

The University of Huddersfield
School of Education and Professional Development

West Yorkshire Lifelong Learning Network 'Progression from 14 - 19 Advanced Diplomas to Higher Education in West Yorkshire' Research Project

Institutions providing HE courses in West Yorkshire

Bradford College	www.bradfordcollege.ac.uk
University of Bradford	www.bradford.ac.uk
Calderdale College	www.calderdale.ac.uk
University of Huddersfield	www.hud.ac.uk
Kirklees College	www.kirkleescollege.ac.uk
Leeds City College	www.leedscitycollege.ac.uk
Leeds College of Art & Design	www.leeds-art.ac.uk
Leeds College of Building	www.lcb.ac.uk
Leeds College of Music	www.lcm.ac.uk
Leeds Metropolitan University	www.leedsmet.ac.uk
Leeds Trinity & All Saints College	www.leedstrinity.ac.uk
University of Leeds	www.leeds.ac.uk
Northern School of Contemporary Dance	www.nscd.ac.uk
The Open University	www.open.ac.uk
Wakefield College	www.wakefield.ac.uk
UCAS Lists courses available by institution, subject and entry requirements of courses. HEI diploma statements.	wwwucas.ac.uk / wwwucas.ac.uk/students/beforeyouapply/diplomas/14-19diplomas
DCSF Information on content of 14 - 19 diploma and list of providers.	www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19
EDEXCEL Specification for content of diploma courses.	www.edexcel.com/migrationdocuments/diploma

For further information about the research project

In addition to this summary leaflet, the research project has also produced a detailed final research report and an electronic version of the curriculum map database, showing diploma lines and progression routes, together with contact details of relevant institutions.

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For further information about the West Yorkshire Lifelong Learning Network, please contact www.wylln.ac.uk, telephone 01484 471105.

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The University of Huddersfield School of Education and Professional Development was commissioned in 2008 by the West Yorkshire Lifelong Learning Network (WYLLN) to undertake a research and consultation project on progression from the 14 - 19 advanced diplomas into Higher Education (HE), focussing on the Society, Health and Development (SHD), Creative and Media (C&M) and Construction and Built Environment (CBE) lines. WYLLN had identified a need to improve the clarification, coherence and certainty around the progression into higher education from the newly developed diplomas in West Yorkshire.

The project was undertaken by senior research fellow, Dr Margaret Prescott, and managed by Dr Christine Jarvis, Dean of the School of Education and Professional Development, and was conducted over the period September 2008/09. This leaflet outlines the main findings of the research.

Project aims and activities

The aims of the project were to produce a ‘curriculum map’ database incorporating information about diploma provision; to review curriculum developments and approaches to delivery of the diploma; to identify existing and potential progression relationships into HE, including potential barriers and levers to progression, and to support the development of progression agreements from 14 - 19 diplomas into HE.

Diploma consortia co-ordinators were interviewed to determine the structure of each consortium and the pattern of actual and planned provision. This was followed by interviews with school and college tutors to produce case studies on approaches to diploma delivery. Interviews were also held with relevant HE admissions tutors to explore their views of potential barriers and levers to progression to HE from the 14 - 19 diploma. Desk research was also conducted to identify curriculum development projects in relation to the 14 - 19 diploma and to explore the potential for establishing a ‘virtual meeting space’ for WYLLN’s potential progression partners.

Case studies of advanced diploma delivery

Three case studies of the advanced diploma courses running in West Yorkshire relevant to the project were produced to describe the structure and content of the courses as well as the approaches to the principal, generic and additional and specialist learning (ASL) adopted by tutors. At the time of the study, students were in the first year of a two year course.

The tutors involved in diploma delivery were excited and enthusiastic about the courses and thought the combination of applied learning and academic skills in the advanced diploma course offered considerable advantages to students. The incorporation of personal learning and thinking skills (PLTS) was also seen as valuable; tutors thought this element of the course had the potential to allow students to develop as independent and reflective learners, and that these skills would be of considerable value in supporting progression to higher education. The tutors were also aware of the importance of ASL in the course, both to support progression and to extend the institution’s range of provision.

However, concerns were expressed about the level and pace of work on both the CBE and C&M advanced diplomas. (The SHD advanced diploma line was not being delivered in West Yorkshire at the time of the project). Tutors considered the level and volume of work expected were too high, as well as making too great demands on students’ abilities to manage their own time and workloads. Students had not enjoyed the functional skills element of the course on either of the diploma lines, and the necessity of mandatory courses in English, Maths and ICT for those students who already had a level 2 qualification in these subjects was questioned. Dr Margaret Prescott and Dr Christine Jarvis

Barriers and levers to progression to Higher Education from the 14 - 19 advanced diplomas

A second strand of the project research was to conduct a small-scale qualitative study to gain some understanding of the experience of engaging with diplomas from perspective of HE admissions tutors. Interviews were conducted with 16 admissions tutors responsible for HE courses in West Yorkshire which might receive C&M, CBE or SHD advanced diploma applicants to explore their knowledge of the content and structure of the 14 - 19 diploma, their views of its appropriateness for progression to HE, their perceptions of potential barriers and levers to progression, and their knowledge and views about progression agreements.

The research found that all the admissions tutors interviewed would accept the advanced diploma as an entry qualification to HE. However, tutors on courses which might receive SHD diploma applicants were more willing to accept the 14 - 19 advanced diplomas in ANY subject, seeing the generic skills acquired from studying the diploma as important, whilst tutors likely to receive C&M and CBE diploma applicants were more likely to say they would ONLY accept the diploma relevant to their discipline. For these tutors, the acquisition of specialist subject knowledge was important.

The generic skills which admissions tutors saw as particularly useful preparation for HE were independent research and reflective skills, suggesting that the student’s performance in the extended project and PLTS is important. Admissions tutors seemed less likely to emphasise, or require information about the ASL options which students had taken than had previously been thought, although some courses did require applicants to have studied specific ASL options in addition to the advanced diploma. (See www.ucas.ac.uk for more information).

The research also explored admissions tutors’ perceptions of the diploma. Whilst some tutors thought the advanced diploma would be a better preparation for HE than some other qualifications, others saw the diploma as primarily a vocational qualification. Vocational qualifications tended to be associated with ‘less able’ students and seen as less appropriate preparation for HE courses defined by admissions tutors as ‘academic’ than A levels. Some tutors were perhaps not convinced that diploma students would have the same skills and depth of knowledge as A level students with the same number of UCAS points. The comments of some tutors suggested that they were unfamiliar with the abilities and skills of diploma students and so might be reluctant to offer places if they feared students might not be adequately prepared for their course and so could drop out or fail.

However, the research also found that many admissions tutors felt a need for more information about the 14 - 19 diplomas, particularly about the core content and structure of the qualification.



What college tutors said about the 14 - 19 advanced diplomas

“I like the freedom of the course - it is a fresh approach. I am able to introduce students to a wide variety of media production skills.” C&M tutor

“The standard of functional skills required is incredibly high. All learnersfound it difficult.” C&M tutor

“I am very passionate about the qualification. I think it is excellent preparation for higher education because it develops reflective and analytical skills as well as practical skills.” CBE tutor

“The diploma gives ownership to students straight away.” C&M tutor

“The diploma is asking a lot of students who have never done construction before.” CBE tutor

What HE admissions tutors said about the 14 – 19 advanced diplomas

“...it is spot on. It is better than a lot of A levels.” Social work tutor

“...it seems the diploma is better preparation than BTEC for the Foundation degree as they do get a lot of vocational experience....It looks good to me. I see a lot of positive value in it.” Social care tutor

“I think there are wonderful things in it....This would be of enormous benefit to HE. There are research skills. Academic skills are in there - there is the potential for students to develop as independent learners.” History of Art tutor

“...it seems university tutors are very concerned diploma students might not have sufficient depth, conceptual thinking, to cope with a traditional academic degree.” Social care tutor

“The impression admission tutors have had of the diplomas is that they are for people who can’t achieve A levels....If they have a more vocational outlook or won’t achieve A levels then they might go on to do the diploma.” Health care tutor

“The information that’s been passed down has been quite generic ... from a subject point of view it’s quite difficult from my point of view to get to grips with.” Music tutor

What HE admissions tutors said about progression agreements

“We are in favour of progression agreements... a West Yorkshire progression agreement would be a good idea.” Media tutor

“A sub-regional progression agreement would be useful but getting it would be hard. Institutions are in competition with each other.” Construction tutor

“We have schools at the moment who send good students so it would be good to have a progression agreement with them.” Music tutor

Progression agreements

A third strand of the research was clarification of opportunities for progression from the advanced diploma to Higher Education. Advanced diploma students could potentially progress to a wide range of courses as achievement of an advanced diploma at grade A* for principal learning, generic learning and additional and specialist learning can be worth up to 490 UCAS tariff points. (See www.ucas.ac.uk). Some HE courses do not specify any particular subjects as entry requirements.

The research also explored admissions tutors’ knowledge of the progression agreements in relation to diploma courses in existence or under development in their institutions, and their views about such agreements in general, including the possibility of developing local and sub-regional progression agreements. Progression agreements between institutions can facilitate progression into HE by offering students a guaranteed interview or place on a course.

Overall, there was some support among admissions tutors for the development of progression agreements, at a local or sub-regional level, between the 14 - 19 diplomas and HEIs, but the research also found some confusion and a lack of knowledge of the meaning of such agreements. On the one hand, there were some tutors who expressed arguments in favour of the development of progression agreements whilst others expressed more negative views.

Some tutors thought that progression agreements could provide an institution with good students and encourage non-traditional students to apply to a wider range of institutions. Others expressed concerns about possible unfairness to other applicants. Some were not familiar with progression agreements and thought these could restrict student choice by preventing students from applying elsewhere, although in fact progression agreements are not exclusive in this way.

Key issues emerging from the research

The research found tutors currently delivering the advanced diploma were very positive about the new qualification, and HE admissions tutors were willing to accept the diploma as an entry qualification. However, fewer courses in the C&M, CBE and SHD lines were found to be running and planned in West Yorkshire than had been anticipated at the start of the project. The number of students likely to progress to HE from the diploma was thus lower than was expected. This situation may change, however, as other diploma lines are introduced in future.

The main recommendations of the research were,

- HEIs need to maintain contact with 14 - 19 diploma consortia to obtain up-to-date information on diploma provision in their area.
- There is a need to find effective ways to provide detailed information on and understanding of 14 - 19 diplomas and progression for both HE and school/college tutors.
- Level 4 curriculum development projects to encourage progression from diploma courses to HE should be developed.
- Greater publicity should be given to examples of good practice in the development and maintenance of progression agreements.
- More opportunities for joint working between HEIs and schools /colleges (for example, on curriculum development projects) which could lead to the development of informal links and contacts between schools, colleges and HEIs, should be offered as these can facilitate progression.

Structure of the 14 - 19 advanced diploma

By 2011, a total of seventeen 14 - 19 diplomas will be available nationally in IT, engineering, business, administration and finance, environmental and land-based studies, hair and beauty studies, hospitality, and manufacturing and product design, public services, retail business, sport and active leisure, and travel and tourism, the humanities and social sciences, languages and international communication and science.

All Advanced diplomas have the same basic structure, ie

Principal Learning	Generic Learning	Additional & Specialist Learning
Main subject eg construction	Extended project	Choose from a range of qualifications including BTEC, GCSE, A levels.
Personal, learning and thinking skills embedded in principal learning (60 GLH)	Functional skills – Level 2 ICT, English and Mathematics	
	Work Experience (minimum 10 days)	
540 GLH (at least 50% applied)	120 GLH	360 GLH