



National Audit Office

Partnering for success: Preparing to deliver the 14-19 education reforms in England

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1 The 14-19 reforms are planned to be implemented by 2013.¹ The main aims are:

- to raise the participation of young people in education by increasing the relevance of learning so that all are motivated to attend and learn, and to stay in education beyond age 16; and
- to raise the educational attainment of young people, as a vital strand of efforts to improve the nation's skills.

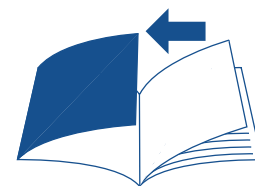
2 Central to the 14-19 reforms is a new set of qualifications, the Diplomas (**Key Facts overleaf**). They aim to merge applied and general learning, providing alternative pathways for 14 to 19 year olds into further education, higher education and employment (**Figure 1**).

3 Unlike most existing qualifications for young people, it will not be possible for a single institution to provide a high-quality education in all the Diplomas, because the content of each Diploma is broad and ranges across both applied and general provision. At local level, local authorities are responsible for providing strategic leadership for delivering the changes through local 14-19 partnerships involving education providers and employers, and others such as the Learning and Skills Council and Education Business Link Organisations. Many organisations will need to work together, for example:

- **schools**² as the place where almost all young people receive their education until the age of 16, with over half of secondary schools offering the opportunity to continue in learning after 16;

- **further education and sixth form colleges** as the main route for young people wishing to pursue vocational options and, in many parts of the country, the sole, or main, provider of post-16 education;
- **independent training providers** who bring relevant expertise drawn from working with employers or in the community;
- **employers** to help develop education relevant to the workplace and to provide high-quality work placements;
- **universities** to help secure the progression routes into higher education; and
- **careers advice services** to assist young people in understanding options and making the right choices.

4 The reforms entail ambitious changes in the curriculum offered to young people aged 14 to 19, and to the way that learning will be delivered. All young people, and their families, need to be confident about the value of education to their future lives and prospects and, in particular, convinced that continuing in education beyond age 16 will be worthwhile. Linked with this challenge, and drawing on lessons from other countries, options from age 14 need to include high-quality education with clear application to real life and work, that will be valued by young people and employers.



Key Facts and Figure 1 overleaf

1 Department for Education and Skills (2005), *14-19 Education and Skills White Paper*; and *14-19 Education and Skills Implementation Plan*.

2 Includes all publicly funded schools; including Academies, grammar schools, faith schools and special schools. Independent schools are not required to subscribe to curriculum entitlements for learners aged 14 to 19, but are encouraged to participate in local partnerships.

Terms of reference of our study

5 The large programme for the 14-19 reforms involves major strands of work to be carried out in parallel. It was not feasible or timely for us to examine the whole programme. This report examines the progress that local 14-19 partnerships are making in preparing to deliver the reforms, across all areas of England. It does not examine the development of the content of the Diplomas, for which the first five specifications became available in September 2007.

6 We decided to examine whether local 14-19 partnerships are on track to deliver the 14-19 reforms for the following reasons:

- Collaboration is a significant change for many institutions used to a regime of performance review and competition.
- A national picture of progress at the local level was clearly the least understood aspect of the programme, including by many key stakeholders.
- A study of this aspect would afford us the opportunity to build an authoritative view of how the reforms are starting to work out on the ground.

7 The methods we used are described in Appendix 1. Our methodology included seven in-depth case studies of local authority areas, a national survey of Learning and Skills Council Partnership Directors⁴ and a comparison with educational arrangements in three other countries (Appendix 5). Because we were examining the preparedness of local partnerships, our focus was on the supply side of the programme. Though we were able to draw on learners' perspectives about applied learning generally from our earlier work⁵ and other research, we judged it too early to seek learner views directly on the 14-19 reform programme.

Main findings

8 We identified six main areas of risk that need to be managed for successful local implementation of the 14-19 reforms (**Figure 2**).

9 The Department for Children, Schools and Families⁶ and its partners are addressing, or have plans to address, all these areas of risk insofar as they relate to the subject of our report, the 14-19 partnerships. The level of interdependence of different aspects of the reforms is very high, and the success of the programme will also depend

on other aspects of the reforms, such as the content and quality of the Diplomas, which are not examined in this report. However, as at September 2007, the Department and its partners were on track against the relevant key milestones for the programme (Figure 20 on page 28).

10 Some young people are more likely to engage with learning and achieve better qualifications if they are offered a combination that includes applied learning alongside traditional subjects. The strategic direction of the reforms draws on local experience of 'what works' and, in particular, the style and content of education that is likely to motivate more young people to want to learn and to continue in education and training beyond age 16. We found widespread frontline support among education practitioners for the changes, which aim to extend formerly localised provision of applied learning through the introduction of Diplomas, so that it becomes more consistently available to all young people who wish to pursue a programme that includes an applied education.

11 Genuine collaboration between organisations leads to benefits for learners, but takes time to establish. It requires institutions such as schools and colleges, which are quite likely to be in competition for the same young people, to build trusting relationships and the confidence that would come from experience of working together for the wider benefit. Partnerships situated in areas that have a history of productive collaboration have benefited from their experience and generally have well established partnership arrangements.

2 Main areas of risk that will need to be managed for successful local implementation

- 1 Commitment to the reforms from all key stakeholders
- 2 Partnerships established and operating
- 3 Full involvement of all partners
- 4 Confidence at local level that the reform process is well managed and that key products are of good quality and will be ready on time
- 5 Good communication of progress and lessons learned
- 6 Clear funding arrangements and coherence of funding for capital projects

Source: National Audit Office

⁴ Partnership Directors are positions at the Learning and Skills Council and are not posts within the 14-19 partnerships discussed in this report. Partnership Directors provide support to 14-19 partnerships.

⁵ For example, our report *Improving school attendance in England* (HC 212, 2004-2005).

⁶ In June 2007, the Department for Children, Schools and Families took over responsibility for the reforms from the former Department for Education and Skills. In this report we use 'the Department' to mean the body in existence at the time, except where it is appropriate to specify which Department we are referring to.

Key Facts

Participation in education and training by 17 year olds in England, at 82 per cent, remains low by international standards

- At the end of 2006, around 10 per cent of 16 to 18 year olds (206,000 individuals) in England were not in education, employment or training, a proportion which has remained fairly static over the last ten years.
- But more than 70 per cent of young people achieve recognised qualifications at Level 2 (five GCSEs at grades A* to C or equivalent) by age 19; and the average young person getting five or more A*-C at GCSE or equivalent earns at least £100,000 more over their lifetime than a person who leaves education with qualifications below Level 2.
- Total expenditure on education for 11 to 19 year olds was £21.8 billion in 2006-07.³ Most development costs of the 14-19 reforms sit within the budgets of organisations such as the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and individual local authorities. However, the Department allocated £15 million in 2006-07 and £14.5 million in 2007-08 to local authorities to help meet the development costs of collaboration.

The 14-19 reforms are seeking to improve attainment and participation in education and training up to age 19

- By 2015, 90 per cent of 17 year olds participating in education or training; from 75 per cent (2005).
- More than 85 per cent of 19 year olds to achieve at least Level 2 by 2015.
- A reduction to 8 per cent in the proportion of 16 to 18 year olds not in education, employment or training by 2010 (from the 2004 baseline of 10 per cent).
- The Government is introducing legislation to raise the age for compulsory participation in education and training to 18, starting with a rise to age 17 to take effect in 2013.

The 14-19 education reforms consist of new elements

- Sufficient information, advice and guidance for all young people, plus online local prospectuses setting out the full range of educational provision in a local area, and a system of pastoral support across different institutions.
- A new qualification, the Diploma, available in parts of England from 2008, and as a national entitlement for all young people from 2013, by which date the Department expects around 25 per cent of young people aged 14 to 19 to be taking a Diploma either singly or alongside other qualifications such as GCSEs (Figure 1).

- The design of the Diplomas is being led by employers. There will be 14 Diplomas, which will offer general education and applied learning relevant to different occupational areas, and at three different levels: Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3. The development of the Diplomas in different occupational areas is being phased, and they will be available in parts of England as follows:

First phase, from 2008

- Construction and the Built Environment
- Creative and Media
- Engineering
- Society, Health and Development
- Information Technology

Second phase, from 2009

- Business, Administration and Finance
- Hair and Beauty Studies
- Hospitality
- Environment and Land-based Studies
- Manufacturing and Product Design

Third phase, from 2010

- Public Services
- Retail
- Sport and Leisure
- Travel and Tourism

- In October 2007, the Department announced a new set of subject-based Diplomas in Science, Languages and the Humanities. The design of these Diplomas is being led by a group of leading academics and employers. The three additional Diplomas will be available in parts of England from 2011.

Implementation of the reforms requires collaboration

- Individual local education providers will have to work together to provide every young person with full access to high-quality Diploma provision, by 2013.
- Local authorities are responsible for providing strategic leadership for delivering the changes through local 14-19 partnerships, involving education providers, the Learning and Skills Council, employers and others.
- 14-19 partnerships vary in structure and complexity reflecting local circumstances. In some areas a strategic partnership will oversee the work of several delivery consortia (mainly rural areas); in others the strategic partnership and the delivery consortium are one and the same (mainly urban areas).

1 Choice of learning routes for young people aged 14 to 19

Young people need to make important decisions about their education, which can have long-term implications for employment opportunities, wellbeing and standard of living. The 14-19 reforms are intended to offer every young person learning that is engaging and valuable, to suit different interests and learning styles at all levels. They introduce new Diploma qualifications and build on existing qualifications, such as GCSEs and Apprenticeships. Young people will be able to choose from a range of learning options, each offering a different progression route, as illustrated below.

Age	Choice
14 to 16	■ GCSEs These qualifications remain and many young people will continue to choose them.
	■ Functional Skills (new) Qualifications in English, maths and ICT (information and communications technology) covering elements that are essential to enable individuals to participate effectively in everyday life, including the workplace. These will be incorporated into GCSEs – it will not be possible to achieve a grade C in these subjects without these elements.
	■ Diplomas (new) Offering a mix of general and applied learning, available at Level 1 (broadly equivalent to five GCSEs at below grade C ¹) and Level 2 (broadly equivalent to six or seven GCSEs at grades A* to C ¹). Functional Skills will be incorporated into Diplomas. Diplomas are the first qualifications to be introduced which are a national education qualification recognising achievement at Level 1. Young people may choose to do one or more GCSEs alongside a Diploma.
	■ Young Apprenticeships These allow study for vocational qualifications, including in college, with training providers and in the workplace. Apprentices spend around two days a week in school studying general subjects.
16 to 19	■ Foundation Learning Tier (new) Aims to establish progression pathways to Level 2 qualifications, and will focus on skills for life and work, subject and vocation-based learning, and personal and social development.
	■ A levels These qualifications remain and many young people will continue to choose them.
	■ International Baccalaureate Entails academic study of a wide range of subjects, leading to a single qualification, rather than qualifications in individual subjects.
	■ Diplomas (new) Level 3 qualification (broadly equivalent to three A levels ¹).
	■ Level 1 Diplomas, Level 2 Diplomas, GCSEs and Foundation Learning Tier also available for this age group.
	■ BTECs Vocational qualifications equivalent to A level, which have practical course elements and involve work placements.
■ Apprenticeships Offering a programme of vocational training which gives young people the opportunity to work for an employer and earn money while they learn.	
■ Other work-based learning For young people who are employed, or based largely at a workplace. Often leads to an accredited NVQ award.	

Examples of learning routes incorporating new Diplomas:

Paula is 15 years old and doing her GCSEs at a secondary school in London. She will be one of the first pupils in the country to undertake a Diploma. She will be staying on in sixth form and in year 12 (in 2008) has chosen to study a Level 3 Creative and Media Diploma, which will incorporate English A level as part of her additional and specialist learning. She plans to go to university to study media studies. She was motivated by the fact that media studies gave the highest proportion of full-time employment out of all degree subjects in arts and humanities.

Peter is 14 years old and attending a secondary school in Birmingham. He wants to be an engineer. He has decided to undertake the Level 1 Engineering Diploma and then wishes to progress onto an Apprenticeship at the age of sixteen. He will attend a vocational skills centre as well as school. He will do his Apprenticeship alongside GCSEs in English, maths, science and ICT, and has already made contact with a large local car manufacturing company to carry out his work experience.

Source: National Audit Office

NOTE

- ¹ The equivalences for the first Diploma qualifications are expected to be announced in early 2008.

12 All areas in England have set up strategic partnerships. They vary widely in structure and complexity, reflecting different local circumstances. An urban local authority area is more likely to have a single partnership encompassing both strategic planning and operational delivery. Those in more rural areas commonly have two tiers: a single strategic partnership overseeing a number of delivery consortia. We found that progress in establishing delivery consortia was variable, with some areas more advanced in their planning than others. Clear structures and accountability aid collaboration and help make joint working between partners focused and effective, and the majority of delivery consortia considered that they had established appropriate arrangements for implementing the reforms. Some 80 per cent of consortia reported that roles and responsibilities were clearly defined between partners, and 85 per cent had agreed joint strategies, most planning to 2009 or beyond. However, over a third of consortia reported that they were only in the early stages of implementing their 14-19 strategy.

13 The largest task for local delivery from now to 2013 is to implement the Diplomas. Partnerships had to apply to the Department to be among the first to deliver one or more Diplomas from September 2008, and their applications were assessed against criteria for the readiness of the partnerships. 143 local authority areas submitted applications; seven local authorities chose not to apply to deliver any of the first five Diplomas, most because they judged that their partnership would not have done enough development work to start offering any Diplomas in their area by September 2008. 43 of the local authorities that applied were not approved to deliver any Diplomas in the first round for a range of reasons, principally because their applications were judged not to be sufficiently well developed.

14 The applications approved for delivery of Diplomas from September 2008 collectively plan to establish 39,000 Diploma places. This represents 5 per cent of the supply of places required to meet anticipated demand for the original 14 Diplomas (around 25 per cent of young people) from 2013. To date, applications approved to start delivering Diplomas from September 2009, subject to certain conditions being met, would make available a further 39,000 places, representing an additional 5 per cent of the places estimated to be required from 2013. The Department anticipates that a further 60,000 to 70,000 places will be approved in early 2008 for delivery from September 2009.

Conclusions and recommendations

15 Our conclusions and recommendations, set out below, are structured to address the risk areas in Figure 2. Many of the recommendations are for the local 14-19 partnerships to implement. However, given the variable state of development of partnerships, some will require substantial support from the Department and other partners to make sure that they are not left behind, and can meet the imperative of providing every young person in their area their full entitlement to the 14-19 curriculum by 2013.

Risk area 1: Commitment to the reforms from all key stakeholders

- a **An appropriate balance across general and applied learning.** We found strong support at the local level for the flexible nature of the Diplomas and the increase in choice for young people, though there were concerns about achieving the right balance between general and applied learning. Partnerships should expect institutions to communicate the importance of both applied and general learning and to cooperate to develop effective approaches to embedded learning.⁷
- b **Credible new qualifications.** Understanding and acceptance of Diplomas by employers and higher education will be essential to their success and appeal to young people, and we found concerns at the local level that full acceptance of the Diplomas is still some way off. The Department and its national partners need to clearly establish and communicate progression routes into continuing study and employment.
- c **Strong leadership to build trust between partners.** Building trust between partners more used to being in competition takes time and effort. Partnerships should be led by senior representatives from the institutions within the partnership who have the necessary level of authority to establish effective relationships and drive implementation.

7 Embedded learning is where a general subject, such as English, is taught within an applied programme.

Risk area 2: Partnerships established and operating

- d Collaboration to deliver comprehensive coverage of all 17 Diplomas by 2013.** There is a risk that areas that do not yet have approved applications to deliver Diplomas will struggle to develop effective collaboration. Partnerships and delivery consortia not currently preparing to provide one or more Diplomas from September 2008 should prepare plans of the progress they intend to make over the next two to three years, and as a minimum have an outline strategy for the implementation of Diplomas to 2013. The Department should help them to bring in relevant expertise, for example through secondments of people who have experience of leading implementation in areas that are much further ahead.
- e Continuous improvement in partnership structures and arrangements.** Many partnerships have evolved from earlier initiatives and they benefit from periodic review to ensure they remain fit for purpose and are continually improving. Partnerships should make use of self-assessment tools that help identify areas for improvement.
- f Protocols to deal with practical obstacles.** Partnerships all face a similar list of practical challenges, such as the need for schools and colleges to agree a common core timetable, so that young people can take up options that involve attending different locations. Travel between locations requires pooled resources and agreement, as do decisions about which institution retains pastoral responsibility for each young person. All partnerships should develop and agree protocols to deal with these important matters, drawing on the large amount of experience that is building up on workable, practical solutions, and investigate the use of innovative options such as e-learning, peripatetic teachers and mobile learning facilities. All partnerships should use the views of young people to inform their planning.
- g Good quality information, advice and guidance.** All areas have introduced area-wide electronic prospectuses providing information about the courses of study that are available. Young people, and their parents and carers, also need access to people with good knowledge of all the options from age 14, who are capable of giving impartial advice. All areas should provide young people access to comprehensive personalised advice about all the options available, including those delivered outside of their current school or college.

- h Effective use of technology-based products.** Well designed technology-based products have a dual advantage. They are popular with many young people. They can also be a powerful facilitator of communication between them and the wide range of people involved in their education and, potentially, in helping them navigate an appropriate career path. The Department should facilitate partnerships in developing tools to support the integration of young people's studies and their career aspirations or goals, drawing on the experience of areas that have already done so.

Risk area 3: Full involvement of all partners

- i All relevant institutions participating in partnerships.** There are still some institutions delivering education to 14 to 19 year olds that are not actively involved with partnerships. Individual schools were most commonly cited as not yet being involved. Local authorities and the Learning and Skills Council should be prepared to use sanctions where necessary in relation to those few institutions that are unwilling to collaborate to secure a high quality provision of the full national entitlement for their students.
- j Appropriate groupings of institutions.** Strategic partnerships generally conform to local authority boundaries, and the need to work across boundaries where it would make more sense is not well known or documented. It is important that partnerships' plans take account of natural 'travel to learn' routes for learners irrespective of the local authority area. The Department should examine the case for a stock take at regional level of whether joint work across local authority boundaries is meeting the needs of young people.
- k Comprehensive coverage of all curriculum areas.** Some consortia have already determined that they will not attempt to deliver all the Diplomas, but will instead buy in some elements from neighbouring areas. The scale of the need to buy in provision is not known at the regional or national level, nor have the potential risks been assessed, such as poor access or very long travel times for some young people. Decisions about buying in provision and information on the potential impacts need to be coordinated, either by partnerships within a wider area working closely together, or by the Department commissioning an assessment of the position at a regional level.

- l Performance management arrangements to support collaborative provision.** Current assessment of schools and colleges is focused on assessing the institution and gives limited credit for working in partnership. The absence of relevant measures creates the risk that some institutions will not give sufficient attention to developing partnerships that will help broaden the options available to young people in their own and other institutions. Assessment measures should be revised to incorporate measures of partnership working that recognises the effort that institutions make to creating wider benefits for the whole community.
- m Sufficient good-quality teaching staff to deliver the Diplomas.** There are already staff with the skills to teach the more technical aspects of the Diplomas working in many further education colleges and in some schools, and to give existing staff the skills to teach the new Diplomas, the Department is developing a programme of support. However, the amount of development work to provide enough good quality teaching staff to deliver the Diplomas between now and 2013 is not yet known, and we found that 45 per cent of consortia had not yet undertaken a skills audit. All partnerships should undertake local audits of existing skills to determine professional development requirements. They should also explore how to deploy the expertise of independent education providers and employers' own training functions.
- n Local employer engagement, sufficient work experience placements and work-related learning.** Engaging employers is the least developed aspect of most partnerships – 45 per cent of consortia had not yet involved employers in developing their approach to 14-19 education. Partnerships should ask schools and colleges to catalogue existing links with employers and for proposals about how these links can be expanded and coordinated, and how to establish links with more employers, particularly small- and medium-sized employers. Employers' role in providing work experience and work-related learning will be essential to the Diplomas' appeal to young people, and partnerships should seek the support of local employer organisations in encouraging employers to contribute to delivering the Diplomas.

Risk area 4: Confidence at local level that the reform process is well managed and that key products are of good quality and will be ready on time

- o Robust forecasts of Diploma take-up.** The Department's forecasts of the numbers of young people it anticipates will take up the Diplomas each year to 2013 are provisional, because with courses due to start in September 2008 there is no data as yet on established demand. The Department should continue to refine its forecasts as data becomes available, including an early indication of take-up for the first five Diplomas in 2008. It should also use detailed information on the take-up of Diplomas to inform the ongoing implementation, including, for example, relative take-up between regions.
- p Confidence in the process underpinning approvals to deliver the Diplomas.** The approvals process involves considerable work for the Department and partnerships, and was the subject of some complaints from partnerships in the first round. The Department has used the feedback to improve the process for the second round. It should review the outcome of the second round of applications to check that the changes made to the process have fully met partnerships' earlier concerns about the first round.
- q Adequate support to all partnerships.** Several consortia suggested that there was insufficient support for those that were unsuccessful in applying to deliver one or more Diplomas from September 2008, or felt unready to apply at all. The Department has responded by increasing support for these consortia, but they are likely to need much more if they are to provide all Diplomas by 2013. The less advanced partnerships will need adequate, timely support to enable them to meet their statutory commitment to giving all young people in their area access to all 17 Diplomas by 2013. The Department should periodically re-examine the balance of support it provides to partnerships relative to their state of development.

Risk area 5: Good communication of progress and lessons learned

- r **Learning from experience.** The Department's 14-19 Pathfinders programme has been successful at developing and trialling options for implementing the reforms. It should periodically review the experience of the implementation of the first Diplomas and continue to use well established methods to disseminate the lessons.
- s **Awareness and understanding among all frontline staff.** Awareness of the Diplomas is currently low among non-managerial frontline staff (teachers, lecturers and support staff). The Department has adopted a phased approach to communicating the reforms to different groups of staff as more aspects become better established. However, partnerships should now be planning communications and events to broaden awareness, for example to teachers, lecturers and others who need to know what future contributions they may be expected to make. The Department should create guidance that partnerships can tailor to their local circumstances.
- t **Coordinated guidance and information to partnerships.** Most general guidance and information to partnerships is good but it needs to be better coordinated. Guidance coming from too many different sources and to differing institutions or individuals within a partnership can result in some partners not receiving timely information and confusion over the precedence of information. The Department and organisations providing guidance to partnerships should coordinate their efforts.

Risk area 6: Clear funding arrangements and coherence of funding for capital projects

- u **Clear and sustainable financial arrangements.** At this stage, the likely future costs of delivering the Diplomas at local level are not established, which is a risk to confidence. Agreeing financial arrangements that recognise real costs and are therefore acceptable to all was the most frequently cited matter of concern at local level. The Department has since indicated to partnerships the broad funding arrangements to support the delivery of the reforms, but local area pilot projects that the Department has set in hand will not report until September 2008. In the meantime, the Department should make available the results of interim reports of this work, so that the knowledge can be used to advance thinking on funding at local level.
- v **Capital programmes to support the reforms.** There are two separate major capital programmes for renewing school and college buildings. The Department has worked with partners to develop processes to enable both these capital programmes to support and take account of the objectives of the 14-19 reforms. Much of the process sits within local capital projects, and partnerships should take responsibility for checking that projects in their area support plans for 14-19 provision. The Department should continue to take soundings from local areas about how well policies and processes on capital spending support the 14-19 objectives or whether additional flexibilities, such as more pooled funding, are required.