

Diplomas FAQs

Q. Is this a new qualification or just a wrap-around for existing qualifications?

A. It's a bit of both. There are many newly developed components in the Diploma. These include functional skills, project/extended project and Principal Learning which is the sector related element of learning for which new content has been developed by employer led Diploma Development Partnerships. These components form a mandatory part of each Diploma. Existing qualifications can be included as Additional/Specialist Learning so there is choice for learners as to which existing qualifications they include within the overall Diploma qualification.

Q. Are Diplomas replacing any other qualifications?

A. Diplomas offer a qualification which is very different from GCSEs and A Levels on the one hand and vocational qualifications on the other, as they incorporate both general and applied learning. They have been introduced to broaden the curriculum offer rather than to replace existing provision.

Q. Does this mean that a learner will choose between GCSEs and a Diploma?

A. At Key Stage 4 learners will still have to follow the National Curriculum so the Diploma will be taken instead of some GCSEs but those GCSEs that assess National Curriculum subjects will still be taken. There is also room within Additional/Specialist learning for one or two GCSEs so a learner could complete Key Stage 4 with a Diploma and a handful of GCSEs.

Q. Who will do Diplomas?

A. Eventually Diplomas will be available to all learners as one of several optional routes so that every learner can choose the qualification(s) that best suits their strengths, weaknesses, future plans and learning/assessment preferences. Schools and Colleges will advise learners in exactly the same way they do at present taking these factors into account.

Q. If Diplomas have been developed with employers in the lead; does this mean they will prepare young people for jobs in industry?

A. Diplomas are intended to prepare young people both for Higher Education and employment. They will prepare learners for employment by giving them an understanding of how particular employment sectors work and by giving them some broad employability skills. What they will not do is prepare someone for a particular job.

Q. Will Diplomas prepare students for a Degree course?

A. They are certainly intended to prepare students for higher education as well as for employment. The Extended Project which is included in the Level 3 Diploma is designed for stretch and challenge; the Principal Learning content is sector related rather than occupation specific and the focus of Principal Learning is on knowledge, understanding and skills, including cognitive skills.

Q. How would the Extended Project fit with the Diploma and with A/AS programmes?

The Extended Project will look the same whether it is offered within a Diploma or alongside a programme of A/AS Levels or other Level 3 qualifications such as OCR Nationals. The standard will be the same, the assessment will be the same and the opportunities for the development of personal, learning and thinking skills will be the same.

Q. What do I need to do if I want to offer Diplomas?

A. You need to be a member of a consortium of centres wanting to deliver Diplomas through their partnership arrangements. Your consortium would then need to apply to go through the DCSF Gateway. This is a process of evaluating a partnership's readiness to deliver by assessing this against a number of factors including employer engagement, collaborative working, capacity, workforce development arrangements and planning effectiveness. The Gateway application process for those partnerships wishing to deliver in 2008 and 2009 has already closed. However, application can be made during autumn 2008 for delivery in 2010.

Q. Will UCAS points be available for Diplomas?

A. Yes. Tariff points have been allocated separately to the Principal and Generic Learning component and the Additional/Specialist Learning (ASL) component. At present only those ASL qualifications already on the Tariff will attract UCAS points; however it is likely that more ASL qualifications will be included on the Tariff over time.

Qualification	Grade	UCAS points
A Level	C	80
Progression Diploma	C	200
Advanced Diploma – Principal Learning and Extended Project	C	200
Advanced Diploma – Additional/Specialist Learning (in this case one A Level)	A	120

Q. What are the Diploma equivalences?

This very much depends upon whether you are comparing Diplomas with other qualifications in terms of delivery time required, complexity, perceived value or other factors. However, the Department for Children Schools and Families has adopted the following as broad equivalencies:

Foundation Diploma – 5 GCSEs at level 1 (D – G grade)

Higher Diploma – 7 GCSEs at level 2 (A* - C grade)
Progression Diploma - 2.5 A levels (A* - E grade)
Advanced Diploma - 3.5 A levels (A* - E grade)

The extended diploma designed to extend each of the 17 diploma lines will be available in 2011 the extended diploma is expected to be equivalent to:

7 GCSEs at foundation level grades D – G
9 GCSEs at grades A* - c for foundation and 4.5 A levels

Q. How will Diplomas be assessed?

A. For principal learning – assessment will be a combination of internal and external assessment.

Those elements of generic learning that need to be assessed are functional skills in English, maths and ICT and the Project. The Project will be internally assessed and functional skills externally assessed. At present Functional Skills are assessed in different ways by different awarding bodies for the purposes of piloting a range of assessment approaches. Final decisions on the assessment of Functional Skills have not yet been taken.

Work experience and personal learning and thinking skills will need to be recorded and there will be opportunities for recognising the latter within both Principal Learning and the Project in particular.

Where existing qualifications are taken as Additional and Specialist learning they will be assessed and verified using the existing methods. Any new qualifications developed will have their own assessment methods.