

ASDAN AIMHIGHER NATIONAL ACTIVITY PROJECT SUMMARY

Background and Context

The overall aim of the ASDAN Aimhigher national activity project has been to raise attainment and the potential for progression for entry into Higher Education by helping to develop more independent and autonomous learners in schools and colleges through the use of the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE) as the central project instrument.

This initial two year project was approved by the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) in February 2004 to parallel the QCA national pilot of the CoPE qualification within 200 pilot centres.

The CoPE qualification emerged following ASDAN's involvement in the Tomlinson Working Group on 14-19 Reform and many of the qualification's design features specifically echo Tomlinson themes: especially in relation to the need for the development of new ways of engaging and motivating learners, for raising attainment, and for raising aspiration and encouraging progression into higher education.

The CoPE qualification design includes, for example, a multi-disciplinary prototype of the Extended Project (a vehicle proposed formally in the Government's response to Tomlinson in the February 05 White Paper '14-19 Education and Skills' and subsequently built in to the DFES 14-19 Education and Skills Implementation Plan for the Reform Agenda (December 05) as a central development strand).

Another of the CoPE qualification design features echoes the Tomlinson concern to provide additional means for HE to be able, with confidence, to select appropriate candidates: this is the Oral Presentation and Discussion component.

As part of the HEFCE funded project, briefing seminars and workshops were run across the nine government office regions to provide information and guidance. Regional consultants were also appointed to support the schools and colleges for the pilot.

CoPE Qualification Results from the Case Study institutions: Summer 2006.

Aylwin School (Now Harris Academy, Bermondsey): 'CoPE has made a considerable contribution.' (Jasmine West, Assistant Principal). Nearly 2% points increase in A*-C results from using CoPE with a small group of students.

Mid Cheshire College: Submitting candidates in Spring 07.

Mounts Bay School: Submitting candidates in Spring 07.

Northcliffe School: The school's A*-C percentage was raised by over 4% through CoPE.

Sir Bernard Lovell: 148 students received 440 units of CoPE accreditation. Candidates submitting for full qualification next year, following this pilot.

St Edmund Campion School: 'CoPE has underpinned another increase in the school's overall A*-C results by over 3%.' (William Penny, Assistant Head)

(See the full statistical outturn data from the 200 schools/colleges participating in the pilot on page 3 under 'Project Outcomes and Evaluation')

Strategic Impact Measures

A number of strategic impact measures were agreed for the project and, despite a delayed start date for commencing the national activity, all of these measures were achieved within the first eight months of the project's duration. These strategic impact measures, which consolidate sustainability for continued and future activity within the national Aimhigher policy remit, are as follows:

- QCA approval of the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE) as a full qualification within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). This approval enables the qualification to be available for national uptake as a framework for progression, through its 3 levels, for the accreditation of many aspects of personal, social, citizenship and work related learning in schools and colleges across the country.
- The calibration by DFES of the CoPE qualification as a GCSE equivalent at levels 1 and 2, and as an AS equivalent at level 3 achievement of the certificate.
- The inclusion of the CoPE qualification by DFES in the Schools and Colleges Attainment and Achievement Performance League Tables with the following points ascription:

Achievement at Level 1 of the Certificate: 25 points (GCSE Grade 'E/F' Equivalent).

Achievement at Level 2 of the Certificate: 46 points (GCSE Grade 'B' equivalent).

- The ascription of 70 UCAS Tariff points to the CoPE qualification at Level 3 achievement (10 points more therefore than an 'A' grade at AS level).
- Qualification eligibility for funding achieved both pre and post 16:

For post 16 the LSC National Office has agreed funding for achievement of Levels 2 and 3 of CoPE, such that there are positive funding incentives for national uptake alongside other AS levels at Level 3, and at Level 2 as a significant contributor to the government's national Level 2 Achievement and Attainment Targets.

For the pre 16 sector also the qualification is included in Section 96 of the Education and Skills Act 2000, which enables it to be used by, and funded for, schools.

- Over 150 institutions of Higher education (HEIs) are formally acknowledging the significance of the ASDAN contribution to the process of application and entry to HE.
- The QCA are researching the contribution of the CoPE qualification as a multi-disciplinary model for the Extended Project (envisaged in the Tomlinson Final Report of October 2004 which also acknowledged ASDAN as a source of the Personal Challenge/Extended Project methodology). This research is in the context of the development of both the General Diploma and the Specialist Diplomas which are being developed jointly by QCA and Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) as part of the DFES Implementation Plan for the 14-19 (And in some aspects 11-19) Reform Agenda.

Project Outcomes and Evaluation

The statistical achievement outturn data (passed to DFES for inclusion in the national Schools and Colleges performance data) from the 200 CoPE schools and colleges participating in the pilot for the periods 01/09/2004 to 31/08/2005 (Year One) and between 01/09/2005 to 31/08/2006 (Year Two) is as follows:

Year One (04/05) Certification Outturns:

Level	Certificates Achieved	Fail	Pass Rate
1	1275	20	98.43137
2	921	16	98.26276
3	264	27	89.77273

Year Two (05/06) Certification Outturns:

Level	Certificates Achieved	Fail	Pass Rate
1	1417	30	97.88285
2	1617	42	97.4026
3	313	11	96.48562

NB. A note on the statistical data: In the second year of the Aimhigher project the candidate numbers submitted from the 200 institutions within the pilot rose from the first year total of 2,523 to a second year total of 3,430. This increase is in the context of i) the qualification by this time having achieved full approval from the QCA (See under: Strategic Impact Measures, above), and ii) the specified Aimhigher project plan to encourage and support the pilot schools/colleges to move, with greater confidence, once the QCA national pilot aspect was completed successfully, to offering the qualification to further appropriate groups of learners for the purposes of raising attainment, developing more autonomous learners from across the age and ability range, and providing progression.

To parallel this overall statistical outturn achievement data from the national project, the School of Lifelong Education and International Development, Institute of Education, University of London (under the direction of Ann Hodgson with a project team led by Patricia Sweeney) has undertaken a number of in-depth Case Study evaluations in six of the Aimhigher designated project pilot centres. The Case Studies were produced following visits to the Case Study centres by the IOE research team which took place between February 06- June 06, and were informed by the Aimhigher national guidance template for Case Study design. (See IOE ASDAN Aimhigher National Activity Project Case Studies, and the qualification outcomes/results from the six Case Study Institutions summarised at the bottom of page 1 of this Summary, above).

Overall Project Achievements and Issues Arising

- As can be seen from scrutiny of the overall statistical outturn data produced for the DFES on achievements of the CoPE qualification in the pilot, and from the IOE independent research Case Study evaluations, there is considerable evidence of benefit to learners having been achieved in terms of raising attainment, developing more independent and autonomous learning skills, and increasing the potential for progression into HE.
- There is also evidence that much more needs to be done to support both staff and learners in developing independent learning skills approaches, and in embedding the qualification's learning outcomes into the mainstream curriculum. This evidence emerges especially in the context of attempts to personalise the curriculum and integrate the personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) in both academic and vocational curriculum pathways. Many staff, in schools especially, will need continued support in addressing and implementing a skills based approach to assessment. This is likely to become particularly significant in the context of the government agenda to introduce General and Specialist Diplomas, for example.
- The potential of the CoPE qualification needs to be further understood within the HE sector, especially by senior policy makers, as well as by admissions tutors at course level. The deployment of undergraduate student mentors in the future to assist younger learners in schools and colleges to tackle the Extended Research Project and Personal Challenge aspects of the CoPE qualification cannot be overstated in terms of the significance of potential impact.

Future Developments and Next Steps

Following the achievement of the project's Strategic Impact Measures within its first eight months, the subsequent and parallel uptake of the CoPE project instrument (one of the factors by which the project is to be judged in terms of future embedding and sustainability) has risen phenomenally from the inception of the project with 200 participating schools and colleges within the pilot to 1,262 registered centres as at 31st August 2006. The number of registered learners on the same date (31st August 2006) now stands at 34,500. This represents: a national parallel growth in centres of over 500% (compared with those registered in the pilot taken as the baseline); a national growth in registered learners of over 1,200% (compared with those originally registered in the pilot taken as the baseline).

These growth and mainstream embedding outcomes of the project represent a very significant potential for future impact on the implementation and achievement of Aimhigher national policy targets, as well as continued and future targeting of Aimhigher nationally prioritised learner groups through the CoPE project instrument.

An increasing number of LEAs and LSCs are now working with ASDAN on strategies to disseminate and embed the CoPE qualification and methodology for raising attainment, developing more independent and autonomous learners and, thereby, widening participation and progression to HE.

ASDAN qualifications and award programmes are featured in five of the six DFES Extension Pathfinder projects focussing on the theme of Engagement in Learning, and in a number of other DFES Extension Pathfinders focussed on the Extended Project and the Specialist Diploma.

The CoPE qualification has been recognised as having potential significance for learner entry to, and retention in, Foundation Degrees. (See: The Foundation Degree Forward journal, Issue 7, 2006).

Following the acknowledgement of ASDAN as a source of the 'Personal Challenge /Extended Project' methodology in the Final Tomlinson Report (October 2004) and subsequent Government White Papers, a clear focus has emerged for the need to develop the Personal Challenge methodology into Key Stages 2 and 3 as a means of both personalising the curriculum and for enhancing the development of more independent and autonomous learners at these earlier Key Stages.

There is clearly a developmental role here to take the work of the project forward in relation to future Aimhigher national policy, and through local and regional Aimhigher activity implementation.

Although not a specified outcome of the current ASDAN national activity project, Aimhigher practitioners in the field have expressed considerable interest in developing Aimhigher activity modules as contributory components to the CoPE qualification and its precursor Key Stages 2 and 3 award programmes. This would mean that, in future, a wide range of Aimhigher activity taking place in schools and colleges across the country in collaboration with HE, and at all Key Stages from 2-5, could count towards the CoPE GCSE equivalent qualification and other ASDAN awards, and be accredited within them.

The HEFCE have awarded ASDAN a further grant for the dissemination of this material and information. This will be reported upon separately to HEFCE and the information posted on the national Aimhigher Practitioner website in due course, by the end of November 2006.

The ASDAN Aimhigher National Activity Project Steering Group Members:

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