



**Review of the implementation and impacts
of the 14-19 Diplomas**

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This study aimed to evaluate the implementation and impacts of the 14-19 Diplomas run by, and involving, City College Norwich. This included post-16 Diplomas run by City College Norwich and pre-16 Diplomas run as part of the OpenOpportunity consortium. Data were collected regarding uptake and achievement on Diploma courses, and views and experiences of the Diplomas were collected from staff and students through online surveys, and through one-to-one interviews with staff.

Provision and Achievement

- 1263 individuals had enrolled on the Diplomas investigated as part of this study since they were first offered in 2008. In 2009/10 these accounted for 63.3% of Diplomas in Norfolk, and 2.0% of Diplomas nationally. The post-16 Diplomas investigated represented 5.3% of national post-16 Diploma intake.

- 38.0% of completed post-16 Diploma students (35.8% of pre-16s) claimed a fully aggregated Diploma at the end of their course. This was comparable to national levels of achievement. The main barrier to achievement was the ability to pass all three functional skills (pre-16: 35.8%, post-16: 38.0%).

- Principal learning achievement varied hugely between courses. Diplomas starting in 2008/9 showed the poorest rates of principal learning achievement. In most cases, principal learning achievement had improved in subsequent years. The highest rates of principal learning achievement were seen in Engineering, Hair and Beauty Studies and Business, Administration and Finance.

Staff preparedness

- Teaching staff reported feeling under-prepared when they started teaching on the Diplomas, primarily due to the perception that Diploma implementation had been rushed, and due to a lack of specific training and support from awarding bodies. Preparedness was reported to have improved significantly in teachers' more recent Diploma teaching. Staff highlighted the importance of communication and effective teams in sharing experiences and materials.

Learner choice

- Pre-16 students were most likely to report having chosen to do a Diploma because of the new way of learning and GCSE equivalency. In contrast, post-16 students were most likely to have chosen their course because it was related to their

career interests and potential progress to university. 18% of post-16 Diploma students reported having chosen their course because they did not know what else to do. This contrasted strongly with pre-16 learners (5%), and post-16 learners in a national survey (6%).

- Most students had received a wide range of information and guidance (IAG) before starting their Diplomas. However, many reported that IAG relating to how the course would be taught had not been adequate. Teaching staff echoed this view, identifying specific problems with IAG in specific lines of learning, particularly in the early years of delivery.

- Most teaching staff suggested that the Diplomas benefited a specific type of 'more academic' learner. The role of IAG in selecting students that were suited to the qualification was identified as a key factor for Diploma success.

Teaching and delivery

- Differences in the model of delivery of the Diplomas were identified between pre-16 and post-16 Diplomas. Pre-16 Diplomas were seen to run through a cross-site consortium model, while post-16 students were most likely to be registered and taught at City College Norwich by college teaching staff. Both models of delivery were perceived by staff to be successful.

- Evidence of good practice was reported in providing hands-on, context driven learning and independent study in most Diplomas. Teachers frequently used employers to engage students. Students and teaching staff responded well to these opportunities. However, a number of staff commented that the amount of practical and holistic learning offered was restricted, firstly by the assessment structure of the Diplomas and secondly by a lack of support for individual teachers. As a result, students and staff felt that the Diplomas contained too much dry theory taught in traditional classroom environments.

- Students and teachers reported that the additional and specialist learning (ASL), project and work experience components were enjoyed the most due to opportunities for practical learning. In contrast, functional skills and personal learning and thinking skills (PLTS) were least enjoyed, with students suggesting that they did not see the point of these components.

Assessment and feedback

- Interviewees were positive about controlled assessments, suggesting that students were more motivated by them, and that they provided a more rigorous framework for assessment in comparison to less controlled approaches. Problems

identified with assessments were related to poor support and feedback from awarding bodies, and inconsistencies in mark schemes and moderation.

Progression

- Foundation and higher level students were most likely to want to progress to a course in college. Advanced Diploma students most commonly wanted to progress to a job with training or university. These findings were comparable to results from national surveys.

- Sector relevance was identified by many as being a key factor in the success of courses. In many cases, teachers identified good progression potential from the Diplomas for more 'academic' students interested in progressing to supervisory and management roles. In cases where the Diploma was not reported as being successful, it was often suggested that alternative qualifications (usually BTECs) offered appropriate progression routes.

- Progression was reported between levels of Diploma in many lines of learning, and successful progression to higher education was reported in some instances. However, there were still a number of concerns over the attitudes towards, and understanding of Diplomas by higher education institutions.

Key areas for development

- Examples of good practice were identified in many of the Diplomas investigated. However, some major issues were evident that were preventing the full ethos of the Diplomas from being embraced. Key areas for development were identified, and are applicable not just to Diploma implementation, but in many cases represent factors important to 14-19 courses more generally.

- IAG was shown to play a crucial role in recruiting the 'right students' for the Diplomas. Therefore, it is important that IAG provided, and the intake criteria used to select students, are accurate, well-considered and consistent.

- Communication was highlighted as one of the most important issues for the successful running of the Diploma. Staff reported that communication was particularly difficult between teachers based in different organisations.

- It was widely reported that the ethos of the Diploma could have been better achieved, and learning experiences improved, if more support were provided for individual teachers.

1. Introduction

1.1 An introduction to 14-19 Diplomas

The 14-19 Diplomas were introduced in 2008 as a central part of ongoing reforms to 14-19 education. Offered across three levels (level 1, foundation; level 2, higher and level 3, advanced), the Diplomas were available in 14 subject areas (referred to as lines of learning). These were introduced in three phases (see Table 1). The Diplomas' primary aim was to provide a qualification that combined academic and vocational learning to prepare young people for progression to further / higher education and employment. In contrast to other 14-19 qualifications, the Diploma promoted hands-on approaches, and the involvement of employers and training providers in providing learners with work experience, and the opportunities to use industry relevant techniques and equipment (Directgov, 2011). To facilitate this vision, consortia of educational institutions and training providers were encouraged to run the Diplomas as a collaborative effort, sharing resources and expertise.

Table 1. Diploma lines of learning introduced since September 2008.

Phase	Date Introduced	Line of Learning
Phase 1	September 2008	Construction and the Built Environment Creative and Media Engineering Information Technology Society, Health and Development
Phase 2	September 2009	Business, Administration and Finance Environmental and Land-Based Studies Hair and Beauty Studies Hospitality Manufacturing and Product Design
Phase 3	September 2010	Public Services Retail Business Sport and Active Leisure Travel and Tourism

Each Diploma consisted of three main learning components:

1. *Principal learning*: sector-related knowledge and skills.
2. *Generic learning*: functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT, the development of personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS), and a project.

3. *Additional / specialist learning (ASL)*: additional subjects / qualifications that offer the opportunity to study particular topics in more depth or to widen learning.

To aid the progression of learners, each level was assigned an equivalence to other qualifications. The foundation level Diploma was equivalent to 5 GCSEs at grade D-G, the higher level Diploma was equivalent to 7 GCSEs at grades A*-C, and the advanced level Diploma was equivalent to 3.5 A-Levels.

1.2 Summary of national scale surveys

To monitor the implementation and delivery of the Diplomas, as well as the impact that they have had on young people, a range of organisations have undertaken national-scale surveys (see Table 2). These studies surveyed a wide range of stakeholders, offering valuable insight into the different views and opinions relating to Diplomas. A broad overview of these studies provides a positive view of the Diplomas' implementation, with most learners satisfied with the qualification, and evidence of widespread good practice in organising and running uptake, delivery and progression of Diplomas. While a more comprehensive review of these studies can be found in Busby (2011), a summary of their main findings has been provided here:

1.2.1 Information and guidance (IAG)

The provision of good IAG for learners considering doing a Diploma has been highlighted as a key factor in meeting uptake targets, and learner satisfaction (Lynch *et al.*, 2010; Ofsted, 2009, 2010). Consortia that delivered IAG most successfully (through the use of course taster days and provision of clear information on the structure and content of the Diplomas, as well as possible progression routes) were most likely to be most successful in terms of recruitment. Lynch *et al.* (2010) found that over 25% of students surveyed who were not studying for a Diploma reported that they had not considered the qualification because they did not know anything about it. Many centres had not adequately explained the structure of the Diploma, and the need to pass all of the component parts in order to pass the qualification. As a result, one of the major reasons for dissatisfaction in Diploma learners was that they did not feel they had been accurately informed of the course content (Lynch *et al.*, 2010).

Table 2. Key studies of the Diplomas since their introduction in 2008.

Organisation	Reference	Number of Consortia	Diploma Phases Included	Groups Surveyed
DCSF	Richardson and Haynes (2009)	NA	Phase 1	Higher Education Institutions
	Lynch <i>et al.</i> (2010) McCrone <i>et al.</i> (2010)	30	Phase 1	Consortium Leads Senior Managers Teaching Staff Employers Diploma Learners Non-Diploma Learners Students Parents
Ofsted	Ofsted (2009)	23	Phase 1	Learners Teachers Managers Learner's Work Lesson Observation
	Ofsted (2010)	21	Phase 1 Phase 2	
Ofqual	Ofqual (2009)	NA	Phase 1*	Assessments Mark schemes
UCAS	UCAS (2010)	NA	Phase 1**	UCAS application and admissions data

* Only surveyed three higher level lines of learning (Construction and the Built Environment; Creative and Media; and Engineering).

** Studies data from the first cohort to complete advanced level Diplomas / apply through UCAS (those completing Diplomas in 2009/10).

1.2.2 Models of delivery

A number of different models regarding the delivery of the Diploma have been identified, which vary between consortia, between centres within a consortium, and between different lines of learning within individual centres. The most common approaches were outlined by Lynch *et al.* (2010):

- Learners travel between their own school and a Further Education (FE) college or training provider for their Diploma learning; delivery occurs in both locations.
- Learners travel between their own school and another for Diploma learning; delivery occurs at both locations.
- All Diploma learning takes place within the learners' own school.

- Teachers/ tutors travel outside their own institution to teach.
- Learners study all of their Diploma in a FE college or training provider.

In most cases, delivery models were found to be managed effectively, with the sharing of specialist staff and facilities being common (Ofsted, 2010). This was recognised to have improved since the first phase of the Diplomas in 2008. Key to this success was the role of senior managers and line-of-learning coordinators in managing the delivery of the Diploma, and the formation of networks of communication between staff at different sites (Ofsted, 2008; McCrone *et al.*, 2010).

1.2.3 Teaching approaches

A high quality of principal learning teaching was reported across the lines of learning on a national-scale. There was evidence that the ethos of the Diploma was being met in principal learning teaching, with context driven learning focusing on industry relevant practices, and promoting independent thinking and team work. Lynch *et al.* (2010) suggested that this was strongly linked to learners' satisfaction in the Diploma, with many learners being impressed both by the hands-on nature of the work done, and the independence they were given when undertaking tasks. Where learners were not satisfied, they often suggested that lessons were not practical enough, and that there were too many reading / writing exercises.

All of the literature reviewed in this study reported that employer engagement provided an applied context, specialist knowledge and realistic working environments that motivated learners on their principal learning topics. Reports have indicated that employer engagement was widely used in the teaching of the Diploma, with employers commonly providing visiting speakers, work placements, site visits, assignments and teaching. Where employer involvement had not been used effectively, learner engagement has been shown to have suffered (Lynch *et al.*, 2010).

1.2.4 Functional Skills

In contrast to the relative success of the principal learning component, the teaching of the functional skills component was criticised in a number of reports (Ofsted, 2009, 2010; Lynch *et al.*, 2010). Functional skills teaching was strongest when it was successfully integrated with the principal learning, as learners were able to see, and practice, the applications of the skills they were learning in a context that interested them (Ofsted, 2010). However, the functional skills component was often taught in

isolation from the principal learning, leading to learners failing to see the relevance of functional skills to their qualification. This concern was exacerbated by worries that functional skills requirements were too difficult, with the difficulty of the functional skills exam highlighted as a reason for many learners being unable to claim a fully aggregated Diploma (Lynch *et al.*, 2010).

1.2.5 Assessment

There has been a significant amount of confusion regarding assessment of the Diplomas in terms of mark schemes, deadlines and expectations. This had influenced learners' achievement and opinions of their courses, as in some cases learners were unsure of how well they were progressing, and had received little useful feedback (Lynch *et al.* 2010). In part, this confusion was caused by the complicated nature of Diploma assessment and the different components of the qualification. Therefore, improved communication between awarding bodies and teachers has been recommended (Ofsted, 2008). Where successful examples existed, many of these problems had been overcome by establishing processes for setting targets for learners, highly effective tracking of learners' progress and well structured processes for assessment and moderation (Ofsted, 2010).

1.2.6 Progression

The Diplomas were developed to facilitate progression into further / higher education, as well as into employment. Lynch *et al.* (2010) found that most of those who were studying for a foundation or higher Diploma were keen to undertake an applied course in a similar subject area after they had finished, with over half suggesting that they wanted to progress to another Diploma. It has been reported that HEIs welcomed the breadth of the qualification and the potential for widening participation (Richardson and Haynes, 2009). Analyses of UCAS applications from Diploma students were comparable with those from other qualifications, suggesting that applicants with advanced level Diplomas were able to access Higher Education (UCAS, 2010). However, these studies also suggested that 'research intensive' institutions were more often sceptical of the Diplomas' academic rigour, while the 'teaching-led' institutions were more likely to support Diplomas.

1.3 Local Context

It is important to bear in mind the limitations of these national-scale studies. Due to the short length of time the Diploma has been active, most studies only reviewed one year of intake, and usually focused solely on the phase one Diplomas (as detailed in Table 2). At the time of writing, no studies had examined the phase three Diplomas in detail. In addition, the national scale of these studies meant that individual consortia were not examined in detail. Therefore, potential for a more local study was identified, allowing closer examination of the links between schools and centres within consortia, and the implementation and the success of Diplomas across the three phases of Diploma implementation.

This study focuses on the 14-19 Diplomas run by or involving City College Norwich (CCN). CCN, a further education (FE) college, had been involved in running Diplomas since phase 1 in 2008, and had developed one of the largest Diploma offers in the country (see Section 3.1). These were delivered in conjunction with a number of different consortia, involving schools and other training providers. CCN has been involved in running Diplomas for both pre-16 students and post-16 students.

For post-16 learners, Diplomas were run by, recruited for, and principally taught within four existing schools at CCN, at the time of writing called: Creative and Business Industries; Hotel, Hair and Beauty; Technology, Environment and Sport; and Health and Community Studies. As a result, these courses were subject to college structures of management, teaching and administration. This study examines all post-16 courses run by CCN. In contrast, individual consortia had more control over Diplomas for pre-16 learners. This study focuses on pre-16 courses run by the OpenOpportunity consortium. While this excluded some consortia from the study, OpenOpportunity was the largest consortium partnered with CCN to deliver pre-16 Diplomas, both in terms of the lines of learning offered, and the total number of students enrolled. The OpenOpportunity consortium consisted of five local secondary schools and CCN. In addition to students from partner institutions, OpenOpportunity enrolled Diploma students from 12 other schools in the region. Their Diplomas were delivered across the 6 member institutions (dependent on facilities and staff), with students travelling from their home institutions for 2 days per week. OpenOpportunity was responsible for recruitment, staffing, and communication between the different institutions involved.

1.4 Ongoing developments

During the course of this study (January 2011 - April 2011) there were a number of key developments regarding Diplomas and 14-19 education provision. These had significant impacts on the opinions expressed by participants in this research and must be taken into account when analysing the data collected.

1.4.1 Changes in future 14-19 Diploma offers

Uncertainty over the future of the Diplomas was common. In interviews conducted with teaching and management staff, they frequently expressed the feeling that they were 'on a sinking ship', and were unsure (and usually pessimistic) regarding which Diplomas would be offered in future years.

In mid-February 2011, some of this uncertainty was addressed in an announcement by OpenOpportunity and a number of local secondary schools that resulted in the withdrawal of Diploma offers for next year's (2011/12 academic year) pre-16 students. This decision was made, "*...as a result of funding changes made by the government and the lack of information about how diploma courses are to be altered*" (Downes, 2011). OpenOpportunity instead declared an intention to offer eight newly revised BTECs to start in September 2011, intended to, "*...retain some of the best elements of Diplomas whilst removing some of the complexity that those qualifications involved*" (OpenOpportunity, 2011). These were planned to involve one day per week out of school at a consortia training provider. At the time of writing, future provision of Diplomas for post-16 learners was still uncertain. In mid-February, CCN announced that, "*We will be offering post-16 diplomas only. We are still determining what our exact offer will be, so it is too early for us to comment on this and on take up*" (Downes, 2011). Discussions with staff as part of this research suggested that this offer was likely to be small, and that many subject areas were not planning to offer Diplomas to begin in September 2011.

1.4.2 Withdrawal of IT provision

In March 2011, CCN announced that no further IT courses would be offered by the college due to low uptake onto courses and poor attendance, retention and achievement figures (Dickson, 2011). This announcement had a significant impact on the survey responses collected as part of this study, in particular from students on the IT Diploma regarding potential progression routes.

1.4.3 The Wolf Report

The Wolf Report was published in early March 2011, and considered, “...*how we can improve vocational education for 14-19 year olds and thereby promote successful progression into the labour market and into higher level education and training routes*” (Wolf, 2011). Many of the views expressed by interviewees in this study were influenced by the Wolf Report, both before and after its release.

The Wolf Report offered little specific comment on the Diplomas. However, a number of points were made that were likely to influence on Diploma offers. These have been summarised here:

The failure of centrally designed qualifications: The Wolf Report was critical of the impacts of, “...*a whole succession of new ‘non-academic’ qualifications for young people designed by central government, with the Diploma merely the most recent*” (Wolf, 2011). Wolf stated that,

“Recent experience with the Diploma underlines the danger of trying to create new, highly detailed and very complex programmes on a national scale, especially in an environment which already has important and well established qualifications and qualification pathways, known to employers and HE alike.” (Wolf, 2011).

The report suggested that the low uptake onto the Diploma, despite huge funding, preparation and publicity, demonstrated public resistance to reforms that were not perceived to be relevant to labour markets and demand. It advised that, “*Any further large-scale reform involving new centrally designed sets of qualifications is bound, at present, to meet enormous resistance. Young people and parents will again vote with their feet*” (Wolf, 2011).

Provision of core subjects for pre-16 learners: Wolf warned against early specialisation, in particular the dangers of tracking pre-16 learners down routes from which they cannot return. She recommended that,

“Non-GCSE/iGCSE qualifications ... should make a limited contribution to an individual student’s score on any performance measures that use accumulated and averaged point scores. This will safeguard pupils’ access to a common general core as a basis for progression.” (Wolf, 2011).

This common general core, Wolf argued, should be delivered across approximately 80% (4 days per week) of students' time, leaving 20% (1 day per week) for vocational learning. This was of particular relevance to the Diplomas, as Diplomas for pre-16s were most commonly taught across 2 days per week. Therefore, without considerable central reform of the qualification (that Wolf advised against), the Diplomas seemed to be incompatible with the proposed route for 14-16 education.

Provision of English and Maths:

The Wolf Report strongly recommended a strengthening of English and Maths skills, both as part of the common core learning at the pre-16 level, and in post-16 education. Wolf stated,

“Students who are under 19 and do not have GCSE A-C in English and/or Maths should be required, as part of their programme, to pursue a course which either leads directly to these qualifications, or which provide significant progress towards future GCSE entry and success.” (Wolf, 2011).*

While Wolf did not consider Key Skills as suitable for this purpose, she acknowledged that Functional Skills (an essential component of the Diploma) might, *“...settle into being useful qualifications for some post-16 learners”* (Wolf, 2011). However, the report identified conceptual issues with functional skills (most prominently how to 'embed' them in learning), and suggested that, *“...they are certainly not in themselves an adequate 'maths and English diet' for the 16-19 cohort”* (Wolf, 2011).

1.5 Aims

This study focused on the implementation and impacts of Diplomas run by, and involving, CCN. This included all post-16 Diplomas at CCN, and pre-16 Diplomas run as part of the OpenOpportunity consortium. This study aimed to:

- Review the scale of provision and levels of achievement on Diploma courses involving CCN. These are compared to data from Diploma cohorts on a national scale.

- Review the implementation and delivery of the Diplomas, identifying examples of successful practice, and problems that have arisen. Areas of focus include staff training and support, uptake and IAG, delivery and teaching, assessment and progression.
- Investigate factors that have contributed to successful examples, and factors that have caused problems with the implementation of the Diplomas.
- Represent the views and experiences of a wide range of stake holders involved in the Diplomas, including management staff, teaching staff and students.

2 Data and methods

2.1 Uptake, retention and achievement data

Data on uptake, retention and achievement data were obtained from a variety of sources. It is important to understand how these data were collected, and limitations associated with their use.

2.1.1 Pre-16 data

Uptake and retention data for pre-16 OpenOpportunity courses was provided by the Planning, Funding and Admissions department at CCN. These data included the number of students starting each OpenOpportunity course, and the number of students retained on each course (as of 15 February 2011).

Data regarding achievement of pre-16 Diploma learners who had completed Diplomas in 2009/10 was provided by OpenOpportunity. This included Diplomas in Construction and the Built Environment and Creative and Media Studies at foundation and higher level, all of which started in 2008/09. This data contained information on achievement in each component of the Diploma, and the final aggregated grade for 67 students. The data represents the status of learners at the end of the 2009/10 academic year. Therefore, it was likely that rates of success had since increased as a result of students re-sitting components, such as functional skills. The data included predicted final grades for 16 learners expected to achieve functional skills that they had previously failed. However, information on whether these learners had since completed their Diplomas was not available.

2.1.2 Post-16 data

Data on uptake, retention and achievement of post-16 Diploma students were extracted from CCN's ProAchieve database on 23 February 2011. These data were sorted by learning aim (eg. principal learning or functional skills English). Data were extracted for the principal learning and functional skills components, and provided the number of students starting each course, those retained on each course and those achieving each learning aim for all post-16 Diploma courses that have run at CCN. As a result, this data provided an up-to-date and accurate view of the post-16 Diplomas. However, some limitations were identified, primarily because it was only able to report on individual learning aims, and did not give an indication of the number of learners claiming fully aggregated Diplomas.

In order to obtain information on the number of post-16 students claiming fully aggregated Diplomas, a second source of information provided by Curriculum Support at CCN was used. This consisted of information regarding post-16 students who completed Diploma courses in the 2009/10 academic year (227 students across 16 courses). This dataset had been compiled using information from the Diploma Aggregation Service (DAS) that tracked individual learners through their Diplomas. Similar limitations to the pre-16 data provided by OpenOpportunity were experienced. First, it provided a snapshot of Diploma aggregation, taken when the dataset was compiled (November 2010). Therefore, it was likely that some students may have since achieved the Diploma. Second, due to the complex nature of extracting data from DAS, and the fact that DAS was continuously being updated, there were some missing data, such as the results for thirty one students with most awaiting clarification of specific components (most frequently functional skills). In order to minimise the uncertainty associated with these learners, this study cross-referenced individuals against the ProAchieve dataset. As a result of this cross-referencing, twenty one learners with uncertainty over their functional skills were found to have achieved all of the components necessary to claim the full Diploma. Therefore, the total number of students claiming a full Diploma was adjusted to take this into account.

2.2 Collecting views and experiences

In addition to quantitative data regarding uptake and achievement on the Diplomas, this study collected data on individuals' views and experiences of the courses. Data was collected from staff and students in online surveys and through one-to-one interviews.

2.2.1 Student survey

A survey was conducted of Diploma students studying at the time of the research, aimed at gathering information regarding students' views and experiences of their course. The survey was distributed and completed electronically, and was available to complete from 1 – 20 March 2011. In total, 702 students were identified as being currently enrolled on Diplomas in the 2010/11 academic year. Of these, 478 post-16 students were contacted directly via email while 224 pre-16 students were contacted indirectly through teaching staff in OpenOpportunity member schools.

A total of 101 responses were received. Table 3 shows the number of responses broken down by age group, with 76% of respondents reported being enrolled on post-16 courses at CCN. Overall, 14.4% of all students contacted took part in the survey. 4.0% of respondents were studying Diplomas at foundation level, 37.0% were studying at higher level and 59.0% at advanced level.

Table 3. Number of respondents to the survey of Diploma students. For each age group, the percentage of the targeted population is given.

	Number of Respondents	Percentage of targeted population (%)
Pre-16	20	8.9
Post-16	81	16.1
All Respondents	101	14.4

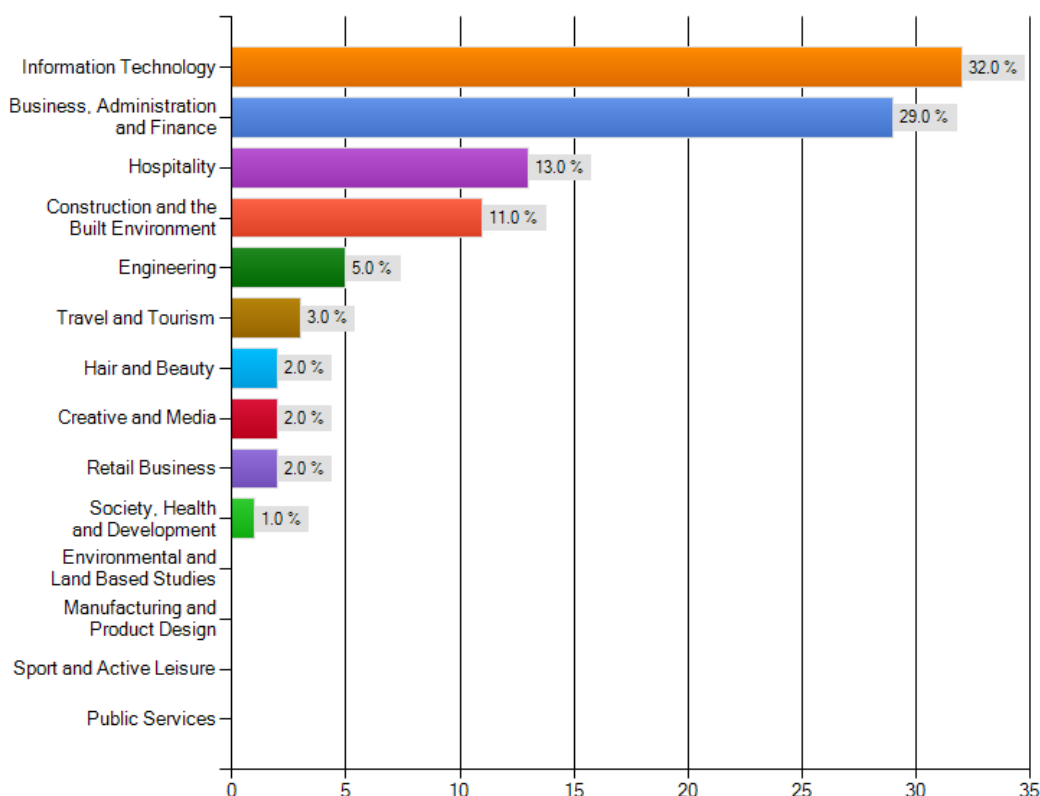


Figure 1. The number of survey respondents enrolled on Diplomas in each line of learning. The percentage of respondents from each line is also reported.

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of respondents based on line of learning. Information Technology and Business, Administration and Finance students accounted for over 60% of respondents, though such a bias might be expected given the large numbers of students currently studying for Diplomas in these areas (see Section 3.1).

2.2.2 Teaching staff survey

A survey was conducted of staff involved in teaching the Diplomas, either at the time of the research, or previously. This was aimed at gathering information regarding teachers' views and experiences of the courses they taught. The survey was distributed and completed electronically and was available to complete from 14 February – 20 March 2011. Teaching staff at CCN were contacted through programme managers. Teaching staff in schools were contacted through OpenOpportunity. In total, 23 members of staff completed the survey. Due to the method of distribution, it was not possible to establish the exact number of staff the survey reached.

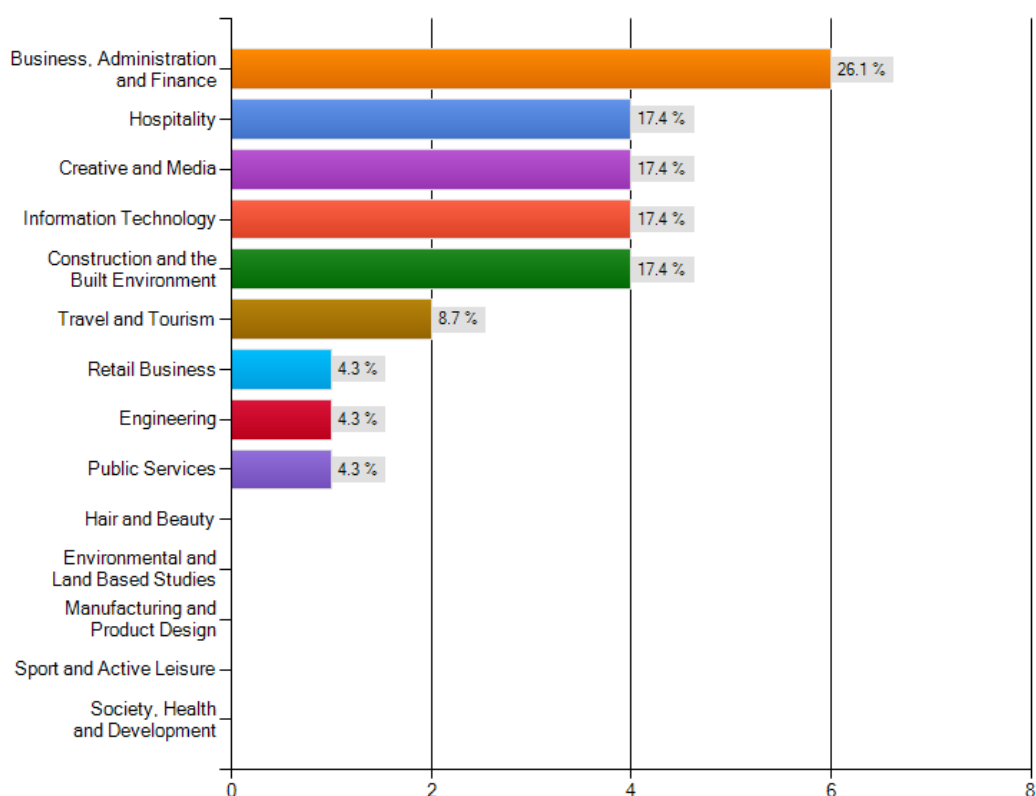


Figure 2. The number of survey respondents teaching on each line of learning. The percentage of respondents from each line is also reported. Note that each respondent could select more than one option.

Figure 2 shows the number of respondents teaching on each line of learning. The greatest number of responses came from staff teaching the Business, Administration and Finance Diploma. Teaching staff from across the lines of learning responded, with the notable exception being Hair and Beauty Studies (the remaining four Diplomas with no respondents had little or no current provision at CCN). Of those responding, 19 (82.6%) out of a total of 23 were based at CCN, with the remaining four based in partner secondary schools. 12 reported having experience teaching pre-16 Diplomas, while 18 reported having taught on post-16 Diplomas. Figure 3 shows the levels of Diploma taught by respondents.

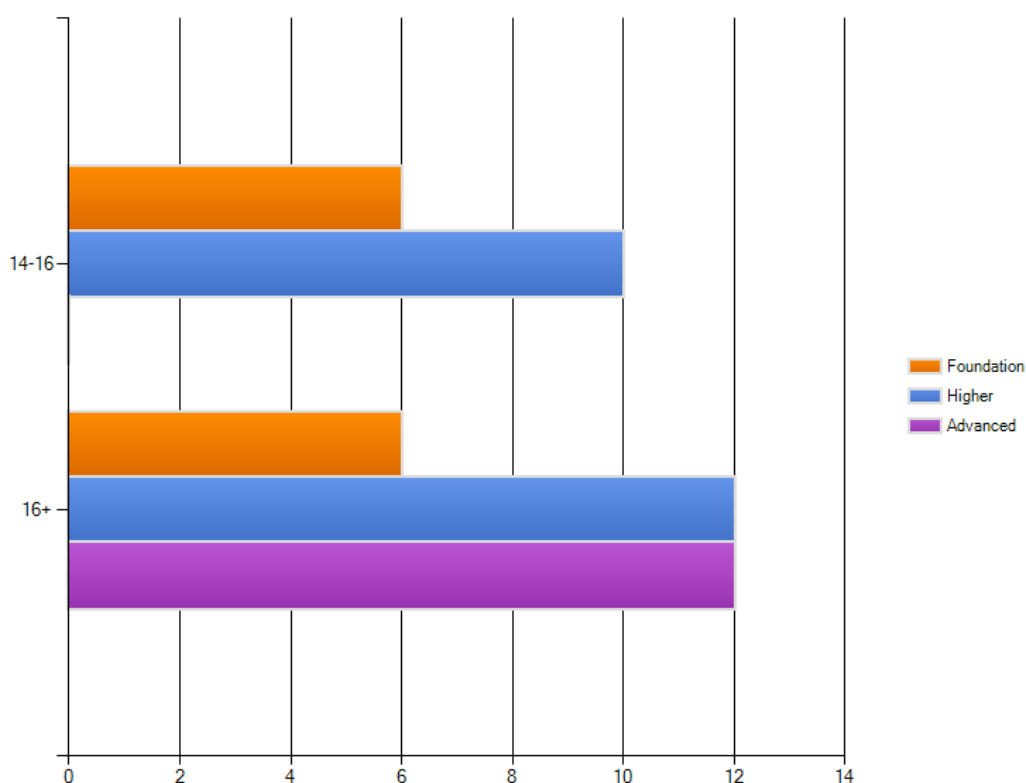


Figure 3. The number of survey respondents teaching at each level. Each respondent could select more than one option.

Figure 4 shows the number of respondents with experience teaching each component of the Diploma. Twenty-one (91.3%) of 23 respondents had experience of teaching the principal learning component. In contrast, four respondents had taught functional skills, with just one of these teaching solely functional skills.

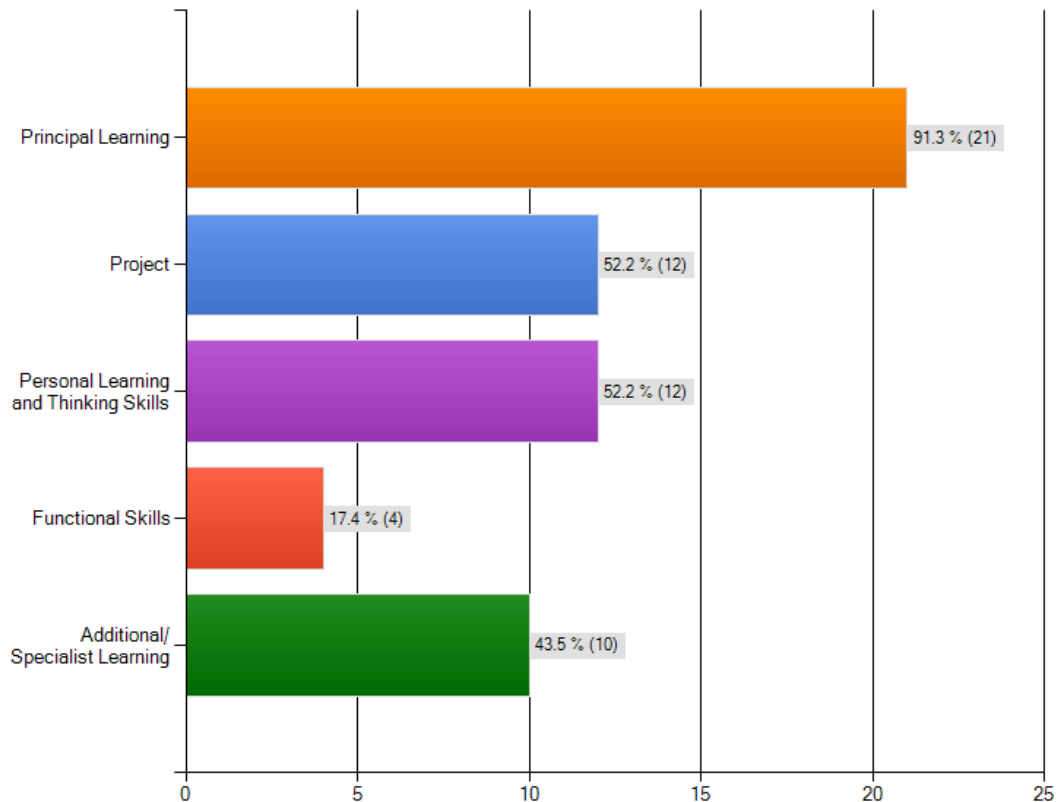


Figure 4. The number of respondents with experience of teaching each component of the Diploma. Percentages do not add up to 100% as more than one option could be selected.

2.2.3 Interviews

In addition to the data collected from the surveys, information was collected from staff through one-to-one interviews. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and were semi-structured to ensure that all desired topics were covered, while allowing individuals to focus on their own views and experiences.

Thirty four interviews were conducted as part of this study, with staff from across CCN and the OpenOpportunity consortium. For the purpose of reporting the results of these interviews, they were divided into four main categories, based on their roles. These categories were as follows:

- Senior management staff: Eight senior management staff were interviewed. These included heads of school and consortia leads.
- Programme managers: Five programme managers were interviewed, providing a view of the organisation and administration of groups of courses.
- Teaching Staff: Interviews were conducted with 18 staff teaching on the Diplomas. The involvement of the teachers interviewed with the Diplomas

varied considerably, ranging from course tutors involved in setting up and running the courses, to staff teaching only on specific Diploma units.

- Support Staff: Three members of support staff were interviewed. These involved staff involved in providing IAG, student support, and examinations administration.

3 Provision and achievement

3.1 Diploma provision

CCN has been involved in the running of Diplomas since they were first introduced in 2008. Figure 5 shows the number of learners starting Diploma courses since 2008, including all OpenOpportunity pre-16 students and all students enrolled at CCN on post-16 Diplomas. It is important to bear in mind that other consortia have run pre-16 Diplomas involving CCN, notably in Business, Administration and Finance, and Engineering (provided through the Northern Lights consortium), and in Society, Health and Development (provided through the Wensum Partnership), though these are not represented in the figures here.

In 2008, only two lines of learning were offered: Construction and the Built Environment and Creative and Media. In 2009, this offer was expanded to include the remaining three phase one Diplomas (Engineering, Information Technology and Society, Health and Development), and four of the five phase two Diplomas (Business, Administration and Finance, Hair and Beauty, Hospitality and Manufacturing and Product Design). In 2010, three more Diplomas (Public Services, Retail Business and Travel and Tourism) were added to the offer. Two lines of learning, Environmental and Land-Based Studies and Sport and Active Leisure have not been run at the college. Since their introduction, the Diplomas being examined here have catered for 1263 individuals, with 338 pre-16 and 925 post-16 learners. 702 students were enrolled on Diplomas at the time of this study (based on those still enrolled on 23 February 2011). 275 of these students were in the first year of a two year course and, were therefore, not expected to complete their course until 2011/12. A full breakdown of the number of students starting each course can be found in Appendix 1.

Not every line of learning was offered at all levels in each year, and many lines have altered their offers. Diploma uptake at CCN peaked in 2009, with lower numbers starting in 2010. This was most noticeable in the removal of foundation level Diploma provision by 2010, from seven post-16 and three pre-16 foundation courses starting in 2009, to just two post-16 and one pre-16 course in 2010. Of the seven lines of learning that offered foundation level courses for post-16 learners in their first year, five had removed the offer in subsequent years (four out of six on pre-16 Diplomas).

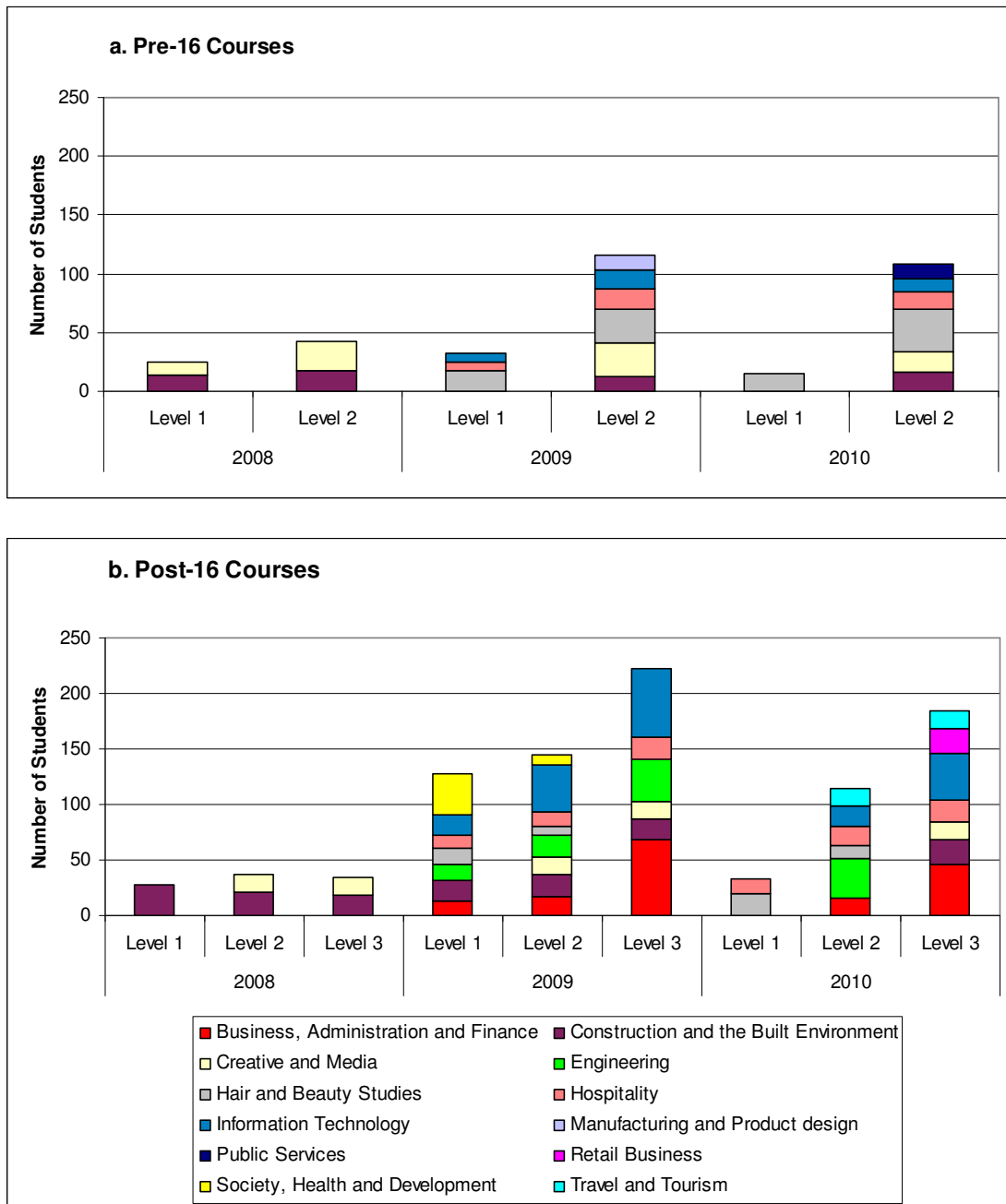


Figure 5. Number of learners since 2008 starting a. pre-16 OpenOpportunity Diplomas, and b. post-16 Diplomas at CCN.

Comparing these data to the national picture showed CCN and associated consortia to have been one of the largest Diploma providers in the country. Figure 6 indicates the total number of students who participated in Diplomas in the academic year 2009/10, on a national scale, in Norfolk, and in the courses examined as part of this study. Of the 38013 learners studying for a Diploma in England, 1180 (3.1%) were enrolled at institutions in Norfolk (DFE, 2010). 747 were enrolled on the Diplomas investigated in this study (2.0% of national participants, 63.3% of Norfolk participants). Only two other Local Authorities (Lincolnshire and Hertfordshire) had more Diploma students enrolled than Norfolk in 2009/10 (DFE, 2010). The role of

CCN as a major Diploma provider on a national scale is particularly striking when considering post-16 learners. In 2009/10 there were 10060 post-16 Diploma students in England (DFE, 2010). 529 of these (5.3%) were enrolled at CCN. As a result, Norfolk went against the national trend of approximately 75% of Diploma learners being pre-16.

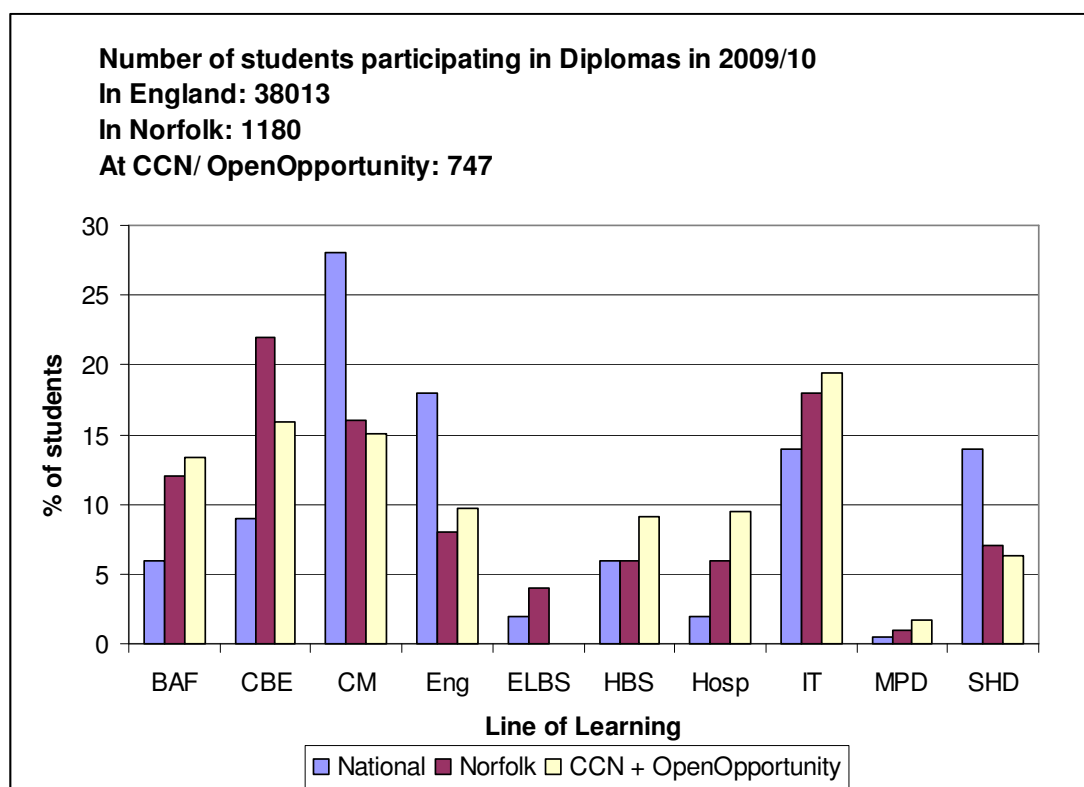


Figure 6. Students participating in Diplomas in 2009/10 in England, Norfolk and CCN+OpenOpportunity. The percentage of students participating in each line of learning is shown, including Business, Administration and Finance (BAF), Construction and the Built Environment (CBE), Creative and Media (CM), Engineering (Eng), Environmental and Land Based Studies (ELBS), Hair and Beauty Studies (HBS), Hospitality (Hosp), Information Technology (IT), Manufacturing and Product Design (MPD) and Society, Health and Development (SHD). Data for England and Norfolk are from DFE (2010). Data for CCN and OpenOpportunity were compiled as part of this study (see Section 2).

Figure 6 also shows the percentage of learners studying for each line of learning in 2009/10. Similar patterns are seen at the different scales, with relatively low numbers of students studying for the Environment and Land Based Studies and Manufacturing and Product Design Diplomas. While at the national scale Engineering and Creative and Media were the most popular courses, in Norfolk a greater proportion of learners was seen on the Construction and the Built Environment, Business, Administration and Finance and IT Diplomas.

These patterns provide the context in which this research was based. The Diplomas investigated in this report, those offered by CCN and OpenOpportunity, represented a significant proportion of Diploma offers at regional and national scales.

3.2 Achievement

3.2.1 National achievement levels

At the time of writing, few studies had explored Diploma achievement, due to a number of reasons. First, there was only one significant cohort of students that had finished Diplomas; those finishing in 2009/10. A small number of learners (188) who started their Diplomas in 2008 achieved Diplomas in the 2008/9 academic year (DFE, 2010). However, it was not until 2009/10 that the number of Diploma students increased significantly, and that students who had started two year courses in 2008 began to finish. Second, achievement statistics for the Diplomas were complicated by the nature of the qualification. In order to achieve a fully aggregated Diploma, a learner must have completed (although not necessarily passed) all of the components. If a learner failed to complete all of the components, they were entitled to claim the value of the components that they have completed, and could complete the full Diploma at a later stage. As a consequence, Diploma results could continue to change after learners have finished studying for the qualification.

A Department for Education statistical report (DFE, 2010) found that in 2009/10, 4599 learners claimed fully aggregated Diplomas. Of these, 3231 were pre-16 learners (70.3%). Over half of this Diploma achievement was in Engineering or Creative and Media (DFE, 2010), the subjects with highest participation at the national scale (see Figure 6). While these statistics give a good indication of the total number of Diploma achievers, they do not provide an indication of success rate. This was because the data did not indicate how many learners were expected to complete their Diplomas in 2009/10, as learners expected to finish in 2010/11 were also included in the total amount. One indication of success rate was provided by an Ofsted report stating that, of the 11326 learners who started Diplomas in 2008/9, 4296 (37.9%) had claimed aggregated Diplomas by the end of the 2009/10 academic year (Ofsted, 2010).

3.2.2 Aggregation of the full Diploma

Data regarding the number of learners claiming a full Diploma in the Diplomas examined in this study were obtained from two principal sources. Information on pre-

16 Diploma achievement was provided by OpenOpportunity, while information on post-16 achievement was extracted from DAS by Curriculum Support at CCN in November 2010 (see Section 2 for a description of these data).

Table 4 shows the number of students enrolled on OpenOpportunity and CCN Diplomas who claimed a full Diploma in 2009/10. The percentage of starting students claiming a fully aggregated Diploma was equivalent to the national figure of 37.9% reported by Ofsted (2010). 35.8% of pre-16 learners and 38.0% of post-16 learners claimed a full Diploma in 2009/10. It is worth noting that these figures do not represent the final levels of achievement, as learners were able to aggregate their Diplomas at a later stage upon completing the required components. OpenOpportunity estimated that a further 16 learners (of 67) would achieve the full Diploma following functional skills re-sits. This could potentially have raised achievement to 59.7% in the pre-16 Diplomas. No data were available to indicate the number of post-16 students expected to complete their Diplomas at a later stage.

Table 4 also shows the proportion of learners that achieved each component of the Diploma. In both age groups the ASL, PLTS and work experience components showed high rates of success. In contrast, principal learning and functional skills achievement was much lower, suggesting that these components most commonly contributed to students' failure to claim the full Diploma. The close relationship between the percentage of learners failing to claim the Diploma and those failing at least one functional skill is particularly striking. Interviews with a number of senior management staff and programme managers supported these findings. One senior manager suggested that, in relation to the 2009/10 achievement rates, "*functional skills were the big thing, and I think have been clearly highlighted as being the biggest issue*". Therefore, it is worthwhile looking in more detail at achievement levels in these components, and the patterns that emerge between different lines of learning and levels.

Table 4. Number of learners achieving Diplomas in 2009/10. Pre-16 data was provided by OpenOpportunity, post-16 data was provided by CCN Curriculum Support.

	Number of Students Achieving	Percentage of total starting Students (%)	Percentage of total finishing students (%)
Pre-16 OpenOpportunity Diplomas (4 courses, 67 starting students)			
Full Diploma Aggregation	24	35.8	40.7
Principal Learning (A-E)	33	49.3	55.9
ASL	46	68.7	78.0
All Functional Skills	24	35.8	40.7
Project (A-E)	38	56.7	64.4
PLTS	59	88.1	100.0
Work Experience	59	88.1	100.0
Post-16 CCN Diplomas (16 courses, 297 starting students)			
Full Diploma Aggregation	113	38.0	49.8
Principal Learning (A-E)	162	54.5	71.4
ASL	194	65.3	85.5
All Functional Skills	118	39.7	52.0
Project (A-E)	164	55.2	72.2
PLTS	213	71.7	93.8
Work Experience	204	68.7	89.9

3.2.3 Principal learning and functional skills achievement

As already identified in Section 3.2.2, the poorest rates of success occurred in the principal learning component and in the ability to pass all three functional skills. Figure 7 examines achievement in these components, showing levels of retention, principal learning achievement and functional skills achievement in all Diploma courses that had been completed (in 2008/9 and 2009/10). Both pre-16 courses (Figure 7a) and post-16 courses (Figure 7b) are shown. Achievement percentages were taken as a proportion of the number of learners who had completed their course of study.

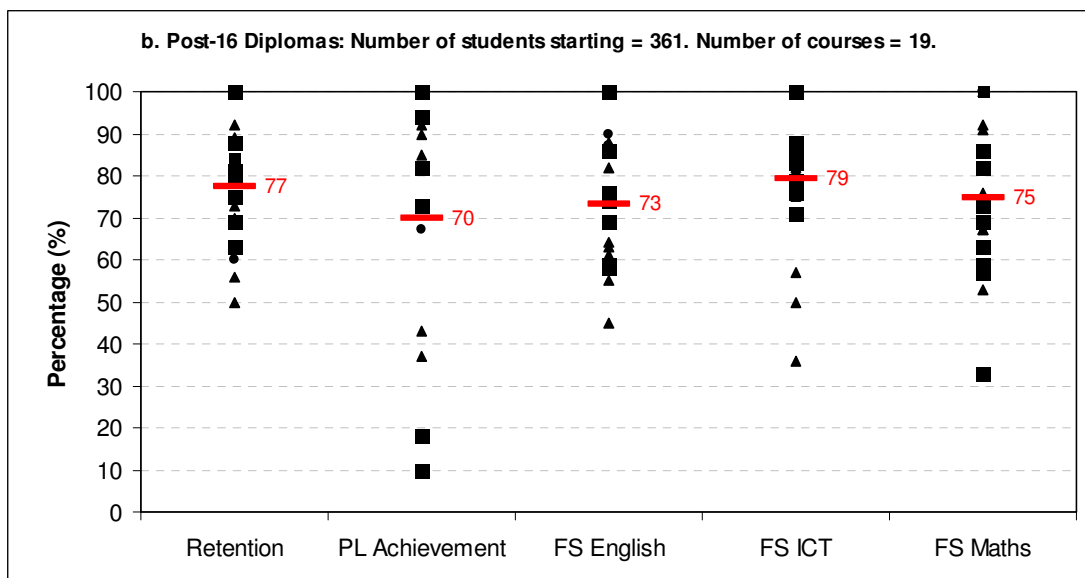
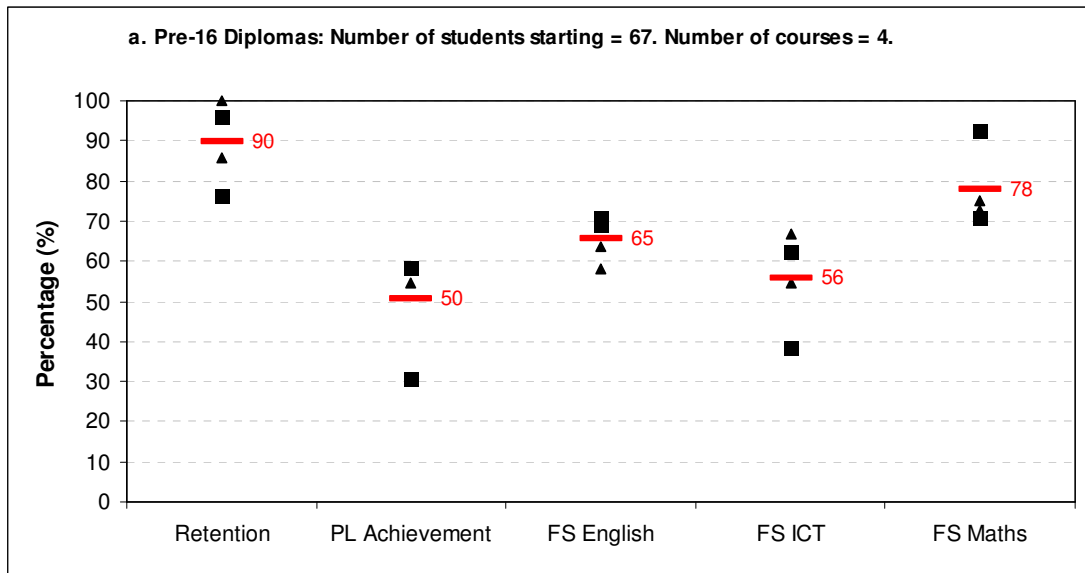


Figure 7. Percentage retention, principal learning achievement (PL Achievement) and functional skills success (FS English, FS ICT and FS Maths) for all completed Diploma courses (those finishing in 2008/09 and 2009/10) in a. pre-16 OpenOpportunity Diplomas and b. post-16 CCN Diplomas. Each point in a column represents one course (for example: Higher Level Creative and Media Diploma that finished in 2008/9). Triangles represent foundation courses, squares represent higher courses and circles represent advanced courses. Red bars indicate the mean value across all the courses. Post-16 data was extracted from ProAchieve (23 February 2011). Pre-16 data was provided by OpenOpportunity.

All of the factors examined in Figure 7 showed a considerable spread in values across Diploma courses. This was particularly evident in post-16 courses, though the low number of completed pre-16 courses may prevent similar variability from being evident. The high variances seen in retention and achievement statistics (Figure 7) limited the usefulness of means in interpreting the data. The large spread between values suggested that a range of factors were responsible for patterns observed in

individual courses. While this section identified key patterns and trends, the reasons for these patterns are explored in the remainder of this report.

The factor with the highest variance was principal learning achievement in the post-16 Diplomas, which showed a non-normal distribution. Courses either performed well (with 65% or more learners passing), or very poorly (with less than 50% passing). There were a range of reasons for this distribution. First, there appeared to be a relationship between the course start date and principal learning achievement. Three of the six post-16 courses with lower than 50% principal learning success rates were completed in the first year that the Diplomas were offered (2008/09). It was suggested that these courses may have experienced ‘teething problems’ in their first year, an argument that was supported by a high proportion of interviewed teachers and management staff. In contrast, 13/16 of Diplomas ending in 2009/10 recorded principal learning achievement rates of greater than 65%. Courses that showed particularly good principal learning achievement included Business, Administration and Finance (foundation level, 92%; higher level, 94%), Engineering (foundation and higher levels, 100%) and Hair and Beauty Studies (higher level, 100%). The three courses ending in 2009/10 that showed low principal learning achievement (Society, Health and Development, foundation level; Information Technology, higher level; and Creative and Media, higher level) were all identified in interviews as having suffered from specific problems.

In contrast to the principal learning, functional skills achievement did not demonstrate a relationship with course start date. Post-16 Diploma learners had similar levels of achievement in all three functional skills. Pre-16 learners performed best in maths, and worst in ICT. One common criticism of functional skills from interviewees was that functional skills were too difficult to pass, in particular for higher level Diploma students who had to pass level two functional skills to claim a Diploma. As one senior manager argued;

“You can have a level two student who curriculum-wise is level two, but isn’t level two in terms of their basic functional core skills ... That rigidity [the requirement to pass functional skills at level two] took away the flexibility and the opportunity to personalise a student’s programme as we do with our other courses.”

(Senior Manager)

This view was also present amongst the teaching staff, with one survey respondent stating that;

“The linking of the Functional Skills into achievement especially for the Higher Diplomas who need to achieve at the same level (2) as the Advanced students has made achieving the award difficult for many students and added pressure to the course and acted as a demotivator for those who initially fail the Functional Skills exams.”

(Teaching Staff)

While this view was prevalent in a number of interviews, no significant difference was identified between functional skills achievement on courses completed at foundation and higher level. Advanced level Diploma courses performed better in all three functional skills, though the small number of completed advanced level courses made it impossible to establish whether this was a significant difference. This was an expected pattern due to advanced level Diploma students only being required to pass functional skills at level 2. It was notable that the rates of finishing students passing all three functional skills (40.7% on pre-16 Diplomas and 52.0% on post-16 Diplomas) were considerably lower than achievement rates in individual functional skills. This indicated that students were most commonly failing one functional skill, rather than all three.

3.3 Summary

The analysis undertaken in this section has provided an overview of the scale, and performance of the Diplomas investigated in this study. On a regional scale, CCN and OpenOpportunity have provided for over 60% of Diploma learners, with CCN contributing 5% of Diploma provision nationally for post-16 learners. Achievement was comparable to national figures, with the primary barrier to achievement being functional skills. While principal learning achievement was poor in the first year of Diplomas, figures suggest that this had been improved in most lines of learning. However, the quantitative nature of these data did not allow for a detailed examination of the factors influencing the implementation of the Diploma. The remainder of this study focuses on exploring these factors and explaining many of the patterns that have emerged.

4 Staff preparedness and training

4.1 Staff preparedness

National-scale reviews of the Diplomas have suggested that levels of staff preparedness were key to the successful delivery of the Diploma (Lynch *et al.*, 2010; McCrone *et al.*, 2010). Respondents to the staff survey were asked to rate their preparedness to teach the Diploma on a scale from one (very unprepared) to ten (very prepared), from when they started teaching the Diploma, and in their most recent Diploma teaching. On starting Diploma teaching, the 23 respondents returned a mean value of 4.5, suggesting that staff did not feel adequately prepared when they started teaching on the Diploma. This mean increased to 7.2 when asked to rate their preparedness in their most recent Diploma teaching. This indicated that teaching staff felt considerably more prepared for Diploma teaching now than they did when they first started. It is worth exploring the factors contributing to this increase in preparedness, in relation to the training and support offered to teaching staff.

4.2 External training and support

When the Diplomas were introduced, considerable funding was put into the provision of training courses for staff from external bodies, such as awarding bodies and the Diploma Development Partnership (DDP). A number of teaching staff interviewed reported that they had attended training days provided by awarding bodies when the Diplomas were introduced. However, very few identified these training opportunities as useful to their Diploma teaching. One common criticism of these opportunities was that they failed to address subject specific issues, instead being too general in focus. As one teacher responded,

“I attended two training sessions with Edexcel in London. Information about the structure of Diplomas was available but there was nothing subject specific. We looked at the Project, the session was delivered by a physics teacher and looked at examples from that area of specialism. It was difficult to relate any of this to my subject.”

(Teaching Staff)

While training days organised by awarding bodies were considered beneficial for general Diploma information, many staff questioned their worth regarding, “...*the actual nitty-gritty of schemes of learning*” (Programme Manager). This view supported the conclusions presented by Lynch *et al.* (2010), suggesting that training and support opportunities offered to staff needed to be more targeted and specific.

Most staff criticised the rushed nature of Diploma implementation, and indicated that they had received few resources from awarding bodies. In some cases, staff reported having to, “...*teach blind...*” for up to a term while course specifications and assessment materials were still being finalised by awarding bodies. This initial lack of support from the awarding bodies was one of the main contributors to poor initial staff preparedness. This was summarised by one teacher: “[The awarding body] *rushed at it and provided poor information relating to delivery and assessment*”. Beyond the initial lack of resources, teachers in many lines of learning suggested that awarding bodies had continued to fail to provide resources that had been promised. However in contrast, some lines of learning had shown evidence of resources being provided by awarding bodies, which included schemes of work, good sample assessments and mark schemes, and textbooks. Where these had been provided, teachers had responded positively. For example, one teacher stated that the provision of sample assessments and mark schemes was invaluable, and that, “...*without it I would probably have failed completely*”.

4.3 Internal training and support

While staff were often very critical of the support provided by awarding bodies, support and training provided within the college and consortium received a more mixed response. Senior management staff and programme managers reported regular meetings being held between teaching and management staff. In the best examples, there was evidence of strong teams of staff working together to develop the Diploma. As a result, experiences and ‘lessons learnt’ could be shared collaboratively, to ultimately provide the best experience for learners. A positive example was that recorded in the Business, Administration and Finance Diploma, where a strong team was reported having worked together effectively to develop and run the Diplomas from an early stage. One member of this team provided a good summary;

“The team has taken a new approach with the Diplomas, teaching the same units with different classes alongside each other to maximise team support and IV as you go”.

(Teaching Staff)

Teaching staff often commented positively on initial training provided by OpenOpportunity, particularly for those involved in teaching on the pre-16 Diplomas, suggesting that it had helped them prepare to deliver the Diplomas.

However, there was a general perception from teaching staff that training opportunities had been offered initially, but that teachers were then left to run the Diplomas themselves, with little or no support. One teacher stated;

“We were never given time to plan the diploma properly. We needed time to develop schemes of work and lesson content, which only happened because we gave up our own time”.

(Teaching Staff)

Many staff suggested that they felt more prepared to deliver the Diploma as a result of their own efforts and experiences of working with the Diploma, rather than as a result of training and support provided for them. Some interviewees reported that teaching had become fragmented, with little communication between staff. In these cases, teachers were more likely to report feeling isolated and often felt that this impacted negatively on students. Such experiences highlighted the importance of good management structures and communication networks in supporting staff to best provide for students.

4.4 Summary

This section explored issues of staff preparedness and training. As has been described in national-scale studies, many staff reported feeling underprepared when they started teaching on the Diplomas. Reasons for this included a sense that the implementation of Diplomas had been rushed and that initial training and support from awarding bodies had not been specific enough. Teachers were likely to have felt significantly more prepared in their more recent teaching. This was reported to be due primarily to gaining experience with the Diploma. In the most successful examples reported in this study, these experiences were shared between staff

through regular meetings and communication networks. However, a number of staff reported that this was not occurring and that they were not receiving adequate support.

5 Learner choice

This section examines the choices that Diploma learners made in applying for, and being accepted onto, their Diplomas. First, the reasons for learners choosing the Diploma were explored. Second, the structure and quality of IAG provided to prospective Diploma students was examined. The provision of good quality IAG has been identified as a key factor linked to student satisfaction (Ofsted, 2008, 2009, 2010; Lynch *et al.*, 2010). As a result, this study focused on whether Diploma students felt the IAG they were provided with was adequate, and whether it provided them with an accurate representation of the course. Third, the intake criteria applied to each Diploma were investigated. These were seen as crucial to ensuring that the 'right students' were enrolled on the 'right course'.

5.1 Learners reasons for choosing the Diploma

Students were asked why they had chosen to study their particular Diploma. The responses collected have been reported in Table 5, along with figures from a national-scale survey (Lynch *et al.*, 2010). The results of this research were broadly similar to those reported by Lynch *et al.* (2010), with learners most likely to have chosen a Diploma because the course was related to a career they were interested in, or because the course sounded interesting. Unsurprisingly, post-16 learners were more likely to be concerned with the potential to progress to university or higher education. Similar to the findings of Lynch *et al.* (2010), pre-16 learners were strongly attracted by characteristics unique to the qualification, such as the different way of learning and the GCSE equivalency. In contrast, these factors did not play as large a role in attracting post-16 learners. While the percentage of learners choosing the Diploma because they were encouraged by their school or college was similar to the study conducted by Lynch *et al.* (2010), the post-16 learners surveyed for this research were considerably more likely to have chosen the Diploma because they didn't know what else to do (18% of respondents).

Table 5. Students' reasons for choosing to study for a Diploma. 89 students responded to the question. Results from a national scale survey are also reported (Lynch, 2010). More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100%.

	Percentage pre-16 learners (%)		Percentage post-16 learners (%)	
	Survey respondents (n=20)	National scale (n=823)	Survey respondents (n=69)	National scale (n=176)
The course is related to a career I am interested in	75	58	65	76
The course sounded interesting	45	46	49	41
I liked the number of GCSE/ A-Levels that the Diploma is equivalent to	45	48	27	23
I thought it might help me get into university/ HE	10	23	33	32
I wanted to try a different way of learning	45	24	13	14
I liked the idea of doing some of my course outside my school	35	26	4	n/a
I wanted to gain work experience	25	16	7	13
I didn't know what else to do	5	5	18	6
I wanted to do something different to other subjects I am taking	15	32	7	14
My parents encouraged me to	10	12	5	4
I thought it would help me get into college	25	23	0	n/a
My school encouraged me to	5	9	1	4
Other	5	n/a	4	n/a

5.2 Information and Guidance (IAG)

5.2.1 Provision of IAG

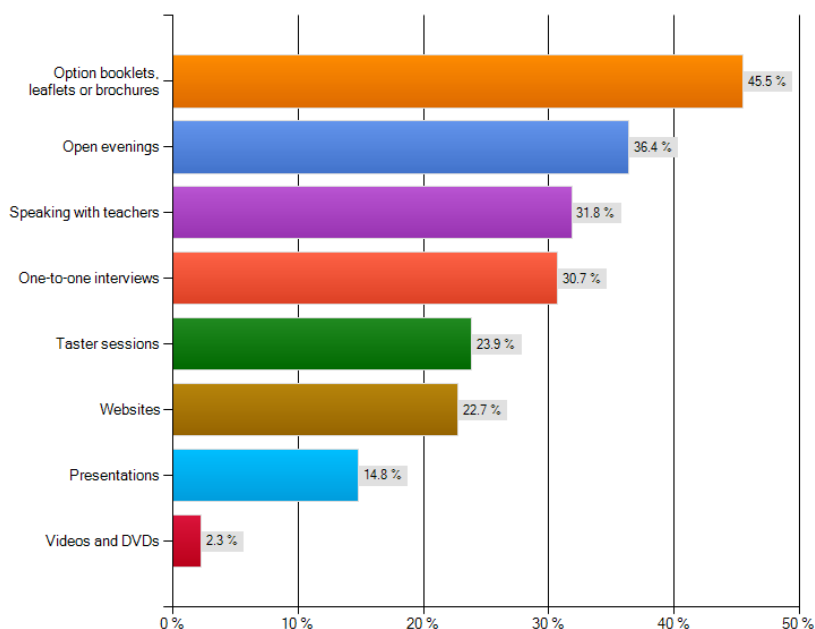


Figure 8. Forms of IAG received by Diploma students prior to starting their course. 88 respondents replied to the question. More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100%.

Most students reported having received IAG in a number of different forms before they started their course. The forms of IAG received are shown in Figure 8, with the use of option booklets and open evenings being most common. Speaking with teachers, one-to-one interviews, taster sessions, websites and presentations were also frequently used. The broad range of IAG experienced by students was supported by the fact that the majority of respondents reported having received more than one form of IAG.

The IAG provided varied between pre-16 and post-16 Diplomas. For pre-16 learners, OpenOpportunity took the lead role in providing IAG. One senior manager described the IAG cycle for pre-16 learners:

“It starts from initially going and doing some year nine assemblies and raising awareness of the Diplomas through presence at parents’ evenings. In the past we have then had a Diploma information evening ... with the staff that are on it, and students can then talk to the staff and find out from them first hand. Next they go

through ... a taster event ... very much the kind of activity you are going to do."

(Senior Manager)

They continued to say:

"We then have an interview process, students fill out a pre-interview task, they do an application pack ... the school fills out bits about their academic ability... the parents fill out a section, it is quite a complete process."

(Senior Manager)

The final part of the IAG cycle was an interview with the student. In addition to there being an assessment of the individual, "[The interview] *is the last opportunity for the student to find out, any queries, any questions, any worries*". Staff involved in this process were keen to highlight not just the importance of promoting the Diplomas, but the importance of allowing prospective students to experience and fully understand the course.

For post-16 students a similar structure was implemented, with open evenings and taster days supplementing written/online prospectuses and interviews. However, in contrast to pre-16 IAG, this was primarily run through the individual schools at CCN, supported by the Advice Centre as the first port of call for prospective students. As a result, it was suggested by a number of staff that the types of IAG provided, and its quality, varied between the different schools. In addition, one interviewee expressed a worry that some students received effectively no IAG on courses where initial uptake was low and students were recruited onto the course at a late stage. This appeared to be the experience of one student, who responded in the survey that they had received no IAG, and had, "*...just turned up on the sign up day and signed up*".

5.2.2 Satisfaction with IAG

While Diploma students had access to a range of IAG before starting their course, survey respondents gave mixed opinions of their satisfaction with the IAG they had received. Figure 9 shows the distribution of student responses to the question, 'How satisfied are you with Information and Guidance that you received before you started your course?'. The mean level of satisfaction was 5.1, suggesting that on average students were neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied with the IAG they had received. Pre-

16 respondents reported higher levels of satisfaction with IAG (a mean of 5.7) than post-16 respondents (a mean of 5.0).

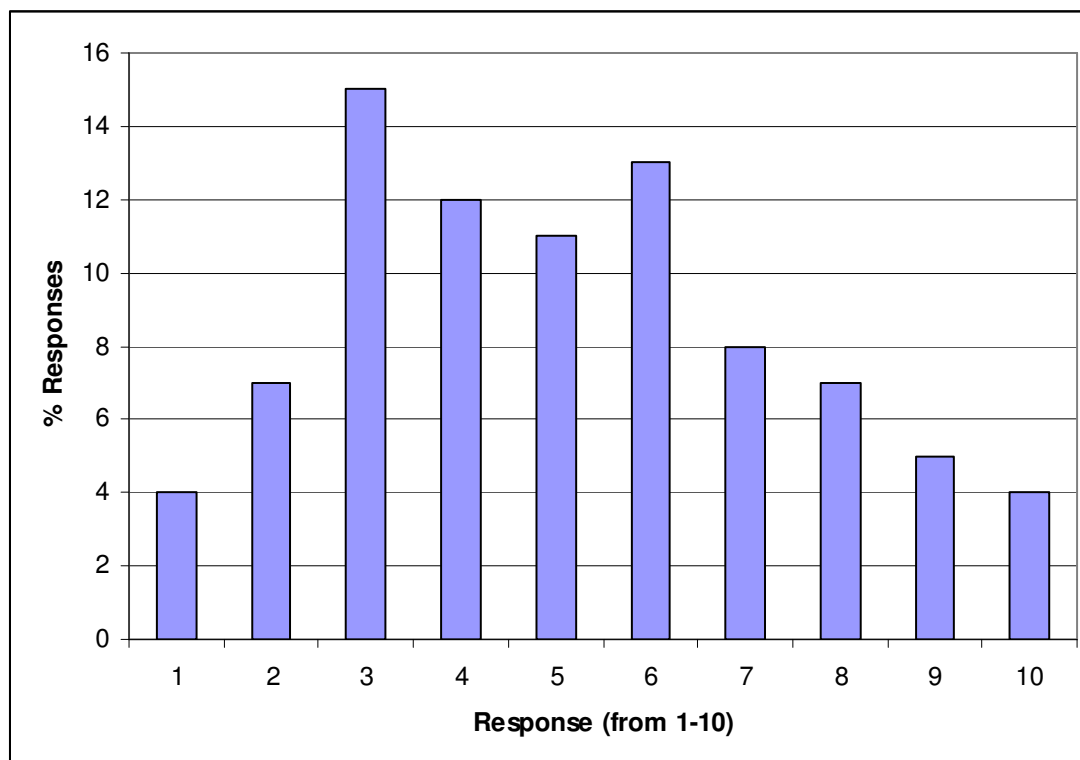


Figure 9. Student responses to the question 'How satisfied are you with Information and Guidance that you received before you started your course?'. 1 represented very unsatisfied, 10 represented very satisfied. 90 students responded to the question.

There was considerable variability between levels of satisfaction on different lines of learning, with Construction and the Built Environment having the highest mean level of student satisfaction with IAG (6.6) and Creative Media having the lowest satisfaction (2.0), indicating the existence of IAG issues specific to individual lines of learning.

Student dissatisfaction with IAG across all lines of learning was focused predominantly on the way the course was taught. When asked to rate their awareness of different aspects at the start of their Diploma (the requirement to pass all components to claim the Diploma, the course content, course difficulty, the amount of work required, the types of assessment used, the different components of the Diploma and how the course would be taught), respondents claimed to be significantly less aware of how the course would be taught in comparison to awareness in the other areas (see Figure 10).

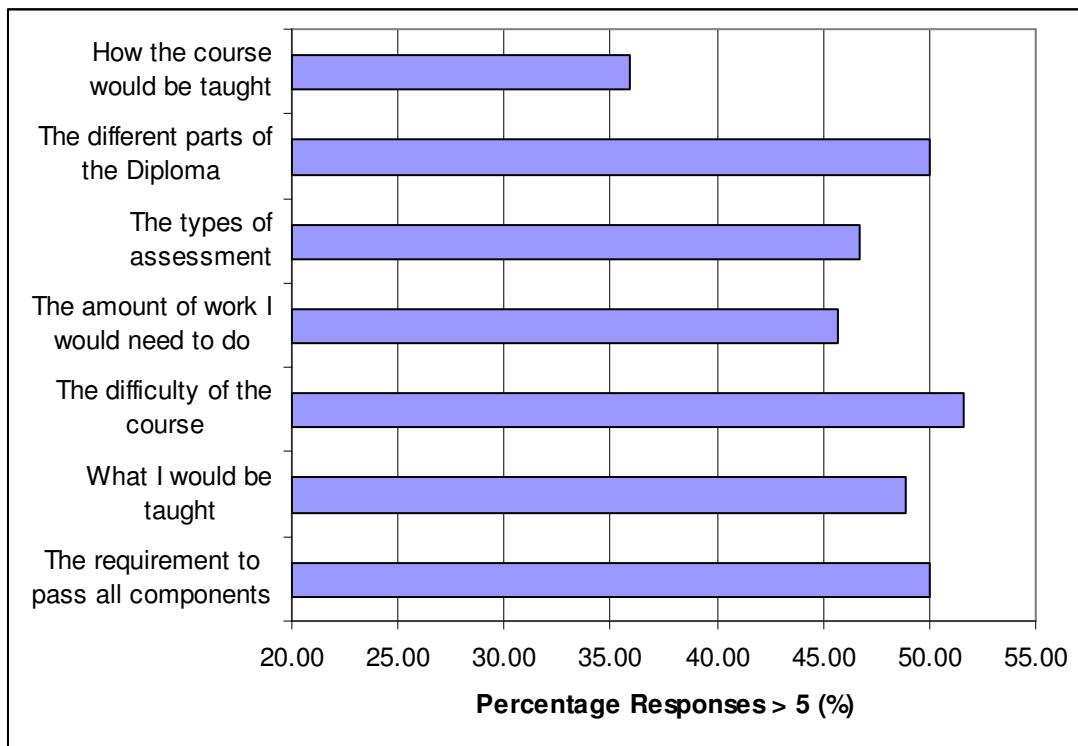


Figure 10. The percentage of students replying that, when starting their Diploma they were aware (a response greater than 5/10) of different aspects of the course. 92 students responded.

This observation was supported in statements from students:

“This entire course has been done completely different to how we were told when we came for the interview”.

(Engineering Student)

“If I had known how the course was taught – mainly the principal learning units, I probably would not have done this course”.

(Information Technology Student)

“They need to give an honest view on how the course is, they explain it as a different course and when you join its nothing like it”.

(Business, Administration and Finance Student)

While students from a wide range of post-16 courses expressed views on IAG, most comments were focused in individual lines of learning. These were often reported at interview by staff, and were seen as major problems with the Diploma course. Two examples are explored here.

First, in the post-16 Hair and Beauty Studies Diploma, staff at all levels reported that students had felt misled by course information and IAG. Staff reported that many students aiming to become hairdressers and beauty therapists did not fully understand what the Diploma qualification represented, and what progression routes it could open up. As one teacher stated,

“I don’t think the information and guidance was quite what it should have been for the post [-16], because they have to realise that even at the end of that year they are not a qualified hairdresser or beauty therapist, and they’ve then got to go and study their chosen area”.

(Teaching Staff)

This highlighted the importance of IAG needing to provide a clear outline of what the course could provide the learner and what progression routes may exist following the qualification.

Second, students on the Creative and Media Diploma often felt that the course they had signed up to was not the course that was delivered. Students reported having been told at interview that the Diploma would allow them to focus on particular areas (for example: drama, photography or fashion), but that the course had not allowed them to do any of these things. One teacher summarised this, by stating that, *“...students have been largely sold a lemon. It was promoted as allowing them to try different things but it doesn’t”*. Another teacher suggested that morale was very low in one group with the, *“...general feeling that the course was one thing – then they arrive on it and it is a very different thing to what they were sold. So I think there is a real confusion over what the course is when they first start”*. In addition to being demoralising to staff and students, this was reported to have been the cause of poor retention of very able students. This example also highlighted the importance of IAG needing to accurately represent the course content.

There were examples of good IAG reported in the pre-16 Diplomas, the structure of which was described in Section 5.2.1. One interviewee explained how pre-16 IAG practices had been constantly adapted to ensure that students and parents were accurately informed of the content of courses, the way it would be taught and what it would give students,

“We learned a lot from previous experiences of YA [Young Apprenticeships] delivery and other courses. For example, many years ago we sold courses in a real marketing sense. So you’d put on a taster session that was absolutely fantastic and kids would love to do it. They then join a course which isn’t like that, there’s bits like that, but they’re not doing that every day of the week so students leave and get disgruntled. We learned from that. Our Diploma taster events are very much, ‘This is what you are going to do. If you can’t handle it for a day this course isn’t for you’. It’s not about bums on seats, it’s about getting the right bums on the right seats.”

(Senior Manager)

5.3 Intake criteria

The final part of the above statement highlighted another key issue connected to IAG, that of getting the ‘right’ students onto the right Diploma course. A large number of the programme managers and teaching staff interviewed felt that the Diplomas were suited to ‘more able’ students, due to the level, quantity and nature of work required. There was a perception that Diplomas were higher level than they were set at. Many of those interviewed suggested that, at least in the initial years of Diploma courses, this had resulted in the ‘wrong sort’ of learners being enrolled on Diplomas. As one interviewee stated:

“As time has gone by it has become evident that students need a more mature, independent attitude. Originally students were not aware of this and the wrong students were recruited.”

(Support Staff)

An example of this was identified in the post-16 foundation level Society, Health and Development Diploma. This course ran for one year (2009/10) and reported very poor results (see Section 3). It was suggested that the downfall of this course had been due to the initial recruitment, with a senior manager stating that, *“Level one were recruited as traditional level ones”*.

A number of Diplomas had addressed initial problems with intake in their selection procedure to attract more ‘academic learners’ to the Diploma. For example, the

Business, Administration and Finance Diploma took the step of raising GCSE entry requirements for post-16 Diplomas in an attempt to address poor functional skills results. The post-16 Information Technology Diploma took similar steps, introducing a functional skills test at the initial assessment and interview stage, which prospective students had to pass to be accepted onto the course. In both of these cases, staff reported much greater confidence that they currently had learners well suited to the course. A possible limitation to these approaches was highlighted by a teacher who expressed concern that, *"...it seems as if some students have been pushed into Diplomas due to exam results, rather than considering what the qualification entails and what the student wants to achieve"*. A number of teachers suggested that the Diploma required a genuine interest in the subject area, and was often of most benefit to students who wanted to end up in management and supervisory roles. However, most staff were satisfied that the most recent Diploma cohorts had been selected appropriately, and were, as one senior manager suggested, *"...good Diploma learners"*.

5.4 Summary

Diploma students were shown to have received IAG in a wide range of forms, from options booklets to taster sessions, with many being satisfied with the IAG they had received. Where there were problems with IAG, they were normally associated with specific courses and related to students not realising what opportunities they would have on a course, and where it would lead them. Teaching staff often reported that IAG and intake criteria had improved to suit the Diploma. However, many students still reported that they were unaware, on starting their Diploma, how the course would be taught.

6. Teaching and delivery

This section examines the teaching and delivery of the Diplomas. First, the models of delivery used are detailed, with a comparison to those reported in national-scale surveys. The learning experiences of Diploma students are then explored, focusing on the teaching methods used, and the inclusion of practical learning and employer engagement, factors integral to the original ethos of the Diplomas.

6.1 Models of delivery

The models of delivery used on the Diplomas investigated in this study varied between age groups and individual courses, and had been subject to considerable change since the Diplomas were first run. Senior management staff reported that while pre-16 and post-16 courses had originally been run using a partnership approach, responsibility for delivery had quickly changed, with OpenOpportunity organising the pre-16 Diplomas and CCN organising the post-16 Diplomas. Therefore, it was appropriate to examine the models of delivery used for the two age groups separately.

6.1.1 Pre-16 Diplomas

Pre-16 Diplomas were delivered over two days each week, with learners travelling from their home institution to be taught in other consortium partners. Of the 20 pre-16 students responding to the survey, 65% reported being taught some or all of their principal learning at CCN, 15% at their home secondary school, and 40% at other secondary schools. More than one response could be selected so figures do not sum to 100%. It was reported by interviewees that due to timetabling constraints, functional skills were delivered by students' home institutions.

Staff confirmed that changes had occurred in the delivery of pre-16 Diplomas since their introduction. One senior manager stated that originally, particularly in the Creative and Media Diploma, the consortium,

“...went for an all singing, all dancing, multi-discipline, mixed teams working on a number of projects at once with multiple teachers and lots of employer engagement.”

(Senior Manager)

This approach was reported to have presented difficulties over the first year of delivery, and interviewees described the need to simplify delivery, “...for reasons of accountability, sanity and communication” (Senior Manager). As a result, delivery was simplified considerably, by reducing the number of teachers and institutions involved. Interviews with teaching staff involved in the Diploma suggested that this change was appreciated by staff and students. The degree to which this simplification occurred appears to have varied from course to course. Some pre-16 lines of learning (including Hospitality, Construction and the Built Environment and Hair and Beauty Studies) retained cross-site teaching, usually being delivered between CCN and a specialist facility located in a secondary school. In contrast, some lines of learning were taught entirely within one institution. An example of this was the pre-16 Information Technology Diploma, which had originally been delivered between CCN and a secondary school, but was being brought, “...entirely in-house...” at the secondary school. Teachers reported that this model of delivery was advantageous for teaching and communication. However, it was acknowledged that the pre-16 students, “...might not like this!”.

Lynch *et al.* (2010) identified four factors as key for the successful collaborative delivery of Diplomas. It was worth exploring these in the context of the shared delivery of the Diplomas investigated in this research. In general, teaching staff on the pre-16 Diplomas reported that they, and students, were happy with the current model of delivery.

- *A willingness to collaborate:* The OpenOpportunity partnership had the advantage of being formed in advance of Diplomas being introduced. As a result, all members had experience of working together to facilitate delivery across institutions.
- *Communication and frequent meetings:* Early in their experience of running the Diplomas, the consortium created the position of Diploma Curriculum Lead (DCL) for each line of learning, drawn from staff across partner institutions. The role of the DCL was intended to facilitate communication between staff on different sites. Despite this role, teachers interviewed raised a number of issues with communication between staff across different sites. For example, one teacher from a secondary school pointed out that despite having been teaching the Diploma since 2009/10, they had never met their DCL, and had little communication with other teachers on the course. Another teacher stated that delivery teams were too large, and that arranging meetings between staff at different sites was problematic. These problems

represented one of the most common causes of dissatisfaction among staff, and was identified as a key area for development in pre-16 provision.

- *Aligning timetables*: The central role of the consortium in organising delivery appeared to have ensured that timetables were aligned and ran smoothly. Only minor timetabling problems were reported on pre-16 Diplomas, primarily involving staff having to move between sites very quickly to fulfil their teaching commitments.
- *Shared protocols*: As with the willingness to collaborate, evidence was seen that the existence of the consortium prior to the Diplomas had allowed the development of shared protocols between centres. Issues such as attendance and discipline were communicated centrally through the consortium (a process that many staff reported could be time consuming and frustrating), while it was indicated that progress reporting had improved significantly.

6.2.2 Post-16 Diplomas

Diplomas for post-16 learners were primarily delivered at CCN and taught by CCN staff. Of 79 post-16 students responding to a question about where they were taught their Diplomas, 100% reported receiving teaching at CCN, while only 3% reported being taught elsewhere. As a senior manager stated, "*The consortium role in post-16 Diplomas has become a matter of finding outside expertise to fill college gaps. Some courses are 100% run and staffed by City College*". Another interviewee described the Diplomas as being, "*...almost fully CCN post-16, including facilities, teaching and line management*". Functional skills were generally taught independently of the principal learning, by functional skills teachers associated with each school.

Lynch *et al.* (2010) indicated that delivery of the whole qualification in one institution was a common approach for post-16 students. Their survey of teaching staff revealed that this was perceived to be the most successful model of delivery. Teachers interviewed in this study were often in agreement with this finding, usually referring to the added complexity of involving other institutions when the college had all of the facilities and staff necessary to teach the Diplomas.

6.2 Learning Experiences

6.2.1 Real world context and practical learning

Teaching using practical, hands-on methods in real-world contexts was central to the original ethos of the 14-19 Diplomas. Most teachers interviewed praised the real-world context of the Diplomas they were teaching, reporting that the Diplomas allowed learners to see how the real world worked and how knowledge was applied in industry. However, concerns about the level of practical learning were raised by teachers in most lines of learning. These views were prevalent amongst teaching staff at CCN.

Concerns often related to the amount of theory taught as part of the Diploma and the expectations students had regarding practical hands-on learning. Only 38% of staff who responded to the survey agreed with the statement that Diploma learning was taught using practical and hands on approaches. Teachers expressed a number of reasons for these views. One suggested that on the Creative and Media Diploma; *“Teachers are trying very hard but struggle to make dry topics interesting”*. On the Hair and Beauty Studies Diploma, staff reported that the timetable (based around 1 hour classes) did not suit practical activities. One teacher gave the example of an hour long hair styling class involving, *“...20 minutes to demonstrate, then by the time they have been shampooed, there are only 2 basins, they end up going out with wet hair because we can't get the subject taught in the time allocated”*. In most lines of learning, teachers reported that large amounts of the specification were taught in a classroom environment using traditional teaching methods due to the amount and nature of the content. One member of staff summarised these experiences;

“My teaching method was to try to encourage the correct learning styles as dictated by the diploma requirements BUT i have changed to a more formal approach to delivery and learning, just to get them through the course. The college has not changed the way time is managed to allow for new methods of delivery, a formal timetable still exists [sic.] and it is impossible to deviate”.

(Teaching Staff)

Some staff suggested that these changes had compromised the real-world context of the Diplomas. One interviewee argued that;

“If you take out the visits and the employers we are pretty much delivering the same as we used to but a lot more of it, and their only resource base is a computer. That’s not the real world”.

(Teaching Staff)

Teaching staff often felt that students struggled with the amount of theory, in particular at level one, and made it clear that students enjoyed the practical learning they did receive. It was suggested that low retention figures on some courses had resulted from learners expecting more practical and hands on learning. This highlighted the importance of accurate IAG for prospective students, though as one teacher replied; *“Even though I was involved in interview and induction they still think it will be easy as they only see the practical content even though we spelt and spell it out to them each year”.*

A large part of providing learning based in a real world context relied on the use of employer engagement by teachers. 17 (81%) survey respondents reported having used employer engagement in their teaching. One teacher reported not having used employers but intending to in the future, while three teachers reported that they did not intend to use employer engagement in their teaching. The types of engagement used by teachers are detailed in Figure 11. In similar patterns to those identified at a national scale (Lynch *et al.*,2010), the most common forms of employer engagement were the provision of speakers and one-off visits, with work placements and the provision of projects from employers being less extensively used.

Interviews with staff revealed that the forms of employer engagement used were strongly influenced by the time and effort required to organise them. Teaching staff explained that organising trips and employer engagement was made particularly difficult by the lack of support provided. They reported that opportunities had to be organised by individual staff. Comments included;

“...it complicates things. Risk assessments, consents, cover. You can’t just say ‘this afternoon we are going into the city’. I’ve got a full teaching timetable as well”.

(Teaching Staff)

“I got interest from a developer to run visits. However, I’ve now got to organise it alone, there is nobody to help me. It needs to have a purpose built staff to arrange things”.

(Teaching Staff)

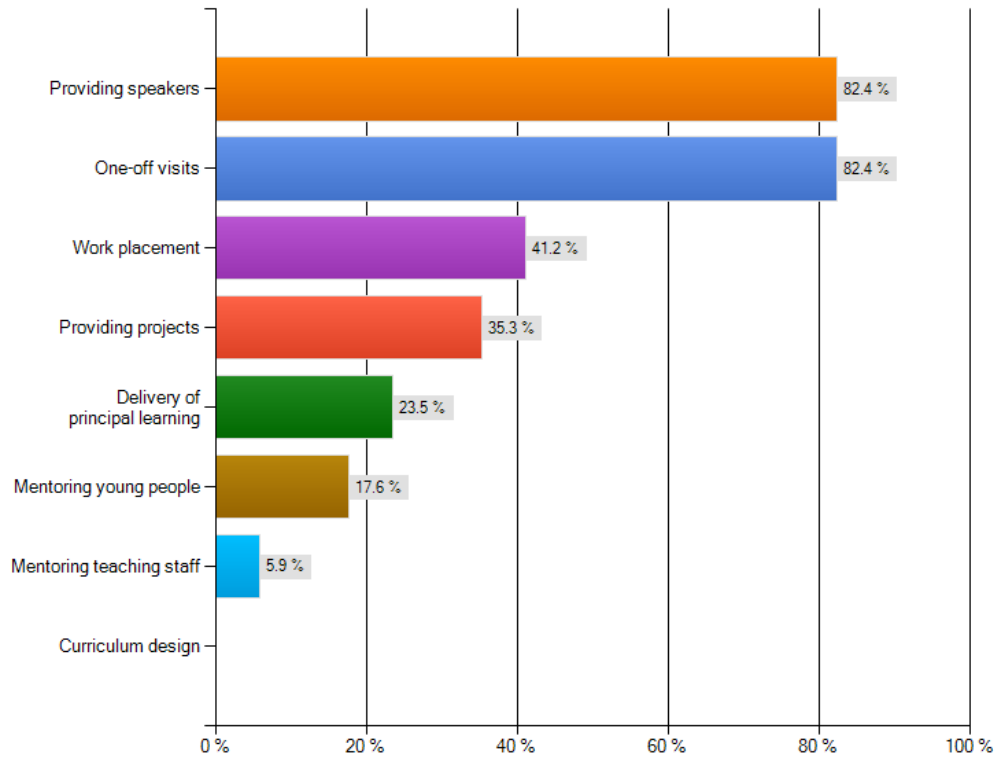


Figure 11. Types of employer engagement used by Diploma teaching staff. 17 staff responded to the question. Percentages may sum to more than 100% as more than one option could be selected.

Student responses supported many of the views expressed by staff. One of the factors that learners enjoyed the least about their Diploma was the methods of teaching used, mostly focused around the lack of practical opportunities and the amount of classroom-based learning. In contrast, students reported enjoying work-based and practical learning opportunities that they had received.

While there were criticisms of the amount of theory and classroom based teaching, and the difficulties of organising trips and employer engagement, many good examples of real-world context and practical learning in Diploma teaching were reported. In particular, the facilities at CCN allowed practical learning in authentic sector-relevant environments, such as the Debut Restaurant and kitchens for Hospitality students while Hair and Beauty students were taught practical techniques in salon environments. Other good examples encountered included: Creative and

Media Diploma students involved in organising and running events such as fashion shows, music events and anti-bullying campaigns; Construction and the Built Environment students visiting construction sites in the region; Business Administration and Finance students planning and setting up small businesses, and Travel and Tourism students involved in a research project with Norwich Castle Museum. In all of these examples, teachers reported that students had been more engaged with learning, and had benefitted from the opportunity to work with employers in a real work context. As one teacher described, after organising a tour of an employer's headquarters, "*...the students were interested and it sparked discussion ... If I had tried to do this in the classroom it would have been meaningless*".

These examples highlighted the importance of practical learning opportunities and employer engagement in fulfilling the ethos of the Diploma. However, a number of barriers to this were identified. These barriers were, first, the amount of theory in the Diploma specifications and, second, a lack of support for teachers in organising and running these opportunities. In a few cases, teachers reported using practical learning and employer engagement in all aspects of Diploma teaching. These staff often supported the view that support was lacking and that the onus should not always be on individual teachers to provide opportunities. However, as one teacher described,

"If you get in the mindset it makes it. As a teacher you have to open your mind. I think where Diplomas do fail it is where teachers think of it as a traditional classroom activity. It's not. "

(Teaching Staff)

They went on to suggest that, "*The Diploma is there, its open, and that's probably what scares some people, they have moved out of their comfort zone*". While this research found some evidence of individual staff being reluctant to embrace the full ethos of the Diploma in their teaching, the perception expressed by most was that a more comprehensive network of support could have facilitated a more engaging experience for learners.

6.2.2 Independent learning

Independent learning was identified as another key area in the original ethos of the Diploma. A large proportion of student respondents reported that they enjoyed opportunities to work independently. One teacher explained how they had changed

their teaching methods for the Diploma; *“As a traditional ‘classroom’ teacher I have had to pass on a lot of the control of the course to the students”*. Another teacher described their experience;

“The first thing I did was go in teaching like a GCSE class and messed it up something chronic. It took 4-5 weeks to realise what the problem was. I needed to get into a facilitator role. Then it became so much fun to teach”.

(Teaching Staff)

Most teachers responded positively to this shift in control. For example, a Creative and Media teacher explained that students were managing their own learning, setting aims and negotiating deadlines, *“...to the point that they were almost running themselves. They have reacted well to it”*.

There were few examples of teachers reporting problems with independent learning. One interviewee suggested that less able students sometimes found being given independence challenging, particularly given limited teaching time. For example, they stated that,

“When students have no concept of taking notes, how can they be expected to compile a project or complex assignment or research? They are struggling with the independent learning aspect. In the main they can’t cope with it”.

(Teaching Staff)

Another teacher suggested that the amount of material to teach and the nature of controlled assessment had limited the amount of independent learning that could take place in teaching hours, and that students were unlikely to do much work independently outside of college. However, on the whole, it was reported that independent learning was being promoted in Diploma teaching and having had a positive impact on learning experiences.

6.2.3 Holistic learning

The Diplomas were seen by many as an opportunity to avoid linear teaching approaches, by avoiding compartmentalisation and by providing closer integration between different elements of the principal learning (Lynch *et al.*, 2010). However, Lynch *et al.* (2010) found that these approaches were often not practised. Teaching

staff reported similar issues, with many teachers indicating that while their Diploma teaching included innovative approaches, opportunities for holistic teaching were limited by the assessment model and the amount of work required.

Some examples of successful holistic learning were reported. Teachers on the Business, Administration and Finance Diploma indicated that teaching was linked well across the principal learning units, with staff working together to deliver content from across the specification. Teachers on the pre-16 Public Services and Information Technology Diplomas also reported successful linking between units, and the use of broad, holistic patterns of teaching and learning. However, there was little evidence of holistic learning in other Diplomas. Teaching staff most frequently reported that the principal learning units were taught independently of each other. One teacher suggested that;

“Students don’t see how the different components of the course work together. They are encouraged to look at it as eight separate units. This seems to be against the Diploma ethos”.

(Teaching Staff)

Another interviewee reported that, *“...linking between units rarely occurs, despite clear links existing”.*

The reasons for this mode of teaching were explained by interviewees. First, a number of staff reported that students preferred the delivery of units to be separated as it gave them a clearer indication of what they had to achieve in each unit. Second, teachers reported that the nature of controlled assessments had restricted teaching options. As one teacher indicated;

“Issues started to come when assessment began: a broad learning experience quickly became limited and prescribed. Teach broad, assess narrow was being asked, but we could no longer teach broad and ended up teaching to assessment”.

(Teaching Staff)

The perception that teaching had been narrowed as a result of the assessment structure was common. Staff responding to the survey reported strong agreement with the statement that the principal learning component was taught ‘to assessment’ (a mean of 6.9 on a scale from one to ten). Many interviewees indicated that that this

was compounded by the amount of work required for the Diploma. As one teacher stated, the students, “...struggle with the fast pace trying to fit it into a 30 week year. They don’t have time to enjoy what they have done. Every day is spent working non-stop”. In one line of learning, teachers reported that in the first year of running, “...we started off delivering all the teaching and then doing the controlled assessment”. It was explained that this model of teaching and assessment had not worked because, “...of the nature of the student profile. It was too much at too high level all at once, and was forgotten by assessment”. In most cases, interviewees felt that the lack of holistic teaching occurred as a result of the nature of the Diploma, and that a more linear approach suited the qualification more. However, one interviewee suggested that, given time, holistic teaching could have been developed effectively;

“Teaching style and linking is important. If it stood it would become easier and linking between units would have been easier. It could have been seamless and more creative”.

(Teaching Staff)

6.3 Response to individual Diploma components

6.3.1 Enjoyment of different components

The teaching and learning reported in Section 6.2 largely related to the principal learning units. However, the different components of the Diploma had significantly different responses from students and teaching staff. Figure 12 shows the mean responses from students when asked if they agreed with the statement that they enjoyed working towards each individual component of the Diploma. Teaching staff were asked a similar question in relation to the student’s enjoyment of the different components. ASL and work experience were reported by both groups to be the most enjoyed, while functional skills and PLTS were the least enjoyed. A student t-test showed the reported levels of functional skills and PLTS enjoyment to be significantly lower than other components at the 95% confidence level. There were no significant differences between the principal learning, ASL, work experience and project components. The remainder of this section looks at the delivery of, and response to, these individual components.

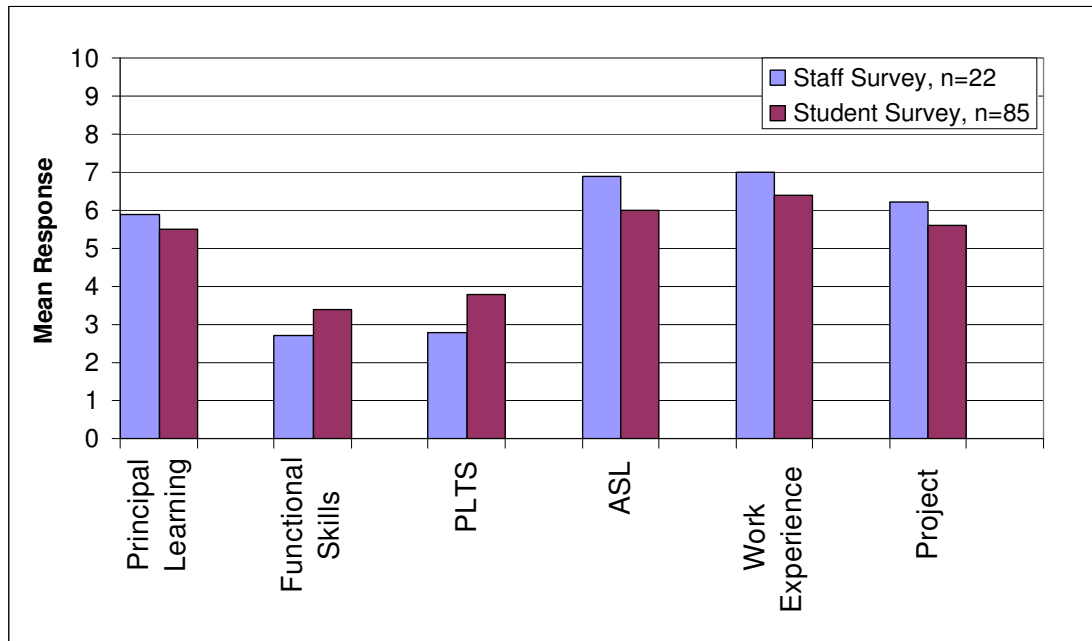


Figure 12. Mean survey responses from staff (n=22) and students (n=85) regarding students' enjoyment of individual components of the Diploma rated on a scale from one to ten.

6.3.2 ASL

As suggested in Figure 12, units studied as part of the ASL component were one of the most enjoyed parts of the Diploma. This was supported by the high number of students referring to specific units (usually ASL) as factors that they most enjoyed about their Diploma (see Appendix 2). Interviewees suggested that students enjoyed the ASL component because it often contained more practical work than the principal learning. A specific example of this was seen in the Information Technology Diploma, in both pre-16 and post-16 courses. This Diploma had been criticised by students for being too business orientated (Lynch *et al.*, 2010; Ofsted, 2009, 2010). This view was supported in this research. One interviewee explained the choice of ASL offered;

“We tried to add in hands on working with computers, for example networking, website design, games design and graphics. Students enjoy these aspects. Other components are too business orientated”.

(Teaching Staff)

While ASL units were enjoyed by students, staff on some lines of learning reported problems in selecting ASL units to run. These problems were often caused by the stringent rules dictating the selection of ASL; that they had to be at the same level as the learner's Diploma, that they had to be approved as part of the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) and that they could not overlap more than 50% with the

principal learning content. In particular, issues were reported by staff from three lines of learning; Business, Administration and Finance, Hospitality, and Travel and Tourism.

In the case of the Business, Administration and Finance Diploma, staff reported that, to meet the interest of students and to provide an industry recognised qualification, they would like to offer an Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) qualification for advanced level Diploma students. However, they suggested that the level three AAT qualification was too complex, but that the Diploma did not allow advanced level students to take a level two ASL qualification. As a result, an A-Level in accounting had been offered, though this was not considered to be as applied and had also returned poor results. Staff involved in the Hospitality Diploma had experienced extensive problems with selecting ASL due to the small range of qualifications meeting the criteria, particularly at level three. As a result, Hospitality Diploma students were offered a large number of small ASL units. This option was not considered by staff to be effective or efficient. Finally, staff involved in the Travel and Tourism Diploma reported that their (and the students') preferred ASL option (cabin crew), had not been possible, due to the lack of a funding stream, and that an aviation qualification had been offered instead.

6.3.3 Functional skills

As identified in Section 3, functional skills represented the largest barrier to the successful completion of the Diploma. This was supported by a large number of interviewees and was reflected in measures of students' enjoyment of the component (Figure 12). Teaching staff reported that students, "*...don't understand why they have to do it...*", that "*...they hate it...*", and that functional skills were, "*...demoralising for students and staff*". Interviewees provided a myriad of reasons as to why this was the case.

First, a number of interviewees suggested that functional skills were too hard for Diploma learners, in particular the requirement to pass all of them at the same level as the Diploma. A desire to allow learners to complete functional skills at lower levels and still complete the Diploma was common. However, a number of staff argued that functional skills were not too hard, and instead represented a standard that learners should be able to achieve. One senior manager suggested that, "*...to scrap or lower the level of functional skills because they are too hard would be to fall at the first hurdle*". Staff with this view often suggested that the larger problem with functional skills was the limited number of guided learning hours assigned to it. As one

functional skills teacher argued; *“I teach them for one hour a week [for each functional skill]. It’s not sufficient. If you gave me twice the time they would all pass”*.

Second, very little evidence was seen of functional skills teaching being integrated into the principal learning. Instead, functional skills were taught in discrete lessons. One senior manager reported that, *“...the way it is taught there is no bridge between functional skills and principal learning”*. This was often seen to be a result of the assessment methods for functional skills, where, *“...the exam requires jumping through hoops separate to the principal learning”* (Senior Manager). Where teachers did report integrating functional skills learning with principal learning, for example calculating ratios of ingredients in Hospitality, they acknowledged that these opportunities made little contribution to learners’ ability to pass the functional skills exam. In post-16 Diplomas, learners were taught functional skills in groups related to their line of learning, giving teachers the opportunity to provide context driven examples. One teacher described their approach to functional skills teaching; *“For the first ten sessions I introduce the key topics, then I incorporate it into real life situations, preferably on the Diploma line topic”*. In contrast, functional skills in the pre-16 Diplomas were usually delivered to groups of students from a range of Diplomas, and in some case as part of GCSE maths and English classes. One teacher explained that this was a result of the low numbers of Diploma students in individual lines of learning, adding; *“Much as we’d like to teach the utopia, it’s not the way it works. Number is the constraint”*.

Despite difficulties with functional skills, a number of interviewees indicated that results were improving as a result of changing strategies and more stringent intake criteria (see Section 5). One teacher described how they were pushing their students through functional skills, *“...every month until they pass”*, while some senior management staff referred to the provision of after-hours classes and re-sit opportunities to get students through functional skills. Another teacher stressed the need for functional skills to be, *“...better organised and taught, preferably early in the course to allow re-takes”*.

6.3.4 Project

Good results were reported in the project component. A number of interviewees praised the project for creating an opportunity for independence and free thinking. In the few cases that interviewees were more negative about the project, criticisms focused on it being too dry and research based. One teacher suggested that, *“...the*

project got the best results, but was ultimately a dry dissertation". Another teacher indicated that the research skills necessary for the project were challenging for students, in particular the need to provide a long written report. They argued that, *"The project is good for stretching the more able students, but not so good for others"*. However, the majority of interviewees reported that the project was the best part of the Diploma, with some suggesting that they intended to use it as a stand-alone component in future years if the Diploma was no longer being taught.

6.3.5 Work experience

As with the project, work experience was very well received by staff and students, and was achieved by the vast majority of learners. Interviewees particularly valued the industry-relevant context of work experience for Diploma students. A few staff reported problems finding placements for large groups of students, and some suggested that students were unwilling to undertake work experience in their holidays (a necessity due to timetabling constraints). However, most reported that work experience placements had been found for students, and that it was an essential part of providing work-based learning opportunities.

6.3.6 PLTS

Survey results showed the PLTS component of the Diploma to be almost as unpopular as the functional skills component, despite much higher success rates. Students often suggested that they didn't understand what PLTS were for, or why they had to complete them. One teacher suggested that, *"...students don't like PLTS and don't understand the purpose of it. It's a lot of hard work for nothing"*. It was reported that the lack of student engagement with PLTS was a result of the way that they were taught, with students being asked to complete PLTS evidence in sessions separate to their principal learning. Very few teachers reported encouraging learners to think about PLTS during the principal learning, with PLTS often considered by teachers as a *"...tick-box exercise..."* to be completed at a later stage. This lack of integration of PLTS with the principal learning led to disengagement by students. In the best example of PLTS teaching reported, a group of students had been encouraged to complete PLTS diaries, which they could later draw upon for the evidence they needed. This helped to link the PLTS with the context-driven principal learning and other experiences.

Staff from different lines of learning reported extensive problems with the electronic system used to submit evidence of PLTS, citing issues of bugs, glitches and slow feedback. While these issues were largely addressed, staff felt that the system had

complicated the submission of evidence for the PLTS components, and had added to their workload, rather than eased it. One teacher commented that;

“The electronic system went down for 2 months, then returned with a new site that nobody knew how to work or submit material. No support was given for using the new system”.

(Teaching Staff)

6.4 Summary

This section examined the delivery and teaching of the Diplomas. In most cases, changes to the model of delivery had been implemented since the Diplomas were first introduced, with delivery most commonly being simplified. Pre-16 Diplomas were seen to run a cross-site consortium model, while post-16 students were most likely to be registered and taught at CCN by CCN staff. Both models of delivery were perceived by staff to be successful, though the importance of communication between staff was identified as key. Evidence of good practice was reported in providing hands-on, context driven learning in most Diplomas, with teachers frequently using employers to engage students. However, a number of staff commented that the amount of practical and holistic learning offered was restricted, firstly by the assessment structure of the Diplomas and secondly by a lack of support for individual teachers.

The ASL, project and work experience components were identified as most enjoyed by students, while functional skills and PLTS were least enjoyed. It was suggested that students struggled to engage with these components in real contexts, and instead thought of them as extras that they had to, rather than wanted to, complete as part of their Diploma.

7 Assessment and feedback

The type and amount of assessment associated with the Diploma was considered by many interviewees to be the largest difference from other qualifications. This section investigates views of these assessment procedures and the issues raised by teachers regarding the assessment, moderation and feedback of Diploma students' work.

7.1 Assessment methods

7.1.1 Controlled internal assessment

The majority of Diploma assessment took the form of controlled internal assessments. Crucial to this form of assessment was the fact that learners were supervised while producing all evidence for assignments. This was significantly different to assessment methods used for other qualifications, with staff most commonly highlighting differences with the less controlled assessments of BTECs. Interviewees were very positive about controlled assessments. As one teacher indicated; *“Controlled assessments are good and manageable and a good focus for the students. They know what has to be done when, and they only get one chance at it. Job done”*. Teachers were particularly positive about the fact that students could not continue to resubmit assessments indefinitely. This was thought to motivate students, *“...giving them a better mindset from the start”*, and provided, *“a more rigorous framework for assessment”*. Interviewees reported that assessments were engaging for students and praised the fact that; *“Assignments are now in a real-life context”*.

Where issues with controlled internal assessment arose, staff identified two main problems. First, moderation and feedback problems were common, and are addressed in Section 7.2. Second, some staff identified a lack of support materials for assessments, with a number suggesting that awarding bodies had failed to provide materials that were promised. As one teacher reported; *“We made contact with Edexcel and received half a day of training, they promised us sample assignments but we received nothing”*. Another commented that; *“We started in September not knowing what we were doing, from how you write assignments, to how the marking grids work, to how you mark them”*. Issues with provision of sample assessments were specific to individual lines of learning, primarily those in the third phase of Diplomas. Teachers in other lines reported that, while provision of materials

had been limited originally, they were now able to make good use of sample assessments. One such teacher reported that; *“Assessment has been good so far. Creating assignments has pretty much been done for me”*.

7.1.2 External examinations

In addition to internal assessments, assessment of the principal learning component included some externally examined papers. Staff that commented on the external exams felt that they were a valuable addition to the Diploma, as they increased the academic rigour of the qualification. However, a number of interviewees raised issues regarding the relationship between the content of the exams and the principal learning specification. One interviewee described their students' experience of external exams,

“We started to go through external exams and began to get very poor results, we never got good feedback and mark schemes were very complicated. The exams were just too difficult. Some teachers couldn't come up with the desired answers”.

(Teaching Staff)

A number of staff reported similar experiences, with some reporting that desired answers had not matched the principal learning specification. This was reported as having been a particular problem in the external exam for the advanced level Information Technology Diploma. An interviewee reported that, *“The language in the delivery material that had been produced by Edexcel was not the language used in the exam. There were technical questions involving terminology that students had never been taught”*. These experiences were reported to be compounded by a lack of feedback and information from awarding bodies regarding assessments and mark schemes.

7.2 Moderation and feedback

The most common criticism of Diploma assessments was a lack of feedback from awarding bodies regarding mark schemes and assessment. A large number of interviewees reported that they had received no feedback at all regarding assessment. For example, a teacher suggested, *“I started this year not knowing if last year was done right”*. Staff reported that the complexity of Diploma mark schemes made the lack of feedback particularly damaging, making it much harder to

give students good feedback on their progress. Respondents to the student survey indicated that this uncertainty had an effect on students' experiences, with a significant number listing lack of feedback and guidance as things they least enjoyed about their course.

The issue of moderation also elicited some strong responses from interviewees. A particular worry for many staff was the amount of work required to internally moderate the volume of assessments required for the Diploma. In one case it was reported that this role would fall on individual teaching staff due to the removal of the domain assessor position. In relation to this, one senior manager reported;

“The Diploma assessment expectation is huge. All seven units have to have samples moderated ... To expect colleagues to do this without extra reward is too much to ask.”

(Senior Manager)

There were also some significant issues with external moderation of work by awarding bodies. A number of staff reported being confused by moderating decisions, with one teacher suggesting that, *“Moderators don't have a handle on the quantity or quality of material that has to be provided. It is inconsistent”*. An example of this was reported in the higher level Information Technology Diploma, which received very poor principal learning results. One interviewee described their experience of moderation,

“We had abysmal results on internal assessments. Marks we put through were decimated in moderation. It was due to moderation inconsistency rather than poor marking. The exam board expected specific answers and were inflexible in what responses could be accepted.”

(Senior Manager)

Another interviewee described how this example demonstrated the importance of national benchmarks in assessing achievement. As a result of a lack of benchmarks and a limited understanding of the demands of the qualification, staff had been unable to prepare students adequately for assessment. It was suggested that guidance from awarding bodies had since improved, and that the assessment criteria were now better understood. This was supported by staff from a range of lines of learning, suggesting that many of the problems with assessment and moderation

represented 'teething problems' with a new qualification and a lack of experience regarding the standards and demands of the Diplomas. As one member of staff indicated; "*Once you have learnt the system it is much easier to assess [than the BTECs], more consistent*".

7.3 Summary

A large number of interviewees commented that controlled assessments represented one of the largest differences between the Diploma and other qualifications such as BTECs. Most interviewees indicated that controlled assessments were beneficial and served to motivate students. Where problems were identified with assessments, staff reported poor feedback and support from awarding bodies, and inconsistencies in mark schemes and moderation decisions. However, these were generally seen as symptoms of a new and untested qualification.

8 Progression

The issue of progression is central to the successful running of any qualification. This section explores perceptions of progression from the Diplomas, looking at whether or not the Diplomas were considered sector relevant, and the progression options that were available to students following their Diploma.

8.1 Sector relevance

A number of interviewees suggested that sector relevance was key to the success of the Diploma. In cases where the Diploma was seen to be providing the best opportunities, it was reported that not only was the qualification relevant, but that it attracted a different 'type' of learner, who would not benefit as much from other qualifications. In other areas, those interviewed reported that there, "*was not space for the Diplomas*", and that pre-existing qualifications had provided a full progression framework for students.

In many lines of learning staff reported that the Diploma was relevant to post-16 learners looking to take 'a more academic route' into the sector. Staff involved in the Business, Administration and Finance, Creative Media, Construction and the Built Environment, Engineering and Travel and Tourism Diplomas suggested that the Diploma was particularly suitable for learners wanting to progress to university. For example, a Construction and the Built Environment teacher indicated that the Diploma offered, "*...a good progression route to careers such as surveyors, architects, etc*". Another teacher on the Construction and the Built Environment course suggested that the level three Diploma was not suitable for those that wanted to enter a trade directly, as it did not offer a competency. Other lines of learning were also identified as being relevant to learners wanting to enter more managerial and supervisory roles in their sector. For example, Information Technology teachers indicated that the Diploma was relevant to learners interested in, "*applications of IT and IT use in business*", but was not suitable for those who were interested in hands on technician roles and PC maintenance. Central to all of these examples was the perception that there was a specific group of students who would benefit from the Diploma over other alternatives.

In contrast to these examples, staff on some lines of learning argued that the Diploma was not sector relevant to students, and that pre-existing provision (usually

BTEC National Diplomas) had offered appropriate progression routes for students. An interviewee involved in the Society, Health and Development Diploma argued that; *“The National Diplomas offer a much better option in this sector; we don’t need the 14-19 Diplomas”*. Staff involved in the Hair and Beauty Diploma suggested that the Diploma was not suitable for post-16 learners, because;

“They all want to be hairdressers and beauticians but at the end of the course they don’t have a qualification that allows them to be a hairdresser or beautician. It’s not a competent qualification.”

(Teaching Staff)

As a result, staff reported post-16 learners needing to progress ‘sideways’, or even backwards in order to enter the industry they wanted to be in.

Perceptions regarding the sector relevance of the pre-16 Diplomas were very different to the post-16 Diplomas. Interviewees who reported a lack of sector relevance for post-16 learners often indicated that the qualification was a good introduction to the sector for pre-16 students. This view was particularly prevalent in the Hair and Beauty Studies Diploma. As one interviewee commented;

“Pre-16 it is a really nice qualification because they are still at school, and if they are thinking ‘do I want to be a hairdresser or beauty therapist when I leave school?’, they have a good knowledge of the industry”.

(Teaching Staff)

A teacher on the Construction and the Built Environment shared a similar view; *“For 14-16s it is a good insight into the industry. Post-16 we gather students that don’t really know what to do”*. This was supported by the relatively high proportion of post-16 Diploma learners who indicated that they had chosen the Diploma because they didn’t know what else to do (see Table 5).

8.2 Progression routes

8.2.1 Desired progression routes

Respondents to the student survey were asked what they intended to do once they had finished their course. The results of this question are shown in Table 6.

Foundation and higher level Diploma students were most likely to want to continue to do a course at college (41.0%). Pre-16 students were likely to express an interest in courses in school sixth forms (25.0%, not shown in table). In contrast, advanced level Diploma students were most likely to want to do a job with training (38.0%) or do a course at university (37.9%). These results showed similar patterns to a question asked to Diploma students as part of a national scale survey (Lynch *et al.*, 2010).

Table 6. Percentages of respondents intending to follow progression routes after completing their Diploma. More than one option could be selected so options do not sum to 100%.

Desired progression	% Advanced Level (n = 58)	% Foundation and Higher Level (n = 39)
Course in a school 6 th form	1.7	12.8
Course at college	10.3	41.0
Course at another training provider	5.2	0.0
Apprenticeship	10.3	18.0
Job with training	38.0	12.8
Job without training	12.1	10.3
Course at a university	37.9	18.0
Don't Know	22.4	12.8
Other	3.5	5.1

Students studying for foundation and higher level Diplomas were also asked whether they would consider studying for another Diploma after their current course. Of 35 respondents opinions were mixed, with 37.1% of students stating that they would consider a Diploma and 34.3% stating that they would not do another Diploma. The remaining respondents were not sure. Pre-16 Diploma students were more likely to be interested in studying for another Diploma (45% of responses compared to only 30% who did not want to do another Diploma).

8.2.2 Actual progression routes

Only limited progression data was available for use in this study. An examination of progression data collected by OpenOpportunity from 67 pre-16 students who completed Diplomas in 2009/10 showed that 41.8% had progressed to courses in a college (predominantly CCN), 14.9% had progressed to study A/ AS-Levels (either in

school sixth forms or at CCN) and 3.0% were studying GCSEs. No information had been collected for 40.1% of students. Interestingly, only two students were recorded as having progressed onto 14-19 Diploma courses.

In contrast, interviewees involved in post-16 Diplomas at CCN reported good student progression between Diploma levels. Progression from higher level to advanced level was reported in the Creative and Media Diploma (though the higher level course was no longer run due to poor uptake). Interviewees involved in the Business, Administration and Finance Diploma suggested that students had progressed between all levels. Staff reported poor progression from higher level to advanced level in the Hospitality Diploma, though this was not considered to be unusual in the sector. Relatively little progression was reported from foundation level Diplomas to higher level Diplomas. This was possibly due to the perception that the learners recruited for foundation courses were not suited to the Diploma, and could explain the huge reduction in the number of foundation courses run for both pre-16 and post-16 learners. One secondary school teacher summarised their concerns over the foundation Diploma;

“The Foundation student has had a raw deal, in my opinion. The Foundation Diploma offered little encouragement when the highest achievable grade is a 'D' equivalent. It is my feeling that if these same students had opted for a GCSE, then it is likely that some would have achieved a 'C'. This would have meant that they would have been able to enter a higher stream post 16.”

(Teaching Staff)

Many interviewees focused on issues of progression from advanced Diplomas to Higher Education, a desired progression route for many learners (Table 6). Information from a national-scale survey of students completing Diplomas in 2009/10 suggested that of 743 applications to UCAS, 68% were accepted onto a course starting in 2010 (UCAS, 2010). These were most commonly accepted to the ‘teaching-led’ higher education institutions. Staff interviewed in this study reported mixed experiences of Diploma progression to Higher Education. Construction and the Built Environment reported particular success, with one teacher suggesting that, “...those that applied to university were successful. Last year it was five out of fifteen and it should be similar numbers this year”. In contrast, staff involved in the Creative and Media Diploma reported that they had experienced, “...some issues with universities favouring the BTEC”. Other lines of learning had not yet completed any

advanced level courses, but often reported that students were applying to universities. However, many remained unsure of how Higher Education Institutions would receive the Diplomas, with some citing experience of institutions failing to understand the structure and value of the qualification. For example, one Business, Administration and Finance teacher explained their, “...concerns regarding university entry. Two universities have contacted me asking what the Diploma is. They only seem to want A-Levels”. Another member of teaching staff commented;

“There is some confusion from organisations over what the Diploma is and how many UCAS points it is worth. They find it hard to understand what the predicted grades mean with all the different components”.

(Teaching Staff)

These concerns were exacerbated by uncertainty over the Diploma’s future, with worries that the Diploma would be devalued if it were to be stopped.

8.3 Summary

Most interviewees were positive about progression options from the Diploma. In many lines of learning it was suggested that the Diploma provided good progression options for a specific type of learner, those interested in entering management and supervisory roles, and those interested in university. In contrast, the Diplomas were often not seen as being suitable for learners who wanted to enter a trade directly, as they did not offer a competency. The Diplomas were seen as being beneficial for pre-16 students interested in an industry, as they were considered to give a good introduction to the area to allow students to make up their minds. Progression was reported between levels of Diploma in many lines, and successful progression to higher education was reported in some instances. However, there were still a number of concerns over the attitudes towards, and understanding of Diplomas by higher education institutions.

9 Conclusions

This report has focused on the experiences of staff and students involved in Diplomas at CCN, and as part of the OpenOpportunity consortium in Norwich. Diplomas from all three phases were examined (those starting in 2008, 2009 and 2010), and the opportunity was taken to investigate how individual institutions and collections of institutions had managed and delivered the Diplomas. This contrasts with studies that have been completed on a national scale that have taken a broader approach to reviewing Diploma implementation. This section presents a summary of the key finding, and is intended to provide a framework for future development of the Diplomas, and other 14-19 qualifications.

9.1 Summary of findings

On a regional scale, CCN and OpenOpportunity have provided for over 60% of Diploma learners, with CCN contributing 5% of Diploma provision nationally for post-16 learners. Levels of achievement were comparable to national figures. Functional skills presented the main barrier to achievement. Principal learning achievement varied significantly between courses, and was particularly poor in the first year of the Diplomas. However, it was suggested that results had since improved in most lines of learning. Where results were still poor, staff indicated specific problems, often with IAG and the role of exam boards. The reasons for these patterns were explored in this research.

Examples of good practice were seen in the management and delivery of many of the Diplomas investigated. There was considerable variation between different lines of learning. However, a number of issues were identified, and scope for improvement was seen in a number of areas. Problems that had arisen were found to have been caused by a range of factors at different scales. These included issues that had occurred as a result of: the structure and design of the Diploma (eg. the requirement to pass functional skills), the role of awarding bodies (eg. provision of supporting materials), the role of the college and consortium (eg. management of delivery models), and the role of individual teachers (eg. teaching methods and approaches).

Most staff reported feeling underprepared when they started teaching on the Diplomas. Reasons for this included a sense that the implementation of Diplomas had been rushed and that initial training and support from awarding bodies had not

been specific enough. Teachers were likely to have felt significantly more prepared in their more recent teaching, primarily due to gaining experience with the Diploma. This was best facilitated through regular meetings between staff, in particular when dealing with staff based in other institutions. However, a number of staff reported that this was not occurring, and that improved networks of communication between staff managing and teaching different components would improve teaching and learners' experiences.

Diploma students were shown to have received IAG in a wide range of forms, from options booklets to taster sessions, with many being satisfied with the IAG they had received. Where there were problems with IAG, they were normally associated with specific courses, and related to students not realising what opportunities they would have on a course (as identified in the Creative and Media Diploma), and where it would lead them (as seen in the post-16 Hair and Beauty Diplomas). A large number of interviewees stressed the need to get the right students onto the Diplomas, and in many cases indicated that this had not been the case initially, though had improved. However, many students still reported that they had been unaware how the course would be taught on starting their Diploma.

Pre-16 Diplomas ran as a cross-site consortium model of delivery, while post-16 students were most likely to be registered and taught at CCN by CCN staff. Both models of delivery were perceived by staff to be successful. Evidence of good practice was reported in providing hands-on, context driven learning in most Diplomas, with teachers frequently using employers to engage students. However, a number of staff commented that the amount of practical and holistic learning offered was restricted, firstly by the assessment structure of the Diplomas and secondly by a lack of support for individual teachers. The ASL, project and work experience components were identified as most enjoyed by students, primarily due to their practical applications, while functional skills and PLTS were least enjoyed. It was suggested that students struggled to engage with these components in real contexts, and instead thought of them as extras that they had to, rather than wanted to, complete as part of their Diploma.

Controlled assessments were seen as beneficial, as they provided a more rigorous structure that motivated students, though many staff reported that the amount of assessment was very large, requiring extensive time to arrange, mark and moderate. Where serious problems were identified with assessments, staff reported poor feedback and support from awarding bodies, and inconsistencies in mark schemes

and moderation decisions. However, these were generally seen as symptoms of a new and untested qualification, and were often reported as having improved.

In many lines of learning it was suggested that the Diploma provided good progression options for a specific type of learner, those interested in entering management and supervisory roles, and those interested in higher education courses. In contrast, the Diplomas were often not seen as being suitable for learners who wanted to enter a trade directly, as they did not offer a competency, or sufficient practical skills. The Diplomas were largely seen as being beneficial for pre-16 students interested in an industry, as they were considered to give a good introduction to the area to allow students to make up their minds. However, concerns were raised over the value of the foundation level qualification. Successful progression to higher education from the advanced Diploma was reported in the few courses that had been completed. However, concerns existed over the attitudes towards, and understanding of Diplomas by higher education institutions.

9.2 Key areas for development

As a result of the analysis completed as part of this study, a series number of key areas for development have been identified. These recommendations build upon the examples of good practice seen in the Diplomas, and address some of the problems that were found to have arisen. They are intended to be applicable not just to Diploma implementation, but in many cases represent factors important to 14-19 courses more generally.

9.2.1 Recruitment

IAG was shown to play a crucial role in recruiting the 'right students' for the Diplomas. The quality of IAG varied significantly between Diploma lines, in particular for post-16 courses. Successful examples of IAG identified gave students clear and accurate expectations of their course. In these examples, teachers reported better engagement and achievement from students. In contrast, in some lines of learning staff and students reported IAG to have been misleading. Interviewees felt that this had led to the wrong type of students being recruited for the Diploma. Therefore, it is important that IAG provided, and the intake criteria used to select students, are accurate, well-considered and consistent.

9.2.2 Communication

Communication was highlighted as one of the most important issues for the successful running of the Diploma in interviews for this research, and in other reports (Lynch *et al.*, 2010). It was seen as particularly important when teaching involved staff based across different member institutions. Management staff reported regular team meetings, and in some lines of learning this was echoed by teachers. In these cases, interviewees were more likely to feel supported, and happy with their teaching and the course as a whole. However, many teaching staff described feeling isolated, not knowing what other teachers on the course were doing, and in some cases not knowing who other teachers were or how to contact them.

9.2.3 Support

Many examples of teaching 'in the ethos of the Diploma' were seen, with teachers commonly using real-world contexts and employer involvement to engage students. In these examples, students and teachers reported good experiences. However, it was widely reported that more could have been achieved, and learning experiences improved, if more support were provided for individual teachers. In particular, interviewees commented that they had to organise opportunities in their own time, in addition to already busy teaching schedules. Many reported that this had restricted the number and scale of innovative teaching approaches they could run.

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Appendix 1: Learners starting Diplomas

The number of learners starting Diploma courses since 2008. Figures include all learners enrolled on CCN and OpenOpportunity Diplomas.

	Pre-16 (OpenOpportunity)		Post-16 (All CCN courses)		
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Courses starting in 2008/9					
Construction and the Built Environment	14	17	27	21	19
Creative and Media	11	25	-	16	15
Courses starting in 2009/10					
Business, Administration and Finance	-	-	13	17	69
Construction and the Built Environment	-	12	18	20	18
Creative and Media	-	29	-	16	16
Engineering	-	-	15	19	38
Hair and Beauty	17	29	14	8	-
Hospitality	8	17	13	14	19
Information Technology	7	16	18	41	62
Manufacturing and Product Design	-	13	-	-	-
Society, Health and Development	-	-	37	-	10
Courses starting in 2010/11					
Business, Administration and Finance	-	-	-	16	46
Construction and the Built Environment	-	16	-	-	23
Creative and Media	-	17	-	-	15
Engineering	-	-	-	35	-
Hair and Beauty	15	37	20	12	-
Hospitality	-	14	13	17	20
Information Technology	-	12	-	19	42
Public Services	-	12	-	-	-
Retail Business	-	-	-	-	23
Travel and Tourism	-	-	-	16	15
Totals	72	266	188	287	450

Appendix 2: Factors contributing to levels of student satisfaction.

The student survey asked respondents to list three things they most enjoyed about their Diploma, and three things they least enjoyed of their Diploma. Their answers were sorted into themes. The number of responses to these themes is listed in Table 6. Only themes with more than five responses were listed.

Factors most enjoyed by students (total number of responses = 181)	
Factor	Number of Responses
People/ friends	29
Specific subjects or topics	26
Learning new things	21
ASL units	20
Location/ college environment	19
Work based/ practical learning	17
Tutors	15
Independence	6
Timetables	5
Access to resources	5
Other	18
Factors least enjoyed by students (total number of responses = 169)	
Factor	Number of Responses
Course/ college organisation	21
Methods of learning	19
The amount of work	18
Tutors	18
Functional skills	13
Exams and assessments	11
Feedback and guidance	9
Pre-Diploma IAG	8
Specific units or topics	8
PLTS	7
Other students on the course	6
Other	31