



# **HIGHER EDUCATION ENGAGEMENT WITH THE IT DIPLOMA**

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**West London Lifelong Learning Network and South  
London Lifelong Learning Network**

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## **1. Executive summary**

The successful introduction of the Diploma lines and their linkages to Higher Education (HE) is central to the progression agenda of Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs).

All partners in the West and South London LLNs - universities, colleges, schools, academies and employers - have shown themselves keen in principle to embrace the Diploma development model.

There is a symbiotic relationship between the new Diploma lines and the development of related, innovative curriculum areas across HE/FE.

Local Diploma Development Partnerships (DDPs) expressed interest in the development of progression routes into HE, HE delivery and input into the Diploma, and continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for teachers.

All partners in the West and South London LLNs expressed concerns about developmental timescales for the 2008 Diploma launch. DDPs expressed frustration at the delay in the publication of the detailed curriculum specification, while HE/FE institutions were concerned about delays in publication of the UCAS tariff.

Other DDP concerns included difficulties in engaging employers, both in the Diploma development process and in planning high quality work placements.

HE and FE institutions offering HE curriculum were aware that admissions staff lacked knowledge about Diploma developments but were interested to find out more about how to engage with local DDPs.

The West and South London LLNs will continue to work with local DDPs, HE/FE institutions, and other interested stakeholders with a view to forging new partnerships, delivering new progression routes via Progression Agreements (PAs), and exploring the possibilities for new curriculum development opportunities.

## 2. Preamble

- 2.1 The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) have made it clear that 14-19 reforms are designed to encourage more young people to continue learning for longer and to gain the qualifications they need to progress into Further and Higher Education or employment. Learners entering Higher Education (HE) will have experienced a challenging and relevant programme of learning through GCSEs and A-Levels, new Diplomas, or a combination of both. They will be well prepared for further study, will be able to learn for themselves, be self-motivated, interested, and will not need remedial study when they enter Higher Education.
- 2.2 These changes will have wide ranging implications for HE, impacting on curriculum, assessment and entry requirements, and potentially on the demand for HE programmes. An information pack containing tailored information on the 14-19 reforms for HE has been produced and most recently added to it is a DVD which includes supporting statements from 'champion Vice Chancellors' (including the Vice Chancellor from London South Bank University, a member of the South London LLN) and from university admission tutors, including those from Russell Group universities like Bristol. All information can be accessed through the Diploma web pages<sup>1</sup> where Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can sign up to an HE newsletter and also through the QCA website<sup>2</sup> where the latest curriculum and assessment information is outlined in detail.
- 2.3 To understand the implications for HE of the introduction of the new Diplomas, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) approached all the LLNs nationally to investigate how best to engage universities in the first five Diploma line areas. West and South London LLNs submitted a joint proposal to review the interface between the Gateway providers and HE institutions for the IT Diploma line across their combined Network areas.
- 2.4 Highlighting and replicating good practice in promoting and supporting the new Diplomas is crucial, as can be seen from press speculation about the impact of the new Diplomas in "dumbing down" the 14-19 curriculum. The 7<sup>th</sup> January 2008 statement from the Russell Group<sup>3</sup> on "less desirable" A-Levels demonstrates the important of HE perceptions on all school curriculum areas and the need for transparent and high quality Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19)

<sup>2</sup> [www.qca.org.uk/diploma](http://www.qca.org.uk/diploma)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/news/2007/statement-on-a-level-choices-following-sunday-times-article-of-6-january-2008.html>

However, the figures for Computer Science course applications have fallen by nearly half since 2001. The recently announced 2007 Computing A-Level results also highlight the need for a new approach - with just 5,610 entrants taking the Computing A-Level exam, this equates to just 0.7% of all national entrants<sup>4</sup>. The combination of greater choice, flexibility and an industry-focussed curriculum offered by the Diploma must have a positive impact on both achievement and progression. Linkages between the new Diplomas and the development of innovative higher level vocational learning driven by the LLNs will be crucial to the success of both initiatives. Demographic changes alone mean that progression from the new Diploma lines will become an ever more important source of undergraduate recruitment for HE.

- 2.5 This report is based on the project-based activities that West and South London LLNs have initiated and delivered in support of their remit from HEFCE between April 2007 and January 2008.
- 2.6 South London LLN and West London LLN represent all the major HE and FE institutions together with Sixth Form Centres/Academies in the two sub-regions of London.

South London LLN covers a geographical sweep that includes parts of North Surrey, through Hounslow in the West of London to Bromley and Greenwich in the South East of London, as well as all intermediary areas south of the River Thames. The South London LLN combines the strength of 23 Further and Higher Education institutions and some 20 other stakeholders including local authorities, AimHigher London South, the South London Learning Partnership and Connexions.

The West London LLN area stretches from Hillingdon in the extreme West of the capital into the central London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. WL LLN's host institution TVU also has significant delivery at sites in Reading and Slough. The West London Network includes 14 Further and Higher Education institutions plus Sixth Form Academies and Colleges. It focuses particularly on the development of Foundation Degrees (FDs) and works alongside stakeholders such as Sector Skills Councils (including e-Skills), criminal justice bodies, and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) providers.

- 2.7 This final report, commissioned by HEFCE, summarises the progress made on establishing better links between HE and the IT DDPs and increasing understanding among HE and FE institutions around HE delivery of the new Diplomas, up to January 2008. Project activities have encompassed both West London and South London LLNs and the project itself has drawn on staff expertise and match funding from both these organisations. The project has been managed by two representatives of West London LLN and one from South London LLN, forming a small steering group.

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<sup>4</sup> Joint Council for Qualifications June 2007 Provisional GCE A Level Results

### 3. National context

3.1 In October 2004, the Government-commissioned Working Group on 14–19 reform, chaired by Sir Mike Tomlinson, brought forward wide-ranging proposals for changes to the examinations system<sup>5</sup>. The hope was that it would provide a plan to improve attainment pre-16 and ensure better staying-on rates post-16; more choice for young people in terms of what programmes they could follow; and ensure better vocational options available to those not well-served by ‘academic’ options. The Government laid out its response in February 2005 in the White Paper ‘14–19 Education and Skills’<sup>6</sup>. Among other reforms, this proposed the introduction of 14 new awards, originally called Vocational Diplomas, rejecting the overarching Diploma award that Tomlinson had proposed. In 2007 the Government expanded the original 14 disciplines to 17, with the addition of Science, Languages and Humanities. The original 14 are:

5 starting in 2008: Society, Health and Development; IT; Construction and the Built Environment; Creative Media; Engineering.

5 starting in 2009: Business, Administration and Finance; Hair and Beauty; Hospitality; Environment and Land Based Studies; Manufacturing and Product Design.

4 starting in 2010 currently called: Travel and Tourism; Retail; Sport and Leisure; Public Services.

3.2 The Government established national Diploma Development Partnerships (DDPs). These are headed by Sector Skills Councils and involve employers, Higher Education and other stakeholders to outline the skills, knowledge and understanding required within a given line of applied learning. This was to ensure that Diplomas chart a middle course between vocational and academic learning. Furthermore, the leading role given to employers in the design of the Diplomas is expected to ensure that the qualifications will be recognised by employers and be seen as reflecting practical workplace experience. A review of A-Levels is planned for this year, the year in which the Diplomas will be first taught. A-Level and apprenticeship routes are described as alternative pathways to those provided by the Diplomas.

3.3 e-skills UK made it clear in its evidence to the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee in January 2007 that it believed employers to be totally behind the introduction of the Diplomas: “There is an extraordinary synergy between the requirements expressed by higher education and employers.”<sup>7</sup> Thus the Diplomas are presented as a unique blend of theoretical study with practical and applied learning and employer involvement that give young people the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge that are relevant to and valued by employers.

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<sup>5</sup> Working Group on 14–19 Reform, *14–19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform: Final Report of the Working Group on 14–19 Reform*, October 2004, (Tomlinson Report)

<sup>6</sup> Department for Education and Skills, *14-19 Education and Skills*, Cm 6476, 23 February 2005

<sup>7</sup> House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, *Fifth Report of Session 2006-07 on 14-19 Diplomas*, May 2007, HC 249

They are also seen as forming an educational continuum through from Level 1 to Level 4 and on to Foundation Degrees and above, as well as pathways to employment. The Government believes that Diplomas will raise standards by providing a coherent learning programme that will engage a wide range of learners. Therefore schools and colleges will be incentivised to engage in collaborative arrangements to ensure their learners follow the most appropriate course. Better motivated students will lead, it is hoped, to better outcomes.

- 3.4 A leaflet explaining the Diploma was produced early in 2007 but it is only in recent months that the Government has focussed on communication with young people and their families through illustrative case studies that intend to bring the Diplomas to life<sup>8</sup>. At the end of 2007 the UCAS Tariff was set and the final piece in the Diploma jigsaw was completed. Marketing is now developing locally as well as nationally.
- 3.5 The Diplomas have a common structure. They can be awarded at Level 1 - the Foundation Diploma, at Level 2 - the Higher Diploma, and at Level 3 through the Progression Diploma and the Advanced Diploma. The Foundation Diploma has the same value as 5 GCSEs grade A\*-G and can be graded A\*, A, B or ungraded. The Higher Diploma has the same value as 7 GCSEs grade A\*-C and can be graded also A\*-C or ungraded. Functional Skills at Level 2 is required but is graded independently. The Advanced Diploma, graded as for A-Levels, is equivalent to 3.5 A-Levels grade A\*-E (up to 420 UCAS Tariff points). To be awarded a Level 1 qualification the learner must have achieved Level 1 in the Functional Skills of English, Mathematics and ICT and to be awarded a higher level Diploma, the learner must have achieved Level 2 in the three Functional Skills. A Level 2 Functional Skill has the same GCSE value as a half or short GCSE A\*-C.
- 3.6 Within each Diploma there is an area of Principal Learning. This is the core of the Diploma and is the compulsory element that gives the Diploma its particular line of learning – e.g. IT or Society, Health and Development. There is a commitment that this will develop knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to a particular economic sector, using realistic contexts and leading-edge sector relevant materials. Functional Skills is one aspect of Generic Learning. The others are Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS), work experience and a project. The project is an extended project at Level 3, with 120 Guided Learning Hours rather than 60 at Levels 1 and 2. Finally, there is additional and specialist learning. This can be more study in areas related to the main line of learning or additional areas. The student with the Progression Diploma will not have taken any additional and specialist learning qualifications and so their maximum UCAS Tariff will be 300 points.
- 3.7 Diploma programmes will be typically taken over two years. At Level 1, there will be 600 Guided Learning Hours (GLHs), of which 240 are for the Principal Learning, 60 GLHs for each of the project and for PLTS, 120 for each of the Functional Skills and the Additional and Specialist learning. The Level 2 Higher Diploma is a programme of 800 GLHs, 420 GLHs for the Principal Learning, 180 for Additional/Specialist Learning. The Level 3 Advanced Diploma consists of 1,080 GLHs, 540 GLHs for the Principal Learning and 360 for Additional/Specialist Learning.

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<sup>8</sup> DCSF Leaflet entitled: "What is a Diploma?" reference 00424-2007 LEF-EN

Assessment is through a mixture of internal model assignments and externally assessed exams, tasks and assignments completed under controlled conditions. At least half of all Principal Learning is applied, and work experience is seen as meaningful work-based learning. As Philip Garrahan, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Sheffield Hallam University said: “We expect the Diplomas to provide a valuable and different route into Higher Education, combining academic rigour with vocational practice.”<sup>9</sup>

- 3.8 The Government has argued that in introducing the Diplomas there is no intention to down-grade long serving successful qualifications like those of the Business Technology Education Council [UK] (BTEC) in Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT), and that it was the decision of the national Diploma Development Partnerships themselves to work “*ab initio*”<sup>10</sup>. The result is that the first five Diplomas all reflect innovative thinking and a determination to engage students in the Principal Learning component of the Diplomas. A student taking a BTEC National Diploma would gain the equivalent UCAS maximum Tariff with a full distinction and an A grade in an AS Level.
- 3.9 Foundation Degrees have provided a strong example of effective collaboration between employers and HE and FE institutions. Clearly there is a need for local DDPs to inform their local HE and FE institutions about the Diplomas they are delivering and for the HE and FE institutions to explain how Foundation Degrees can fit into a pathway through and beyond Level 3, either directly from school or in partnership with employers, through an alternative to apprenticeship. The Science, Engineering, Manufacturing Technologies (SEMTA) Sector Skills Council, which has led on the development of the Engineering Diploma, and the Royal Academy of Engineering have made it clear that the Level 3 qualification is to be seen as a direct entry to Foundation Degree courses, Diplomas of Higher Education, and Higher National Diplomas. Where the Level 3 Diploma is taken by learners who would not have followed a traditional A-Level course, a significant increase in those taking a Higher Education pathway would be a clear success for the Government. Present progression rates from vocational Level 3 courses to Higher Education are low, at around 50%. However, at present it remains unclear if the language of the new Diploma is not more ‘academic’ than that of the BTEC National, and hence no more likely to attract the learners mentioned above.
- 3.10 The focus of this report is on learners such as those who may now take the IT Diploma. e-skills UK has been the Sector Skills Council leading on the development of this Diploma. A Diploma Employer Steering Group was established from the start of the Diploma’s development to ensure broad employer engagement. Once the national IT Diploma Development Partnership determined the skills, knowledge and understanding required, the QCA produced the regulatory criteria. Finally, the accredited awarding bodies developed units and full Diploma Qualifications, which were then endorsed by DDP and QCA. AQA, Edexcel and OCR have all produced accredited IT Diplomas.
- 3.11 The IT Diploma development is particularly urgent as the current educational situation indicates a threat to UK competitiveness and productivity in IT and Telecoms, and subsequently to all sectors of the economy.

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<sup>9</sup> HE Information Pack via [www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19)

<sup>10</sup> House of Commons Education and Skills Committee Government’s responses to the Fifth Report, *14-19 Diplomas*, Session 2006-07, October 2007, HC 1033

The Leitch Report clearly and rightly associates the key role that such skills play in the prosperity of the UK economy. It particularly emphasises the gap at Levels 3 and 4, the Advanced Technical, Supervisory and Intermediate Management level<sup>11</sup>.

- 3.12 e-Skills UK has provided figures showing that total Computer Science course applications have fallen by nearly half since 2000. The 2007 Computing A-Level results also highlight the need for this new approach with just 5,610 entrants taking the Computing A-Level exam, which equates to just 0.7% of all national entrants. In such circumstances it is reasonable to propose that greater choice, flexibility and an industry focussed curriculum will have a positive impact on both achievement and progression. LLNs can play a crucial role in driving forward improved linkages between the new Diplomas, particularly the IT Diploma, and the development of innovative higher level vocational learning.
- 3.13 The IT Diploma, through the compulsory Principal Learning, focuses on ‘working with technology’ and ‘working with people’ as well as the more expected focus on ‘the digital world’. At Levels 2 and 3 this is extended to a particular focus on enterprise and business too. Throughout the Principal Learning and the project work there is a sustained emphasis on transferable skills. By Level 3 ‘team-working’, a transferable skill, is linked to a module on ‘understanding organisations’ for example. The programme fits well with the concerns noted above for a more highly skilled management level workforce in the near future.

## 4. Local context

- 4.1 During the summer of 2007, information introducing the present project was circulated to all South and West London based HE institutions and FE colleges, Sixth Form Academies and schools within local DDPs that had been successful in their IT submissions for 2008 and 2009 (see Appendix 1 for list of local consortia). Stakeholder consultation/discussions were established and there has now been continuing dialogue for some nine months with local DDPs, HE/FE colleagues and other interested stakeholders. A WL LLN representative has joined three local IT consortia steering groups at Hillingdon, Hounslow, and Hammersmith and Fulham. Through contacts with local DDPs updated information on expected Diploma recruitment has been received regularly. The two LLNs involved in the project have created and piloted an online survey of HE/FE admissions and curriculum contacts, the results are brought together in a small report (see Appendix 2).
- 4.2 The publication of a detailed curriculum specification for the IT line was originally due to be disseminated to local DDPs in June 2007 but was delayed until September 2007. This obviously had an impact on this project and necessitated delaying detailed HE/FE consortia discussions until November 2007. Nevertheless, in the preceding six months, a desk-based analysis of 14-19 developments was carried out, including a mapping exercise of existing Foundation Degree (FD), HND and Honours Degree opportunities across all Diploma areas, as well as detailed curriculum mapping of relevant IT FE/HE progression routes along with published entry requirements (see Appendix 5).

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<sup>11</sup> Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills, Final Report, December 2006 HM Treasury 12/06 349624 PU061

In addition, a small focus group session was held on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2007, attended by admissions and curriculum leads from across the two LLNs. It was ascertained that, up to this date, only limited dissemination of IT Diploma information had taken place.

- 4.3 Since November 2007 two workshops have been held. The first took place at Kingston University on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2007 (see Appendix 3 for Delegate List). It brought together HE/FE colleagues and local DDP representatives from consortia that were planning delivery of the IT Diploma in 2008 and 2009. The workshop's aim was to explore partners' perceptions and facilitate ways of joint working. The second workshop took place on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2007 at Thames Valley University. This workshop brought together curriculum leads from two large local FE providers, Hammersmith and West London College and Uxbridge College, and from Royal Holloway, University of London (see Case Study in Section 4.6 below). An earlier workshop in July 2007 at Kingston University reviewed attitudes and admissions processes within HE / FE.

#### **4.4 Local DDP Perceptions**

- 4.4.1 Local DDPs have expressed clear frustration at the delays in the production and dissemination of detailed curriculum information. This has led to concerns around learner/parent perceptions as there was insufficient concrete evidence to allay fears that the new Diploma would be an option for the less academically able learner. The DDPs were anxious that this could become a self-fulfilling prophecy. There was also the concern that learners/parents would see that the option choice made at 14 could lock the learner into particular career paths. However, DDPs saw this as less of an issue for the IT Diploma because of its cross-cutting sector appeal and its strong business focus. There are obvious pathways between the IT and Business Diplomas and higher level study, less clear-cut might be those involving Engineering and Creative Media Diplomas.
- 4.4.2 The local DDPs saw the changing position of IAG through the reforming of Connexions services as being a concern in communicating with learners and parents about the Diplomas even if there had not been a delay in providing the curriculum content. Nevertheless, the inability to answer questions relating to the UCAS Tariff and HE impressions of the Diploma was having an impact at 6<sup>th</sup> Form Open Evenings and consequently on the likely take-up of the Level 3 Diploma in its first year of delivery. Local DDPs had made as much progress in their collaborative planning as practical, given the limitations on information. They had gone ahead on common timetabling agreements but still had concerns about how practical aspects such as transport arrangements would work out in practice. This linked fundamentally to the fact that learners from differing institutions and differing learning cultures would be coming together and that agreements both had to be reached, and implemented, on dress code and learner support etc. Although the local DDPs had been involved in piloting Functional Skills this had not required learners to be brought together for delivery - only staff involved in planning had been travelling from site to site. Even though delivery had begun, the place of Functional Skills as stand-alone or features of the new Diploma remained unclear.

## **4.5 Local HE/FE Perceptions**

- 4.5.1 No concern has been expressed by HE/FE representatives about the Diplomas in principle. There was general concern that information about the Diplomas had been too limited and that admissions staff and curriculum tutors responsible for admissions had yet to feel that their position was being sufficiently recognised by DCSF and DIUS. No instructions had been received as to what implications the Diplomas would have for either the completion of or scrutiny of UCAS information. There was particular anxiety that while there could be intensive local dissemination of information among institutions involved in DDPs to facilitate understanding, learners trying to progress from outside the locality might not be so well understood when referring to their particular Diploma background. HE institutions with FE sections are unlikely to concentrate solely on progression from their FE section to their HE section, but will be seeking students from across London and its surrounds. Given that Computing degrees are under-subscribed at present, there is also likely to be low concern about specificity in Additional/Specialist learning. This could be further affected by the likely immediate employability of those with the Level 3 Diploma.
- 4.5.2 The mapping exercise mentioned above in 4.2 and provided in detail at Appendix 5 showed a wide range of acceptance requirements for HND, FD and BSc programmes with UCAS Tariff entry points ranging from 40 to over 300 points. The full document is being used as a starting point for detailed curriculum and entry discussions between DDP consortia and HE/FE institutions. However, these discussions have been delayed until January 2008 because of the late announcement of the Diploma UCAS Tariff.

## **4.6 Case Study of HE perception of Diploma Computer Science progression route**

An example of work in the local context can be illustrated by the workshop convened by the West London LLN on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2007. The workshop was attended by 2 large local FE colleges; Hammersmith and West London College and Uxbridge College as well as Royal Holloway, University of London (RHUL), and focused on the progression route from the IT Diploma to Computer Science in HE. For the FE colleges, the IT Diploma was seen as a natural development from their current curriculum in IT/Business focused programmes, such as BTECs, HND and FDs. There was a more cautious approach from RHUL, which operates one joint undergraduate programme with the Management Department in Management Information Systems. It concentrates on Computing Science and the Computing Science Department has achieved a 5 rating in the latest Research Assessment Exercise. The programme has significant numbers of overseas students. The entry requirements focus on A-Level grades along with programming experience and some assessed track record in Mathematics, usually at A-Level. The University admits about 15 individuals each year without A-Level Mathematics and operates a 1 year Access course with local colleges. There was interest in the IT Diploma but real concern that the Diploma would not be delivering undergraduates with the necessary 'hard science' background. The fear was that they would struggle in two areas:

- i) Programming in areas such as Java and FORTRAN
- ii) Elementary discreet Mathematics. The department provides a significant amount of support in Mathematics to assist students but at entry they are careful to only admit students with mathematical aptitude.

The feeling was that where the Diploma failed to cover these areas evidence would be required from Specialist Units or the Extended Project components of the Diploma. From the FE representatives there was a view that local HE providers could deliver CPD activities for staff in the latest programming areas driven by rapidly changing new technologies and in virtual discussion networks to share best practice.

Workshop attendees agreed to continue these discussions and the development of progression agreements during 2008.

## 5. Key issues identified by the project

### **5.1. Issues for HE and FE**

- 5.1.1 HE institutions were concerned to have evidence that the Diploma grading reflected the knowledge, skills and understanding signified by the curriculum, so that they can be confident that learners can progress successfully to the particular undergraduate course of their choice. Some HE providers thought that learners who actually achieve the Diploma outcomes as indicated could find first year undergraduate work “too low level”. This is not currently the case with BTEC.
- 5.1.2 The Diploma module descriptors, as currently articulated, may be too vague with regard to the skills and knowledge learners would be able to demonstrate.
- 5.1.3 Further clarification is needed for HE/FE institutions on the Diploma’s assessment structure. This is even more important as A-Levels are seen as moving away from coursework while Diplomas potentially have a substantial coursework element (up to 80%). The presence or absence of an examination element is important and requires clarification.
- 5.1.4 Clarification is needed of the distinction between the unitised nature of the Diplomas and modularised and non-modularised A-Level courses. This could be achieved through a mapping exercise. In particular, interest was expressed about the place of an e-portfolio in the IT Diploma. However, it was recognised that e-portfolios are difficult to authenticate or legitimise.
- 5.1.5 At present there is no strategic plan to ensure that Level 3 Diploma staff benefit from the specialist knowledge of HE staff. As noted in the Case Study in Section 4.6 above, HE staff can help to ensure that staff delivering the Level 3 Diploma are kept abreast of the latest developments in IT and Business. HE staff in these areas are more likely to have recent and relevant vocational experience. There are examples within both regions of university Computer Science departments offering accredited CISCO qualifications – these could be made available to staff delivering the new Diploma.
- 5.1.6 Without clarification on funding, potential new developments, such as HE staff participating in the delivery of Level 4 Specialist Diploma units, could be lost. HE participation would be important to help give learners better awareness of Higher Education, as well as offering ‘stretch’.

5.1.7 It is less clear at what point learners and their parents identify and decide on indicative progression routes while making their course selection. HE opportunities may therefore influence Diploma choices at lower levels. In such cases HE engagement with Level 2 Diploma learners could be seen as an appropriate method of maximising progression opportunities. Many HE institutions recruit students from overseas and there may be a need to place Diplomas within the framework of international accreditations.

Given the broad nature of the IT Diploma, and the very diverse range of the HE provision it will serve, progression agreements will need to be of the “single entry, multi exit” variety. Here, individual HE institutions will specify the content and standard of achievement required in the Additional Learning and Project elements of the Diploma for entry onto their programmes. Such an approach would provide very clear and guaranteed routes into HE for Diploma learners - greatly reassuring parents, learners and potential employers.

5.1.8 A current key challenge for entry onto HE IT programmes is the very wide range of computing ability of first year students. This leads to classes of mixed computing ability, where there is often a need to go over the basics.

5.1.9 Substantial gaps have been identified in the availability of progression routes to Foundation Degrees (FDs) for some Diploma line areas, although IT coverage itself was deemed to be satisfactory.

5.1.10 Foundation Degrees or part-time degree courses might be seen as the natural progression route for Diploma students because of the emphasis on employment and employability, but that will depend on the content of the FD.

5.1.11 Staff development is needed for HE admission staff around all aspects of the new Diploma.

## **5.2 Issues for Diploma Delivery Partnerships**

5.2.1 Many of the points noted above in the National Context (see Section 3) have been echoed by local DDPs and HE and FE institutions within the two regions. There was appreciation of the evidence of greater employer involvement in the development of the Diplomas, but concern that the distinction between current vocational qualifications, notably BTEC Nationals, and the new Diplomas, remained unclear. Funding and UCAS Tariff announcements came too late for these to be fed into this project, but clearly all stakeholders considered they could impact on the relative marketability of the new Diplomas, as against current vocational and, as it turned out, academic qualifications. It could be that the Diploma, particularly with its emphasis on strategic thinking, is seen as a prestigious qualification, a ‘vocational IB’, which guarantees a university place and links with particular employers. There was appreciation of the introduction of projects at all levels, and the Level 3 Extended Project was seen as a crucial way for collaboration among employers and Higher Education staff with local DDPs.

### 5.2.2 In addition, the following issues have been identified:

- There is variation in the deployment of grants received by Local Authorities to support Diploma developments. Strategic deployment of funding for CPD has been difficult until the curriculum requirements for the first new Diplomas became known in full. Up to now funding has therefore been spent largely on teacher supply cover to attend meetings, without the certainty that this provided good value for money.
- Provision of Level 3 IT curriculum varied between DDPs, with some opting for delivery via a local FE provider, and some using individual schools with a track record in IT and/or specialist technology centres.
- The first cohort of Level 3 learners will come through the current Level 2 curriculum route, but future Level 3 learners will come through a new range of Level 2 curriculum routes, including a number of Level 2 Diplomas. Consideration will have to be given as to what differing prior knowledge, skills and understanding future learners will have at the start of Level 3 courses.
- The development of the Functional Skills has been largely independent of the Diploma developments as evidenced by the Functional Skills delivery pilot, which began in September 2007. There is concern that this may impact on the coherence of the programmes offered.
- It is acknowledged that there is a need to secure early agreement among partners on timetabling and on the commonality of differing protocols, such as school uniforms and learning support. Given that there will be low numbers of Diploma learners in most single DDP partner institutions during 2008/2009, there is a reluctance to make radical changes in these areas, particularly for Level 3 cohorts, which are likely to be very low in number at least in the first instance.
- DDPs report that it has been difficult to involve employers in course development and plans for delivery (including employer placements) whilst the Diploma curriculum detail was not known in full. Clarification is also sought on how placements will be quality assured. It has been suggested that HEIs could offer assistance either by sharing their own quality assured placements or by being placement providers themselves. With the expectation that 50% of the Principal Learning element of the Diploma is applied to a work setting, it is crucial that learners have access to high quality placements to ensure that their experience is genuinely applied.
- Connexions Services may be initially reluctant to promote the Diplomas, and this may have CPD implications for Connexions staff.
- IAG is crucial and raises a resource issue. Learners will require information about the Diplomas, but may also require guidance as to which Additional or Specialist Units are most appropriate for which progression routes. These points could require local, very specific information which could be provided by progression agreements.

- HE/FE providers may be keen to visit and discuss pathways with DDP staff, families and learners but it is unlikely that there will be funding for them to do this and providers will have to be sure that the numbers of potential learners will make the effort worthwhile.

## 6. Recommendations and next steps

### **6.1 DCSF and DIUS responsibilities**

- 6.1.1 DCSF and DIUS need to improve publicity machinery so that all parties know what support materials are available and when.
- 6.1.2 DCSF should clarify funding implications for Level 4 units taken within a Level 3 Diploma.

### **6.2 Responsibilities of all local partners**

- 6.2.1 The expectation is that initial numbers on Level 3 Diploma courses will be relatively small, but that numbers will increase substantially in subsequent years. There has to be strategic planning for this development across all partners. Within local DDPs there is great interest and enthusiasm to work with HE/FE colleagues and an appreciation of the importance of progression from the Diploma. There is particular interest in using HE interest in the Diploma as a method of encouraging recruitment onto the pilot year classes early in 2008.
- 6.2.2 Pre-HE and HE partners need to work together to design relevant bridging programmes (where necessary) and to adapt existing undergraduate programmes to ensure fit with the new Diplomas. Discussions with partners have indicated the possibility of identifying Diploma 'high fliers' whose work is of such a standard and who, through the use of APEL, may be able to complete a degree in two rather than three years.
- 6.2.3 As partnerships continue to be formed between DDPs and HE/FE institutions, there is a need to create new and innovative work-focussed curriculum pathways, particularly where schools have not traditionally made such provision available – e.g. in the Manufacturing; Environment and Land-Based; Hair and Beauty; Retail; and Public Services Diploma lines.
- 6.2.4 It is recognised that there needs to be a locally agreed shared statement of intent across all partners for potential Diploma learners and their families, in order to reduce the possibility of mixed messages. Of particular concern would be issues, such as one partner suggesting that a Level 3 Diploma is suitable for HE and another saying that it is not.
- 6.2.5 Production of local Diploma-specific fact sheets and websites are needed to support colleagues in agencies such as the Integrated Youth Service to offer information on local Diploma developments. This could be extended into a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) supportive to all partners.

- 6.2.6 There is a need to identify 'Diploma Champions'; representative of all partners, pre-HE, HE, employers, and eventually past learners and their families who could promote the Diplomas in their respective communities.
- 6.2.7 The LLNs are well placed to work with local partners, which they know well, to provide the coherence and assurance offered by progression agreements which guarantee HE entry if grade requirements are met.

### **6.3 HE responsibilities**

- 6.3.1 HE should support DDPs in securing greater employer involvement both for work placements and to support Extended Projects.
- 6.3.2 HE needs to secure CPD for admissions tutors and curriculum staff making admissions decisions about the Diplomas.

### **6.4 DDP responsibilities**

- 6.4.1 Year 11 learners are currently in the process of making option choices. Hence it is too late in the current cycle to significantly influence their decision making process. In future, it may be more appropriate to target awareness raising amongst younger learners through more generic initiatives, such as AimHigher and Connexions Advisers. In laying out alternative pathways for learners, there needs to be a clear explanation of what the Level 3 Diploma provides that a comparable IT apprenticeship does not.
- 6.4.2 A VLE could be used to maintain communication among those strategically managing the new Diploma curriculum and those delivering particular Diplomas.
- 6.4.3 Local DDPs need to ensure that the IT Diploma is understood by HE as an IT and Business qualification rather than as a Computer Science Diploma.
- 6.4.4 Learners completing Diplomas will need ongoing support with completion of employment and apprenticeship/FE/HE applications, particularly UCAS forms.

### **6.5 Lessons to be fed into Gateway 2 developments**

- 6.5.1 It is essential to have communication among partners as early and as fully as possible, particularly, but not exclusively, over timetabling.
- 6.5.2 A resources checklist detailing all the information/toolkits currently available from DCSF, DIUS, Sector Skills Councils, QCA, National Assessment Authority and the examination boards would ensure that all partners have, or have access to, all the available documentation. There may be a role for the local LLNs to help here.
- 6.5.3 HE institutions need to clarify to DDPs where entry decisions are made. In other words, will there be institution-wide decisions as to how applicants with Diplomas will be treated or will the decisions be made at the curriculum level? This could be facilitated through the process of negotiating progression agreements.

6.5.4 The delivery implications of having some learners who will have completed Level 1 and 2 Diplomas and some who will be coming directly to Level 3 from a range of other curriculum pathways will need consideration.

6.5.5 The curriculum balance in the IT Diploma between IT and Business needs to be recognised and this needs to be reflected in the available staff resource.

## **6.6 Priorities for South and West London LLNs**

6.6.1 The following priorities have been identified:

- The development of a suite of progression agreements and associated necessary curriculum change across South and West London. Progression opportunities from one DDP onto a Foundation Degree provider in South London is already being explored. Leaflets highlighting these progression opportunities will be made available to DDPs to promote uptake in subsequent years.
- Production of Qualification Fact Sheets and Case Studies to increase HE/FE understanding of the new Diplomas that will help to tackle the perception issues around the Diploma.
- Information sharing and partnership building through a VLE for longer term sustainability.
- Establishment of a sub-regional grouping of Gateway 1 and Gateway 2 consortia to help ensure that barriers to progression are eradicated at the earliest opportunity.

6.6.2 It has become clear that work on the Diplomas will be central to the achievement of the LLN objectives. Both LLNs involved in this project have Diploma progression related activities at the heart of their work. To encourage this work the LLNs are supporting a project to develop activities which will support the first year of the Diplomas. Invitations will be sent out to all HE and FE institutions in January 2008

6.6.3 Appendix 4 outlines the matched funding that the West London and South London LLNs will make to support the delivery of this project with £40,000 ring-fenced to support collaborative working across local DDPs, HE/FE institutions and employers. The focus will be on Extended Project work and the Continuing Professional Development of school staff delivering the Diploma. This funding will encourage collaborative proposals from HE/FE institutions to launch pilot activities in the areas covered by the two LLNs.

6.6.4 IT Diploma progression linkages will not be solely into IT courses; there will be clear routes for students into Business and Management degree programmes. The flexibility of the Diploma structure means progression opportunities will be particularly broad once all Diploma lines are in operation. The implications of this will need some teasing out as this will necessitate the design of several, parallel, progression agreements. The IT Diploma developments could act as a pilot for all the Diploma lines in the sub-regional areas represented by the two LLNs. Appendix 4 shows how the LLNs will provide the funding to support the curriculum changes which may follow completed progression agreements.

6.6.5 The scope and ambition for this area of work goes well beyond the delivery of this report and includes plans for a national Progression Agreement Conference, which will focus on Diploma progression routes.

## 7. Other reading

Department for Education and Skills, *14–19: Opportunity and Excellence*, 0744/2002, January 2003.

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, *The Specialised Diploma*, January 2007, QCA/06/2986

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, *The Diploma*, March 2007, QCA/07/3084

## 8. Appendices

### Appendix 1: Local DDP Consortia

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Consortium</b>	<b>Gateway Status</b>	<b>Region</b>
Bromley	The Bromley 14-19 Collaborative	2 (start 2008)	London
Hammersmith & Fulham	Hammersmith & Fulham	1 (start 2008)	London
Hillingdon	Hillingdon Consortium	2 (start 2008)	London
Hounslow	West Thames College	3 (start 2009)	London
Merton	Merton College	3 (start 2009)	London
Reading	Reading (includes Thames Valley University)	1 (start 2008)	South East
Richmond Upon Thames	Richmond 14-19 Forum	3 (start 2009)	London

## Appendix 2: Analysis Report - 14-19 IT Diploma Development Survey

This report summarises feedback drawn from an on-line survey of contacts from partner institutions for the 14 – 19 IT Diploma. E-mail links to the survey were disseminated in September 2007.

In total, **16** respondents participated to this survey.

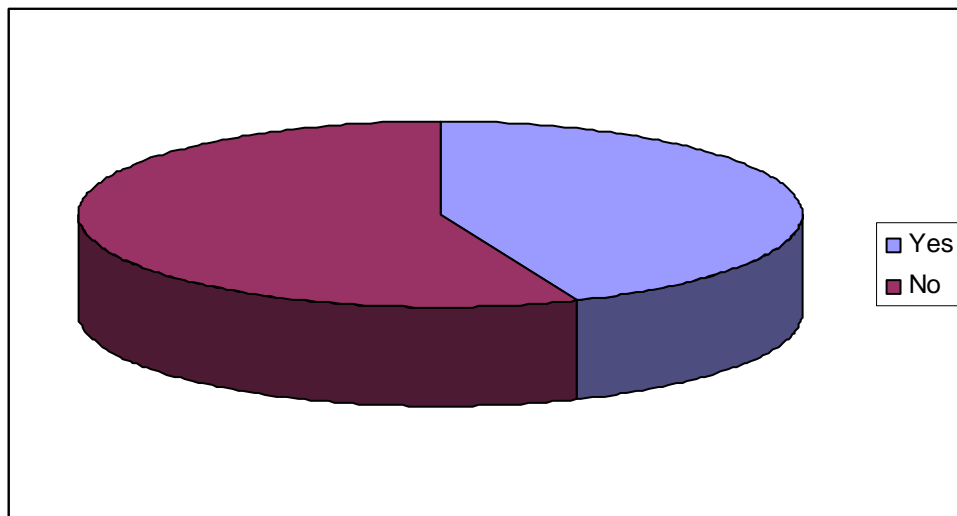
### Higher Education Institutions

#### Q.1. How much do you know about the new IT diploma?

The majority of the respondents that took part in this survey had 'limited knowledge (some areas)' of the IT diploma (**50%**). None of the respondents had 'detailed knowledge (all areas)'.

#### Q.2. Do you know which of the local 'Gateways' have been approved to deliver the 14 – 19 IT diplomas from September 2008?

For this question there was a mixed response as is shown in the chart below:



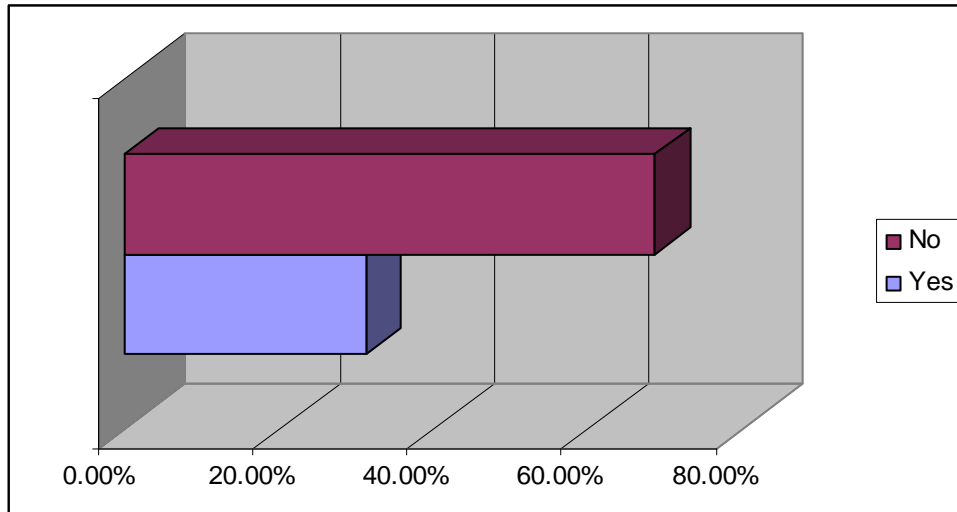
#### Q.3. Have you had any involvement with the development of the 14 – 19 IT diplomas in your area?

The majority of the respondents (**87.5%**) had not had any involvement in the development of the IT diplomas in their area.

#### Q.4. If yes, which consortium was this and what did this involve?

**2** respondents answered this question. **1** respondent was part of the Brent Consortium. The other respondent did not state what consortium they were involved with but did say that they were a member of staff at Harrow College.

**Q.5. Are you aware of the overall structure, content, assessment and grading of the new IT diplomas?**



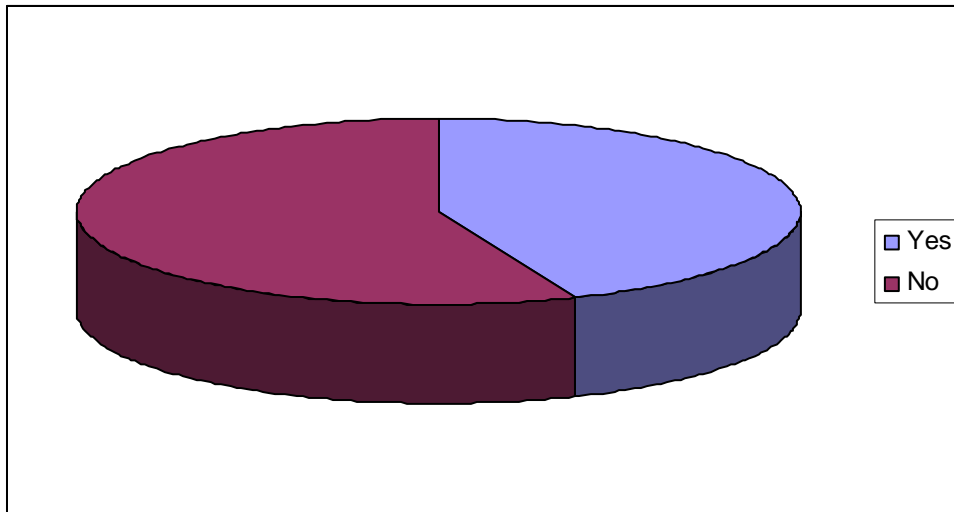
**Q.6. If no, what area would you most like more information?**

The majority of respondents (55.5%) said they would like more information on 'all areas'.

Other answers included:

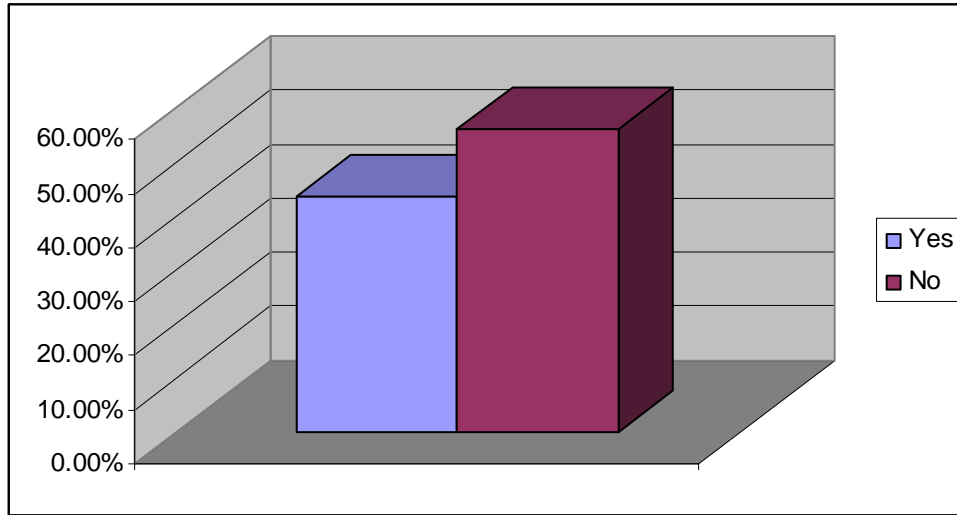
- Although I have awareness, I would appreciate being sent info on Engineering Diploma in particular.
- I manage a busy HE admissions office based in West London so I am keen to understand the fit with degrees, how best to articulate conditional offers and what to ask for during the admissions process in terms of portfolios etc.

**Q.7. Have you had any internal discussions within your organisations as to how you would describe entry criteria to your courses for those entering with the new IT diploma in September 2009?**



Worryingly 81.3% have not yet had any internal discussions on this subject.

**Q.8. Are you involved in the preparation of prospectus / web based material for prospective learners?**



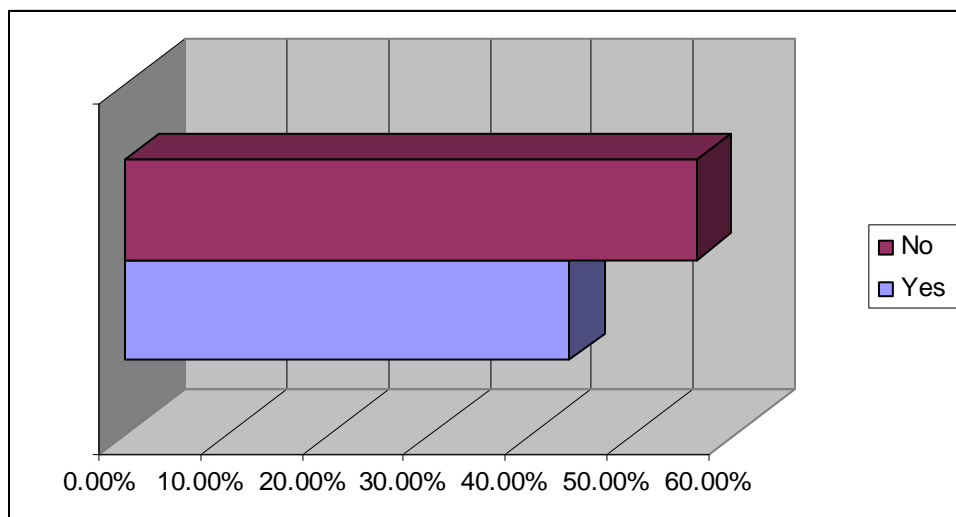
**Q.9. Would you like to be involved in future staff development activities that will bring HEIs and Gateway providers together to discuss curricula, qualification mapping etc?**

The majority of the respondents (64.3%) said they would like to be involved in such activities.

**Q.10. Would you be willing to contribute to the development of SL / WL LLN progression agreements? (These are formal agreements between academic institutions which set out precisely how applicants with vocationally related qualifications will be given equal access with traditional academic qualifications within the admissions process.)**

An encouraging (53.3%) said that they would be willing to contribute to the development of progression agreements, with 46.7% saying that they would not.

**Q.11. Are you responsible, in your department for making decisions about how to match the IT diploma against your curriculum offer?**



One respondent said that within their institution, it is dealt within the various faculties.

### Appendix 3: Delegates List for 14-19 Workshops

#### Higher Education Workshop held Monday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2007 at Kingston University

Name	Institution
Denise S Cooper (Chair)	South London LLN
John McDonald	West London LLN
Andy Smith	Thames Valley University IT Department
Liz Sokolowski	Thames Valley University IT Department
Christine C Marchant	Thames Valley University Admissions
Brian Houghton	Head Teacher, Vyners School, Hillingdon
Paul Wallin	Kingston University New Technology Institute

#### Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2007 at Kingston University

Name	Institution
Julie Hemmings	Kingston College
Catherine de Baritault	Richmond upon Thames College
Sally Grimley	Goldsmiths, University of London
Naomi Winson	William Morris Sixth Form College
Kevin Gilmartin	William Morris Sixth Form College
Lyn Borrow	Thames Valley University
Andy Smith	Thames Valley University
Mostafa Azzi	The University of Greenwich
Mark Stacey	College of North West London
Lucy McLeod	Ravensbourne College
David Williams	Brunel University
Paula Ellard	University of Westminster
Alun Hughes	London, South Bank University
Brian Houghton	London Borough of Hillingdon and until August 2007, Vyners School
Rob Manderson	Roehampton University
Andrea Harris	Kingston University
Alexandra Thurston	e-Skills
Sue Nieland	e-Skills
Chris Watson	Ealing, Hammersmith & West London College
Eric Blaire	LSN Solutions Associate
Denise Cooper	South London LLN
John McDonald	West London LLN
Danny Rozario	West London LLN
Nicola Prime	West London LLN

**HE / FE progression agreement workshop on computer science options held Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> December at Thames Valley University**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Institution</b>
Graeme Hall	West London LLN
John McDonald	West London LLN
Caroline Jones	Uxbridge College
Adrian Johnstone	Royal Holloway, University of London
Graeme Mitchell	Hammersmith and West London College

**Appendix 4: Finance**

<b>Heading</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Contribution</b>	<b>Focus</b>
HE engagement pilot	HEFCE	£20,000	HE/DDP discussions
West London LLN match funding	West London LLN	£20,000	Curriculum development, IAG materials, PA design and implementation
South London LLN match funding	South London LLN	£20,000	Curriculum development, IAG materials, PA design, development and implementation
Joint South & West London LLN match funding	Joint South & West London LLN	£20,000	Project management, attendance at DDP meetings and organisation of focus groups
Dissemination of findings via national PA conference in June 2008	West London and South London LLN	£15,000	Organisation of 2nd national PA conference will focus on Diploma progression routes

**Appendix 5: Curriculum Mapping**

Please see separate document for the results of the curriculum mapping exercise.