

## **The 14-19 Diploma: partnering and piloting the agenda within Higher Education to enhance and inspire future learners**

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### **A paper for the Students of the future theme**

A series of government initiatives from 1997, aimed at reforming the education system, resulted in the Tomlinson Report (2004), which proposed a new framework for 14-19 education resulting in the proposal of a new qualification- the 14-19 Diploma. The first five lines of this structure were introduced into schools in 2009. By 2013 all young people will be entitled to choose to follow this course of study. The Diploma is designed to offer a mix of vocational and educational opportunities for learning which reflects the 21<sup>st</sup> century world. Tomlinson (2007) states that 'Diplomas offer students theoretical and practical learning with clear progression to HE and employment. The strength of this qualification lies in the partnerships between schools, colleges, employers and HE. By working together we can engage and motivate more young people and make their learning more relevant to their lives.' Philip Garrett, PVC Sheffield Hallam University, suggests that 'the 14-19 Diploma provides a valuable and different route into HE and combines academic rigor with vocational practice'. It is recommended (Nuffield Review, Issues Paper 1, Nov 2007) that it sit within an overall framework, which will also include other routes through education, including GCSE's, A Levels and apprenticeships. This has happened in Wales, where all pathways have been contained within the umbrella of the Welsh Baccalaureate. The framework system is intended to avoid the danger of the Diploma, and other pathways, such as Apprenticeships, being perceived as 'second rate' as well as allowing very flexible, Individual Learning Plans to be developed, which

include a series of compulsory and optional courses. Completion may be achieved in time scales to suit learners.

By 2015, when it becomes compulsory for all young people to remain in the education system until the age of 18, the government intends to have increased the numbers of schoolchildren in post-compulsory education from 75% to 90% (Nuffield Issues Paper 3, Jan 2008). To support this, a range of alternative routes is being developed and the 14-19 Diploma plays a central role, offering innovative approaches to learning and teaching and having a particular emphasis on the involvement of employers. Employers and professional practitioners are encouraged to take a formative place in the design and implementation of 14-19 curricular content, as well as actively participating in delivery. The intention is to develop skills valued by employers and engage students in learning which is relevant to their lives, whilst identifying what makes a creative business successful. Ten days work experience is required as well as support from a mentor chosen from a professional field. Learning takes place in realistic scenarios, in the workplace, as well as classrooms and local colleges and universities. Minimum standards in English, ICT and Maths must be achieved and can be studied as part of the Diploma, or as a GCSE, alongside it. Diplomas blend the practical and applied needs of the employment sector with theoretical learning. This breadth of learning allows options to be kept open, offering valuable transferable skills rather than job training.

In this context Aimhigher, Surrey and the Guildford Consortium invited the Learning and Teaching/Widening Participation Coordinator of UCA, Farnham to devise a programme of events to meet the criteria of the 14-19 Creative and Media Diploma, at Level 1, Key Stage 3, which could lead to entry to the Advanced Diploma, A Levels, or an Apprenticeship at 16.

A two day, Arts and Media event was designed as a pilot study, using Kolb's (1975) model of 'action, reflection, change, action.....' as a generic foundation for further reflection and development. Methods of evaluation for a longitudinal study of issues raised are suggested. Training needs for student mentors, teachers and industry professionals are considered.

### **Design of the event**

The link between employers and the Diploma is central, as is the need to guide young learners to understand routes into FE and HE and for institutions to work collaboratively (to achieve features of the Creative and Media Diploma such as travel to learn and the development of individual learning plans). The tutor team reflected this diversity and was made up of UCA specialist staff and student mentors, professional practitioners and school tutors.

The Programme Leader, Curtis Tappenden, working with other team members, prepared a densely packed timetable of activities which followed the curriculum of the Level 1, C&M Foundation Diploma. The programme handbook covered 5 units: Introduction to Creative and Media Skills, Visual Arts (Designing and Making), Performance Arts (Choreography, Rehearsals and Performing), Media Production (Promoting, Filming and Editing) and Presentation (Performance). As well as the unit descriptor, a scheme of work and assessment criteria were developed which cover the aims of the C&M Diploma 'to teach young people to think, question, explore, create and communicate'. Collaboration with teachers, to seek feedback on all aspects of the composition and delivery of this unit is planned. This is in line with the QCF accreditation policy that HEI's

should both devise units for delivery in revised A Levels and/or 14-19 Diplomas and ask for credit achievement on particular units as part of admission requirements.

The workshop was held at UCA campus in Farnham, in June 2008 and was attended by 27, Year 8, schoolchildren and their teachers. Preparations for the workshop had been made in schools before the visit and teachers were invited to participate in activities at the university.

Teachers from the Surrey Consortium were consulted prior to finalizing the Learning Programme. The L&T/WP Coordinator met with representatives from participating schools and the Director of Aimhigher to discuss the content and delivery of the programme. Teaching staff were asked to address content prior to the event. Teachers were present throughout the two days. Some took an active role in workshops, some were less directly involved and observed.

A performance poet (freelance academic, writer/illustrator, performance artist), a pop promo video and film director (entrepreneurial industry professional), a fashion designer (academic tutor) and a singer/songwriter/musical director (part-time academic tutor and freelance musician) were to lead each unit and all would come together for the final performance. University students, from various disciplines, were attached to each group of 5-8 school students. The design of the programme was to ensure that all participants gain from this experience. Student Mentors act as teaching assistants, talk to the school students about all aspects of university life and their post-graduate plans. This represents an invaluable role model/peer learning situation for learners who are generally only a few years younger. A diverse range of subjects may be addressed, from

course content and expectations to the support systems available at university for students facing challenges such as disability (the incidence of dyslexia in arts and media is significantly higher than other disciplines), to portfolio and employment advice, expectations for creative practitioners, finance, leaving home and making friends. The importance of such interaction cannot be over emphasized. Yorke and Longden (2007) in their review of the first year experience cite 'worry over financing one's studies' and lack of good information about the institution and/or programme entered' as primary reasons for withdrawal and non-completion. Working in the university setting over an extended period offers visiting students an invaluable opportunity to gather knowledge from current students and get a feel for the university environment. Working in different locations, school, university teaching spaces (which include an industry standard Film Studio) inevitably promotes independent learning and working in mixed groups from three schools offers collaborative opportunities and the chance to broaden the scope of interaction and the development of friendships.

The objectives were that school students should work with practitioners to gain the necessary skills to devise, produce, direct and film their own whole group performance as the culmination of the two days. The group performance was shown publicly at the university and further evaluated in the school context.

Students were required to participate in at least two workshops and all were involved in the final performance. A 'fly on the wall' documentary was made over the two days and an 8 minute edited version will be shown at the conference. Copies were circulated to all individuals and participating organizations for further evaluation and reflection by all.

A follow up workshop was held for 1 day in January 2009. This workshop included members who had participated before, as well as those who had been unable to attend previously. A Hollywood concept artist was employed to talk about his freelance career and to deliver a drawing workshop. Students from the previous year made a video of the day, using knowledge and skills gained previously.

## CONCLUSIONS

The delivery of the pilot proved invaluable and even in its infancy, offered the following conclusions which will require further investigation:

### **Bridging**

The need for strong working collaboration between FE/HE tutors, schoolteachers, businesses and the learners is seen as key to successful delivery of this qualification. Recognition of roles under the guidance of coordinators and their teaming up at relevant stages of the curriculum must be of very high importance. The pilot workshops offer teachers a challenge in 'creative and media' skills and knowledge as brought by inspired practitioners, and the involvement of mentors can be considered an excellent bridge to a strong working environment where students are outside of their recognized places of learning, and may be teamed with others they do not know. The FE/HE tutors have much to offer in their specialist knowledge of pedagogic practice and identifying learner needs.

This was demonstrated in the pilot where the teaching and learning coordinator's input to non-teacher practitioners brought awareness of the wide range of approaches necessary when instructing young learners. The blend of innovation with strong pedagogic practice was seen to contribute to the strength of outcomes on the day(s).

Schoolteachers' collaboration with mentors and professionals was keenly witnessed by the university staff who were challenged to reflect more closely on the needs of all involved- in itself, valuable cpd.

Current interest in the 'community of practice' model (Wenger 1999), '...where groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly...' can be explored within the remit of 14-19 Diploma.

The transformative nature of the content of both pilot workshops engaged learners in a united experience with set achievable goals. Learners focused quickly and were naturally bonded with like-mind, enabling them to foster strong working relationships, which in turn raised the level of aspiration to achieve creative group and individual outcomes within tight time deadlines over the two days. The learners were surprisingly quick to learn new skills, and we suggest that it may be linked to the inspiration of working alongside professionals- recognizing the strong link between their learning environment and the high expectations and rewards of the working world (ref 'Street,' dvd, Aim Higher Surrey and UCA, 2008).

One recommended outcome is to provide instruction in the form of a training manual or guidance handbook available for all 14-19 Diploma partners (including students) which clearly illustrates with relevant exemplars, the importance of group and individual roles of all partners within the curriculum and most importantly how they relate throughout the various stages and levels of the qualification. Open discourse and communication, as exercised through focus groups could benefit the development of the diploma, especially at this early stage. This leads to the important consideration of the creation of a specific role or roles to disseminate information and coordinate necessary training.

Consistent financial input will need to be made available throughout the 14-19 Diploma programme to underpin the necessary collaborative meetings between all the

professionals involved, to provide backfill for teachers actively engaged in 14-19 delivery, and to ensure that students are able to travel to learn. In this instance, it was serendipitous that the UCA Teaching and Learning Coordinator was also Widening Participation Coordinator. Partners involved in the pilot invested valuable time and money to ensure that the experience closely mapped that of the working world. HEI's in the Art and Design sector (re: Creative and Media Diploma) already have infrastructure in place to support this provision and even this minor role, in providing suitably equipped venues is invaluable to the delivery of practical modules, not least to educate young learners on progression routes into HE, and show the value of Universities within the wider community (as mentioned earlier).

This pilot raised issues for those working at UCA in considering the diploma's place in FE and HE, and its place on the NQF (re: parity with other equivalent qualifications). What might the FE and HE institutions be required to deliver on a sustainable basis? Would the Diploma provide learners at 19 with necessary skills and knowledge in specific creative subjects and with the ability to use independent learning capabilities, which at present are rigorously taught in Foundation and National Diploma programmes? Would HE course leaders recognize the new Diploma as having parity with A levels and a foundation-based portfolio? Who might be responsible for developing the framework for assessment of modules undertaken at host institutions outside of school? The authors of this pilot study are concerned that an overall coherence in strategic planning and delivery must be developed and maintained with the agreement of all partners. The inspirational, holistic thinking behind the 14-19 CM Diploma will need to be managed in all its detail if it is to achieve its ambitious aims.

**Involvement with the programme: university interpretations**

Academics and Industry Professionals will need to promote collaboration between all involved and regular review and reflection should be sought to strengthen the curriculum and take ideas further. A mentor training programme will be needed, so that these valuable helpers understand their role within the university and their responsibility to assist in the education of younger learners.

Industry professionals and mentors will need to understand and receive instruction in Inclusivity/diversity/checking learning/using mentors to support specific need (eg reticence to participate).

Forward planning with teachers is deemed as essential and follow-up valuable for future development of curricular content and delivery.

The level of financial input must be considered in terms of its viability and sustainability for the quality of the provision and its experience not to be compromised.

Much, it seems, still needs resolve and debate to strengthen the cause of the 14-19 Diploma and assist its success as a qualification. If partners together are willing to communicate and help strengthen the framework; be willing to adjust and change as and where the model requires, according to current debate and criticism, then future learners could benefit hugely from and add to their lifelong learning experience.

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