generic learning component of the Diploma is made up of the following constituent parts:

- functional skills
- personal, learning and thinking skills
- a project
- work experience.

Experiential learning, planning and reviewing play a central role in the Diploma.

Grade

A point on a scale of performance used to differentiate achievement within a qualification (for example: A, B, C, D, E, F, G; Distinction, Merit, Pass).

Guided learning hours (GLH)

The number of hours of teacher-supervised or directed study time assigned to complete the qualification or a unit of a qualification.

Internal assessment

Tasks are set and marked against criteria provided by the awarding body and are subjected to external moderation. Internal assessment is normally supervised and conducted under controlled conditions.

Key stage 4 curriculum

At key stage 4 all students are required to study English, mathematics, ICT, science, citizenship, physical education, religious education, sex education, careers education and work-related learning. This requirement will remain following the introduction of Diplomas.

Lines of learning

First teaching: September 2008

Information technology
Society, health and development
Engineering
Creative and media
Construction and the built environment

First teaching: September 2009

Environmental and land-based studies
Manufacturing and product design
Hair and beauty studies
Business, administration and finance
Hospitality

First teaching: September 2010

Public services
Sport and leisure
Retail
Travel and tourism

First teaching: September 2011

Science
Humanities
Languages

The lines of learning titles are subject to change.

Moderation

The process of checking that assessment standards have been applied correctly and consistently between assessors, between centres and over time, and making adjustments to results where required to compensate for any differences in standard that are encountered. See also 'Verification'.

National curriculum

What pupils are taught in state-maintained schools. It provides a balanced education covering 11 subjects, divided into four key stages according to age.

Pathway

A route to progress through the Diploma framework.

Personal, learning and thinking skills

The framework of skills that will equip all young people for successful employment and lifelong learning. Personal, learning and thinking skills require learners to be:

- independent enquirers
- creative thinkers
- reflective learners
- team workers
- self-managers
- effective participators.

Principal learning

Mandatory learning in the Diploma. Principal learning is sector- and subject-related, predominantly applied in character and consists of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes that support progress through the line of learning into the sectors and subjects concerned. Opportunities to develop and apply generic skills are also integrated into principal learning.

Regulator

Government-designated statutory organisation required to establish national standards for qualifications and ensure consistent compliance with the standards.

Reliability of assessment

The extent to which assessment results are an accurate measurement of the candidate's demonstration of the abilities specified by the assessment criteria.

Synthesis

A range of related intellectual skills. These include bringing together facts, skills, knowledge or concepts that have been learnt separately and that may belong to different subjects or disciplines.

Unit

The smallest portion of a qualification that can be awarded credit in its own right and wholly transferred into another qualification.

Validity of assessment

The fitness for purpose of an assessment tool or scheme.

Verification

A process of moderation that includes local checking of assessment processes and decisions. See also 'Moderation'.

About this publication

Who is it for?	This document is for all those involved in 14–19 education and achievement.
What is it about?	This document replaces <i>The Diploma: version 2, 2007</i> (QCA/07/3312). It sets out the structure, assessment and grading of the Diploma.
What is it for?	This document supports the development and delivery of the Diploma qualification.
Related publications	<i>Criteria for accreditation of Diploma qualifications at levels 1, 2 and 3: version 1, 2007</i> (QCA/07/3112) www.qca.org.uk/diploma www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19

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